

**REMAKING DOWNTOWN TORONTO: POLITICS, DEVELOPMENT, AND PUBLIC  
SPACE ON YONGE STREET, 1950-1980**

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## Abstract

This study explores the history of Toronto's iconic downtown Yonge Street and the people who contested its future, spanning a period from the 1950s through to 1980 when the street was seldom out of the news. Through detailed analysis of a range of primary sources, it explores how the uses and public meanings of this densely-built commercial strip changed over time, in interaction with the city transforming around it. What emerges is a street that, despite fears for its future, remained at the heart of urban life in Toronto, creating economic value as a retail centre; pushing the boundaries of taste and the law as a mass-entertainment destination; and drawing crowds as a meeting place, pedestrian corridor, and public space. Various understood as an historic urban landscape and an embarrassing relic, a transportation route and a people place, a bastion of Main Street values and a haven for big-city crime and sleaze, from the 1950s through the 1970s Yonge was at the centre of efforts to improve or reinvent the central city in ways that would keep pace with, or even lead, urban change.

This thesis traces the history of three interventions—a pedestrian mall, a clean-up campaign aimed at the sex industry, and a major redevelopment scheme—their successes and failures, and the larger debates they triggered. The result is a narrative that ranges widely in theme: planning, automobility, and youth culture; vice, moral regulation, and citizen activism; capitalism, corporate power, and urban renewal. Engaging with the North American and international historiographies of these topics, it places the politics of downtown in Toronto in larger historical context. It offers an account of urban transformation that emphasizes complexity in the interaction between ideas, structures of power, and the often idiosyncratic decisions of a range of downtown actors. An increasingly interventionist local state, dynamic capital investment in retail and real estate, and diverse citizen mobilizations all contributed to transforming Yonge Street, helping to create the modern, globalized downtown shopping street and public space we know today.

## Acknowledgements

My own journeys downtown began early, riding the subway with my father to his office a few blocks from the Yonge Street Strip. By the time I was thirteen I was making the trip on my own, just one of a steady stream of bored teenagers from all over the city visiting Yonge's arcades, record stores, and head shops. Wandering downtown was the perfect way to spend a Saturday afternoon, and Yonge offered spectacles—religious evangelists, buskers, break-dancers—that were missing in sedate west Toronto. Later, as an undergraduate student I quit loitering and went to work, spending my evenings and weekends as the tiniest cog in one of the city's most successful money-making machines: the Eaton Centre. It was around that time that I began to wonder how the Yonge Street I knew was built, and what had been there before. I didn't know it, but that was the start of a different type of journey.

This city has been an inspiration, and so has the wonderful community of scholars I have encountered since I began this dissertation. At York University, Marcel Martel, Colin Coates, Marlene Shore, Craig Heron, and my other teachers have been true mentors, opening doors for me, challenging me to think my ideas through, and providing a model of a supportive, democratic, engaged pedagogy. Over the last seven years I've also had the privilege of learning from a fantastic group of graduate students, many of whom have become not just colleagues but collaborators and friends. Our department's *cafés en français* have provided years of conversation, laughs, and support.

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Historians are only as good as their archives, and I have been fortunate to work at some very good ones indeed. My sincere thanks to staff at the City of Toronto Archives, the Archives of Ontario, the Clara Thomas Archives, the Toronto Public Library, and the City of Toronto for their help and patience with my many requests for information and access. Former Mayor David Crombie gave generously of his time over a series of coffees, and prompted me to take the challenges of municipal governance seriously; so did Janis Cole and a number of other people who were there at the pivotal moments of my study.

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I've been fortunate to have a family that has encouraged me in my choices, and supported me with love, advice, and, more than occasionally, food and shelter. Thank you Mom, Da, Anna, and Jacob. This project is dedicated with all my love to Lauryn, my partner on this journey and in life.

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## Introduction: The Street and the City

In September 1975, Toronto threw its first birthday celebration for Yonge Street, 180 years after it opened to traffic. Downtown businesses, civic leaders, and citizens came together to honour the street and its evolution from colonial road to bustling urban thoroughfare. For five days, retailers on Yonge decorated the sidewalks and offered special promotions, alongside a series of public events intended to draw people downtown. These included free musical performances in nearby Nathan Phillips Square and the lighting of “the world’s largest candle,” an 11 million candle power flare visible across the city, atop a downtown skyscraper on the night of September 5. The next day, a crowd of 1,000 watched as Toronto Mayor David Crombie gave official sanction to “180 Years Yonge Week,” before helping cut and share out a 300lb birthday cake in front of City Hall.<sup>1</sup>

The cake was painstakingly decorated with a 1795 map of the colony of Upper Canada—now Ontario—just one of many references to Yonge Street’s particular place in local history. Earlier on the same day, reenactors bearing muskets and clad in green felt marched down the street to commemorate the Queen’s Rangers, the soldier-settlers who carved out what was then the colony’s first north-south road, and the basis for agricultural settlement in the area. Past and present mingled freely as their leader, portraying 1790s Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe, bantered about the dramatic changes of the past two centuries. He expressed both pride and amazement to see the muddy little outpost of York—population 600 in 1795—transformed into the modern city of skyscrapers, subdivisions, and subways of the 1970s. Yonge’s anniversary was seen as an important date for the entire city, not in the least by its main organizers, merchant group the Downtown Business Council, who promoted it as the “birthday of downtown Toronto.”<sup>2</sup>

However, any suggestion that the intertwined stories of Yonge Street and Toronto could be reduced to a 180-year narrative of progress was complicated by the undercurrent of anxiety that ran through the festivities. Toronto chose to celebrate Yonge Street at the

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<sup>1</sup> “Week of cakes, drums for city’s birthday,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 30, 1975; “180 years Yonge,” *Globe and Mail*, Sep. 6, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> “Downtown: 180 years Yonge,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 26, 1975.

moment when its future seemed most in doubt. In the months leading up to the anniversary local newspapers were full of controversy over the street's problems, including flagging retail sales, the proliferation of body rub parlours and sex shops, and plans by the regional municipality to widen it into a commuter thoroughfare. The Downtown Business Council admitted that the event was intended to counter the perception that Yonge was in decline. "Nobody else is going to do it for us," explained the merchant group's managing director, "so we've got to create some positive publicity, promote the street properly, and clean it up." Commissioned to write a song for the occasion, local crooner Tommy Ambrose captured the mood with lyrics describing Yonge Street as a friend in need, "a loved one that has seen better times."<sup>3</sup> There was hope, but also anxiety, about what the future might bring.

The story of 180 Years Yonge Week highlights some of the complexities of the relationship between Toronto and Yonge Street in the second half of the twentieth century. First, it conveys some of the street's significance to the city, and to the many people who were invested in its future. Amid widespread urban change, Yonge appeared as an historical through-line linking Toronto's humble beginnings to its dynamic present, and Simcoe's uncertain Loyalist settlement to the 1970s metropolis of 2 million people. "Toronto grew up alongside Yonge Street," argues a popular history written a few years later, "and Yonge Street is a reflection of the city itself."<sup>4</sup> Geographically it mattered too. Yonge was, as a newspaper editorial summing up the 1975 celebrations explained, Toronto's "datum line," dividing the city into east and west; as a major north-south route it pointed the way for urban expansion, connecting the older urban core with its largest and most affluent suburbs to the north.<sup>5</sup>

While the anniversary celebrations took in the whole street, they were, like this study, particularly focused on one small stretch of it: the dozen city blocks that made up the core of downtown Yonge Street, running roughly between College and King Streets. For nearly a century this part of Yonge had been Toronto's main shopping and entertainment destination, a site of consumption but also a key public space used by a wide cross-section

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<sup>3</sup> "Retailers use past to help Yonge St. future," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 4, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> William Kilbourn, *Toronto Remembered: A Celebration of the City* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing, 1984), 21.

<sup>5</sup> "Recalling the wolves..." *Globe and Mail*, Sep. 6, 1975.



of the city's population. Anchored by the flagships of two major department store chains and hundreds of smaller businesses, it abutted on one side the growing financial district, and on another City Hall and the city's administrative centre. It was the section of the city that was busiest, that contained the most prized real estate; that evoked the most vivid memories. It was this aging but popular commercial strip that people referenced when they described the week as "downtown's birthday bash."<sup>6</sup> To the merchants and civic leaders behind the event, the media, and many other Torontonians, Yonge Street *was* downtown.

Second, the story of Yonge's 180<sup>th</sup> records the ambivalence that defined attitudes towards this important place in the postwar decades. On the one hand, there was criticism and concern. Beginning in the 1950s, the idea that downtown Yonge had (as Tommy Ambrose put it) "seen better times" became commonplace in Toronto. Urban transformations—suburbanization, redevelopment, demographic change—were altering the patterns of city life, threatening the business contexts that had made Yonge a success. The spectre of decline, inseparable from discussions of the urban future in postwar North America, seemed to loom over Yonge's commercial landscape, in many places unchanged since the beginning of the century. In a modernizing city, that constancy might spell stagnation, or even obsolescence; worse, those changes that were occurring on Yonge, including new retail and entertainment trends, were rarely interpreted in a positive light. By the late 1960s Yonge was seen as both the "heart of Toronto" and the part of downtown most in need of improvement.

On the other hand, there was optimism and enterprise. Lost sales or public criticism were seldom met with inaction. It is no coincidence that Toronto celebrated the anniversary of its main drag for the first time in 1975, a moment when controversy over the street was at its peak. The organizers of 180 Years Yonge Week were confident that Yonge's history could be employed to secure the strip's doubtful future. Historical re-enactments, special birthday sales and promotions, lobbying to have Yonge recognized as "the world's longest street";<sup>7</sup> all of these attractions were part of an attempt to leverage the street's centrality to

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<sup>6</sup> "Sex industry not invited to Yonge party," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 29, 1975.

<sup>7</sup> The origins of that erroneous but persistent designation are in the 1975 birthday celebrations. See Jay Myers, "Yonge Street," *Globe and Mail*, Dec. 2, 1976. Guinness World Records removed the category of longest street from its listings in 1999, and now lists the Pan-American Highway as the world's longest road.

the city, and the best aspects of its past, to create value. By drawing people downtown, they would reinvigorate the shopping and entertainment strip. By further cementing the bonds between Yonge and Toronto, they would ensure that their street—and the livelihoods attached to it—would not be forgotten. The week-long birthday festivities are just one episode in a longer history of improvement agendas that extends over decades. People who valued Yonge, whether business owners or shoppers, citizen activists or politicians, saw in its changing circumstances not just problems, but possibilities.

### **A street at the heart of the city**

This study explores the history of downtown Yonge Street and the people who contested its future, spanning a period from the 1950s through to 1980 when the street was seldom out of the news. Through detailed analysis of a range of primary sources, including government and corporate records, citizens' letters and petitions, newspapers and planning reports, I trace how the uses and public meanings of this densely-built commercial strip changed over time, in interaction with the city transforming around it. My analysis reveals a street that, despite fears for its future, remained at the heart of urban life in Toronto, creating economic value as a retail centre; pushing the boundaries of taste and the law as a mass-entertainment destination; and drawing crowds as a meeting place, pedestrian corridor, and public space. Various understood as an historic urban landscape and an embarrassing relic, a transportation route and a people place, a bastion of Main Street values and a haven for big-city crime and sleaze, from the 1950s through the 1970s Yonge was at the centre of efforts to improve or reinvent the central city in ways that would keep pace with, or even lead, urban change. This study examines the history of those interventions—planning experiments, clean-up campaigns, redevelopment schemes—their successes and failures, and the larger debates over urban development they triggered. It explores the relationships between citizens and an iconic street in an attempt to reconstruct what people thought about the city, and how they acted to shape it.

The result is a narrative that ranges widely in theme: planning, automobility, and youth culture; vice, moral regulation, and citizen activism; capitalism, corporate power, and urban renewal. In three discrete sections, this thesis engages with the North American and international historiographies of these topics, placing the politics of downtown in Toronto in larger historical context. It offers an account of urban transformation that emphasizes

complexity in the interaction between ideas, structures of power, and the often idiosyncratic decisions of a range of downtown actors. An increasingly interventionist local state, dynamic capital investment in retail and real estate, and diverse citizen mobilizations all contributed to making the period from the 1950s through the 1970s a creative—if at times chaotic—period in politics and urbanism in Toronto. Urban experts and growth-oriented administrators cast their gaze on Toronto’s largely unplanned streetscapes, and they saw much that could be improved. Influential local businesses and the country’s first modern land development corporations consolidated their power, and applied themselves to the profitable business of the creative destruction of the older city. Both in response to these changes and as part of the surge in civil society activism that characterized the era, a range of citizens and community groups—from business associations to environmentalists—demanded an unprecedented role in working out the urban future. At no time before or since has such a diverse array of futures been imagined for the city’s core, and the debates of the postwar decades continue to influence urban development today.

In an attempt to account for the interrelated impact of a range of downtown actors, trends, and ideas, I approach this story at two levels: the local and the global. Both, I argue, are essential to understanding the remaking of Toronto’s downtown. In a city more than ever connected to the world, larger economic developments and the international circulation of ideas had great influence; however, their impact also depended on local agendas, personalities, and circumstances. In Toronto, the idea of downtown pedestrian zones, part of the repertoire of modernist urbanism since the 1940s, took on a life of its own in the 1970s as a symbol of political reform, downtown rejuvenation, and mass rejection of the automobile. Likewise, the dramatic rise and fall of “Sin Strip,” a collection of body-rub parlours and sex shops that dotted Yonge from the late 1960s, contains echoes of the transnational sexual revolution and its discontents; but when viewed from street level, local factors—redevelopment pressures, Yonge’s Main Street image, the mobilizing of new political constituencies—also played a decisive role. Finally, the postwar rebuilding of Yonge’s low-rise retail landscape through projects like the Eaton Centre was influenced by both the local agendas of citizens, civic-authorities, and Canada’s largest retailer, and the wider, trans-Atlantic embrace of modernist reconstruction as a path to urban vitality.

## **A view from the street**

“Think of a city,” asked celebrated urbanist Jane Jacobs in 1961, “and what comes to mind? Its streets.”<sup>8</sup> She wrote those words in the context of a sustained rebuttal of mid-twentieth-century modernist planning, with its apparent disregard for human-scaled environments like the street. But Jacobs was also speaking to something larger: the idea that the street is one of the essential elements of the city, and perhaps its most universally recognizable image. Streets make the city, whether as places of encounter, corridors from place A to place B, or as destinations in their own right. Viewed from on high through maps or satellite images, they appear as an ordering framework and an essential system of mobility; from the sidewalk level of the *flâneur*, they are a site of life and unexpected experience. The crowded street is the original public realm, and it should be no surprise that for more than a century it has been the starting place for thinkers from a range of disciplines seeking to understand and interpret the city.<sup>9</sup>

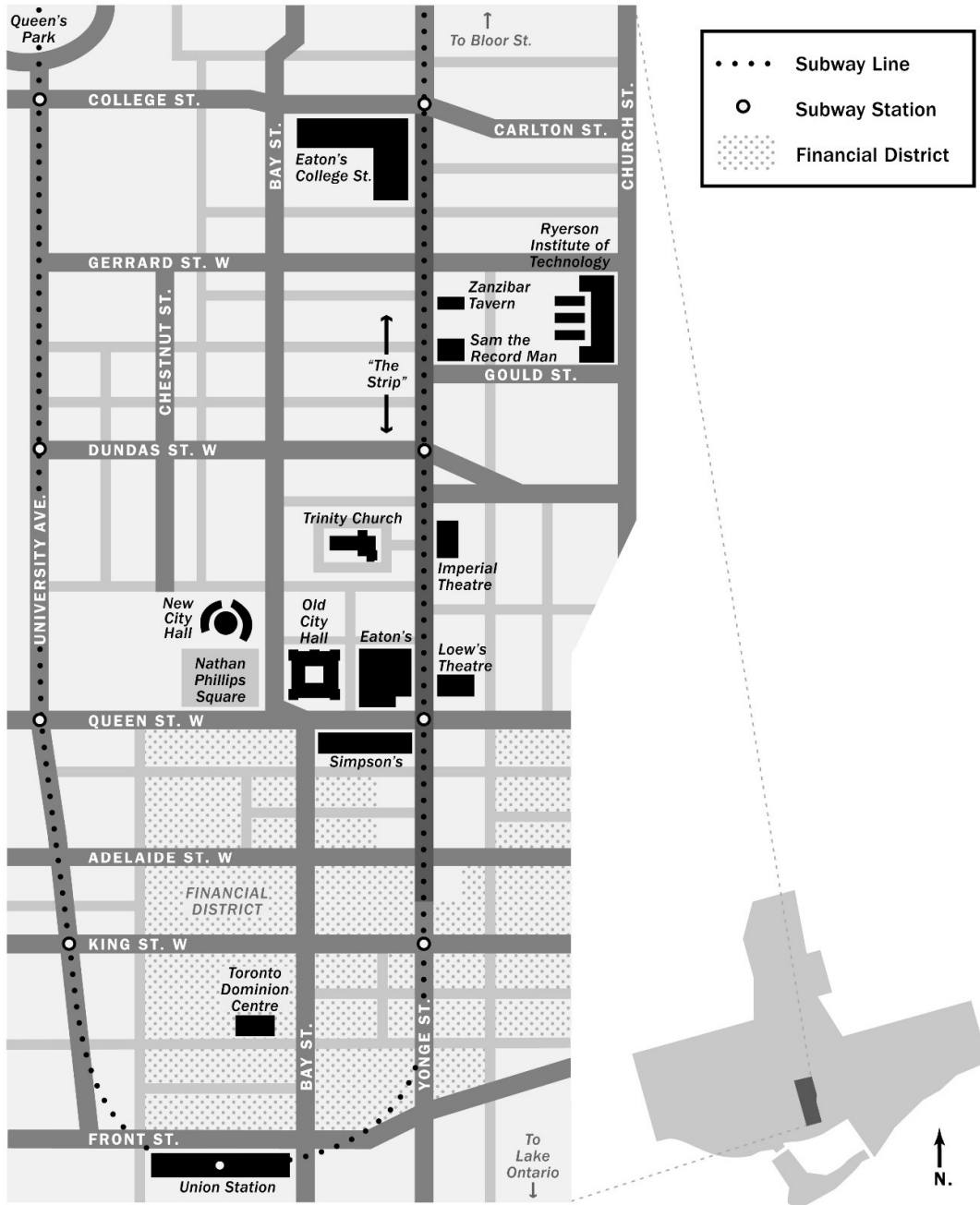
For the historian, the street can be a uniquely productive point of entry into the urban past. This study reads the street as a constitutive part of the city’s history. It is rooted in the story of a single thoroughfare, which over the years has connected countless people to work, leisure, politics, and their fellow citizens. Here Yonge is the through-line connecting a range of historical episodes and actors to each other and to the urban fabric. In all of its complexity and inconstancy, it is a fitting metaphor for the larger city. But a view from street level provides more than a useful narrative device. Focusing in on Yonge Street allows this study to explore larger historical processes affecting the city and society within a clearly delineated space.

Wider developments like the sexual revolution or corporate concentration become more tangible, more easily unravelled when rooted in this specificity. Equally, detailed analysis of their impact on urban lives and forms helps better understand these processes at

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<sup>8</sup> Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 29.

<sup>9</sup> See the “grand tour” of fascination with the street in Nicholas Fyfe, “Introduction: Reading the Street,” in Fyfe, ed., *Images of the Street: Planning, identity, and control in public space* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 1-12.



Yonge Street in the 1960s

*Image 1: Map of Yonge Street by Meredith Sadler.*

a national or global level. However, in this account downtown Yonge Street is not only the background to the action, a site where political struggles, economic improvement programs, or planning experiments played out. It also emerges as an important, dynamic factor influencing those episodes and processes. Yonge's built form, its economic functions, the symbolic meanings and political possibilities people invested in it all play important roles in the story.

Yonge stands out among Toronto streets, but it is not unique as an urban landscape rich in historical meanings. Other major thoroughfares, from Montréal's rue Sainte-Catherine to Sydney's Oxford Street, have been the subject of productive historical investigations.<sup>10</sup> In fact, recognizing the complexity of interactions between people, representations, and urban form has become a central concern for historians of the urban past around the world, for whom the idea of the city as a site has gradually been replaced by more contingent and active notions of place and space.<sup>11</sup> By applying some of their insights to a time and place and to several themes—local politics, private redevelopment, the regulation of public space—underrepresented in the historical scholarship on Canadian cities, I hope to re-assert the importance of a spatially-informed approach to writing the kind of detailed analysis of urban transformation and politics presented here.<sup>12</sup> In other

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<sup>10</sup> Paul-André Linteau, *La rue Sainte-Catherine. Au cœur de la vie Montréalaise* (Montréal : Les Éditions de l'Homme, 2010), Pierre Anctil, *Saint-Laurent. Le « Main » de Montréal* (Montréal : Septentrion, 2002), Garry Wotherspoon and Clive Faro, *Street Seen : A History of Oxford Street* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> See Michael B. Katz, "From Urban as Site to Urban as Place: Reflections on (Almost) a Half-Century of U.S. Urban History," *Journal of Urban History* 41:4 (2014): 560-66 and Simon Gunn, "The spatial turn: changing histories of place and space," in Gunn and Robert Morris, eds., *Identities in Space: Contested Terrains in the Western City since 1850* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 1-14.

<sup>12</sup> There is a vast literature on the "spatial turn" in the social sciences and humanities, beginning with foundational works like Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso Press, 1989), Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), and David Harvey's writings on Paris, assembled in *Paris: Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2005). The present study is informed most of all by scholars who have productively applied a focus on space and place in their historical work. In Canada this includes, but is not limited to, studies of urban ethnic communities, exemplified by geographer Kay Anderson's "The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* Vol. 77, No. 4 (Dec., 1987): 580-598; literature on gender and sexual identity in the city, including Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); studies of commemoration and public memory such as Ronald Rudin, *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the Streets of Quebec, 1878-1908* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); and urban environmental histories like Jennifer Bonnell's *Reclaiming the Don: An Environmental History of Toronto's Don River Valley* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014). In the United States there is an emerging spatially-focused literature on downtown transformation, including Max Page, *The Creative*

words, to paraphrase historian Leif Jerram, I want to make the “where” of this story just as important as the “what” and the “why.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Politics of place**

I find the idea of “politics of place” useful for understanding how people in Toronto related to Yonge Street. Influenced by the work of scholars including Dolores Hayden and Max Page, I define this idea as an attachment to the specificity of a place—both physical and symbolic—that manifests itself in the political sphere.<sup>14</sup> Downtown Yonge Street, I argue, was as much composed of abstract meanings and lived experiences as it was of bricks, buildings, and lampposts.<sup>15</sup> Through representations they encountered, through discussion, but most of all through personal experience and longstanding use, people invested this landscape with memories and meanings. They became attached to the street, the uses they made of it, and asserted ownership over it. This thesis is most of all concerned with the way that these personal or group identifications with the street were represented in the public sphere through the media, citizen mobilizations, or the discourse of elected officials. In other words, it traces the emergence and impact of a set of political stances and debates that were bound up in a distinct and significant place.

One result is that this account uncovers a diversity of political expression and citizen engagement that has previously been muted in our historical memory of the period. Our understanding of the postwar decades in Toronto, and in particular the turbulent city politics of the 1960s and 1970s, has been dominated by the perspectives of a small group of progressive politicians, activists, and thinkers who were themselves politically active at the time.<sup>16</sup> Their writings, while often thoughtful and informed, have reproduced many of the

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*Destruction of Manhattan, 1900-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) and Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Leif Jerram, *Streetlife: The Untold History of Europe’s Twentieth Century* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13.

<sup>14</sup> Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan*, esp. 252-53, see more broadly the pioneering Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Edward Relph’s classic definition of a place is a combination of physical setting, human activities, and assigned meanings. Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976).

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the most widely known writing on the period is by former reform politician and activist John Sewell. See Sewell, *The Shape of the City: Toronto Struggles with Modern Planning* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) and *Up Against City Hall* (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1972). Other influential accounts of the period include Jon Caulfield, *The Tiny Perfect Mayor* (Toronto: Lorimer and Co., 1974) on the mayoralty of

political binaries of the time—young urban reformers vs. “Old Guard” councillors, rapacious land developers and righteous community activists—and cemented them in the public imagination. In this study I work towards a more balanced account, one that grants agency to actors on all sides of the era’s debates, and does not uncritically accept received accounts of the period. Politics of place is one way to both acknowledge and move beyond long-entrenched political divisions to understand the ideas and decisions of the wide range of people who engaged with downtown Yonge Street.

That includes those who put their labour and capital to work on the street—merchants, corporate investors, department store employees, sex workers—but also others who encountered Yonge as shoppers, commuters, or newspaper readers. This thesis explores, for example, the motivations of the thousands of people across Toronto who wrote to the mayor in the early 1970s, protesting the conversion of failing retailers into body-rub parlours. This was an unprecedented outpouring of opinion, triggered as much by attachment to the specificity of place as engagement with the moral or social issues perceived to be at stake. As this example suggests, feelings of ownership inspired efforts to protect or restore. This meshed well with nostalgia about an idealized urban past, or with the opposition to social and cultural change—whether in attitudes towards sex or inter-generational relations—that galvanized social conservative reaction in the postwar decades. Including the category of place in analysis of citizen activism around youth misbehaviour, public propriety, or sexual expression complicates and enriches our understanding of this important political phenomenon. But the politics of Yonge Street were never exclusively reactive or conservative. People asserted ownership over the street not just to protest changes, but to make them: to imagine better, sometimes radically different futures. Paying attention to politics inspired by place helps us to understand why and how this happened.

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David Crombie (1972-78). More broadly, the legacy of urbanist Jane Jacobs, who lived in Toronto in the 1960s and 1970s and participated in many of the planning debates of the time, is given great attention. See for example Christopher Klemek, “From Political Outsider to Power Broker in Two ‘Great American Cities’: Jane Jacobs and the Rise and Fall of the Urban Renewal Order in New York and Toronto,” *Journal of Urban History* 38:2 (2008): 309-22; for a re-evaluation of her importance, see Richard White, “Jane Jacobs and Toronto, 1968-1978,” *Journal of Planning History* 10:2 (2011): 114-38.



## Contested terrain, contested futures

Competing claims of ownership made downtown Yonge Street contested terrain. On the basis of their attachments to the street, a wide and varied cast of historical actors disputed its form and function, whether through business decisions, the political process, or day-to-day use. This was most obvious in the proliferation of often conflicting plans to improve, revitalize, or rebuild the strip, and debates over their enactment. Some of these schemes succeeded, others failed; all were contested. For example, when the regional municipality of Metro Toronto attempted to put into action longstanding plans to widen Yonge into an automobile artery, downtown politicians and planners responded with proposals to curb traffic, pedestrianize, and beautify; in 1966 and again in 1972 a colossal redevelopment project by retail giant Eaton's was opposed by citizens who organized to express public attachment to historic buildings and concern for maintaining the street's Victorian sociability and scale. From this contestation and the resulting negotiations emerged the street as we know it today.

At almost any given moment in the postwar period, in fact, people were imagining multiple futures for Yonge Street.<sup>17</sup> Plans and improvement agendas were often rooted, this thesis argues, in fundamentally different images of the future. From the 1950s through the 1970s, at least four different visions were articulated for Yonge: modern, comprehensively planned shopping core; pedestrian-friendly "people place"; edgy, big-city entertainment destination; nostalgized Main Street commercial strip. At times impractical or grandiose, these futures cannot be dismissed as exercises in speculation: they were an integral part of the way people understood the changing city and its possibilities.<sup>18</sup> Encounters between conflicting agendas for Yonge triggered larger discussions, in public and in the corridors of power, over the development of the postwar city. Closing Yonge Street to cars in the early 1970s brought into focus the possibilities of planning a human-scaled downtown; it also offered Toronto a site of conversation about public space and its civic, commercial, and recreational purposes. Likewise, the imminent demolition of Toronto's Old City Hall in 1966

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<sup>17</sup> I am indebted to Jennifer Bonnell for her simple and effective idea of "imagined futures." Bonnell, *Reclaiming the Don*, esp. xx-xxii.

<sup>18</sup> On the importance of future thinking to understanding historical subjects, see David Engerman, "Introduction: Histories of the Future and the Futures of History," *American Historical Review* (Dec. 2012): 1402-10.

drew attention not just to the municipal administration's apparently callous attitude towards built heritage, but also to the larger question of locating the public interest in private redevelopment.

It was never enough simply to imagine a better urban future. This study uses politics as a lens for understanding the different types of power exercised in Yonge Street's transformation. It examines, first of all, the ways in which representations of the future were employed to mobilize political support for collective projects, whether rigorous policing, the closing of streets to traffic, or the modernization of Yonge's built landscape. But it also digs below the surface of those projects, exploring the ways they took shape outside of the public eye, according to structures of economic or administrative power that were rarely subject of protracted debate. The influence of capital looms large here. Much of the dynamism in this story, the imperative for urban change, was supplied by private decisions to invest—or disinvest—in Yonge Street's economic development. This thesis pays particular attention to the influence of the redevelopment process, which over several decades not only rebuilt a substantial section of the street, but also helped create a speculative market in downtown land that had far-reaching impacts on Yonge's future. In my account of the Eaton Centre project, I describe not only how the project was framed and, to an extent, "sold" to Toronto, but also of the land assembly, corporate investment structures, and larger economic context that made it possible. The result is a narrative that connects the turbulent politics of redevelopment with corporate decision-making and the power of capital investment to reshape the downtown landscape.

Major private and public improvement projects hogged the headlines, but people also acted out their claims on Yonge Street on a more personal, immediate level. Daily occupancy and use of the street was a form of contestation, particularly for those lacking the public voice, political influence, or economic power of municipal authorities, business leaders, or recognized urban experts. Small merchants and craft vendors occupying sidewalk space with advertising or their wares; youth or party-goers using the street as a meeting place; sex workers discretely circulating among weekend crowds or boldly advertising their services: all were asserting their right to the street in their own way. Ongoing, street-level contestation was not limited to the weak or marginalized, however; like city politics, it too had its power relationships. Police, for example, made their presence felt on Yonge each

day, regulating use and behaviour through both formal and discretionary powers. In these ways, like all well-used public spaces, Yonge was a medium for the negotiation of day-to-day politics.<sup>19</sup> That the issues at stake were mundane does not mean they were insignificant. This study finds that quotidian squabbles over noise levels, pamphleteering, or soliciting mattered, and over time could have as much impact on the street as higher-level debates over urban renewal or transportation policy.<sup>20</sup>

### **A history of change**

This thesis explores a transformative period in the history of downtown Yonge Street, and the unprecedented public debates that helped drive that change. But Yonge, like other successful commercial thoroughfares, has always been a street in transformation, changing in interaction with the modern city and urban region that grew up around it. In 1873 local clergyman and historian Henry Scadding marvelled in his nostalgic *Toronto of Old* at the speed at which the street had been “so solidly and even splendidly built up,” on its way to displacing King Street as the city’s principal commercial thoroughfare.<sup>21</sup> Three decades later the small but prosperous wholesale and retail businesses that characterized the street in Scadding’s day were being bought up and repurposed or torn down as land values soared and competition for consumer dollars stiffened. Interviewed by the *Globe* in 1908, retiring merchant John Wanless expressed regret to see the business he had established fifty years previously close its doors; the newspaper was more sanguine, calling the closing of the Wanless store “time’s advance...mak[ing] room for new enterprise,” in this case the relentless expansion of department store giant Simpson’s.<sup>22</sup>

By the time redevelopment on Yonge was halted by the Great Depression, the three to four-storey Victorian streetscape admired by Scadding had evolved. Yonge in the mid-twentieth century retained the identity it had taken on in the nineteenth: that of a bustling commercial artery offering shopping and entertainment to a wide cross-section of Torontonians. But some of those functions were now housed in denser, modern

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<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Blomley, *Rights of Passage: Sidewalks and the Regulation of Public Flow* (London: Routledge, 2010), 18-19.

<sup>20</sup> A similar point about the importance of everyday law and policy is made in Mariana Valverde, *Everyday Law on the Street: City Governance in an Age of Diversity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Henry Scadding, *Toronto of Old* (Toronto: Adam, Stevenson & Co., 1873), 377.

<sup>22</sup> “A Yonge Street Landmark,” *The Globe*, July 23, 1908.

constructions, including imposing block-sized department stores, ornate theatres, and a series of solid corporate office buildings clustered south of Queen Street. The piecemeal transformation of the street and its adaptation to new technologies and patterns of use would continue throughout the twentieth century, quickening during the period investigated in this study, and after.<sup>23</sup> Most recently, in the twenty-first century Yonge's landscape has been dramatically altered by a series of large-scale residential developments that have set its street-level retail at the base of sixty and eighty-storey condominium skyscrapers. Contemporary changes on Yonge are explored in more depth in the conclusion of this thesis.

In the past, as now, not every observer appreciated Yonge's heterogeneous built landscape, seemingly always in the process of becoming. In 1927 influential architect John Lyle made front-page news when he speculated whether "any city in the world of a similar size can show a shabbier street than Yonge Street: a meaner lot of shops, or a worse conglomeration of false fronts."<sup>24</sup> This kind of criticism of the utilitarian, sometimes gaudy commercial façade presented by Yonge would be amplified in the postwar era. Others complained about congestion, both on sidewalks crowded with shoppers and on the pavement, where streetcars and growing numbers of private automobiles vied for space. But this excess of vitality was also viewed as one of the street's greatest attributes. Yonge Street was crowds, wrote another observer in the 1920s—"loitering crowds, hurrying crowds, window-shopping crowds, buying crowds"—and many people appreciated being part of the big-city bustle it offered, surely a sign of the city's economic success and social cohesion.<sup>25</sup> It is important to remember that crowds meant not just bargains and thrills, but also livelihoods: this busy street was a workplace for thousands, whether shop clerks, tailors, cooks, accountants, or cab drivers. Toronto celebrated Yonge Street first and foremost not for its beauty, but for its obvious prosperity.

The street was also valued as a major downtown public space. Yonge at mid-century was a Main Street landscape to which many people were attached, the site of Friday night

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<sup>23</sup> For two perspectives on 1990s and 2000s changes on Yonge, see Evelyn Ruppert, *The Moral Economy of Cities: Shaping Good Citizens* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006) and Beth Moore Milroy, *Thinking Planning and Urbanism* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> "Says Yonge Street Shabby; Has Mean Shop Fronts," *Toronto Star*, Jan. 31, 1927.

<sup>25</sup> "Swarming Christmas Crowds Transform Downtown Toronto," *Globe*, Dec. 21, 1925.



*Image 2: Yonge Street looking north from Queen Street on an unusually crowded summer afternoon, August 1929. City of Toronto Archives 16-71-6564.*

cinema and Saturday shopping, of Labour Day and Santa Claus Parades. Soldiers went off to two World Wars marching down Yonge Street, and in 1918 and 1945 victory was celebrated by jubilant crowds along the same route. Yonge was the street where churchgoers strolled after Sunday services—past shops closed for the Sabbath by a firmly Protestant municipal administration—but also where lunch-counters stayed open twenty-four hours to accommodate shift workers and late-night revellers. The brightness of the strip contrasted sharply with the dark, often deserted cross-streets that intersected it; Yonge’s centrality was only emphasized by the lack of any substantial commercial development on east-west streets in this part of downtown Toronto.

To some observers, this wide range of uses symbolized the North American ideal of downtown as a site of civic communion, an essentially democratic place where citizens met, transacted business, and negotiated difference on terms of equality.<sup>26</sup> People referred to Yonge as Toronto’s centre, or its beating heart, an idealized place where citizens of all classes and backgrounds rubbed shoulders, including the working-class, recent immigrants,

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<sup>26</sup> See Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 4-6.

and the suburban housewife; a rare “mingling of the splendid and the shabby,” as one city desk columnist put it in 1912. In a city that aspired to big-city status, Yonge was proof of success: on its most crowded days, several observers argued, the street was Toronto’s “testimony of metropolitanism,” presenting street scenes reminiscent of New York’s Great White Way or London’s Strand.<sup>27</sup> In the postwar period, the idea that Yonge was not just a commercial zone but a vital civic space remained important, serving to justify both interventions aimed at protecting and enhancing that function, and a populist politics that claimed majority control over the street’s fate.

### **Strolling postwar Yonge Street**

A tour of downtown Yonge in the post-1945 era reveals continuities, but also new changes: the street refused to stay still. Our stroller begins walking where Toronto—and Yonge Street—meet Lake Ontario. After crossing over the industrial in-fill of Toronto’s harbour lands and the city’s extensive railway yards, the street emerges into the city proper at Front Street. Almost immediately there is a change in atmosphere. Once within the confines of the nineteenth century city, which effectively begins north of the railway lines, Yonge is much more densely developed, with most buildings constructed right to the edge of their lots. The centre of activity is a shopping and entertainment strip approximately twelve blocks (1.4 km) long, running from just south of Queen Street to as far north as College Street. Commercial development continued north more or less continuously to Bloor Street and into the residential suburbs, but the iconic strip—and debates over its future—effectively ended there. In comparison to nearby University Avenue, downtown Yonge lacks stately public buildings, grandeur, or perspective. Instead, its great strength is its human scale, allowing a pedestrian to see what is happening on the other side, and cross midblock in relative safety.

Upon arrival at the southern end of the strip, our Yonge Street *flâneur*’s attention is drawn by the impressive, block-sized flagships of the Eaton’s and Simpson’s department store chains. Their presence made Yonge and Queen the most trafficked retail crossroads in

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<sup>27</sup> Brian Bellasis, “Yonge Street,” *Globe*, Nov. 2, 1912; “Swarming Christmas Crowds Transform Downtown Toronto,” *Globe*, Dec. 21, 1925.



*Image 3: The two major department stores on the west side of Yonge at Queen, late 1960s. At left with flags is Simpson's, and the large red-brick building further north (also hung with flags) is Eaton's. Commercial postcard, Chuckman's Toronto Collection.*

the country, with the highest land value per square foot in the downtown core.<sup>28</sup> Further north, the end of the busiest stretch of the strip is marked from the 1930s by the huge footprint of a second Eaton's store, constructed at the intersection with College Street. As elsewhere, major department stores had tremendous influence on downtown, drawing consumers to the area and stimulating streetlife with their elaborate window displays, sales, and celebrations.<sup>29</sup> And while their presence drew smaller retailers to the strip, there could be no doubt that these heavyweights dominated the market. In the early 1950s an Eaton's business consultant estimated that as much as 75¢ of every dollar spent by downtown shoppers on clothes and household goods went into the coffers of one of the two giants.<sup>30</sup> Yet despite their success, the major department stores were not complacent: in the postwar

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<sup>28</sup> City of Toronto Planning Board (CTPB), *Downtown Toronto: Background Studies for the Plan* (Toronto: CTPB, 1963), 9.

<sup>29</sup> See Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> "Larry Smith & Co.: Toronto: Preliminary Report, Vol. I, Feb. 17, 1954," Eaton's Fonds, Archives of Ontario (AO) B381767.

era they invested considerable time and money in refining and improving their operations, whether through new marketing strategies or modernization of their physical plant.

Still, there was room for smaller businesses to thrive, and they did. In the 1950s and 1960s Yonge south of College Street was home to nearly three hundred shops and service establishments, by far the largest concentration of shopping in the city.<sup>31</sup> These mostly small, independent businesses accounted for more than one million square feet of retail floor space, twice that of any other retail strip in Toronto, and equivalent to all but the largest suburban shopping centres of the period.<sup>32</sup> Many were prominent members of the Downtown Businessmen's Association, a voluntary group that was one of the largest merchants' associations in the city and a frequent intervenor in civic affairs.<sup>33</sup> In terms of offerings, the short block from Dundas Street south to Terauley Street was typical, housing in the 1950s three shoe stores, two women's fashion outlets, an office furnishing store, two opticians, two jewellers, and a furrier, all sitting on the long, narrow (15-30 foot) lots that defined the first wave of development in Toronto. Above these ground floor uses were additional layers of activity: a billiards hall, a private club, a tailor, two photographers, and several apartments.<sup>34</sup> Postwar these businesses were increasingly oriented towards two groups of customers: young people and the considerable number of Torontonians—150,000 in the early 1960s—who commuted to the expanding office district nearby.

The street was also busy by night. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the east side of Yonge Street was the city's principal hub for popular entertainment, with theatres and musical halls offering vaudeville, film, and other attractions. Postwar this intensified, reaching its peak with the boisterous nightlife and commercialized sex of the 1970s, described in detail later on. Always on the cutting edge of taste, Yonge played host to

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<sup>31</sup> Statistics for 1965 & 1966 show 158 retail stores and 138 service establishments on downtown Yonge. Drawn from *Might's Greater Toronto City Directory* (Toronto: Might's, 1965) and Richard Baine, A. Lynn McMurray, *Toronto: An Urban Study* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1973), 47.

<sup>32</sup> Yorkdale, Canada's largest shopping centre until the late 1970s, boasted just over 1 million square feet of retail space at this time. Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board (MTPB), *Shopping Centres and Strip Retail Areas: Metropolitan Toronto Planning Area, 1969* (Toronto: MTPB, 1970).

<sup>33</sup> The Downtown Businessmen's Association would later be renamed the Downtown Business Council and the Downtown Council. It survives in a very different form today as the Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Association.

<sup>34</sup> "Survey map of Yonge Street properties, late 1950s," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381767; *Might's Toronto Directory* (Toronto: Might's, 1955).



Toronto's first cocktail lounges in the 1940s, and the city's burgeoning blues, jazz, and rock and roll scenes from the 1950s. Venues like the Edison Hotel, the Colonial Tavern, and the Coq d'Or hosted major American musicians on circuit, and also acted as a laboratory for home-grown talent, including folk singer Gordon Lightfoot and jazz pianist Cy McLean. By the 1960s the area had half a dozen small and large movie theatres—including the famous Imperial and Loew's stacked Elgin and Winter Garden Theatres—with a total capacity of more than 5000 spectators. The city's largest records stores were among a growing list of hubs for a youthful consumer and leisure culture that also included blue jeans, posters, and pinball arcades. The range of entertainment offered and the expectations of the audience had changed since the pre-war years, but Yonge by night was still often celebrated in the same terms. In 1969 local rags-to-riches retail and entertainment mogul "Honest" Ed Mirvish described the strip:

People! People! People! Here is Bassel's restaurant, where you might find the mayor sitting next to a truck driver. The bars, go-go parlours, jazz combos, arcades, noise. A & A Records and Sam the Record Man. This noisy, busy strip, beautiful in its ugliness, contrasting with the stark, cold white skyscrapers of University Avenue just a few short blocks to the west.<sup>35</sup>

On a typical day, the Yonge Street sidewalk buzzed with people headed to and from appointments, shopping trips, and lunch breaks. At night, a corridor of neon signage shone on sedate symphony-goers and cruising gangs or car-loads of teenagers. Our downtown stroller would note sidewalk businesses and streetlife that had disappeared from the rest of the downtown core, but still thrived on the strip. As police across the city took to scout cars for their daily patrols, Yonge was one of the last streets in Toronto still patrolled daily and nightly by "beat" cops on foot. Street vendors selling hot chestnuts, flowers or candles were ubiquitous, especially at Christmas-time and in the summer. Meanwhile, boys as young as 12 years old, often drawn from the working-class neighbourhoods of the inner core, set up portable shoeshine shops—a stool and a polish kit—on the busiest blocks. Postwar observers tended to romanticize "Donnie the bootblack" and his companions as entrepreneurs, or examples of Yonge's diverse human landscape; as explored in the second section of this study, in the 1970s many Torontonians came to see the shoeshine boy as a

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<sup>35</sup> "Honest Ed's Toronto: 'It's where the action is,'" *Toronto Star*, Dec. 13, 1969.



*Image 4: The Yonge Street strip (east side, north of Dundas Street) by night, late 1960s. Theatres, restaurants, and taverns, all advertised in bright neon, predominate. Commercial postcard, Chuckman's Toronto Collection.*

powerful symbol of innocence lost.<sup>36</sup> Needless to say, all of this activity was seasonal in a city where humid summers and frigid, snowy winters could dramatically impact mobility and desire to be outdoors.

### **Decentralization, decline, and the postwar city**

The most obvious way to experience Yonge Street was on foot, but how to get there? The range of transportation options available to our postwar *flâneur* helps us situate Yonge in the changing postwar city. By the 1950s a visit to the strip might still start with a streetcar ride—Toronto, unlike most North American cities, continued to invest in its street railways—but it was just as likely to involve a trip by subway or car. From 1954 Yonge was the site of Toronto's first subway line, running seven kilometres underneath the street from the northern suburbs at Eglinton Avenue to southern edge of downtown at Front Street.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> "Donnie the bootblack lets you set the price..." *Toronto Star*, May 21, 1969.

<sup>37</sup> "100,000 Take First Ride; Token Machines Run Dry," *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 31, 1954; on the development of the subway as a metropolitan project, see Jason Young, "Searching for a Better Way: Subway Life and Metropolitan Growth in Toronto, 1942-1978," (PhD Thesis, York History 2012).

Meanwhile, at the street's foot construction began on a lakefront freeway, part of a modern roadway network planned by the newly established Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, which from 1953 bound Toronto together with surrounding communities in the common purpose of planning and managing urban growth.<sup>38</sup>

These projects, like the establishment of Metro Toronto, were long-debated policy responses to an emerging urban reality: decentralization. In the postwar decades rapid suburban development burst the bounds of the densely-built, downtown-oriented "streetcar city," already stretched to the limit by unprecedented levels of immigration and population growth.<sup>39</sup> As Canada slowly transitioned from depression and war to a prosperous consumer society, pent-up demand for housing and growing rates of automobile ownership drove rapid decentralization. From the 1940s through the 1960s, while the population of the inner core remained virtually unchanged, 1.2 million people—almost two additional pre-war Torontos—settled in an outer ring of suburbs that dwarfed the old city in scale. Residential subdivisions were followed by new manufacturing and office concentrations, and the development of strip and shopping malls: in a matter of a few decades, Toronto, like most North American cities, became suburban.<sup>40</sup>

The fact of decentralization, and its impact on downtown politics, surface in each of the three sections of this thesis. Downtown actors, whether department store executives or environmental activists, rightly saw the rise of the suburbs as one of the defining urban transformations of the twentieth century. They traced its impact on Yonge Street in different ways, adding up sales receipts, measuring pollution levels, and counting pedestrians on summer evenings, and they debated their findings in newspapers and other public fora. From these investigations emerged a complex and often contradictory body of opinion. Some saw opportunity in Toronto's changing shape, confident that, if the right choices were made, Yonge would remain the beating heart of the emerging metropolis. Others feared that the flight of people, jobs, and consumer dollars to the suburbs posed an

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<sup>38</sup> Albert Rose, *Governing Metropolitan Toronto: A Social and Political Analysis, 1953-1971* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972) remains the best account of the inception and functions of Metro Toronto.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Relph develops this idea in *Toronto: Transformations in a City and its Region* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), esp. 26-44.

<sup>40</sup> The best account of this larger process of suburbanization and its roots is Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

existential threat to downtown life and livelihoods. This ambivalence was part of larger trend. Surveying the postwar decades, it would be difficult to find a comparable shopping street anywhere in North America that was not singled out for the same combination of hope and anxiety. Everywhere, the downtown future seemed up for grabs.<sup>41</sup>

In this context of uncertainty, images of urban decline influenced discussions of Yonge Street's future. Many observers began to see changes on the street—including the boom in entertainment and youth culture noted by our *flâneur*—not as continuity, but rupture or loss. If in 1908 the closing John Wanless's beloved store was seen as part of the march of progress, by the 1950s and 1960s the demise of similar enterprises seemed to many like the death knell for the strip. To individuals attached to the street, changes in Yonge's streetscape and patterns of use provoked anxiety and nostalgia for earlier times. And to observers of economic and urban trends, Yonge's lack of dynamism relative to other areas of the city seemed to confirm its decline. The image of Yonge as a dying place, in need of artificial resuscitation to survive—"revitalization" was the term most often used—gained political currency and was employed to justify a range of improvement agendas.

This study casts a critical eye on these prognoses of downtown failure, searching for their roots both in the realities of postwar change in Toronto, and in the larger social and cultural context of the postwar period. Among other factors, it notes the influence of demographic change, the city's increasing ethnic diversity, and the debate over public morality and behaviour that defined 1960s and 1970s Canada. Equally important was the powerful discourse of urban crisis—and salvation—filtering north across the border from the United States.<sup>42</sup>

While I take declensionist narratives seriously because of their impact on postwar perspectives and politics, I find that they fall short as a framework for understanding Yonge's fate. Many fears for the street's future proved to be unfounded: on the whole, Toronto's downtown was spared the plummeting land values and loss of commercial activity that characterized many urban centres in the United States and, to a lesser extent,

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<sup>41</sup> Isenberg, *Downtown America* discusses this at length.

<sup>42</sup> The classic account of this subject is Robert Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of US Cities* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995).

Canada.<sup>43</sup> Independent businesses that failed or relocated were soon replaced by national or international chains better able to exploit this expensive prime real estate. A continental recession in the mid-1970s slowed—but did not halt—downtown redevelopment. Disaster never overtook Yonge Street, even if some familiar landmarks disappeared, and others were put to new uses. In fact, within a few decades Toronto would be viewed by many North American observers as a model of a successful city, a status it still holds today to a certain degree. More broadly, this study rejects the assumption that the complexities of urban development can be understood through simplistic metaphors of life and death, which often allow for just one model of success, and ignore the creativity and human agency inherent in the process.<sup>44</sup> This is not an account of an arc towards failure arrested by revitalization, but a complex story of urban transformation.

### Sources

Postwar debates over Yonge Street and the future of Toronto's downtown created a rich archive. From the 1950s through the 1970s there was seldom a moment when the city was not debating Yonge's perceived problems and their many possible solutions. Much of what was said and done is preserved in documentary sources from the period, including (but by no means limited to) newspaper accounts, official reports, business memoranda, and citizens' letters to elected officials. A few numbers give a sense of the size of this archive: over three decades I count at least 20 major reports by city staff, citizen groups, planners, and businesses; more than 2,000 letters from citizens to the mayor; and approximately 1,000 newspaper articles, all dealing with the future of Yonge Street. Surrounding these documents is a larger collection of memoranda, meeting minutes, and internal reports that dwarfs them in size. These and other public and private sources form the core of my research. Dealing with the recent past and with a topic that was of significant public interest, I have rarely been faced, as many historians are, with major silences in the documentary record. In approaching this topic, the challenge has been quite the opposite:

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<sup>43</sup> Richard White makes a similar point about downtown Toronto in "Urban Renewal Revisited: Toronto, 1950 to 1970," *Canadian Historical Review* 97:1 (spring 2016), 4. On Canada and the United States see Michael Goldberg and John Mercer, *The Myth of the North American City: Continentalism Challenged* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986).

<sup>44</sup> Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 2.

how to listen to a cacophony of voices—some much louder than others—weigh them one against another, and bring them into conversation.

The first and most readily accessible source employed here is the press. My research includes a wide reading of over 3,000 articles from Toronto’s three major daily newspapers—the *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, and *Telegram* (reborn in 1971 as the *Toronto Sun*)—as well as dozens more from other major Canadian and, occasionally, international newspapers.<sup>45</sup> In this study, newspapers are, first of all, used as a source of information and detail. Journalists were keen observers of local affairs, including the day-to-day transaction of municipal business, with privileged access to politicians, bureaucrats, and local business elites. This reporting provides the colour that brings past events to life: the attitude of a crowd; the mayor’s impromptu comments to the press gallery; images of streetlife, building façades, or development plans. When followed over time it creates a narrative of the local—with its own particular interpretations, inclusions, and omissions—that is a useful contrast to the official record.

The press also features here as an important influence on municipal politics. The press both helped shape what people in Toronto thought about a range of issues, and created a forum for public discussion, albeit one framed by distinct editorial agendas. Despite the challenges posed by changing tastes and broadcast media, the Toronto dailies remained widely read throughout the period covered here. To give just one example, a 1966 Canadian Facts survey of 1000 Torontonians found that most relied on the major papers for their local news: half read the *Star* on a daily basis, and two-thirds either the *Telegram* or *Globe and Mail*.<sup>46</sup> Each paper had a distinct voice: the *Globe*, “Canada’s national newspaper,” was business-oriented but generally socially progressive; the conservative *Telegram/Sun* offered opinionated columnists and populist editorials; the *Star*, Canada’s

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<sup>45</sup> Here subject clipping files compiled by the Toronto Public Library and the City of Toronto Archives were immensely helpful; so too was the availability of the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail* in word-searchable—if imperfect—digital databases. Other publications, including the *Telegram* and *Sun*, magazines, and the alternative press were found on microform and in print. Television and radio news from the era are much less well-preserved, and were not analyzed in systematically, although the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s online digital archive yielded a few gems.

<sup>46</sup> Canadian Facts, *A Study of the Attitudes of Metropolitan Toronto Adults Towards the Proposed Eaton Centre* (Toronto, 1966). The changing postwar landscape for the press is set out in Royal Commission on Newspapers, *Report* (Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services, 1981), 63-85.

largest newspaper with a circulation of 300,000-400,000, was staunchly Liberal with a roster of respected, nationally syndicated columnists.<sup>47</sup> All three took stances on hot-button local issues like the sex industry or downtown redevelopment, and endorsed political candidates at every election. They also devoted significant space to citizen comment through letters to the editor and the more exclusive—typically expert—op-ed. Throughout this study are instances in which coverage in the dailies influenced Yonge Street politics. Citizen activists were inspired to action by columns they read at breakfast; business and political elites sought to use the press to take the temperature of public opinion—and to shape it.<sup>48</sup> Where possible, I have also sought out community papers, trade journals, and the alternative press, finding the latter in particular a rich source of dissenting perspectives.

Much of this study focuses on municipal decision-making and policy, and here I draw on a careful reading of the vast archive produced by Toronto's two levels of local government. A substantial portion was in the public record: planning reports, council minutes, records of public consultations. Crucially, a series of access to information requests and a research agreement with the City of Toronto opened hundreds of previously inaccessible files, including the official correspondence of the mayor of Toronto and chairman of Metro Toronto, and the internal files of several units of the City and Metro bureaucracy. Generally speaking, these records grew both in quality and quantity throughout the period under study. If in the 1940s and 1950s much of city business was either transacted informally or the records not kept, by the late 1960s the duty to record and preserve was taken much more seriously.

These files allow me, to a certain extent, to reconstruct how Toronto's bureaucracy thought, how politicians made decisions, and the ways in which both types of civic official interacted with an increasingly outspoken public on downtown issues. The discovery of hundreds upon hundreds of letters and phone messages to the mayor concerning the state of Yonge Street, and of petitions signed by thousands more, was surprising and exciting.

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<sup>47</sup> In a typical year, 1974, Toronto circulation was as follows: *Globe*- 141, 330, *Star*- 403,505, *Sun*- 101,372. Audit Bureau of Circulations, *ABC Factbook, 1975/1976* (Toronto: ABC, 1976), 84.

<sup>48</sup> This study does not find a coherent body of public opinion on downtown issues in the press—or elsewhere—but it does recognize its importance of the concept to the practice of local politics. For an illuminating discussion of public opinion and the press see Jeffrey McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge: Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791-1854* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), esp. 6-13 and 116-75.

Here were voices of Torontonians from across the city, downtown and suburbs, young and old; here was an assertive politics of place that needed to be mapped and understood. Equally significant was the discovery of Toronto Councillor William Archer's documentation of the history and day-to-day workings of the Yonge Street pedestrian mall, of which he was the principal organizer. These records highlighted for me not just the importance, but the complexity of municipal governance in a period of urban transformation.

Finally, several large groups of private records provide insight into the perspectives of downtown business and citizen activists. Addressing both the politics and practice downtown redevelopment would not have been possible without the extensive archive of the T. Eaton Co., one of Toronto's most important retailers, downtown landowners, and corporate citizens. The Eaton's records are exceptional in that no other Canadian business of comparative size, and certainly no private land developer, has opened up its records to the public in the same way. Other significant groups of records donated by private individuals include the files of environmental activist group Pollution Probe, development researchers Downtown Action, and heritage conservationists the Friends of Old City Hall. This study also incorporates several oral history interviews conducted to fill in gaps in the archival record, including a series of conversations with 1970s Toronto Mayor David Crombie.

This archive has its absences. The files of public figures rarely include the un-minuted meetings and phone calls that are so crucial to the day-to-day transaction of city business; the Toronto police resolutely refused to release reports or internal communications for the period. Many of the small but important players in this story—the Downtown Business Council, for example—left behind an incomplete documentary record. However, these gaps can be addressed in part through a careful reading of what is there, such as the extensive correspondence between police officials and the mayor, or the Downtown Council and various city councillors. Other silences are the result of choices made during research. Early on, I chose to focus on the powerful. This story turns on public debate and policy interventions, and most of the actors in this story are those who wielded the power to influence one or both: businesses, media, politicians, bureaucrats, well-organized citizen activists. I have tried to include other voices—sex workers, youth—but recognize that the extensive oral history work required to do justice to their perspectives is beyond the scope



of this study. Equally, echoes of Torontonians' relationship with their main street are present in fiction, film, and other cultural artefacts, but here I only scratch the surface of that large and varied body of work.<sup>49</sup>

## Structure

This thesis is divided into three main sections, each telling the story of a major project to reshape Yonge Street and Toronto's downtown, interventions that were themselves animated by differing images of the street's present and future. Chronologically, the focus is on the 1960s and 1970s, but elements of this story extend back to the 1940s, or forward to the 1980s. The first section of this thesis focuses on the Yonge Street pedestrian mall, which closed the street to vehicles and opened it to shoppers and strollers for four summers from 1971 to 1974. Tracing the history of thinking about pedestrians and cars in postwar Toronto, I explore how the idea of car-free zones transformed from a neglected planning proposal to one of the most widely publicized downtown interventions of the era. Beginning in the 1960s, the idea was taken up successively by downtown merchants, the youth counterculture, and environmental activists, before being placed at the centre of efforts to promote downtown Toronto as a "people place." That imagined future had resonance in an era characterized by contestation of the speed and scale of urban development and the place of the automobile in the city. Invested with great hopes—for economic revitalization, for increased environmental awareness, for a new urban sociability—the Yonge Street mall was both popular and controversial. Public debates over its future hinged on the challenges of creating and managing a major new public space in the heart of downtown. Much like the street it occupied, the mall was widely used and carried multiple, often conflicting identities: gathering place, shopping mall, transportation corridor, entertainment zone. The positive notion of a people-centred downtown was effectively challenged by portrayals of the mall as a public place that had become *too* public, ending the experiment and leaving an ambivalent legacy for pedestrian closures in Toronto.

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<sup>49</sup> For an excellent essay on Yonge Street on film, see Geoff Pevere, "Flickering City: Toronto on Film until 2002," in Pevere et al., *Toronto on Film* (Toronto: Toronto International Film Festival, 2009). On Yonge and Toronto in literature see Amy Lavender-Harris, *Imagining Toronto* (Toronto: Mansfield Press, 2010).

In the public imagination, nothing symbolized Yonge's need of improvement more than its reputation as one of Canada's most infamous corridors of commercialized vice. In the second section, I relate the extraordinary short-term success of the sexual entertainment industry on Yonge Street, and examine attempts by citizens and civic officials to regulate or eliminate it. The Sin Strip entertainment area gained national celebrity with the shocking murder of 12-year-old shoeshine boy Emanuel Jaques in 1977, but the story related here is much larger than that single episode. It begins with the street's reorientation towards entertainment in the 1950s and 1960s, both as a response to declining retail business and as an attempt to fulfil a future for downtown as "where the action was," a big-city scene of bright lights, crowds, and the pursuit of pleasure. Along with larger changes in the law and attitudes towards sex, this created the right conditions for the sex shops and body rub parlours that appeared by the dozen on downtown Yonge in the 1970s, transforming it into a night-time marketplace for sexual services and a playground for heterosexual men. What followed were years of debates that brought to the fore questions of morality and the regulation of public space, as a citizen-led campaign sought to "clean up" Yonge and, drawing on nostalgic images of the downtown past, create what they understood as a more democratic, moral future for the street. Toronto authorities, like other governments across North America, experimented with a range of regulatory interventions, from licensing to police intimidation; meanwhile, sex workers, the operators of sex-oriented businesses, and their allies asserted their right to the city through legal challenges, lobbying, and day-to-day strategies of resistance.

The third part of this study explores private and public efforts to plan and implement a modern future for Yonge and downtown, with a particular focus on the extensive landholdings of retail giant Eaton's. Beginning in the 1950s, the image of Yonge Street as Toronto's "Fifth Avenue," launched into a new era of commercial success through reconstruction, inspired both business elites and growth-boosting politicians. Civic pride and the quest for profits were entangled as civic officials and revitalization experts placed the Eaton's lands at the centre of a modernist renewal project heavily influenced by the American example. Yet rebuilding downtown proved to be a complicated business: ambitious planning schemes were destabilized by market realities, citizen opposition, and changing conceptions of the ideal city. The story of the colossal Eaton Centre project (1956-

1977) is an account of capitalist creative destruction, one of the largest of the many redevelopment projects that would transform the Yonge corridor and downtown. But it is also a story of the triumph of community activism, of evolving public-private negotiations, and of consolidation and change within corporate Canada. More than any other intervention, redevelopment would transform Yonge Street's form and meanings.

By way of conclusion, I trace how historical dynamics established in the postwar period have continued to shape Yonge Street and downtown through to the present day. Massive investment in redevelopment, first for retail and office towers and later for university buildings and high-end condominiums, has dramatically transformed block after block of the street. Yet amidst this transformation, widespread attachment to Yonge's storied streetscape has led to continued efforts to preserve and celebrate elements of the street, whether through documentary film, historical tours, or heritage conservation designations. Debates over public morality and behaviour in this busy public space continue to erupt periodically, prompting new policing and surveillance interventions aimed at securing the street's value as a shopping and entertainment destination. Much-changed in form and character since the 1950s, Yonge remains controversial and contested, a microcosm of the successful yet divided city that has grown up around it over the last six decades.

## 1. Streets for People: The Yonge Street Pedestrian Mall

On the afternoon of June 3, 1971, Ontario Premier Bill Davis announced the cancellation of provincial funding for the Spadina Expressway, effectively ending debate over one of the most controversial urban infrastructure projects in Canadian history. The proposed expressway would have provided increased access by car to the heart of Toronto's downtown, but at the cost of displacing several vibrant residential neighbourhoods. That evening, members of the citizens' coalition opposed to the project gathered on downtown Yonge Street to celebrate their success. Yonge has always been a place to celebrate; but in this case it seemed particularly appropriate. Just a few days before, Toronto had with much fanfare launched its first downtown pedestrianization scheme, closing three long blocks of the street to cars to create a major new public space. For the Stop Spadina activists, whose ranks included urbanist Jane Jacobs, this experiment had a powerful symbolic dimension. One of the slogans of their campaign—repeated by Bill Davis as he explained his decision to the press that afternoon—was that “the streets belong to the people.”<sup>1</sup> The Yonge Street pedestrian mall, where four lanes of traffic had been replaced by pedestrians, benches, and beer gardens, seemed to perfectly embody those words.

This is the first account of a planning experiment which sought to revitalize downtown Yonge Street by reimagining it as a people place. For four years, from 1971 to 1974, Toronto joined hundreds of other cities in Europe and North America in enthusiastically embracing pedestrianization. If the vision of postwar redevelopment and urban renewal projects was to replace the older city with something grander, more modern, and more profitable, proponents of pedestrianization sought to do just the opposite: to create value by protecting and enhancing what was already there. As a result, anti-expressway campaigners were not the only people who invested the Yonge Street mall with their hopes for the urban future. The idea appealed to a range of downtown actors, including merchants eager to boost sales, environmentalists opposed to the private car, and

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<sup>1</sup> “Cabinet decides to halt Spadina,” *Globe and Mail*, Jun. 4, 1971; “Spadina opponents hold a party in pedestrian mall, of course,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 4, 1971. The episode is also covered in Claire Hoy, *Bill Davis: A Biography* (Toronto: Methuen, 1985), esp. 87-90.

urban reformers who favoured expanding the city's modest public realm. In this respect, the mall was a reflection of a period in which city politics were opening up to a wider range of constituents, who brought with them both creative approaches to urban issues and strident demands for a voice in decision-making.<sup>2</sup>

The Yonge Street mall was popular, but also controversial. This section argues that its broad base of political support masked conflicting visions of the street and its future; few could agree whether the opening of Yonge's pavement to pedestrians should create economic value, encourage urban sociability, or make a statement about transportation planning. Nor was there consensus on how best to manage the new public space it created, which as it blurred familiar categories and uses—road and sidewalk, park and thoroughfare, shopping and leisure—seemed also to blur or bend the boundaries of acceptable public behaviour. The mall was a crowded public space that offered excitement, atmosphere, and spectacle to a broad range of Torontonians, and attracted perceived undesirables like panhandlers, aggressive entertainment promoters, and long-haired young rowdies. In an historical moment characterized by anxiety around the category of youth, the last was particularly salient to the debate. Discussion of the mall soon centred as much on the appropriate regulatory regime for governing public access and use as on the experiment's economic or civic gifts to the city.<sup>3</sup> By 1974 opposition to the mall by citizen activists and law enforcement officials had empowered a narrative that cast the street closure as one of Yonge Street's problems, and not a solution. The idea of Yonge as a street for the people would have continued resonance for the era's turbulent politics, but by the late 1970s a traffic-free strip was seen as having more negative than positive implications.

Something fundamental to the ordering of the city was challenged by the experiment. Using concepts including "automobility,"<sup>4</sup> and "pedestrianism,"<sup>5</sup> scholars from

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<sup>2</sup> On the chaos and creativity of the period see Jon Caulfield, "'Reform' as a Chaotic Concept: The Case of Toronto," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 17:2 (1988): 107-11.

<sup>3</sup> Sociologist Evelyn Ruppert has argued that public spaces are determined most of all by the regimes that regulate their use. "Rights to Public Space: Regulatory Reconfigurations of Liberty," *Urban Geography* 27:3 (2006): 271-92.

<sup>4</sup> A good introduction to the concept of automobility is Mike Featherstone, "Automobilities: An Introduction," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21:4 (2004): 1-24.

<sup>5</sup> On pedestrianism see Nicolas Blomley, *Rights of Passage: Sidewalks and the Regulation of Public Flow* (New York: Routledge, 2011), esp. 3-4, and "How to Turn a Beggar into a Bus Stop: Law, Traffic, and the 'Function of the Place'," *Urban Studies* 44:9 (2007): 1697-1712.

a range of disciplines have described how in North America, municipal authorities and the law manage public thoroughfares and spaces according to principles of scarcity, flow, and separation of uses. Streets are allotted to the car, sidewalks and squares to the pedestrian, and the public interest is defined as the orderly and unobstructed movement of both from point A to point B. This logic is historically rooted, the product of both technological change—the rise of the private automobile looms large—and political and cultural developments, including the expansion of the powers of the local state, and the growing role of technical expertise in urban governance. While this mode of thinking about urban public space integrated well with many of the modernist planning ideas that circulated in Toronto and elsewhere from the early to mid-1900s onwards, it was both more pervasive and more deeply embedded in institutions than any particular trend in urban planning.<sup>6</sup>

The multi-functional, intensely used public space created by the pedestrian malls did not easily fit with that logic. Nor was there a readily applicable alternative framework, although there were numerous precedents in other North American jurisdictions. The city did not possess all of the powers necessary to close Yonge Street or satisfactorily manage the resulting space, relying instead on a mixed set of tools that included special provincial legislation, informal persuasion, and a sometimes overreaching police presence. More broadly, the mall seemed to be a challenge from outside to the authority of those tasked with managing the city's streets and transportation network, including traffic planners and engineers, the Public Works Department, and the police. According to their own interests and political resources, those actors pushed back. In short, everything that was innovative and new about the mall, everything that made it popular, also helped to create serious obstacles to the project's success, and tended to reinforce the *status quo* as the path of least resistance.

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<sup>6</sup> On cars and pedestrians see especially Stephen Davies, "Reckless Walking Must be Discouraged: The Automobile and the Shaping of Urban Canada to 1930," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 18:2 (1989): 123-38 and Peter Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002). On the development of the public interest in the nineteenth century era of municipal reform see the essays in John C. Weaver, *Shaping the Canadian City: Essays on Urban Politics and Policy, 1890-1920* (Toronto: The Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 1977) and Paul Rutherford, ed., *Saving the Canadian City: The First Phase, 1880-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), and on expertise Stephen Bocking, "Constructing Urban Expertise Professional and Political Authority in Toronto, 1940-1970," *Journal of Urban History* 33:1 (2006): 51-76.

Most North American pedestrian malls took a similar journey from popularity into controversy and eventual obsolescence.<sup>7</sup> Their numbers continued to grow until the late 1970s, but by that point enthusiasm was waning. Cities across the continent complained of high vacancy rates and traffic disruption; some were, like Toronto, paralyzed by debates over the perceived dangers posed by homeless people, panhandlers, and youth. As private investment poured into downtowns, many of these experiments were also vulnerable to competition from privately managed, enclosed downtown shopping malls like the Eaton Centre.<sup>8</sup> Cities experimenting with temporary closures often gave up, and many permanent malls were reopened to car traffic.<sup>9</sup> In Canada the few 1960s-1970s pedestrian zones that have survived to today—Ottawa’s Sparks Street, Vancouver’s Granville transit mall—are seldom described as success stories. The image of the pedestrian bringing vitality, culture, and security to the heart of the city remains a powerful one in urban theory and planning practice in Toronto; but the formula behind successful people places remains elusive.

### **Planning for pedestrians downtown**

Compared to other North American cities, Toronto was slow to adopt an urban planning system.<sup>10</sup> The city had no overarching plan or permanent planning committee until the 1940s, relying instead on temporary commissions and municipal bylaws to oversee development. This *ad hoc* process was inadequate for the transformative ambitions of post-Second World War city builders. Toronto’s first comprehensive plans were developed in the optimistic, even utopian context of postwar reconstruction, and it shows. From the 1940s into the 1960s, the experts responsible for planning the city’s future tended to think big. Influenced by the international circulation of modernist planning ideas, they imagined a

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<sup>7</sup> For overviews of the obstacles faced by other pedestrianization projects in North America and elsewhere see Kent Robertson, “The Status of the Pedestrian Mall in American Downtowns,” *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 26:2 (December 1990): 250-73 and *Pedestrian Malls and Skywalks: Traffic Separation Strategies in American Downtowns* (Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 1994), as well as Harvey Rubenstein, *Pedestrian Malls, Streetscapes, and Urban Spaces* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> “City pedestrian malls fail to fulfil promise of revitalizing downtown,” *Wall Street Journal*, Jun. 17, 1987; Kent Robertson, “The Status of the Pedestrian Mall in American Downtowns,” *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 26:2 (December 1990): 250-73.

<sup>9</sup> Several studies suggest that in the United States only 10-15% of pedestrian malls survived into the 2000s. Cole E. Judge, *The Experiment of American Pedestrian Malls* (Downtown Development Centre, 2013), 4. Canada experienced a similar rate of long-term success. Hannah Schostack, *City Centre Pedestrian Systems: A State of the Art Review* (Montréal: Transport Canada, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> Richard White develops this theme in *Planning Toronto: The Planners, The Plans, Their Legacies, 1940-80* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), esp. 9-74.

process of planned expansion and development that would produce a more coherent, better-functioning city.

That is not to say that ready-made modernist solutions were applied to Toronto's perceived urban problems. This was a pragmatic brand of modernism that developed quite differently depending on city forms and political mandates. In the city as a whole, the priority was planning for growth. That meant directing and facilitating suburban expansion, and connecting the new suburbs to the centre and to one another. The large scale of the infrastructure required was a major contributing factor to the creation of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, which assumed powers over area-wide planning in 1953. Roads were widened, sewers and the water system improved, and new public transit planned. Most famously, Metro launched a high-profile series of expressway projects to link city and suburbs, of which the proposed Spadina Expressway was just one link, albeit a crucial one.<sup>11</sup> Another was the Gardiner Expressway (completed 1964), an east-west urban corridor sprawling across the southern edge of the downtown and crossing Yonge Street near its foot.

Densely-built and used, the core defied any attempt to plan the future from zero. Instead, planners envisioned a slow and careful process of redevelopment and modernization.<sup>12</sup> At crucial junctures, they would intervene with expertise to shape private development according to the public interest. The pedestrian played an important role in that vision. Downtown foot traffic was the subject of two City of Toronto planning reports, *The Pedestrian in Downtown Toronto* (1959) and *On Foot Downtown* (1969), and it occupied a prominent place in the 1963 *Plan for Downtown Toronto*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> There is a growing literature on Metro transportation planning. For an overview see White, *Planning Toronto*, 77-138 or Albert Rose, *Governing Metropolitan Toronto: A Social and Political Analysis, 1953-1971* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). On expressways see Danielle Robinson, "Modernism at a Crossroad: The Spadina Expressway Controversy in Toronto, ca. 1960-1971," *Canadian Historical Review* 92:2 (2011): 295-322; on public transit, Jay Young, "Searching for a Better Way: Subway Life and Metropolitan Growth in Toronto, 1942-1978," (PhD Thesis, York History 2012).

<sup>12</sup> See especially CTPB, *The Changing City* (Toronto: CTPB, 1959).

<sup>13</sup> City of Toronto Planning Board (CTPB), *The Pedestrian in Downtown Toronto* (Toronto: CTPB, 1959), *Plan for Downtown Toronto* (Toronto: CTPB, 1963), and City of Toronto (CT), *On Foot Downtown* (Toronto: 1969) and *Official Plan for the City of Toronto Planning Area* (Toronto: 1970).



What explains all of this attention? As a planning concept, building for pedestrians appealed because it promised to help address two of the major preoccupations of downtown planners: congestion and a lack of public space. It also fit with the growing influence of urban design ideas—emphasizing diversity and social functions of city environments—in Toronto planning circles in the 1960s. One of the most revolutionary aspects of the turn towards urban design (also present in the British “townscape” movement of the same period) was the idea that streets were not simply thoroughfares, but social spaces integral to the life of the city.<sup>14</sup> But most of all, planners were interested in the pedestrian because high levels of foot traffic were a reality of downtown life: “However people may get to and from the central core of downtown,” they argued, “the area itself operates primarily as a pedestrian centre.”<sup>15</sup> Inevitably, this was not just a statement of fact, but of policy: Toronto planners thought the fact that the downtown was a pedestrian place was a good thing, and their interventions were aimed at protecting and consolidating that identity.

Two main concerns shaped how postwar planners and civic administrators viewed the pedestrian. The first was efficiency of movement. In essence, they applied the logic and methods of transportation planning to the sidewalk. Following guidelines set out by the US-based Institute of Traffic Engineers, planners divided the pavement into 22-inch “pedestrian lanes.” They then used extensive surveys to chart pedestrian volumes, and interpreted the results using the familiar engineering metaphors of “flow” and “obstructions.”<sup>16</sup> What they found confirmed what most people who spent time downtown already knew: the area’s 12-foot sidewalks were woefully inadequate for the thousands of people that used them. On lower Yonge and Bay Streets, pedestrian volumes reached 6000 per hour at peak periods of the day. Intersections and subway exits were overcrowded, spilling office-workers and shoppers onto the road. Large, densely-developed blocks forced pedestrians to either take long detours or improvise shortcuts through lanes. By rationalizing downtown streets and

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<sup>14</sup> White, *Planning Toronto*, 271. On the townscape movement, see Cullen, Gordon, *Townscape* (London: Architectural Press, 1961). On urban design, see especially Eric Mumford, *Defining Urban Design: CIAM Architects and the Formation of a Discipline, 1937-69* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> CTPB, *Plan for Downtown Toronto*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> CTPB, *Downtown Toronto: Background Studies for the Plan* (Toronto: CTPB, 1963), 112-13; CTPB, *Plan for Downtown Toronto*, 18.

eliminating conflict between uses, planners thought they could improve circulation of both cars and people. Pedestrianization could be a path to a better functioning, more modern downtown.

There was nothing particularly new about this critique: the city had been discussing ways to modernize its narrow streets for decades, mostly to accommodate the demands of the automobile. Thoroughfares designed in the nineteenth century for horse-drawn vehicles and low population densities were seen as inadequate for the crowds and car traffic of the modern city.<sup>17</sup> In the early 1900s Toronto council considered several sets of plans for downtown that, influenced by the “City Beautiful” movement, called for reshaping the old layout with grand boulevards, traffic circles, and diagonal arterial roads.<sup>18</sup> And city authorities twice considered a scheme for improving both pedestrian and vehicle circulation by “arcading” downtown Yonge Street—essentially removing the sidewalk and channelling pedestrians through pathways built into the ground floor of buildings. This method was considered particularly suitable given Toronto’s cold winters, but foundered amid concerns over cost.<sup>19</sup> Foreshadowing discussions of the 1970s pedestrian mall, some commentators worried about the difficulties of managing these new spaces, since they could attract “undesirable characters loafing in the semi-darkness behind the piers and in the doorways.”<sup>20</sup>

Over time, however, planners became less concerned with efficiency, and increasingly preoccupied with improving pedestrian experience. Often the two could not be separated: easing congestion would make walking more pleasant, they argued, and attractive pedestrian features could reduce the number of cars circulating downtown. Nonetheless, in the decade between *The Pedestrian in Downtown Toronto* (1959) and *On Foot Downtown* (1969), planners demonstrated a growing commitment to viewing the pedestrian as more than just another kind of traffic. Instead, they expressed interest in pedestrian infrastructure as a way to make downtown “a vital and attractive place to be,”

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<sup>17</sup> CTPB, *The Pedestrian in Downtown Toronto*, 1.

<sup>18</sup> On those fascinating plans see James Lemon, “Plans for Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Toronto: Lost in Management,” *Urban History Review/Revue d’histoire urbaine* 18: 1 (1989): 11-31.

<sup>19</sup> “Dept. of Works to Committee on Works, May 27, 1947,” CTA, 143179-10.

<sup>20</sup> S.G. Curry, “Yonge Street Improvements,” *Construction* 21:10 (October 1928), 354.

even after office hours and on weekends.<sup>21</sup> Aesthetic improvements, places to meet or rest, sidewalks that could accommodate window-shopping: planning the urban environment to better suit people could have far-reaching effects on how people saw and experienced it. To the growing number of planners influenced by urban design, the city had a long way to go. In addition to the inconveniences and dangers created by crowds and traffic, there was a glaring lack of accessible open space or distinctive features among the parking lots and high-rises. Pedestrianization was one way of addressing this. It also offered a chance to critique the influence of the automobile on downtown streetscapes by suggesting an alternative way forward.

Meeting either of these goals—reducing sidewalk congestion or improving pedestrian experience—was a challenge in a part of the city where both street space and land were at a premium. In the short term, planners suggested widening sidewalks and formalizing mid-block shortcuts into pedestrian pathways. The New City Hall and Civic Square project (completed in 1965) gave them a chance to comprehensively plan what they hoped would be a hub for above-ground pedestrian paths.<sup>22</sup> In the long term, they proposed something more ambitious: the complete vertical separation of foot and car traffic. Ideally, planners explained, surface vehicles would be diverted into tunnels, creating an urban utopia for the pedestrian. In practice, it was clear from the start that for budgetary reasons it was foot traffic that would have to be buried. Inspired by the apparent success of Montréal's Place Ville-Marie development (1957-1962), a series of tunnels beneath downtown towers were designed to provide a safe, climate-controlled environment for pedestrians. By the mid-1960s plans for several major downtown development projects included underground retail arcades, and it seemed likely that the city could work with developers to connect them. This scheme, which would eventually become the PATH network, promised to please budget-minded politicians, since at least part of the price of construction—and all of the costs of maintenance—would be assumed by the private sector. It was also looked on

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<sup>21</sup> CT, *On Foot Downtown*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> CTPB, *The Pedestrian in Downtown Toronto*, 2-3.

approvingly by Metro transportation planners, who saw burying some or all of downtown pedestrian traffic as a way to improve the circulation of on-street motor vehicles.<sup>23</sup>

By the early 1970s, Toronto had been discussing pedestrian improvements in the downtown core for well over a decade. For most of that time, the conversation was limited to professional planners. But one of their lower-priority ideas—converting streets into pedestrian malls—did gain supporters well beyond planning circles, and in some unlikely contexts. By 1970-1971, a range of people supported downtown malls, and the idea was poised to become one of the symbols of a transformation of city politics and planning in Toronto.

### **Pedestrian malls: An international trend**

Planners were well aware that tunnels could not address the core's lack of open space. Nor would they add much to the vitality of the area after business hours. Alongside promotion of the nascent underground system, from the late 1950s onwards they intermittently urged aboveground street closures in several places around the core. A 1958 redevelopment plan for the west side of Yonge between Queen and Dundas emphasized the creation of a new, pedestrian-only street behind the shopping strip, lined with small shops and trees.<sup>24</sup> The *Plan for Downtown Toronto* suggested experimental closures on Yonge's retail and entertainment strip, and the creation of a permanent pedestrian mall that would include elements of the nearby bohemian Village area—very much modelled on New York City's Greenwich Village—on Gerrard Street just west of Yonge.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, in Kensington Market, a cluster of small food and specialty shops run mostly by European immigrants, planners recommended pedestrianization, the construction of new parking facilities, and the conversion of its somewhat rundown buildings into standardized market stalls.<sup>26</sup>

Little real research seems to have been done on closing Yonge Street at this time. But in both cases where a permanent mall was proposed—the Village and Kensington

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<sup>23</sup> CT, *On Foot Downtown*. See also Lindy Goodman, *Streets beneath the Towers: The Development of Toronto's Underground Pedestrian Mall System* (Toronto: York University Geography Discussion Paper, 1984).

<sup>24</sup> This was Viking, discussed in more detail in the section on redevelopment and the Eaton Centre. "CTPB Memorandum – Project Viking, Jun. 9, 1958," CTA, 331388-2.

<sup>25</sup> CTPB, *Plan for Downtown Toronto*, 31, 37.

<sup>26</sup> CTPB, *The Kensington Market* (Toronto: CTPB, 1962).



*Image 1.1: For modernist planners, the pedestrianized downtown promised safety, beauty, and efficiency. Adapted from City of Toronto Planning Board, The Pedestrian in Downtown Toronto (1959). Original image from Victor Gruen's widely applauded Plan for Fort Worth (1955).*

Market—plans were fairly well-developed. Toronto planners, like many locals, were enamoured with Kensington Market's multicultural, "Old World" atmosphere, and the Village's "fascinating" mix of "small shops, tea houses, restaurants, studios and art dealers." Temporary closures in the Village for a community art festival seem to have been successful.<sup>27</sup> Pedestrianization was viewed as an inexpensive intervention that would preserve the distinct characters of the two areas, while improving their generally run-down streetscapes. Removing traffic, fixing up building facades, and adding street furniture would

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<sup>27</sup> "Commissioner to Board of Control, Apr. 23, 1963," CTA, 314-88-1.

turn the Village and the Market into “centre[s] of interest” that would attract increased numbers of local shoppers and visitors.<sup>28</sup>

It would also, planners hoped, provide a measure of protection against encroaching development. This was especially urgent in the Village area, where land speculation and the expansion of Toronto General Hospital were eating away at the area’s formerly abundant low-rise, low-rent building stock.<sup>29</sup> In fact, by the time the pedestrian mall plan for the Village came under serious review, in 1968, nearly all of the artists and specialty businesses that had given the area its charm were gone: many had relocated north to the new bohemian enclave of Yorkville.<sup>30</sup> In the end, neither of the two plans was implemented, although two brand new parking garages were built in Kensington Market in preparation for street closure.

This interest in pedestrian malls was part of a larger international trend. By the 1960s modern pedestrian streets were already well-established in Western Europe: in Germany alone 35 cities had closed central streets to traffic between 1945 and 1960, increasing to 60 in 1966 and 370 in 1971.<sup>31</sup> There, such schemes were associated with postwar reconstruction planning, and in many cases followed pedestrian-friendly medieval street patterns. In the United States and Canada interest was growing as well, although the context was quite different. In North America, pedestrian malls were above all viewed as a way to revitalize or protect declining central business areas, something that was generally not a priority in Europe. This would be accomplished by transposing the successful suburban shopping mall model—attractive, pedestrian-only areas with ample parking nearby—into the heart of the city: in John Teaford’s words, “beat[ing] suburbia at its own game.”<sup>32</sup> It is no

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<sup>28</sup> CTPB, *The Kensington Market and Plan for Downtown Toronto*, 37.

<sup>29</sup> Stuart Henderson discusses this in *Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto in the 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), esp. 33-4.

<sup>30</sup> “An Evaluation of the Plan for Downtown Toronto, Jun. 28, 1968,” CTA, 331336-5.

<sup>31</sup> Kent Robertson, *Pedestrian Malls and Skywalks: Traffic Separation Strategies in American Downtowns* (Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 1994), 19, Harvey Rubenstein, *Pedestrian Malls, Streetscapes, and Urban Spaces* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1992), 15.

<sup>32</sup> John Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in North America 1940-1985* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 7.

coincidence that one of the best-known designers of North American pedestrian malls, Victor Gruen, was also widely hailed as the father of the modern shopping mall.<sup>33</sup>

Gruen's plans for Kalamazoo (opened in 1959) are typical: a two-block car-free mall on a street already lined with shops, with added aesthetic features like benches and trees. Costs were shared between local merchants and the city. Rather than the efficient modernity of the shopping mall, the whole project had a "Main Street" feel that appealed to nostalgia for pre-automotive streetscapes and small town America. Also typical was that, due to budgetary constraints, several aspects of the plan that Gruen thought were vital to its success—new parking lots and a downtown ring road—were never implemented.<sup>34</sup>

Enthusiasm for the idea as a panacea for urban problems was initially very high. A *Life* feature reported that both business and property values in Kalamazoo were "booming" thanks to the mall, and the local press went so far as to claim that their "bold auto-ban plan could become the salvation of Downtown America."<sup>35</sup> In the 1960s, it remained to be seen if that was true; but certainly the idea was spreading. It was established enough that in 1969, the New York City-based planning publication *Downtown Idea Exchange* could identify three distinct generations of malls.<sup>36</sup> By 1970, streets in 30 North American downtowns had been pedestrianized; in 1978 there were nearly 100 pedestrian malls in Canada and the US.<sup>37</sup> As a result, in the 1970s there were plenty of examples for historically conservative Toronto to follow in its cautious attempts to remake the downtown.

### **Stopping decay?**

Toronto was not faced with the same scale of downtown decline as some other North American cities experimenting with street closures. In 1960s Toronto, pedestrian malls were seen by planners primarily as a way of maintaining local colour and preserving unique neighbourhoods, not as a solution to lowering property values or emptying streets. As a

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<sup>33</sup> See M. Jeffrey Hardwick, *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) and Victor Gruen, *The Heart of Our Cities: The Urban Crisis: Diagnosis and Cure* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965).

<sup>34</sup> On Kalamazoo see Michael Cheyne, "No Better Way? The Kalamazoo Mall and the Legacy of Pedestrian Malls," *Michigan Historical Review* 36:1 (2010), 103-28.

<sup>35</sup> Cited in Cheyne, 110.

<sup>36</sup> "New Downtown Mall Analysis," *Downtown Idea Exchange* 16:20 (Oct. 15, 1969).

<sup>37</sup> Rubenstein, 180-85.

result, compared to the underground tunnel network, they remained a low priority. However, they did kindle public interest in a way that subterranean pathways did not. First to weigh in on the idea were the owners of small downtown shops. Their support was logical, since the pedestrian mall schemes proposed by planners generally stood to benefit them the most. Merchants on Yonge Street were the most vocal, pointing to postwar changes in shopping patterns and demographics as signs of imminent American-style decay.

By the early 1960s, decentralization was presenting obvious challenges to the business model of Yonge's small independent retailers. More and more of that most reliable consumer unit, the middle-class family, were living further from downtown than ever before. Between 1941 and 1966 the core area of Toronto lost 14% of its population—20,000 people—as households with children were replaced by people living alone or outside of the family.<sup>38</sup> In the fast-growing suburban fringe, strip retail and the growing number of shopping centres were capturing consumer dollars that might otherwise have been spent in distant downtown. This was felt most immediately and viscerally by Yonge's small independent businesses, who from the 1940s onwards were losing market share much faster than the large department stores.<sup>39</sup> Urban experts exhorted downtown merchants to modernize and focus on "quality and novelty"; in the larger scheme of things they were doing just that, but as much through failure and succession as through adaptation.<sup>40</sup>

In a 1963 letter to the Planning Board, owners of more than dozen shops on Yonge Street signed on to a letter arguing that revitalizing downtown shopping should be a top priority for city planners. "For small independent retailers, the downtown area has become a 'decaying heart city'," they wrote, going on to cite competition from suburban shopping malls and department stores as the main cause. The latter trend, they argued, had been exacerbated by completion of the Yonge Street subway, which catered to those businesses located directly above its stops at College, Dundas, and Queen Streets.<sup>41</sup> This pessimism flew in the face of most assessments of Toronto's prospects. In a recent reassessment of urban renewal, historian Richard White has argued that the overall trend in Toronto's core

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<sup>38</sup> CTPB, *Core Area Task Force: Technical Appendix* (Toronto: 1974), 154-62.

<sup>39</sup> "Larry Smith & Co.: Toronto: Preliminary Report, Vol. I, Feb. 17, 1954," Eaton's Fonds, Archives of Ontario (AO) B381767; "Downtown tax aid favoured by Phillips," *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 3, 1955.

<sup>40</sup> "Downtown Advised to Stress Quality," *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 7, 1959.

<sup>41</sup> "Merchants to CTPB, Mar. 15, 1963," CTA, 331365-5.



was one of modest success, not blight or loss.<sup>42</sup> Throughout the postwar era, the municipal tax assessment continued to rise, albeit more slowly downtown than in the booming suburbs. By the early 1960s, the city's core was in the midst of a redevelopment boom, with significant numbers of older buildings being replaced by newer, taller structures, and a speculative market had developed in downtown land.<sup>43</sup> Most new constructions were office buildings, physical evidence of the city's slow eclipse of Montréal as Canada's financial and business centre.<sup>44</sup> Of course, a bullish office market did not guarantee the vitality of downtown retail, and was little consolation to merchants forced to close their doors. The Board of Trade and planners might agree that the core was "the busy heart of a great city," as the 1963 *Plan for Downtown* had it, but Yonge Street merchants saw things differently.

The owners of shoe, clothing, and other specialty shops who signed the letter saw a solution to their problems in a pedestrianization experiment along the lines of Ottawa's Sparks Street Mall. Sparks Street, opened as a permanent pedestrian mall in central Ottawa in 1967, began as a temporary closure proposed by area merchants with the intention of stimulating retail business. In the mid-1960s it was a popular attraction for visitors and shoppers, viewed by nearly all observers as a success; as a result it was an important influence on other mall experiments in Canada in the 1970s, even after the optimism of its initial reception had begun to wane.<sup>45</sup> Yonge Street merchants promised to cooperate with the city in creating a similar mall, while warning that "(s)hould the city take a wait and see attitude, they would be announcing the death sentence for many small merchants on Yonge street."

City authorities expressed some sympathy for these concerns during a 1963 meeting with these frustrated shopowners, although they were also sceptical about the long-term viability of small retailers in the downtown core.<sup>46</sup> Yonge Street businesspeople continued to lobby the City for a pedestrian mall and other measures aimed at revitalizing the retail

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<sup>42</sup> Richard White, "Urban Renewal Revisited: Toronto, 1950 to 1970," *Canadian Historical Review* 97:1 (spring 2016), 4.

<sup>43</sup> More on this building boom in the following section.

<sup>44</sup> Toronto eclipsed Montréal in its number of corporate headquarters in 1961. James Lemon, *Toronto Since 1918: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1985), 198.

<sup>45</sup> Sparks Street Mall Authority, *The Sparks Street Mall* (Ottawa, 1968), CTA, SC 314, Box 88, File 15; "Ottawa's Sparks Street Mall: Or how to compete with plazas," *Globe and Mail*, July 21, 1965.

<sup>46</sup> "Resumé of meeting with Yonge Street merchants, May 17, 1963," CTA, 331365-5.

strip. But as 1960s planners struggled to turn their schemes for transforming the city centre into reality, many of the ideas outlined in the *Plan for Downtown* fell by the wayside. A serious study of the tunnel network was in the offing, and pedestrian malls were consequently a low priority. This was only reinforced by a warning from the Fire Chief that pedestrian malls could impede emergency vehicle access to crowds, and opposition to the idea from the Redevelopment Advisory Council (RAC), the group of senior managers from major downtown businesses appointed by city council to represent the business perspective in the planning process.<sup>47</sup> Unlike small Yonge Street merchants, for whom the pedestrian mall was the crucial aspect of the plan, the RAC saw it as a distraction from more important elements, including their encouragement of large-scale corporate redevelopment.

### **Fighting traffic**

Not long after, interest in street closures developed in a very different context. By 1965, Toronto's growing youth counterculture was taking shape in the Yorkville district, just a few minutes north and west of downtown Yonge Street. There, as was the case in similar enclaves across the continent, rebellion from the mainstream had become a spectator sport. On evenings and weekends Yorkville Avenue was crowded with a diverse bunch of non-conformists, labelled, among other things, as hippies, greasers, bohemians, and bikers. Narrow, two-lane Yorkville Avenue was crowded with motorcycles and cars as people flocked there to make—or, increasingly, simply to observe—the scene.<sup>48</sup> The growing numbers of tourists, gawkers, journalists and social scientists made the area seem at times like a drive-through zoo of the North American counterculture.

Early calls to convert the street into a pedestrian mall—inspired by planners' 1963 suggestion for the Gerrard Street bohemian Village—were by 1967 taken up by the more politically vocal Yorkville villagers. They seized on pedestrianization as a way to assert their ownership of the Village, while protecting its future as a centre for the youth counterculture.<sup>49</sup> No doubt they were influenced by similar assertions of the right to urban

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<sup>47</sup> "Fire Chief to Commissioner of Planning, Apr. 9, 1963," "Lawson to CTPB, Oct. 24, 1963," CTA, 331365-5. More on the RAC in the following section.

<sup>48</sup> "The truth behind the Yorkville arrests," *Toronto Star*, Jun. 10, 1965. The definitive account of this era is Stuart Henderson, *Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto in the 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

<sup>49</sup> Henderson, 165-68.



Image 1.2: “These are our streets!” In August 1967, hip youth launch sleep-in and hunger strike in City Hall Square—just a block from Yonge Street—demanding that Yorkville Ave. be made a pedestrian street. Jeff Goode/Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0008375f.

space occurring in countercultural enclaves across the continent. In San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury, for example, Halloween 1966 was marked by a guerrilla theatre piece in which hundreds of pedestrians blocked traffic in protest against the gawking car-loads of tourists. “These are our streets!” they chanted as the police arrived to break up the demonstration.<sup>50</sup> Across the continent, opposition to the automobile was becoming part of the arsenal of countercultural urbanism. It fed, and was nurtured by, calls by countercultural intellectuals for a move away from large-scale, environmentally damaging machines and systems, and towards “appropriate technologies” on a human scale.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Michael William Doyle, “Staging the Revolution: Guerilla Theater as a Countercultural Practice, 1965-8,” in *Imagine Nation: The American Counter Culture of the 1960s and 1970s*, eds. Peter Braunstein and Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 86.

<sup>51</sup> Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1969), 47, 178-9; Andrew G. Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence, KS.: University Press of Kansas, 2007) 28-31.

During the summer of 1967 the pattern inaugurated in San Francisco and New York played out similarly in Yorkville. Sit-ins and demonstrations in favour of street closures became common, leading in one case in August 1967 to a violent mass arrest entirely out of proportion to the disturbance caused.<sup>52</sup> The issue of the mall soon became a pretext for confrontation between the increasingly vocal counterculture and city authorities: a chance to chant “love” to police, to occupy city hall, or to level withering criticisms at mainstream society. After all, what better symbol of consumer capitalism and suburban conformity was there in North America than the private automobile? As in other cities, it had a powerful impact but did not last long. Like the larger youth counterculture it was a part of, the Yorkville pedestrianization campaign ebbed and flowed with the seasons, becoming an issue each summer as crowds in the village swelled, and disappearing from city politics and the press in the fall. Yorkville merchants wholeheartedly rejected the mall idea: as one spokesperson explained, closure would only be a pretext for “giv[ing] hippies, who had given them so much trouble, freedom of the street.”<sup>53</sup>

### **Leave the Car at Home**

Recent research has highlighted the easy movement of ideas—and people—between the 1960s counterculture and the burgeoning North American environmental movement.<sup>54</sup> In some cases, environmentalist groups grew directly out of countercultural enclaves and networks, as was the case of Greenpeace in Vancouver. In others, it drew on some of the same ideas that animated 1960s youth rebellion: a suspicion of technology and progress, a renewed interest in simplifying human relations, and a search for truth in the natural world. At the very least, by popularizing these ideas the 1960s counterculture helped prepare the way for the new environmental consciousness of the 1970s.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> The headlines the next day read “‘Jail-in’ for 50 after Yorkville’s worst brawl,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 21, 1967.

<sup>53</sup> “Mayor suggests dead-end streets for malls,” *Toronto Telegram*, Jun. 1, 1971.

<sup>54</sup> See especially Frank Zelko, *Make it a Green Peace! The Rise of Countercultural Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) and Andrew Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007). I have also written about this in “Vive la Vélorution!”: Le Monde à Bicyclette and the Origins of Cycling Advocacy in Montreal.” in Colin Coates, ed. *Canadian Countercultures and the Environment*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2016, 127-50.

<sup>55</sup> Adam Rome makes this point in “‘Give Earth a Chance’: The Environmental Movement and the Sixties,” *Journal of American History* 90: 2 (2003), esp. 541-52.



*Image 1.3: "Where car is king." Interchange of Highway 401 and Highway 400, 1968. The Spadina Expressway would have created a similar auto-centric landscape cutting through the heart of the old city. Boris Spremo/Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0008317f.*

Toronto provides an excellent example of this process. Beginning in 1970, as Yorkville's countercultural scene began to ebb and disperse, new champions of the pedestrian mall idea emerged among the city's growing number of anti-pollution activists. There was nothing particularly bohemian about the founders of Group Action to Stop Pollution (GASP, founded 1967), or student-led group Pollution Probe (founded 1969).<sup>56</sup> Both groups were pragmatic, science-oriented, and interested in playing a part in making government policy on pollution. Nonetheless, they picked up the idea of downtown pedestrianization directly from Yorkville activists, with whom they shared opposition to

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<sup>56</sup> Ryan O'Connor, *The First Green Wave: Pollution Probe and the Origins of Environmental Activism in Ontario* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), esp. 40-5. On earlier attempts at industrial pollution abatement see Owen Temby, "Trouble in Smogville: The Politics of Toronto's Air Pollution during the 1950s," *Urban History* 39:4 (2012): 669-689.

unrestricted use of the private automobile and a concern for creating people space in the downtown core.

Another crucial local influence was the Stop Spadina campaign (1961-1971), which reached peak visibility in early 1970 with public hearings organized by the Metro Transportation Committee. Hundreds of citizen opponents took the opportunity to critique the expressway project, and many of them dwelt at length not only its impact on downtown neighbourhoods, but on the damaging impact of the car on the city's fabric and urban lives.<sup>57</sup> More broadly, anti-pollution campaigners were also inspired by the wider North American environmental movement, which in 1970 marked the first Earth Day with teach-ins, protests, and other events designed to raise awareness of pollution and other issues.<sup>58</sup> In Toronto Earth Day was a quiet affair—members of Pollution Probe had exams—but it nonetheless inspired the Toronto group to think bigger in its public education campaigns.<sup>59</sup>

At a more immediate level, it was impossible to ignore the impact the automobile was having on the fabric of the city. Between 1951 and 1971 nearly a million people were added to the population of Metro Toronto, with 95% of net growth occurring in the rapidly (sub)urbanizing boroughs surrounding the urban core and its older suburbs. The number of automobiles in the city grew even faster, from just over 200,000 to nearly 700,000, or one car for every three people.<sup>60</sup> The effects of this growth and increased mobility were most visible outside of downtown, as regional shopping centres, low-density residential subdivisions, and drive-in strip malls redefined urbanity for the automobile age. But the private automobile also made its mark in the older city, as tens of thousands of cars accumulated in the core each day, adding to longstanding problems of pollution and congestion and prompting new uses for downtown space.<sup>61</sup> Between the late 1950s and 1971 automobile storage was the second fastest-growing land use in the core, after offices,

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<sup>57</sup> See Robinson, "Modernism at a Crossroad," 315-18 and Young, "Searching for a Better Way," 280-83.

<sup>58</sup> Adam Rome, "The Genius of Earth Day," *Environmental History* 15:2 (March 2010): 194-205.

<sup>59</sup> Ryan O'Connor, *The First Green Wave*, 78-79.

<sup>60</sup> Calculations from *Census of Canada*, 1951 and 1971 and CTPB, *Core Area Task Force: Technical Appendix* (Toronto: 1974), 85.

<sup>61</sup> See Stephen Davies, "Reckless Walking Must be Discouraged: The Automobile Revolution and the Shaping of Modern Urban Canada," *Urban History Review*, 18:2 (1989): 123-38 on early twentieth-century struggles to accommodate and regulate the automobile. My discussion here is drawn from MTPB, *Central Area Transportation Study* (Toronto: 1968), CTPB, *Core Area Task Force: Technical Appendix* (Toronto: 1974), and City of Toronto Department of Public Works, *Parking Policies for Central Toronto* (Toronto: 1973).

with 10,000 new parking spots constructed in just over a decade.<sup>62</sup> Transit ridership shrank relative to car traffic, and the Toronto Transit Commission began to cut less-trafficked streetcar routes in an effort to lower costs and reduce congestion. The traffic jam, the multi-level parking garage, and the demolition site repurposed as parking lot became typical features of the downtown landscape.

These factors converged to produce GASP and Pollution Probe's highly publicized, but ultimately unsuccessful, "Leave the Car at Home Week" in the summer of 1970. In many ways the event was a trial run for the Yonge Street pedestrian malls of the following years. The idea was that for a week in July, several downtown streets would be closed to car traffic and people encouraged to walk, cycle, or ride public transit to get around. Meanwhile, the public space freed up by the closure would be converted into pedestrian malls, featuring "trees, music, stage presentations," anti-pollution information and one-off events like bicycle races. Initially the two groups called for three streets—including Yorkville Avenue—to be closed, but they soon settled on limiting the experiment to the stretch of Bay Street running through the financial district.<sup>63</sup>

The event's organizers, including prominent Alderman Tony O'Donohue, made it clear that they saw it as an opportunity to educate the public. Volunteers armed with air quality and noise monitors would measure how the absence of cars affected the urban environment and present the results to the public; commuters would learn about alternative transportation options that they could use every day.<sup>64</sup> There were larger issues at stake, too. Keeping cars out of downtown, one Pollution Probe member suggested, was about "working out a new kind of society." Pedestrianization wasn't the first step towards revolution, as some Yorkville activists may have seen it; but it was a chance to push back against "vested interests," unresponsive local government, and above all the high levels of air pollution caused by cars and industry.<sup>65</sup> Tony O'Donohue, by no means a radical himself, called it simply "the new thinking of the 70's" to question the unrestricted use of cars

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<sup>62</sup> Approximately 6.6 million square feet—over 150 acres—of parking was available in Toronto's core in 1973. CTPB, *Core Area Task Force: Technical Appendix* (Toronto: 1974).

<sup>63</sup> "Yorkville to vote on closing street," *Toronto Star*, Apr. 28, 1970.

<sup>64</sup> "Alderman plans leave-car-at-home week," *Globe and Mail*, Apr. 6, 1970.

<sup>65</sup> "Officials say Pollution Probe plan to close Bay St. won't work," *Globe and Mail*, May 22, 1970.

downtown.<sup>66</sup> He wasn't alone. In Toronto, and indeed across North America, there were a growing number of activist challenges to the car's dominance of the urban landscape. Against the backdrop of widely publicized "freeway revolts" prompted by projects like the Spadina Expressway, a wider critique of the car was emerging. Citizen groups in both Canadian and American cities banded together to fight for a range of traffic calming or other restrictive measures on the grounds of pedestrian safety, noise and air pollution, or simple aesthetic disapproval of suburban sprawl.<sup>67</sup>

In the end, however, Toronto's 1970 anti-pollution week was a non-event. Endorsed by Toronto Mayor William Dennison and Council, and publicized with large ads in three local newspapers, it fizzled amid warnings from transportation officials of traffic jams and transit delays and—more importantly— from legal staff that there could be potentially expensive consequences to a street closure. As the City Solicitor would later explain in a report to the Committee on Public Works, while the Municipal Act allowed the city to make a given street a pedestrian way, it did not indemnify it against claims for damages if the closure hurt neighbouring businesses.<sup>68</sup> If the city wanted to close downtown streets, it would need time to seek special legislation from the provincial government, or get area businesses firmly on board—or both, as was the case in Ottawa. Pollution Probe and GASP did not express interest in a much smaller street closure suggested by the city. In the end, July 12-19, 1970 remained officially Leave the Car at Home Week, but it was business as usual on Bay Street. Mayor Dennison continued to travel to appointments by chauffeur-driven Cadillac, and Pollution Probe marshalled its forces to try again the following year.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Quoted by Robinson, "Modernism at a Crossroad," 318.

<sup>67</sup> See for example Graham Fraser, "The car as architect," *City Magazine* 2:5 (May 1976): 44-51. Recent work on this wider critique of the automobile in Canada includes Steve Penfold, "'Are we to go literally to the hot dogs?' Parking Lots, Drive-Ins, and the Critique of Progress in Toronto's Suburbs, 1965-1975," *Urban History Review*, 33:1 (Fall 2004): 8-23, and Valérie Poirier, "'L'autoroute est-ouest, c'est pas le progrès !' : environnement et mobilisation citoyenne en opposition au projet d'autoroute est-ouest à Montréal en 1971," *Bulletin d'histoire politique*, 23:2 (2015) : 66-91.

<sup>68</sup> "City solicitor to Committee on Public Works, Sep. 22, 1970," *Creation of a Pedestrian Mall on Yonge St.* (1970), Toronto Public Library, Urban Affairs Collection (TPL-UA).

<sup>69</sup> "Name is all that's left of Leave Car at Home Week," *Globe and Mail*, July 11, 1970.



## Planning for (and by) people

In just over a decade, support for downtown pedestrian malls spread in Toronto, from a relatively limited circle of city planners to a range of citizens and groups. It did so on its own merits, and because it was an idea that could be moulded to address diverse concerns: downtown revitalization, pollution, the creation of public space. But, as Pollution Probe's interest in "working out a new kind of society" suggests, it was also part of a larger cultural and political shift. Against the backdrop of the politically charged 1960s and 1970s, politics in Toronto were being transformed by a surge in citizen engagement. Initially focused on opposing specific planning projects—especially urban renewal schemes like Trefann Court (1966-1970) and the Spadina Expressway project (1961-1971)—well-organized and informed citizen groups went on to become a major force in city politics.<sup>70</sup> The scale of the proliferation of community or issue-based civil society organizations in the period is truly impressive: a 1974 survey found more than fifty "organized interest groups"—mostly residents' and business associations, but also unions and environmentalists—operating in central Toronto, and there were many more in the neighbourhoods to the west, east, and north.<sup>71</sup> This remaking of city politics was itself a product not just of the time, but of a demographic trend of "return to the city" for young, often well-educated urbanites that, along with postwar immigration, reversed downtown population decline.<sup>72</sup>

This followed a larger North American pattern. From Vancouver to New York, postwar planning disputes built up support for a forceful critique of modernist planning as undemocratic and overly concerned with growth. In place of a planning system they thought catered to business interests and the automobile, citizen urbanists offered a vision of the city that emphasized local democracy, preserving communities, and concern for the environment.<sup>73</sup> This new urbanist paradigm drew on the countercultural challenge to

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<sup>70</sup> On Trefann Court and related projects see Graham Fraser, *Fighting Back: Urban Renewal in Trefann Court* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1972); John Sewell, *The Shape of the City: Toronto Struggles with Modern Planning* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

<sup>71</sup> CTPB, *Core Area Task Force: Technical Appendix* (Toronto: 1974), 224-25.

<sup>72</sup> See David Ley, *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). The population of Toronto's core neighbourhoods grew from 1966, after 25 years of decline. See CTPB, *Core Area Task Force: Technical Appendix*, 154-62.

<sup>73</sup> One of the best overviews of urban renewal and its discontents is Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). On expressways in Canada see Danielle Robinson, "The Streets Belong to the People": Expressway

authority, growing environmental consciousness, and more than a decade of planning criticism by urbanists like Jane Jacobs and Lewis Mumford.<sup>74</sup> These widely read thinkers stressed the value for community safety and civic culture of spaces that encouraged loitering, strolling, people-watching, and a multiplicity of other everyday uses.<sup>75</sup> Their vision of small, democratic planning and city streets as a site civic communion found ample support in the growing numbers of young, educated professionals who had “rediscovered” inner-city neighbourhoods and were eager to engage in shaping their communities’ futures.

By the early 1970s this critique of planning was widely embraced in Toronto, as demonstrated by the growing power of the “reform” caucus—many of whom had cut their political teeth in local planning disputes—at City Hall, and to a lesser extent in Metro Council. The phrase “planning for people” seemed to be on everyone’s lips; urban observers speculated on how to build a city “for people, not things,” often seeing limiting growth, redevelopment, and automobile circulation as key components of that vision.<sup>76</sup> City planners, despite being viewed by some as the bogeymen of the story, were not unsympathetic. As I discuss above, by the late 1960s urban design, with its emphasis on human-scale environments, was already an important influence in Toronto planning circles. Planners were increasingly prepared to question the modernist tenet that expertise could create ideal solutions to urban problems; indeed some of them had been doing so for years.<sup>77</sup> Nor was it new for Torontonians to oppose major infrastructure and construction projects, especially when they appeared to threaten the *status quo* in established neighbourhoods. In the postwar city, that trend was confirmed by ongoing debates between ratepayers’ associations and authorities over the expropriation of land for the new subway system from the 1940s through the 1960s.<sup>78</sup> What was really new from the 1960s onwards was a growing popular interest in implementing urban design ideas, and the way they began

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Disputes in Canada, c. 1960-75” (PhD thesis: McMaster History, 2012); in the United States see Raymond A. Mohl, “Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities,” *Journal of Urban History* 30:5 (2004): 674-706.

<sup>74</sup> In addition to the sources mentioned above, on Jane Jacobs’ influence see Christopher Klemek, “From Political Outsider to Power Broker in Two ‘Great American Cities’: Jane Jacobs and the Fall of the Urban Renewal Order in New York and Toronto,” *Journal of Urban History* 34: 2 (2008): 309–32; and Richard White, “Jane Jacobs and Toronto, 1968–1978,” *Journal of Planning History* 10:2 (2011): 114-38.

<sup>75</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), Lewis Mumford, *The Highway and the City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963).

<sup>76</sup> For example see “Toronto faces future as a people-oriented lovable, small town,” *Toronto Star*, June 5, 1975.

<sup>77</sup> White discusses this in *Planning Toronto*, 273-76.

<sup>78</sup> On citizen opposition to subway expropriation see Jason Young, “Searching for a Better Way,” 98-109.

to symbolize the new alternative urbanism. Pedestrianization was naturally at the forefront of this.

### **Towards a Yonge Street mall**

Despite the failure of 1970's Leave the Car at Home Week, pedestrian malls stayed in the news in Toronto. New York City provided a convenient counter-example for frustrated proponents of the idea: in spring and summer 1970 Mayor John Lindsay closed busy Fifth Avenue to traffic on several occasions, including Earth Day. Both the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star*, papers that had expressed support for a Yorkville mall as early as 1965, drew an unflattering comparison between the two cities. The *Star* wrote that:

In New York, 15 blocks of fabulous Fifth Ave. are closed to traffic...Steel bands suddenly materialize and the exhaust-free air is filled with music. People actually talk to strangers. In Toronto... Bay St. is just as congested and urgent as usual, the air just as poisonous.<sup>79</sup>

Toronto Council seemed convinced that it was time for the city to experiment with downtown pedestrian malls. Downtown Alderman Ying Hope visited the temporary Fifth Avenue mall and came back with reports of a city transformed. People were "livelier," the atmosphere happier and friendlier, and merchants on the street were doing brisk business. The chairman of the public works committee reported a similar experience in Minneapolis, where eight downtown blocks had been converted into a pedestrian mall, and expressed excitement at the idea of "returning a portion of downtown Toronto to the people."<sup>80</sup> There was a sense in council that Toronto could not only match, but improve on the experiences of these cities with pedestrianization.

New voices lent their support to the idea. The architectural profession had been deeply implicated in the development of urban design and the new urbanism in the 1960s. They too were concerned with limiting the influence of the automobile downtown and with designing streets and civic spaces that encouraged a better quality of urban life. In 1970 an "Urban Action Committee" of Toronto architects began to lobby in favour of pedestrian

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<sup>79</sup> "A place to walk," *Toronto Star*, July 16, 1970, "Streets ahead of Toronto," *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 21, 1970.

<sup>80</sup> "Alderman wants Toronto mall like NYC's," *Toronto Star*, July 20, 1970, "Hope to Public Works Committee, Aug. 31, 1970," *Creation of a Pedestrian Mall on Yonge St.* (1970), TPL-UA; "Alderman wants mall on downtown street," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 23, 1970.

malls. The committee chair, Howard Walker, explained that pedestrian infrastructure could be a crucial part of “humaniz[ing] the urban environment,” not to mention “reclaim[ing] strategic areas from concrete, asphalt, and vehicles.” More controversially, he also argued that a temporary mall on Yonge Street could be the first step towards the banning of all private vehicles from the core, an idea that had been envisioned by urban critics since at least the early 1960s, but never implemented in a North American city.<sup>81</sup>

Despite all the talk about people space and pollution that had reinvigorated the mall discussion over the past few years, the committee struck by Council to plan Toronto’s first mall took a decidedly conservative approach. In this sense it was most shaped by its chairman, Alderman William Archer. An alderman since 1958—he was also a lawyer and QC—Archer was a centrist who was respected in Council as a consensus-builder. Since meeting with Yonge Street constituents in 1963 to discuss a mall, he had been interested in implementing one on Yonge. He was also ambitious, and may have seen the pedestrian mall project as a stepping-stone to a second mayoral run (he had lost one such run in 1966). Archer did not associate support for pedestrian malls with opposition to use of the automobile—like the majority of Toronto Council, he supported the Spadina Expressway project right to the end. Critical of what he saw as Pollution Probe’s radicalism and lack of preparation, he was eager to set his initiative apart from the failure of Leave the Car at Home Week. He dedicated his initial efforts to establishing communication with local businesses and relevant city authorities. Archer also encouraged branding the experiment not as an opportunity to educate the public or an “experiment in pollution control,” but as a test of “the feasibility of a pedestrian-oriented street,” which could be made permanent in the future.<sup>82</sup> The mall project was viewed primarily as a technical problem to be solved: how to fit pedestrian space into the existing downtown street pattern, with a minimum of disruption to traffic and a maximum of benefit to business?

In consultation with the city bureaucracy, Council chose three blocks of Yonge, two south and one north of Queen Street, for closure during the first week of June, 1971. As Archer explained in a mass mailing aimed at rallying support for the project, Yonge was the

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<sup>81</sup> “Architects pin hopes on pedestrian mall proposal,” *Globe and Mail*, Sep. 3, 1970.

<sup>82</sup> “Public Works Commissioner to Committee, Aug. 17, 1970,” CTA, 47197-10, “Support growing for street malls,” *Toronto Telegram*, Sep. 1, 1970.

ideal street for a mall.<sup>83</sup> Unlike neighbouring Bay Street, Yonge had a subway line running its length, meaning the mall would be easier to access and less disruptive of commuter traffic. Furthermore, its theatres and retail stores made it a “lively location” for the experiment. In fact, the blocks chosen for the mall included not the busiest stretch—around the intersection with Dundas—but the most upscale and economically vital one, dotted with established businesses. Like a successful suburban shopping mall, it would be anchored by two department stores, Simpson’s and Eaton’s. Merchants further north on Yonge had been vocal in support of a mall in 1963, and their section of Yonge had many more entertainment and dining options. But that seems to have been counterbalanced in the minds of organizers by the growing number of strip shows and adult cinemas on that part of the street. Not only would the mall be planned to minimize traffic disruption, but it was determined early on that it would be a family affair, with an emphasis on daytime shopping and inoffensive entertainment. Again, this reflected Archer’s careful approach: as Toronto’s first official experiment in street closures, the 1971 mall could not be perceived as a failure.

### **Arterial or pedestrian way?**

One potential obstacle that Archer did not emphasize in his mailouts was the fact that Yonge Street was designated an “arterial road,” and so fell under the control of Metro Toronto. It was part of a network of nearly 1500 km of such roadways that criss-crossed the urban region, mostly following the 1¼ mile grid surveyed by British engineers in the early 1800s.<sup>84</sup> Along with the new expressway network and public transit, they were one of the three pillars of Metropolitan transportation planning, which sought to use the latest in transportation engineering methods and technologies to increase mobility and ease of access across the entire expanding urban region.<sup>85</sup> Faced with this Herculean task, Metro planners viewed major downtown streets like Yonge very differently from their counterparts at the City level. The primary purpose of arterial roads was to disperse expressway traffic

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<sup>83</sup> “Archer to People Interested in a Pedestrian Mall, July 20, 1970,” CTA, 314-88-1. On banning cars two seminal texts are Paul and Percival Goodman, “Banning Cars from Manhattan,” *Dissent*, 8, 3 (Summer 1961), 304-11, and Simon Breines and William J. Dean, *The Pedestrian Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1974), 3.

<sup>84</sup> MTPB, *Metropolitan Arterial Roads Review: Phase 1* (Toronto: MTPB, 1976), 44-45.

<sup>85</sup> Relevant plans are MTPB, *Official Plan of the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Area* (Toronto: MTPB, 1959), MTPB, *Report on the Metropolitan Toronto Transportation Plan* (Toronto: MTPB, 1964). See also John Dakin, “Metropolitan Toronto Planning,” *Town Planning Review* 40:1 (Apr. 1969), esp. 16-17.

throughout the city, while keeping it away from minor residential streets. In the context of rapid growth in car ownership and continued suburban demands for access to the core, the repaving, straightening, and widening of these arteries occupied a significant portion—approximately 25% in the 1960s—of Metro’s transportation budget.<sup>86</sup>

Yonge was by no means a typical arterial road—in fact it was an excellent example of how the pre-automobile urban landscape tended to stubbornly resist modernization. For most of its length, and particularly in the downtown core, it was extensively developed with commercial uses. Like a number of other downtown Metro roads—Queen Street and Dundas Street, for example—it remained persistently narrow, with just 66 feet of right-of-way in most places.<sup>87</sup> Repeated attempts to widen Yonge to improve traffic circulation in the first half of the 1900s foundered on the inability of the City of Toronto to compel property owners to build with setbacks from the current line. The City of Toronto had mostly abandoned plans to widen it in the 1950s, after having more success with University Avenue to the west, and Jarvis Street to the east.<sup>88</sup> But that did not mean it was exempt from future interventions. Although Metro was hesitant to interfere with the City of Toronto’s customary control over planning the core, it nonetheless considered Yonge and other downtown arterials to be an important part of the city’s commuter infrastructure. All the more so if the Crosstown and Spadina Expressways were not completed, something that was a distinct possibility by the late 1960s.<sup>89</sup>

In 1970, as plans for the 1971 mall were taking shape, Metro proposed to enact a bylaw for the widening of downtown Yonge Street by 10 feet on each side through building setbacks. This was ostensibly in response to interest by the Toronto Council in widening the sidewalks. But Metro also used the opportunity to discuss converting it to a one-way street, a measure intended to improve traffic speed and capacity, particularly at intersections. The two changes together, Metro’s transportation experts explained in their particular vocabulary, meant that

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<sup>86</sup> MTPB, *Report on the Metropolitan Toronto Transportation Plan*, 81.

<sup>87</sup> MTPB, *Metropolitan Arterial Roads Review: Phase 1*, 3.

<sup>88</sup> The City’s last serious attempt at widening Yonge south of Bloor seems to have been in conjunction with the building of the Yonge Street subway in the late 1940s and early 1950s. See CTA, 143179-10 and 527603-4.

<sup>89</sup> MTPB, *Metropolitan Arterial Roads Review: Phase 1*, 2.

Yonge Street will no longer be classed as a street facility offering local access to small individual commercial developments along its length, but rather, its role will be increasingly oriented towards an arterial function.<sup>90</sup>

In other words, Yonge would become the commuter thoroughfare it had always resisted becoming. This was a drastically different vision from that of City of Toronto planners, and they vigorously opposed the idea. After all, for a decade or more they had recognized that Yonge was “primarily a pedestrian way.” According to their measurements, on a given day lower Yonge Street carried more pedestrians than cars. Their suggestions to improve it all hinged on expanding that role, whether by widening sidewalks or through temporary closures. In a letter to Sam Cass, Metro’s Commissioner of Roads and Traffic, Toronto’s Chief Planner called the idea of widening unjustified, and argued that by destroying the street’s small scale and human character, it would “do more harm than good.”<sup>91</sup> In the end, the widening bylaw was put on hold, and in March 1971, Metro Council gave its approval to the first mall experiment, despite Cass’s prognostications of traffic disaster if Yonge were closed.<sup>92</sup> However, there was no retreat on Metro’s part from the view that Yonge’s best use was as a north-south thoroughfare, and the spectre of the street being reshaped for commuter traffic would continue to hang over the mall project.

### **A public-private partnership**

Mall organizers saw developing a strong working relationship with Yonge Street businesspeople and other citizen groups as crucial to the success of their project. This followed the prevailing wisdom in mall planning in North America: that malls should be public-private partnerships between local government and interested parties, usually area merchants. Reports Toronto Council read on New York City’s temporary malls in 1970 put it succinctly:

The most successful street closing occurs when government works closely with a local organization, usually a merchant group, that truly represents the area in which the street is closed.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> “CTPB submission to Metro on widening of Yonge Street, Sep. 1970,” CTA, P037427-5.

<sup>91</sup> “Barker to Cass, Sep. 10, 1970,” CTA, P037427-5.

<sup>92</sup> “Report of Transportation Committee, Feb. 18, 1971,” CTA, 83496-12.

<sup>93</sup> “Hope to Public Works Committee, Aug. 31, 1970,” *Creation of a Pedestrian Mall on Yonge St.* (1970), TPL-UA.

One of the first actions Archer took, even before the official striking of his committee, was a mass mailout that targeted businesses along Yonge Street and citizens who had supported Pollution Probe's Leave the Car at Home Week.<sup>94</sup> He asked for the formation of a "committee of interested citizens" to help implement the project, envisioning strong involvement by local businesses in planning.

Some responded positively. The operators of a number of Yonge Street businesses—typically smaller clothing or luxury goods shops that relied on foot traffic—were enthusiastic about the idea. Several wrote to Archer expressing support, and once again citing the success of Ottawa's Sparks Street Mall as an example to be followed.<sup>95</sup> The Downtown Businessmen's Association (soon to be renamed the Downtown Council) took charge of forming a Pedestrian Mall Merchants' Committee over the winter of 1970-71. A long-time advocacy group for downtown businesses, by the early 1970s the Downtown Businessmen's Association was dominated by the owners of small and medium-sized Yonge Street shops and entertainment venues, giving it a natural stake in the mall project.<sup>96</sup> The Merchants' Committee agreed to organize—and partially fund—entertainment and advertising, and work to define a theme for the week-long experiment.<sup>97</sup>

But despite the public enthusiasm expressed in previous years for the mall idea, the initial response to Archer's call for involvement was lukewarm. The Pedestrian Mall Technical Committee, made up mostly of bureaucrats and tasked with coordinating between the various civic departments involved in the project, began work in December 1970. In contrast, it took local merchants until the end of April 1971, just one month before the opening of the mall, to assemble their own committee.<sup>98</sup> A public meeting called in February 1971 to increase citizen involvement was "very sparsely attended," with only 60 of 600 groups, businesses, and individuals contacted attending, including 20 city officials.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> "Archer to People Interested in a Pedestrian Mall, July 20, 1970," CTA, 314-88-1

<sup>95</sup> See for example "Ellis to Archer, July 23, 1970," and "Wiggins to Archer, Aug. 31, 1970," *Creation of a Pedestrian Mall on Yonge St.* (1970), TPL-UA.

<sup>96</sup> For example, in 1972 10 of 12 Association executives owned businesses on Yonge. "Downtown Council: Officers and Directors for 1972," CTA, 47197-11.

<sup>97</sup> "Memo: Proposed pedestrian mall on Yonge Street, Nov. 26, 1970," CTA, 83496-12.

<sup>98</sup> "Minutes, Pedestrian Mall Technical Committee, Dec. 8, 1970," and "Questionnaire, Apr. 26, 1971," CTA, P037427-5.

<sup>99</sup> "The mall: seven-day miracle that changed Toronto," *Toronto Star*, Jun. 5, 1971.



Previously interested citizen groups like Pollution Probe did not submit concrete proposals for their involvement in the project until late spring 1971.

This disorganization or lack of interest among community groups played into William Archer's conviction that, in order for the experiment to succeed, it would have to be planned on very different lines than the citizen-led Leave the Car at Home Week. Whatever the populist rhetoric surrounding the mall, then, most of the organization work was done by Archer and the city bureaucracy, whose representatives also occupied seven of nine seats on the Pedestrian Mall Operations Committee formed in April to direct the final stages of the project.<sup>100</sup> An attempt by Rochdale College, the short-lived but famous local countercultural enclave and educational institution, to get involved and to coordinate further citizen participation, was rebuffed: organizers explained that the suggested music or theatre performances would add a "carnival element" that could "destroy the whole concept of the mall."<sup>101</sup> This raised the issue of who—what public, exactly—the mall was being planned for, and not for the last time.

The only outright private-sector opponent of the mall was, somewhat surprisingly, Simpson's department store. Occupying the south-west corner of Yonge and Queen Streets, Simpson's seemed to have much to gain from increased foot traffic in the area: its neighbour and competitor Eaton's voiced no objections to the mall. Mimicking the tried and tested design of enclosed suburban shopping malls, the 1971 pedestrian mall was planned with the two department stores as anchors for shopping traffic. Yet early on Simpson's management wrote to say that they were "unalterably opposed" to the project. They refused to send representatives to the Merchants Committee, and only grudgingly accepted to create special displays for the mall week. A street closure, they claimed, rather than bringing in more shoppers, would actually prevent the significant portion of their regular customers who arrived by car from getting to the store and parking lot. This view was based on an analysis that put the well-to-do female consumer from the inner suburbs at the heart of business success. Company president Edgar Burton would later argue that

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<sup>100</sup> "Development Department Mall Report draft, Oct. 29, 1971," CTA, 314-88-1; "Pollution Probe presentation, Apr. 30, 1971," and "Operations Committee meeting, Apr. 8, 1971," CTA, P037427-5.

<sup>101</sup> "Rochdale to Archer, Mar. 25, 1971," CTA, P037427-5.

The one thing that will turn Yonge St. off as a viable shopping street is if the ladies who drive downtown to shop have to face additional traffic obstacles...<sup>102</sup>

Simpson's executives were skeptical of organizers' assurances that the subway and curious crowds could make up the shortfall.<sup>103</sup>

### **Provincial support**

These pointed objections from a large and influential downtown business—Simpson's was one of the biggest payers of municipal taxes in the downtown core—highlighted an additional legal hurdle facing the mall.<sup>104</sup> Under existing Ontario municipal law, closing a public thoroughfare was viewed along somewhat the same lines as a government expropriation of property. If the closure was shown to have caused financial losses for any business or person, the city might be liable for damages.<sup>105</sup> In the case of Ottawa's Sparks Street Mall, this had been avoided by a special amendment to the City of Ottawa Act; failing something similar in Toronto, special provincial legislation would have to be passed to indemnify the city against such damages. Without it, if Simpson's gloomy predictions about the effects of the mall came true, the city might find itself forced to pay the cost—on the other hand, if the mall was the success everyone hoped it to be, the issue was moot. City authorities were not willing to leave that to chance, and began a lobbying campaign at Queen's Park to have temporary enabling legislation put in place.<sup>106</sup>

In spring 1971 the Progressive Conservative government led by Bill Davis was in its first year, in the process of establishing itself as the "Big Blue Machine," the most successful of the PC governments that dominated Ontario politics from the Second World War into the 1980s. The premier's biographer and others have argued that his cancellation of the Spadina Expressway—surely one of the defining events of his early administration—was a calculated attempt to rebrand as a "decisive, modern, ecologically-minded leader."<sup>107</sup> Certainly, as

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<sup>102</sup> "Simpson's digs in against mall idea," *Toronto Star*, Apr. 1, 1978.

<sup>103</sup> "Kernaghan to Public Works, Sep. 30, 1970" and "Kernaghan to Archer, Dec. 15, 1970," CTA, P037427-5.

<sup>104</sup> Simpson's Chairman G.A. Burton was invited by Mayor Nathan Phillips to be the first Chair of the Redevelopment Advisory Council, a planning and development group composed of large downtown businesses. "Burton to Board of Control, Jan. 20, 1960," CTA, 506520-6.

<sup>105</sup> "City solicitor to Committee on Public Works, Sep. 22, 1970," CTA, 47197-11.

<sup>106</sup> "Letter to MPPs re: Mall, Mar. 1, 1971," "Archer to Minister of Municipal Affairs, Feb. 25, 1971," CTA, P037427-5.

<sup>107</sup> Hoy, *Bill Davis: A Biography*, 88-89.

scholars of the period recognize, it was the most famous of a series of interventions that created an image of an environmentally conscious, socially progressive Davis government: the creation of a provincial Ministry of the Environment, action to limit logging and pollution, and promises of greatly expanded funding for social housing and public transit.<sup>108</sup> His government's support for the Yonge Street pedestrian malls should be seen in the same light. Enabling legislation was secured after a short debate, with the most contentious issue being the proposal to allow alcohol sales on the mall.<sup>109</sup> This represented a (very small) victory for a government interested in "streets for the people"—and a demonstration of how much the Yonge mall experiment depended on provincial approval.

### **From street to mall**

Turning four blocks of Yonge Street into Toronto's first pedestrian mall required more than just closure to automobile traffic, even if that was the most visible change. A long list of functional and aesthetic modifications went into the creation of a new type of pedestrian space: buses were rerouted, traffic signals altered, deliveries rescheduled, and space allotted to interested merchants. Extra street-cleaning staff and dozens of traffic police had to be scheduled for the week. A design concept was drawn up by city staff, in consultation with architects from the Urban Action Committee. It was pragmatic and focused on converting the street into inviting public space.

This reflected both the reality of temporary closure—everything associated with the mall would have to be installed literally overnight—and what was considered best practice at the time in mall planning. The Yonge mall would resemble what was called a "Minimal Mall," focused on auto-pedestrian separation with minimal functional additions to the streetscape.<sup>110</sup> The idea, gleaned from research into other malls, that overloading the street with entertainment and activities would doom the experiment came up several times in

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<sup>108</sup> Gerald Killan and George Warecki, "The Algonquin Wildlands League and the Emergence of Environmental Politics in Ontario, 1965–1974," *Environmental History Review* 16:4 (Winter 1992): 1–27; Robert Bothwell, *A Short History of Ontario* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1986).

<sup>109</sup> *Legislature of Ontario Debates*, Tuesday, May 4, 1971, Evening session (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1971), 1227–36.

<sup>110</sup> "New Downtown Mall Analysis 2: The Minimal Mall," *Downtown Idea Exchange* 16:22 (Nov. 15, 1969).

mall planning. Organizers emphasized that the Yonge mall should be not a “carnival,” but primarily a “pedestrian way” with its focus on public enjoyment of public space.<sup>111</sup>

The design concept’s main feature was the use of more than two hundred planters, each holding flowers or a 20-foot sapling tree, to break the street into smaller spaces, and shut it off from the sounds and sight of traffic at cross-streets.<sup>112</sup> The latter measure was necessary because, in the interest of facilitating traffic circulation, only one minor east-west street—Temperance Street—was closed. Otherwise, at each intersection mall strollers were just a few feet from the flow of cars. The layout of the planters was such that each block was divided into half a dozen or more distinct spaces, with few sightlines of more than half a block. The new areas created by landscaping were not left empty. Instead, they were nearly all programmed around specific leisure activities. Tables and chairs created areas for eating and drinking; information and exhibit kiosks offered places to browse; and a series of stages hosted daily entertainment programs. They were connected by a winding fire route that would—in theory at least—allow access by emergency vehicles to any point on the mall. And lining both sides of the mall, of course, were the street’s businesses, many of whom had developed special window displays or menus for the event. Overall, as minimal as the mall design was, it was also purposeful, seeming to leave little to chance regarding how the public space it created would be used.

### **Opening Day**

In the week leading up to the mall opening on Sunday, May 30, 1971, the project was publicized in all local media outlets, from newspapers to radio, and with subway car ads, pamphlets and posters.<sup>113</sup> For Yonge Street merchants, of course, the mall was most of all an opportunity to boost business. The theme they developed for the experiment was “Live it Up Downtown,” and that slogan featured widely in advertising for individual businesses’ wares and services. Pamphlets promoting the mall bore images of smiling female dancers in leotards and brass bands (entertainment that was in fact planned for opening day). Both Eaton’s and (more reluctantly) Simpson’s bought full-page ads promising shoppers fun,

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<sup>111</sup> “Development Department Mall Report draft, Oct. 29, 1971,” CTA, 314-88-1.

<sup>112</sup> “Draft plan, Apr. 1971,” CTA, P037427-5.

<sup>113</sup> “Merchants’ budget for mall promotion, Apr. 20, 1971,” CTA, P037427-5.

fashion, and sales at the mall.<sup>114</sup> Press releases from City Hall echoed these encouragements to shop, asking Torontonians “[h]ave you ever thought of doing your Christmas shopping at the pedestrian mall in June?” But even more, they played up the democratic, “streets for people” angle, stressing that the mall was a free public good for the enjoyment of all.

There [is] no list of charges. There will be no ticket collectors because the street is being opened up for people and will be free for all. All credit cards accepted...There will be no special briefings for the Press...The judge and jury for the success of the mall will be the people of Toronto.<sup>115</sup>

By that standard, opening day was a huge success: Torontonians came out in droves. Estimates put the number of people strolling Yonge on that Sunday afternoon and evening as high as 40,000.<sup>116</sup> There was a distinct element of spectacle to the opening, which featured parades by two military brass bands, a puppet performance, and a ribbon-cutting with plenty of pomp and circumstance, including a war veterans’ guard of honour for the local dignitaries wielding the scissors. This was followed by a music program. But perhaps more popular was the opportunity—for the first time in post-Prohibition Toronto—to drink alcohol legally on the street. Under special licenses facilitated by the mall organizers, two of the five restaurants operating on the mall were permitted to serve liquor outdoors; provided, of course, that it was accompanied by a square meal.<sup>117</sup>

Although they had been mostly left out of mall planning, Pollution Probe still managed to make their presence felt on opening day. In fact, they stole the show with a bicycle parade organized to coincide with the opening ceremonies. Hundreds of cyclists converged downtown at Queen’s Park, before riding—bells-ringing—eight-abreast down Yonge Street to the mall, where they parked in a municipal parking lot entirely given over to bicycles.<sup>118</sup> The parade, which organizers called a “bicycle happening,” was intended both to show the practicality of the bicycle as urban transport and put the issue of pollution firmly back on the agenda at the mall itself. The organization’s press release contrasted the “pollutionless bicycle” with the carbon monoxide and other damaging chemicals produced

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<sup>114</sup> See for example “Monday...Your lucky day!” *Toronto Star*, May 29, 1971.

<sup>115</sup> “Press release, May 26, 1971,” CTA, P037427-5.

<sup>116</sup> “People take over Yonge St.,” *Toronto Star*, May 31, 1971.

<sup>117</sup> “Opening Day Program, May 30, 1971,” and “Archer to LLBO, Mar. 30, 1971,” CTA, P037427-5.

<sup>118</sup> “Cycle army converges on the mall,” *Toronto Telegram*, May 31, 1971.

by the automobile.<sup>119</sup> The parade was a very local event, shaped by Pollution Probe's ongoing activism and the special circumstances of the mall; yet it also reflected a growing transnational movement to appropriate the bicycle as a tool of resistance to the automobile, environmental degradation, and consumer capitalism. In 1971 cycling activists claimed city streets not just in Toronto, but in Paris, Philadelphia, and New York.<sup>120</sup>

This was one of the first times that the growing number of Torontonians—environmentalists and others—who used the bicycle for daily transport made their presence felt on city streets. Within a few years, the cycling lobby would be institutionalized in the form of the Toronto City Cycling Committee, a group of activists and sympathetic city councillors who worked from within City Hall for better infrastructure for urban cyclists. Among other proposals floated in the mid-1970s was a network of dedicated lanes for cyclists on city streets, including downtown Yonge.<sup>121</sup> However, in 1971, the cycle parade was most of all a chance for Pollution Probe to reinject its critique of pollution into discussion of street closures. They continued the effort over the following week, with volunteers on the mall offering information about pollution and free breakfasts for bicycle commuters.<sup>122</sup>

### **Talk of the town**

As the week-long street closure continued, responses to the mall were positive. Many observers felt the experiment was an unqualified success, and a breathless excitement about the future of downtown crept into the discussion. Yonge Street businesspeople were surveyed extensively, their approval of the experiment being crucial to the success of future malls. A report by the Bureau of Municipal Research (BMR), an independent information-

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<sup>119</sup> "Press release – Bike Power, May 26, 1971," AO, B253244.

<sup>120</sup> On this see Daniel Ross, "Vive la Vélorution!": Le Monde à Bicyclette and the Origins of Cycling Advocacy in Montreal," in Colin Coates, ed., *Canadian Countercultures and the Environment* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2016), 127-50.

<sup>121</sup> City of Toronto, *Summary: Planning for Urban Cycling* (Toronto, 1977), 8-10.

<sup>122</sup> "Pollution Probe presents..., May 28, 1971," Ontario Archives (OA), B253244.



*Image 1.4: Day-time strollers crowd the southern portion of the Yonge Street pedestrian mall, looking north from near Adelaide Street, June 1972. In the background, a streetcar moves slowly across the intersection with Queen Street. Graham Bezzant/Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0115326f.*

gathering body founded in the 1910s and recently reinvigorated by new staff and ideas, drew on conversations with 54 of the 56 street-level businesses on the affected blocks of Yonge.<sup>123</sup> The lines were drawn clearly between a majority—including nearly a totality of small retailers, restaurants, and entertainment venues—who approved of the mall, and a minority who did not, or were neutral. The former group invested more in mall preparations like window displays and extra staff, and nearly unanimously reported increases in foot traffic and sales. Many of the latter group—making up around 20% of affected businesses—were banks and large specialty shops whose products, like furniture or diamonds, did not lend themselves to impulse purchases or extended opening hours.

Notably, their numbers also included Simpson’s department store, whose spokespeople, unlike those of rival Eaton’s, claimed to have lost business during the week of the mall. Still, all but a handful of businesses surveyed by the BMR and the Downtown Council favoured continuing or expanding the street closure in the future.<sup>124</sup> One called it the “biggest thing to happen to downtown for business,” while several others remarked that it was injecting new life into the area by “attracting people who haven’t been downtown for [years].”<sup>125</sup> The dream of competing with shopping centres for suburban customers, the inspiration for earlier merchant requests for a mall, seemed at first glance to be coming true. Data are not available for the first mall, but surveys undertaken during a later closure recorded that 60% of visitors to Yonge were from outside of the City of Toronto; nearly half of that number came from the suburban boroughs of Etobicoke, York, North York, East York, and Scarborough. Meanwhile, a 1973 poll in the inner suburb of North Toronto found that, of 785 respondents, three in four had visited the mall that summer.<sup>126</sup>

If businesses were enthused by increased sales, the public was most attracted by the pleasant, even a bit transgressive, experience of strolling at a leisurely pace on a busy downtown street. People liked seeing Yonge closed to cars and covered in greenery, even if, as William Archer put it, they “had to be encouraged to move off the sidewalks and walk on

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<sup>123</sup> Bureau of Municipal Research, *BMR Comment: Yonge Street Pedestrian Mall*: 125 (June, 1971).

<sup>124</sup> “Downtown Council: Mall survey report 1971, (n.d.)” CTA, 314-88-8.

<sup>125</sup> “Big, small businesses divided on the value of Yonge mall,” *Globe and Mail*, Jun. 2, 1971.

<sup>126</sup> The City People, *The Yonge Street Mall: A Feasibility Study* (Toronto: 1974), 43; “Eglinton YPC Association Poll, Oct. 20, 1973,” CTA, 527607-4.



the pavement.”<sup>127</sup> The 220 people surveyed by the Bureau of Municipal Research approved nearly unanimously of the mall, its entertainment, and “lively atmosphere.”<sup>128</sup> Many mentioned that they saw the mall as a pocket of life in the centre of an often-dull city. The mall’s focus on providing places to linger, consume, and enjoy was to many a stark contrast from downtown Toronto’s usually business-like demeanour. “It’s just like Paris,” exclaimed one west-end woman, echoing a comparison made by many visitors struck by the mall’s outdoor seating and “European-style” food and liquor service.<sup>129</sup>

### **New spaces, new uses**

As those comments suggest, the Yonge Street pedestrian mall produced not just new public spaces, but also new uses for them. Some, like outdoor dining and evening entertainment, were planned into the mall design concept and program. Others were more spontaneous. Despite the organizers’ suspicion of overly festive, over-planned street closures, the overall effect was to create a street with its own particular human ecology—Jane Jacobs’ “ballet of the sidewalk” in its most concentrated form. The mall amplified Yonge Street’s famous tendency to produce some of the spectacles of downtown life: the fashionable young person, the drunk, the excited Friday night crowd, the impromptu street performance. And that was part of the attraction for visitors. Whether the organizers liked it or not, the “carnival element” they had tried to avoid was there on Yonge from the start.

Sheer numbers of mall-goers set the background. Tens of thousands of people visited Yonge Street each day, arriving in volumes often two or three times higher than the busiest rush hour crowds.<sup>130</sup> That meant that at peak times—especially evenings—10-15,000 people were moving through each block of the mall each hour. But as the city employees conducting the pedestrian counts pointed out, that did not capture the numbers of people who stayed put, accumulating on the mall near the stages and beer gardens. These volumes could have been accommodated on a street cleared entirely of obstructions (likely less of an attraction to crowds); but on the mall ubiquitous planters, seating areas, stages, and other fixtures created choke points for the crowd, leading to what city observers

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<sup>127</sup> “The mall: a sea of Sunday strollers,” *Globe and Mail*, May 31, 1971.

<sup>128</sup> Bureau of Municipal Research, *BMR Comment: Yonge Street Pedestrian Mall*: 125 (June, 1971).

<sup>129</sup> “40,000 love the mall: ‘It’s just like Paris,’” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 1, 1971.

<sup>130</sup> “Development Department Mall Report draft, Oct. 29, 1971,” CTA, 314-88-1.

called “excessive jamming.” At the outdoor cafés, lines of people waited patiently for a seat and a chance to watch the crowds with a beer in hand. A few observers remarked that being pressed together created a new kind of sociability: people talked to strangers, shared tables, and were generally in a better mood than usual.<sup>131</sup> William Archer, who spent hours patrolling and mingling with crowds on the mall every day, talked of looking out at a “sea of smiles.”<sup>132</sup>

Sights and sounds were dense on the pedestrian mall. There was the entertainment program planned by the Yonge Street Merchants’ Committee. Lunch hour and evening concerts concentrated mall-goers near the main stage for square-dancing, a steel band, and music from various European folk groups aimed at showcasing Toronto’s ethnic diversity.<sup>133</sup> But a range of informal entertainment competed with those organized concerts. Impromptu concerts sprung up on street corners, around picnic tables, and in front of the Heintzman piano store, where a brightly-painted piano was left on the street for the use of all.<sup>134</sup> Clothing retailers, including both major department stores, put on fashion shows on smaller stages and on their storefront sidewalks. The emphasis was on eye-catching displays of the female body. Competing for the attention of mall-goers, these shows were often built around a limited kind of (legal) strip-tease: observers reported watching models slowly remove layers—down to a bikini or lingerie—while boisterous young men in the surrounding crowd shouted “Take it off! Take it off!” It is hard not to see in this scene the effects of the development, occurring just a few blocks further north on Yonge, of the Sin Strip scene described later on in this thesis. Meanwhile, as observer accounts attest, the mall itself became a kind of runway, a place for Torontonians to strut their stuff and express their personal style in front of a large, appreciative audience.<sup>135</sup>

The crowds on Yonge provided an attractive target for street vendors, religious proselytizers, and others eager to interact with the public, just as they always did. Flower and candle-sellers did brisk business. Groups of Hare Krishna devotees in their distinctive robes and topknots slowly paraded up and down the mall, chanting, clashing cymbals, and

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<sup>131</sup> “The mall: seven-day miracle that changed Toronto,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 5, 1971.

<sup>132</sup> “Archer loses wife to mall hoopla,” *Toronto Telegram*, Jun. 2, 1971.

<sup>133</sup> “Council exec report – Mall Schedule ‘A’, May 18, 1971,” CTA, 47197-10.

<sup>134</sup> “40,000 love the mall: ‘It’s just like Paris,’” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 1, 1971.

<sup>135</sup> “The mall: ‘It’s a small price to pay’,” *Toronto Telegram*, Jun. 2, 1971.



*Image 1.5: During the first 1971 mall, a mixed crowd watches a fashion-show display put on by Yonge Street retailers. Scantly clad models and calls of “take it off!” from inebriated male patrons contrasted with the family-oriented image mall organizers worked to project. City of Toronto Archives, 1465-312-5.*

selling pamphlets. Rochdale College, excluded from the mall committees, nonetheless took over part of the mall for a loud, irreverent “convocation ceremony” in which 12 students received degrees in front of a crowd of 100 kazoo-playing peers.<sup>136</sup> The mall also showed its potential as a political stage. The leader of the federal opposition, Conservative Robert Stanfield, was led on a tour of the mall by William Archer, pausing for photo opportunities with families, fashion models, and a beer at one of the now nationally famous street cafés.<sup>137</sup>

In short, the mall was everything downtown Yonge Street was—exciting, crowded, commercialized and mediatized, eclectic—only more so. Most saw this as a positive thing. But there were some concerns that the situation could spiral out of control. A few observers noted that “hippies” and “motorcycle types” were moving in on the mall, and one merchant

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<sup>136</sup> “In wake of Yonge Street Mall: People want more,” *Globe and Mail*, Jun. 7, 1971; “Suggestions of permanent downtown mall...,” *Globe and Mail*, Jun. 3, 1971.

<sup>137</sup> “Stanfield sees the people on Yonge mall,” *Globe and Mail*, Jun. 4, 1971.

reported higher rates of shoplifting due to an influx of younger customers.<sup>138</sup> The mall organizers received complaints about the high number of “pedlars and persuaders” interfering with people’s enjoyment of the mall. Alderman Archer admitted to being exasperated with pleading with proselytizers and vendors: in his report he recommended council look into special legislation to control those activities on future malls.<sup>139</sup> These “control problems,” as organizers labelled them, would become the central issue in debates over subsequent malls on Yonge Street. But in June 1971 they were seen as just part of the fun of giving over a major downtown street to the people. Or perhaps, echoing the treatment given to the Yonge Street entertainment area outside of the mall, they were even something to be celebrated, since they seemed to provide proof that “Toronto the dreary” was really no more.<sup>140</sup>

### **Carnival Toronto**

Toronto’s first pedestrian mall ended with a whimper in the early hours of Sunday, June 6, as midnight revellers (including several city councillors) were gently shooed off Yonge by city workers waiting to remove street furniture.<sup>141</sup> But the week-long experiment, attended by hundreds of thousands of Torontonians and visitors, had created an indelible impression. As the *Telegram* put it, the question had become “not if, but where” the next pedestrian mall would be located.<sup>142</sup> Within a few days, a petition was circulating calling for further street closures, and planning was soon underway for two more week-long summer malls.<sup>143</sup>

One complaint that simmered under the surface during the first mall was that it wasn’t long enough. In particular, the owners of businesses on Yonge north of Dundas—some of whom had been asking for a mall since 1963—wanted to share the benefits of the project with the tonier southern stretch of Yonge. Particularly concerned with property speculation and the mushrooming of sex businesses in dilapidated rental units, they saw a mall as a source not just of short-term profits, but also long-term stability for the area.

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<sup>138</sup> “The mall: ‘It’s a small price to pay,’” *Toronto Telegram*, Jun. 2, 1971, Bureau of Municipal Research, *BMR Comment: Yonge Street Pedestrian Mall*: 125 (June, 1971).

<sup>139</sup> “In wake of Yonge Street Mall: People want more,” *Globe and Mail*, Jun. 7, 1971, City of Toronto Development Department, *The 1971 Yonge Street Mall* (Toronto: City of Toronto, 1972), 7.

<sup>140</sup> “Toronto the dreary: Mall caps 10 years of change,” *Toronto Telegram*, Jun. 2, 1971.

<sup>141</sup> “In the wake of Yonge street mall: people want more,” *Globe and Mail*, Jun. 7, 1971.

<sup>142</sup> “Permanent malls,” *Toronto Telegram*, Jun. 7, 1971.

<sup>143</sup> “Petition making rounds to get mall reactivated,” *Telegram*, Jun. 7, 1971.

Support—and crucial funding—came from Carnival Toronto, an organization set up a few years previously by area restaurateur Arthur Carman, with the mission of providing Toronto with its own multi-ethnic “mid-summer Mardi Gras” each year. A mall on Yonge between Dundas and Gerrard Streets became the centrepiece of an activity program that also included a picnic on the Toronto Island and the crowning of a Carnival King and Queen.<sup>144</sup>

The Carnival Mall had some marked differences from the first street closure. It was organized hastily, with final approval of the plans coming on August 6, just a week before the mall was scheduled to open.<sup>145</sup> Even with the support of Carnival Toronto, lack of funding saw entertainment scaled back from the original (admittedly grandiose) plans for four mobile stages, each with their own paid music programme, to one very stationary one, in a parking lot, with musicians playing *pro bono*.<sup>146</sup> William Archer agreed to lead planning, but not before blasting Yonge Street Strip merchants for their disorganization, and presenting them with a laundry list of problems requiring immediate attention. He also expressed concerns that a failure to plan properly could be a severe setback to the cause of pedestrianization in the city.<sup>147</sup> The remaining three weeks of planning took place in an atmosphere of resentment and disorganization, particularly in comparison to the process that created the first mall. On August 13, delays in setting up the elaborate decorations rented by Carnival Toronto—including balloons, spotlights, and overhead canopies—postponed the opening. Archer swore that “[n]ever again will I get involved with a mall organized in such a short time,” even as the head of the mall Merchants’ Committee accused him of attempting to “sabotage” the project.<sup>148</sup>

Disorganized as it was, the mall still attracted tens of thousands of people each day, and was mostly recognized as a success. The “family atmosphere” pursued by Archer with the first mall was less apparent: Carnival Toronto was both louder and more crassly

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<sup>144</sup> “Sad faces in elevators inspired Arthur Carman...,” *Toronto Star*, Feb. 13, 1969; “Carnival Toronto,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 11, 1971.

<sup>145</sup> “Council backs 2<sup>nd</sup> mall for Yonge St.,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 6, 1971.

<sup>146</sup> “Yonge never quite same after mall,” *Telegram*, Aug. 21, 1971.

<sup>147</sup> “2<sup>nd</sup> Yonge Mall: Don’t court failure,” and “Archer to run 2<sup>nd</sup> mall although he’s unenthusiastic,” *Star*, July 22, 1971; “Minutes of executive committee meeting re: Mall, July 22, 1971,” CTA, P048937-3.

<sup>148</sup> “Yonge mall chaos won’t permit opening on time,” *Telegram*, Aug. 13, 1971; “Mall’s success delights promoters,” *Star*, Aug. 14, 1971.

commercial. There was much more on-street merchandising, and less free entertainment; children's programmes like puppet shows were replaced by rock and roll concerts; there were eight, rather than two, cafés serving liquor; passersby could watch not just fashion shows, but also striptease on storefront televisions installed to lure them into burlesque shows. The mall blocks included most of the strip's growing number of adult businesses, and several members of the Merchants' Committee were the operators of venues—like the Coq D'Or—that had recently begun to feature topless go-go dancing and other sexualized forms of entertainment.<sup>149</sup> Observers noted that the crowd was younger than during the earlier mall, and panhandlers, hippies, and other undesirables seemed to be out in greater numbers. *Telegram* columnist and curmudgeon McKenzie Porter railed against this aspect of the mall, claiming to have seldom seen “such a heavy concentration of the unwashed, the inane and the neurotic.” He continued:

I do not believe that we shall enjoy pedestrian shopping malls in Toronto until the hippies fade away, the hicks learn to dress, and the nuts are removed to a hospital.<sup>150</sup>

Peripheral as he was to the main thrust of commentary—which was positive about the Carnival week—Porter set the tone for what would become widespread criticism of these perceived “control problems” on the mall.

### **A celebration of multiculturalism: the Dragon Mall**

Toronto's third mall of 1971 was a street festival centred on the city's Chinese community: the Dragon Mall. For nine days in early September it took over two blocks of Elizabeth Street, a minor north-south connector in the centre of downtown. Historically, those blocks were part of the city's first Chinatown, an enclave of restaurants, shops, and community institutions that was firmly anchored in the downtown fabric by the 1940s.<sup>151</sup> But beginning in the late 1940s, Chinatown—like the rest of the area called “the Ward”—was transformed by private redevelopment and, most of all, expropriation for the new City Hall and Civic

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<sup>149</sup> “Carnival Toronto mall committee, (n.d.),” CTA, P048937-3. For more on the rise of Sin Strip see the following section.

<sup>150</sup> “What was the carnival? Many ask as mall ends,” *Star*, Aug. 21, 1971, “Yonge mall a disaster,” *Telegram*, Aug. 27, 1971.

<sup>151</sup> Arlene Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878: From Outside to Inside the Circle* (Toronto: Dundurn Books, 2011), 23-96.

Square. By 1970 just two blocks of the old commercial strip remained, and a new Chinatown was establishing itself on Spadina Avenue just to the west.

As with the bohemian Village further north, there was interest among planners and other city officials in preserving Chinatown as a “centre of interest” downtown.<sup>152</sup> This was reinforced by the work of the Save Chinatown Committee, which rallied around community leaders in the late 1960s to lobby the city for protection of the area.<sup>153</sup> The Dragon Mall was the latest in a series of proposals for achieving that goal, and like the Yonge closure was seen as a step towards a permanent, pedestrian-led revitalization of the area.<sup>154</sup> Similarly, again, it was championed at City Hall by a popular and ambitious councillor, Ying Hope. There was enmity between the two: in the 1969 municipal election Hope had received more votes than Archer in their two-member ward, giving him the position of “senior” councillor (and a seat on Metro Toronto Council) despite his relative youth. Archer avoided involvement in the Dragon Mall, and later quit (temporarily) the city’s Special Committee for Pedestrian Malls when Hope was made a member.<sup>155</sup>

The first pedestrian mall of 1971 incorporated that today-familiar trope of Canadian street festivals: the ethnic cultural performance. European folk dancing and music drew appreciative crowds as part of the entertainment program. Likewise, in 1972 the Yonge Street mall featured ethnic theme weeks—Italian, Caribbean, British—designed to entertain mallgoers and showcase the city’s diversity.<sup>156</sup> But it was the Elizabeth Street Dragon Mall that really pioneered the street festival as a spectacle of cultural pluralism in Toronto. It also represented an effort by elites in the city’s Chinese community to re-assert their place in a rapidly-redeveloping downtown.

In the 1960s and 1970s, celebration of cultural pluralism was more and more a part of daily life and politics in the city. Toronto in 1971 was the main destination for migrants to Canada, with a population that was 44%—37% for Metro—foreign-born, as compared to 15% for the country as a whole.<sup>157</sup> In other words, the presence of recent migrants,

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<sup>152</sup> “CTPB memorandum on Official Plan, July 8, 1968,” CTA, 331365-5.

<sup>153</sup> Arlene Chan, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878*, 110-11.

<sup>154</sup> “Special Committee on Chinese Community to Commissioner Emslie, Jan. 5, 1971,” CTA, 307-A-1-6.

<sup>155</sup> “Won’t join Ying Hope, Archer quits group,” *Star*, Sep. 16, 1971.

<sup>156</sup> “Yonge Street mall – Progress report #2, Mar. 1972,” CTA, 80424-33.

<sup>157</sup> Statistics Canada, *Census of Canada*, 1971.

particularly from southern and eastern Europe, was a fact of life, especially downtown and in the city's west end. Interest in Toronto's growing diversity was channelled by intercultural associations who worked, often with government support, to encourage community and nation-building through appreciation of the cultural "gifts" brought by new Canadians.<sup>158</sup> This was given an extra boost by federal initiatives like the Canadian Folk Arts Council (established 1964), which marked the centennial of Confederation by organizing one hundred local folk festivals showcasing the country's multicultural heritage.

In Toronto, the late 1960s saw the founding of new, publicly-funded festivals that vastly expanded the audience for "ethnic" entertainment, crafts, and foods. Most popular were Caribana, a Caribbean carnival inaugurated in 1967, and Caravan (1969), which saw dozens of national pavilions—Estonian, Japanese, Scottish, etc.—set up around the city for the curious to visit and check off on festival passports. In the Centennial year, the fading imperial connection was also celebrated with a British Week featuring royal visitors, an exhibition of British products, and a "ten-foot diameter model of the City [of London] animated in light and sound" set up in a tent across the street from City Hall.<sup>159</sup>

The Dragon Mall fit into this new wave of interest in consuming spectacles of multiculturalism. For a week on Elizabeth Street, Chinese culture, shaped to the perceived tastes of Torontonians, was on display. Amid what one world-weary observer called "all the regulation mall equipment"—snack stands, trees in planters, street cafés—visitors could "savour the true atmosphere of the Orient," as the promotional pamphlets boasted.<sup>160</sup> They entered Elizabeth Street through a Chinese-style arch, passing by ornamental fountains and telephone booths decorated as pagodas. A series of booths and restaurants offered variations on Chinese food for a Euro-Canadian audience, including the chicken chop-suey burger and restaurateur Bob Wong's very successful Chinese hot dog. Other cultural amalgams included an Italian folk group playing next to Chinese traditional dancing and a

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<sup>158</sup> On intercultural exchange and nation-building through cultural pluralism in postwar Toronto, see Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Coldwar Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2006) and "Immigrant Gifts, Canadian Treasures, and Spectacles of Pluralism: The International Institute of Toronto in North American Context, 1950s-1970s," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 31:1 (fall 2011): 34-73.

<sup>159</sup> *Programme: British Week Toronto, Oct. 12-21, 1967* (Toronto, 1967).

<sup>160</sup> "Dragon had no fire left for evening," *Telegram*, Aug. 30, 1971; "Festival of the Dragon Mall pamphlet, 1971," CTA, 445061-3.



Mongolian barbecue stand. There were demonstrations of calligraphy and watercolour printing, a 60-foot papier mâché dragon, and even a rock band called Eastern Express.<sup>161</sup>

Paid for exclusively by the Chinese community and local businesses, the Dragon Mall was Toronto's most elaborate street closure yet. There were critics, of course. The *Telegram* complained that the Dragon Mall lacked the nightlife and appeal of the recent Carnival mall. And a group representing Chinese students at the University of Toronto claimed that the mall presented an "archaic and misleading" idea of Chinese culture, with particular reference to the rickshaws dreamt up by Ying Hope as a symbol for the experiment.<sup>162</sup> Overall, however, the Dragon Mall was very popular, with organizers claiming 135,000 visitors over nine days. Participating shops reported a huge boom in business, and fundraising for a Chinese Canadian senior's home netted \$27,000 in donations.<sup>163</sup> Less measurable, but no less important, was the feeling among members of the Chinese community that perhaps—finally—Torontonians were recognizing the value of the neighbourhood they had fought to save.

### **A city transformed?**

By the end of the summer of 1971, few in Toronto had not been won over by the city's first street festivals. Even before the closing of the first Yonge mall, newspaper editorials were speculating that the "[t]he city may never be the same again."<sup>164</sup> To many, the popularity of the malls and the novel atmosphere they created downtown seemed to be clear signs that a new Toronto was taking shape. This was the kind of planning for people that citizen urbanists, municipal reformers and environmentalists had been demanding for years. Notable modernist architect John C. Parkin, who took a tour of the mall with reporters, thought the mall spelled the end of "Toronto the dreary...the city of corridors without a living room" that he had written about in the past.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> "Encouraged by Dragon success, alderman pushes permanent mall," *Globe and Mail*, Sep. 7, 1971, "Dragons on Dundas?" *Toronto Star*, Aug. 28, 1971, "Chinese twist isn't only one on Dragon mall," *Globe and Mail*, Sep. 3, 1971.

<sup>162</sup> "Letter: Dragon Mall," *Globe and Mail*, Sep. 2, 1971.

<sup>163</sup> "Dragon mall draws 135,000 pedestrians," *Toronto Star*, Sep. 7, 1971.

<sup>164</sup> "The walk-in laboratory," *Globe and Mail*, Jun. 1, 1971.

<sup>165</sup> Linda Fraser, Michael McCordie, and Geoffrey Simmons, *John C. Parkin, Archives and Photography: Reflections on the Practice and Presentation of Modern Architecture* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2014), 124.



*Image 1.6: Opening ceremonies for the 1971 Dragon Mall at City Hall Square. Edwin Feeny/Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0110880f.*

Those views seemed to be confirmed when, halfway through the mall week, Premier Bill Davis announced the effective end of the Spadina Expressway project. Anti-expressway campaigners celebrated on the Yonge mall, which seemed to be the positive expression of everything they had fought for over the past decade. In the wake of that decision, the mall was more frequently described as a “symbol of pedestrian rights” and “the ban-the-car movement”—which it was, to some.<sup>166</sup> Newspaper columnist Jack McArthur observed that with the success of the pedestrian mall and the cancellation of the expressway, the city was sending a clear message that it preferred a future as a “people-oriented loveable small town” rather than a sprawling monster of an urban region.<sup>167</sup> By mid-summer, an enraptured Mayor Dennison was calling for further malls, and there was a campaign—led by Pollution Probe—to make the Yonge Street experiment permanent.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> “Spadina opponents hold a party in pedestrian mall, of course,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 4, 1971.

<sup>167</sup> “Toronto faces future as a people-oriented, lovable, small town,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 3, 1971.

<sup>168</sup> “Mayor suggests dead-end streets for malls,” *Toronto Telegram*, Jun. 1, 1971, “The mall: seven-day miracle that changed Toronto,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 5, 1971, “Groups plan to ask city to retain mall,” *Globe and Mail*, Jun. 5, 1971.

Something had changed, but who was responsible for the transformation? There was much congratulatory back-slapping among the mall organizers, and particularly for “father of the mall” William Archer. However, there was also a widely articulated sense that responsibility for the mall’s success belonged to all Torontonians. Even if citizen participation in planning the mall had in fact been slow to materialize, people had embraced the idea once it was implemented, voting with their feet in the tens and hundreds of thousands. This idea of the mall as a collaborative planning project and an exercise in participatory democracy was captured well in a gesture made by the Toronto Chapter of the Ontario Association of Architects in early 1972. That year, the group’s annual design award, normally given to an individual architect, was instead awarded to “the citizens of Toronto” who “demonstrated their enthusiasm for a more livable city” by flocking to the mall in great numbers.<sup>169</sup> William Archer and Ying Hope did not shy away from crediting themselves for the success of the summer’s malls. But they also encouraged this more populist interpretation, which fit well with the growing influence of municipal reform at City Hall.

Buoyed by this enthusiasm, the city planned longer street closures for the summer of 1972. Yonge between Gerrard and Albert Streets would be pedestrianized in portions for a total of six weeks, and the Dragon Mall would reappear for the same length of time. In 1973, under the new council, the mall was extended to three months, taking in the stretch of Yonge from Gerrard all the way south to King. A few changes were made to the concept. The entertainment program was toned down and dispersed, to avoid overcrowding near the stages. Alterations were made to traffic diversions, and several minor side streets were partially closed to include them in the mall.<sup>170</sup> In other respects, however, things were organized much as they were in 1971. Again, permission to close had to be requested from Metro Toronto, and indemnity against damages resulting from the closure assured by special legislation at Queen’s Park.

People outside of the city began to take notice of what was apparently a very successful pedestrianization scheme. The Yonge mall was profiled in local and regional Canadian newspapers, particularly in cities like Vancouver that were conducting their own

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<sup>169</sup> “Take a bow mall strollers,” *Daily Commercial News*, May 19, 1972.

<sup>170</sup> “Report: Yonge Street pedestrian malls, 1972, Jun. 7, 1972,” CTA, 314-88-1.

experiments with pedestrian space.<sup>171</sup> Promotional materials emphasized that downtown Toronto was both a friendly, people-centric place and a hub for consumption. Brochures produced by the Downtown Council for the 1973 mall invited visitors to join them as “[n]ature takes over 15 blocks of Yonge Street, Canada’s NUMBER ONE commercial and entertainment centre,” converting it into the nostalgically titled “Main Street Canada.”<sup>172</sup> Illustrations from previous years showed crowds of mallgoers circulating and happily chatting in sidewalk cafés as one of the city’s iconic streetcars rolled by.

That image mall fit well into the city’s tourism promotion strategy, which overwhelmingly targeted the United States, origin of an estimated 75% of international visitors to Toronto in the 1970s.<sup>173</sup> In ads and sponsored articles in local newspapers Americans were presented with a picture of Toronto as a safer, friendlier, more harmonious version of the North American city, without the racial tension and rising crime rates that plagued urban areas south of the border.<sup>174</sup> The city’s tourist bureau hoped to capitalize on the fact that “[p]eople along the border would rather come to Toronto than to any American city because it is cleaner and safer.”<sup>175</sup> Naturally the Yonge Street mall featured high on the list of sights promoted by the group, and a tourist information booth set up on Yonge in 1972 and 1973 saw more visitors than any other location in the city. A surveys in 1974 found that just over one in ten people on the mall was from the United States.<sup>176</sup> The pedestrian mall was also included, briefly, as a Canadian attraction in federally funded tourist promotion materials.<sup>177</sup>

Before long, there was a steady trickle of correspondence from communities across North America that were, like Toronto, interested in downtown revitalization through

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<sup>171</sup> See for example “T.O.’s downtown mall ending third year,” *The Province*, Sep. 24, 1973.

<sup>172</sup> Downtown Council, *Pamphlet: Main Street Canada* (1973).

<sup>173</sup> “For 4 million tourists, all roads lead to Metro,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 18, 1973

<sup>174</sup> See for example “How to succeed as a city,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 15, 1973.

<sup>175</sup> “Convention and Tourist Bureau of Metropolitan Toronto press release, Aug. 4, 1972,” CTA, 527605-1.

<sup>176</sup> “Tourist promotion report 1972,” and “Tourist promotion report 1973,” CTA, 527605-1; <sup>176</sup> The City People, *The Yonge Street Mall: A Feasibility Study* (Toronto: 1974), 43.

<sup>177</sup> “Ad: Toronto...A skip and a heartbeat away (1972),” CTA, 314-88-1; “Ottawa to tell world about Yonge St. mall,” *Star*, Feb. 6, 1973.



*Image 1.7: Merchant group the Downtown Council promoted the pedestrian mall as “Main Street Canada,” a safe, people-oriented version of the downtown shopping street. The reality of the crowded mall at times conflicted with this image. Downtown Council, Main Street Canada (1973), author’s collection.*

pedestrian malls. These ranged from the nearby—Stratford and London, Ontario—to the more distant New Westminster, B.C., and Louisville, Kentucky.<sup>178</sup> This time, however, in contrast to the research conducted in 1970-71, it was Archer and the other organizers who were offering advice on subjects like mall design, sales promotion, and parking during the street closure.

On the Canadian scene, in particular, the Yonge Street experiment was held up as an example of a successful street closure, alongside the older and more established Sparks Street in Ottawa. In the early 1970s, more and more Canadian communities were investigating—and in a few cases, building—pedestrian zones. In the wake of its own heated political struggle over expressway construction and the goals of urban planning, Vancouver

<sup>178</sup> See CTA, 314-88-6 and 314-88-7.

was considering a new downtown plan based around rapid transit and the pedestrianization of busy Granville Street.<sup>179</sup> Over the next few years Kingston, Halifax, Montréal, Quebec City, and numerous smaller municipalities experimented with creating pedestrian-only streets. In almost every case, the goal was, as in Toronto, to retain or renew the economic vibrancy of a downtown shopping district, coupled with secondary concerns like aesthetics, pollution abatement, and the provision of new public space.<sup>180</sup>

### **Control problems**

However, as the closure of Yonge grew in length from one week to something approaching a summer-long mall—and moved north to include the entertainment-heavy Gerrard-Dundas section of the strip—its image began to lose its lustre. Already, the experience of 1971 demonstrated the difficulties inherent in regulating the different ways people chose to use the public space created by the mall: those problems seemed to multiply as the mall more than tripled in length and settled in for twelve weeks at a time. That organizers felt that those uses could and should be controlled reflected both the purposeful design of the project and its revitalizing goals: bringing life back to Yonge was above all about bringing (and keeping) the right kind of people downtown. Officials had a clear idea of what activities were encouraged on the mall—relaxation, dining, shopping, strolling, watching entertainment—and which potentially disruptive uses were not, including (but not limited to) panhandling, vending, street advertising, and religious proselytizing. By 1973, William Archer had identified the “control and regulation” of those activities as the highest priority item to be addressed if the mall were to continue into the future.<sup>181</sup>

Of course, what was deemed a “control problem,” in the city’s parlance, depended on the observer. It was rarely clear whether control problems were mostly about specific behaviours—selling sunglasses, asking for money—or simply the presence of perceived undesirables—prostitutes, long-haired youth—on the mall. Inevitably, other concerns bled into the discussion: anxiety about youth rebellion and rowdiness, outrage at the appearance

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<sup>179</sup> “Rapid transit will be key to best of concepts for development of downtown Vancouver,” *Globe and Mail*, Oct. 2, 1970.

<sup>180</sup> Transport Canada, *City Centre Pedestrian Systems: A State of the Art Review* (Ottawa: Transport Canada, 1978).

<sup>181</sup> “Co-ordinator’s report on 1973 Mall, May 18, 1973,” CTA, 47197-11.

of body rub parlours and strip shows. Still, a picture emerges from press coverage, police reports, and other accounts. The Yonge Street pedestrian mall was no hotbed of criminality, apart from localized problems with alcohol-fueled rowdyism on Friday and Saturday nights. But it was crowded with an eclectic mix of people and uses, forcing a constant negotiation and raising questions about the purpose and value of the newly created public space.

### **Pamphlets and peddlers**

Yonge Street merchants were a major part of identifying perceived problems. In a 1972 report sent to city officials and the press, the Downtown Council emphasized that members were

deeply concerned with unwelcome changes taking place on Yonge Street during recent months and they believe that the character of our City's main thoroughfare is being transformed in an unfavourable way.<sup>182</sup>

As described in the later chapter on Sin Strip, they were not alone in this assessment. Yet as the city's key partner in closing Yonge Street, the Downtown Council had significant influence when its comments dealt specifically with the summer pedestrian malls. Some of the problems identified in the report, merchants argued, were a direct outgrowth of the "lack of proper controls" during street closures. Activities that were profitable during the mall were subsequently established year-round. They took specific issue with aggressive advertising, proselytizing, and illegal vending.

Many offenders in the first category were among the growing number of sex cinemas, strip shows, and body rub parlours on Yonge. For those businesses the mall presented an unmatched opportunity to attract clients, and was a powerful incentive for their rapid spread in 1971 and 1972.<sup>183</sup> Typically, teenaged boys and unemployed men were hired to press pamphlets on passers-by and walk the mall wearing sandwich-board advertisements. Female attendants or touts stood in front of the stairways leading up to body rub parlours, calling out to men as they walked by. Loudspeakers blared music outside of mini cinemas and strip shows, and closed-circuit TVs showed tantalizing glimpses of the entertainment offered inside.

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<sup>182</sup> Downtown Council, *Report on the Problems of Downtown Yonge Street* (Toronto: 1972).

<sup>183</sup> See Chapter 3 for a more thorough discussion of Sin Strip.

As operators of businesses like the Playboy Mini Cinema pointed out to the city, in the context of intense competition for walk-in traffic on Yonge, this kind of aggressive advertising was their primary source of customers.<sup>184</sup> It was also one of the most common ways that non-customers found out about what was happening behind their typically nondescript upstairs windows. Each year during the mall dozens of shocked citizens mailed evidence of that discovery—copies of pamphlets featuring suggestive language and the nude female form—to William Archer, the mayor, and other civic officials.<sup>185</sup> In this way, by 1973 the mall was swept up in the growing campaign against the sex industry on Yonge Street.

Sex businesses produced and distributed a staggering amount of printed matter; but they weren't the only ones aggressively advertising on the mall. Yonge's summer crowds brought out of the woodwork hundreds of entrepreneurs, evangelists, and would-be prophets eager to spread their message or sell their specific product. In addition to the often risqué offers made by businesses fronting on Yonge, a stroller making her way up the street might receive a copy of the *Radical Humanist* ("A monthly newspaper on alienation"), an ad for an anti-war music festival ("End Canada's complicity in Vietnam!"), a coupon from Italian Canadian sandwich shop San Francesco ("A free offer you can't refuse"), and an invitation to a folk-music night at the Scientology coffee house on Avenue Road ("A night especially for people to be themselves").<sup>186</sup> She could discuss enlightenment and salvation with shaven-headed Hare Krishna devotees and long-haired Jesus People, or art and imperialism with members of the Committee to Strengthen Canadian Culture. Yonge Street mall was the busiest, loudest, and most chaotic marketplace in ideas and services on offer in straight-laced Toronto.

From their point of view of established Yonge Street businesspeople, the most pressing control problem on the mall was illegal vending. By 1972-73 the Yonge Street mall had become one of the most profitable locations in the city for vendors selling everything from sunglasses to roasted nuts. Yonge had by far the largest crowds of potential

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<sup>184</sup> "Playboy mini cinema to Archer, July 28, 1972," CTA, 314-33-22.

<sup>185</sup> See for example "J.B. to Crombie, Feb. 26, 1973," CTA, 527607-6. Like J.B., a number of citizens included examples of these handbills with their letters.

<sup>186</sup> "Materials distributed on the mall, 1972," CTA, 314-88-12



customers, including high numbers of tourists, and a slow pace that encouraged browsing and impulse purchases. Some vendors were tacitly tolerated. Shoeshine boys in particular were considered an iconic part of Yonge's streetlife, and treated sympathetically by the media and other observers; in 1971 the financial success of 10-year-old "little Jimmy Crouse" in shining shoes during the Carnival Mall was used to demonstrate that all categories of Torontonians approved of the experiment.<sup>187</sup> Others were licensed by the city, including dozens of licensed food carts, operated overwhelmingly by Greek Canadians, often recent immigrants.

Most street merchants, however, were unlicensed, whether flower and candle sellers, newspaper vendors—including those offering the countercultural rag *Guerilla*—or people selling handicrafts, personalized art, and jewellery. This last category, dubbed "capitalists of the counterculture" by a Toronto reporter, specialized in handmade rings, pendants, and other crafts and baubles in silver, leather, wood, and bone.<sup>188</sup> Setting up tables or blankets in empty doorways or the street, they did brisk business without the overheads of a conventional shop. This displeased members of the Downtown Council, who pointed out that they paid taxes, contributed voluntarily to fund the mall, and yet were losing business to vendors who did neither.<sup>189</sup>

Mall organizers tried to act on these varied complaints with design changes and enforcement. In 1972 and 1973, organizers, and especially William Archer, lobbied police and city inspectors to pay more attention to handbills, vending, and panhandling.<sup>190</sup> Beginning in 1972, designated areas of the mall were set aside each year for handicraft sellers and street artists, with the intention of corralling them into places where they would neither compete with established merchants nor obstruct other uses. Again, this was part of an attempt to impose order and purpose on mall space by separating uses through design. In press releases, organizers warned that the mall was "a free and easy place for people to enjoy themselves," and that selling crafts and drawing portraits would only be permitted on Edward Street and Gould Street, respectively.<sup>191</sup> The Edward Street fair became a recurring

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<sup>187</sup> "Shoeshine boy, china merchant salute the mall," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 16, 1971.

<sup>188</sup> "Capitalists of the counterculture," *Toronto Star*, Oct. 16, 1977.

<sup>189</sup> Downtown Council, *Report on the Problems of Downtown Yonge Street* (Toronto: 1972).

<sup>190</sup> "Informal meeting—police surveillance, Apr. 13, 1973," CTA, 314-88-4.

<sup>191</sup> "The Yonge Street Pedestrian Mall, July 25, 1972," CTA, 47197-11.

feature of the mall, with vendors applying for permits to reserve one of a few dozen spaces for their wares.

Yet this only partially addressed the problem, since most vendors were uninterested in the application process or being relegated to a specific corner: like buskers and shoeshine boys, they wanted to be where the action was. And there proved to be little the city could do to move them along. Each summer, the pedestrian mall was established by a bylaw passed by Metro Council, and that law set out what activities were permitted on the street during the closure.<sup>192</sup> Selling on the mall without a license was an infraction against the bylaw, and could incur a summons from police or licensing inspectors, and eventually a fine.<sup>193</sup> But those penalties seldom deterred street merchants, who would begin selling again immediately after police left, or, as the exasperated reports of licensing inspectors attest, meet enforcement of the bylaw with disdain or even verbal abuse.<sup>194</sup> In true anti-establishment style, vendors of the countercultural paper *Guerilla* complained of harassment when asked by William Archer, and later ordered by police, to stop selling their paper on the mall—but they kept on doing so, and suffered no repercussions.<sup>195</sup> The mall, it turned out, had all the flaws and freedoms of other densely used public spaces—city parks, certain sidewalks—during hot city summers.

### **Youth, rowdiness, and disorder**

In summer 1972, a 25-year-old man named Jim Davies wrote to the *Toronto Star* to complain: he had been beaten up on Yonge Street in plain view of Saturday night crowds.

Almost 200 people stood and watched early Sunday morning while I was punched and kicked to the pavement in the middle of downtown Toronto. Nobody thought of coming to my aid, nobody called a policeman, and nobody looked me in the eyes when I walked up to them afterward and through bloodied lips asked why they hadn't helped.<sup>196</sup>

A photo of the author's puffed, bruised face ran beside the letter, which was given a prominent place on the editorial page. He went on to complain that "incidents like these

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<sup>192</sup> See for example "Bylaw 99-73: To establish pedestrian promenades on Yonge Street," CTA, 314-88-22.

<sup>193</sup> "Legal Department memo—Yonge Street Mall, Jan. 17, 1974," CTA, 314-89-17.

<sup>194</sup> "Chief Inspector to Archer, Sep. 7, 1973," CTA, 314-89-10.

<sup>195</sup> "Press hassled," *Guerilla* 26 (Jun. 9, 1971).

<sup>196</sup> "I got beaten up on Yonge St. while hundreds just watched," *Toronto Star*, Jun. 26, 1972.

occur with disturbing regularity in Metro Toronto [and] every other major North American city.” Davies’ was not the only story of violence or disorder on Yonge Street to come out that year. By the end of 1973’s twelve-week mall, complaints about misbehaviour had combined with those about panhandling and harassment to form a portrait of a dysfunctional public space, out of proportion with the relative order of the mall’s day-to-day existence.

The category of youth was under intense scrutiny in postwar North America. Historians of the era, and especially the coming of age of the baby boomers in the 1960s and early 1970s, have illustrated how the category of “youth” became more than just an identifier of age: it was a stance, an ethic, a way of being.<sup>197</sup> That meant, in theory, that anyone could embrace a youthful worldview. Conversely, to be young was indelibly associated with certain ideas and practices, and especially non-conformity and rebellion. Youth was the world’s hope, *Time* magazine’s 1966 “Man of the Year”; but it was also seen by many as the culprit behind growing drug use, unsafe city streets, political disengagement, and other moral and social ills.<sup>198</sup>

This dark side of this ambivalence manifested itself in different ways. One was heightened anxiety about the destructive or disruptive potential of groups of youth, and especially young men. Whether in the context of 1950s juvenile delinquency or the 1960s counterculture, the widespread perception was that, perhaps more than ever before, when young people got together, they did things society would rather they didn’t, up to and including rioting.<sup>199</sup> In the 1960s and early 1970s there seemed to be plenty of incidents in the Canadian press that supported this gloomy view: ritualized Victoria Day riots in Hamilton (early 1960s), confrontations between pot-smoking young people and police in Vancouver (1971), and student demonstrations and campus occupations at Sir George Williams

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<sup>197</sup> Peter Braunstein, “Forever Young: Insurgent Youth and the Sixties Culture of Rejuvenation,” in Braunstein and Michael Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>198</sup> *Time*, Jan. 7, 1967.

<sup>199</sup> There was no shortage of commentators prognosticating doom and gloom for Canadian youth in the 1960s. See especially Mark Frank, *Poison for the Youth: A Major Reason for Rising Juvenile Delinquency* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1962) and Simma Holt, *Sex and the Teenage Revolution* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967).

University (1969) and across the country.<sup>200</sup> Youth did not always show the deference to police authority they had in the past; this was particularly the case as growing numbers of middle-class, educated young people were arrested for recreational drug use: in Canada arrests for marijuana possession went from 62 in 1964-65 to a staggering 20,179 just a decade later.<sup>201</sup> Crime rates were rising across the country, reflecting not only those new drug charges, but also a spike in violent offenses that many attributed to baby boom demographics.<sup>202</sup>

In Toronto, concern about youth rebellion and delinquency was localized in a few key sites, including suburban fast food restaurants and parking lots, and downtown arcades and commercial strips. In the 1960s it was most apparent in the city's response to the bohemian enclave of Yorkville, focus of a debate over the counterculture, drugs, and youth alienation that frequently rose to hyperbolic proportions. As historian Stuart Henderson relates, by 1965 the Yorkville Village was widely perceived as a foreign territory inhabited by a cast of flawed youth archetypes: "toughs," "bikers," "rowdies," and, of course, the ubiquitous "hippie." The police response to drug use, street parties, demonstrations—some of them calling for a pedestrian mall—and other public displays was disproportionate, and often violent. Undercover and riot police were deployed in force in the Village on summer weekends, resulting inevitably in an escalation of tension which, at times, culminated in violence and mass arrests.<sup>203</sup> Similar patterns were playing out across the country each summer, as youth from a range of backgrounds—curious weekenders, teenage runaways, students—experimented with rebellion in countercultural enclaves from Vancouver to

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<sup>200</sup> Bryan Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 190-91, Marcel Martel "'Riot' at Sir George Williams: Giving Meaning to Student Dissent," and Michael Boudreau, "'The Struggle for a Different World': The 1971 Gastown Riot in Vancouver," in Lara Campbell, Dominique Clement, Gregory Kealey, eds., *Debating Dissent: Canada and the 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

<sup>201</sup> Discussed in Marcel Martel, "'They smell bad, have diseases, and are lazy': RCMP Officers Reporting on Hippies in the Late Sixties," *Canadian Historical Review* 90:2 (June 2009), 220.

<sup>202</sup> V.P. Bunge, Holly Johnson, Thierno A. Baldé, *Exploring Crime Patterns in Canada* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2005) discusses this in depth.

<sup>203</sup> Stuart Henderson, "Toronto's Hippie Disease: End Days in the Yorkville Scene, August 1968," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 17:1 (2006): 205-34. See also Henderson, *Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto in the 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

Halifax. Not just police, but social services and local community organizations rushed to investigate and respond to the phenomenon.<sup>204</sup>

Under pressure from this near-ceaseless investigation and reporting, and priced out of local services by rapid redevelopment, by 1971 the youth counterculture had left Yorkville behind. Its critics were forced to confront the fact that it appeared to have spread throughout Toronto's downtown, from taverns on Spadina Avenue to the crowded sidewalks of the Yonge Street strip. Somewhat ironically, even as jaded voices within the counterculture were decrying Yonge's crass commercialism—*Guerilla* called Yonge-Dundas Toronto's "arsehole"—the police and other observers were calling it the new Yorkville; a label that brought with a certain cachet, but also the same associations with the drug culture, alienation, and police-youth tension that had persistently dogged the Village.<sup>205</sup> By the winter of 1972-73 concerns over youth delinquency and corruption were a staple part of depictions of Yonge Street's sleazy strip.

Demographics played a role in this. If in 1951 the age distribution of the population of central Toronto aligned closely with that of the larger city, by the 1970s downtown was significantly younger. Of course, thanks to the baby boom communities across the country were getting younger, but this was different: the core area was distinctive in that there were fewer children, but significantly more single 20-34 year-old residents.<sup>206</sup> Toronto was also a crucial hub for the tens of thousands of young people criss-crossing the country each summer for work and pleasure. "Transient youth"—as they were labelled by a prominent 1969 inquiry—were a diverse group, including students on summer break, job and thrill seekers, and, warned police, an unprecedented number of teenage runaways.<sup>207</sup> Like urban centres across the country in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Toronto struggled to cope with this massive influx of young people, often nonconformist not just in their mobility but in their dress and long hair. Transients, many of whom had arrived by hitching rides, required

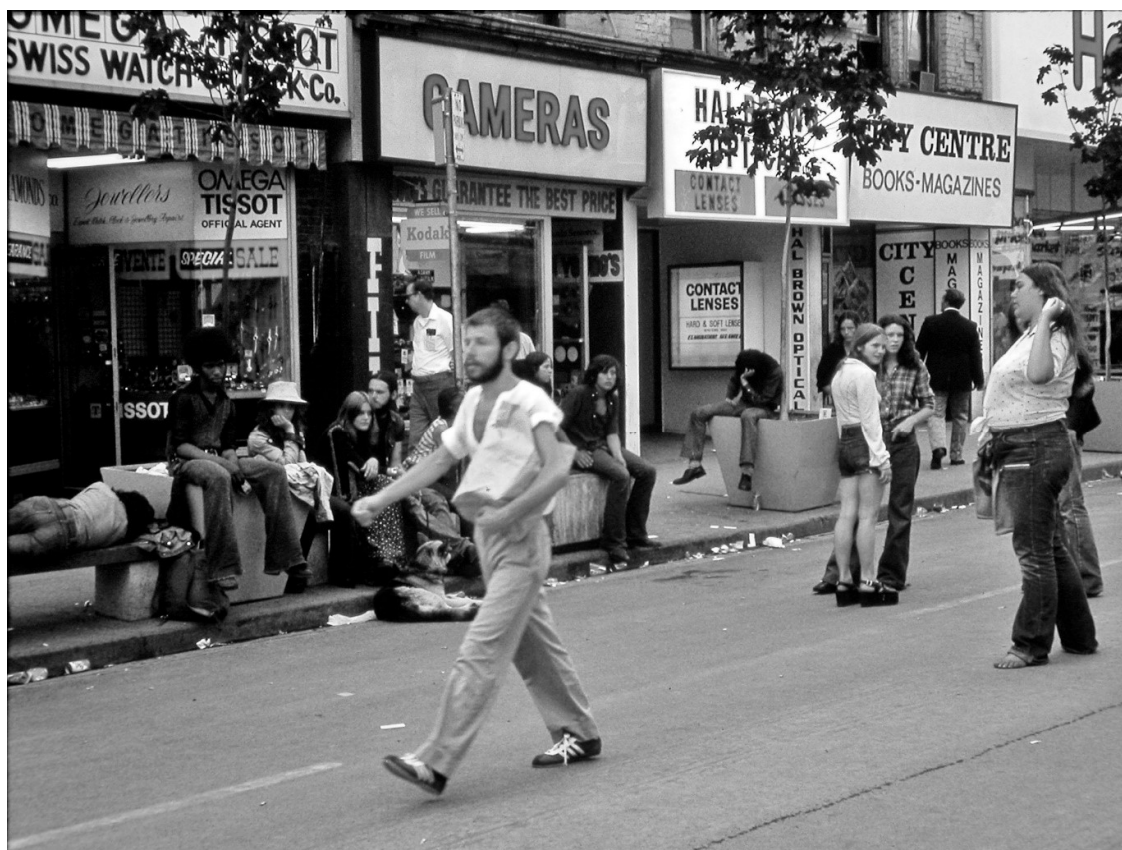
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<sup>204</sup> For a case study see Daniel Ross, "Panic on Love Street: Citizens and Local Government Respond to Vancouver's Hippie Problem, 1967-68," *BC Studies* 180 (Winter 2013/14): 7-37.

<sup>205</sup> "Yonge Street," *Guerilla* 22 (Apr. 71); "Once-groovy Yorkville has now 'gone commercial'," *Toronto Star*, May 22, 1971.

<sup>206</sup> The 20-34 year-old category made up 35% of the core population, against 25% across Metro; 0-19 year-olds 23% against 34%. *Core Area Task Force: Technical Appendix* (Toronto, 1974), 156.

<sup>207</sup> Canadian Welfare Council, *Transient Youth: Report of an Inquiry in the Summer of 1969* (Ottawa: CWC, 1970); "Why thousands of Metro teenagers are running away," *Toronto Star*, July 10, 1971.



*Image 1.8: The youth problem. Many Torontonians, including law enforcement, criticized the mall as a hang-out for undesirables, including teenagers and transients from across the country. Photo by street photographer Bob Whalen, summer 1972.*

beds, food, jobs information, and medical attention. They naturally gravitated to Yonge Street, where a 24-hour information service for youth was quickly set up in a trailer just north of Gerrard. Funded by the federal Opportunities for Youth program, the Peoples' Information Service directed transients to nearby hostels and other services, mimicking similar initiatives that had sprung up in nearly every city in Canada.<sup>208</sup> Those who could not find a place with friends or in crowded downtown hostels camped in a series of official and unofficial tent cities in the west end and on the University of Toronto campus.<sup>209</sup>

Like Yonge itself, the pedestrian malls offered young people a meeting place, made attractive by its central location, ample public space, and the lack of barriers—financial or other—to entry. This is confirmed both anecdotally by photographs and news reports and

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<sup>208</sup> "Youth on the move," *Toronto Star*, July 10, 1971. .

<sup>209</sup> "Tent city won't move until washrooms put on new site," *Toronto Star*, July 16, 1971.

by an extensive study of mallgoers in 1974. That summer, planners researching the mall surveyed, and recorded the details of, a total of 2043 people strolling the mall at various hours of the day. Of that number, nearly half—929—were between 16 and 25 years of age. A further 490 were aged 25-35, and only 549 (26%) were over the age of 35.<sup>210</sup> In other words, in a city where only a third of the population was between 15 and 35 years old, nearly three-quarters of mall goers were in that age group.<sup>211</sup> The sample may have been biased somewhat by the researchers, who were themselves in their 20s, and by the fact that slightly more surveys were filled out on the north section of the mall than on the other portions. But even accounting for those tendencies, the youthfulness of the crowds on the mall is striking.

In this context both the public and police were attuned to any hint that the Yonge Street pedestrian mall was providing an opportunity for youth misbehaviour. Their simple presence was often enough. When in July 1973 citizens began to complain that the mall was becoming a hangout for hitchhikers and transients, organizers were quick to react. A grassy area, according to some frequented by “undesirables”—according to others a “meeting place for youth from all across Canada”—was removed from the lower mall, and replaced with less hospitable trees.<sup>212</sup> William Archer countered criticism of the mall by pointing out that it was safe, business was good, and the police were keeping order.<sup>213</sup> He did not suspect that within a few months the police would become the experiment’s most vocal critics.

### **An “84-day orgy of lawlessness”**

Early on, the Metro Toronto police adopted a wait-and-see approach to the mall experiment. Representatives of the force participated in planning on the mall Technical Committee, and sat in meetings of the Operations Committee. Like the Fire Department, they raised the issue of emergency vehicle access to the mall; police representatives also expressed concern about the number of extra officers—36 in 1971, more in subsequent

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<sup>210</sup> The City People, *The Yonge Street Mall: A Feasibility Study* (Toronto: 1974), 34.

<sup>211</sup> In 1971 33% of Metro residents were aged 15-34. CTPB, *Core Area Task Force: Technical Appendix* (Toronto, 1974), 156.

<sup>212</sup> “The Yonge St. mall fights off its Sin Strip image,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 20, 1973.

<sup>213</sup> “Mall degenerate hangout, he says,” *Toronto Star*, July 24, 1973, “Complaints about Yonge St. mall unfair, Archer says,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 3, 1973.

years—required to manage traffic.<sup>214</sup> But they offered no further obstacles to the mall, and as the months passed seemed to be cautiously positive. Meeting informally with Archer and other city staff in early 1972, police were confident that they could handle control problems that summer by instituting a policy of “rigid law enforcement” during the first week of the closure.<sup>215</sup> And as late as August of that year, Staff Superintendent Vincent Telford—responsible for policing in 52 Division, which included Yonge Street—had called the mall “strictly a no-problem proposition.”<sup>216</sup> However, within a year that attitude had changed, as Chief of Police Harold Adamson began to publicly oppose the closure.

Two objections were at the core of Adamson’s opposition: that the mall increased criminal activity downtown, and that it wasted precious police resources. Both were based on a long report submitted by Superintendent Telford on policing the 12-week 1973 mall.<sup>217</sup> In that document, Telford’s positive evaluation of earlier malls was nowhere to be seen; instead, he highlights the difficulties his officers experienced in doing their job during the street closure. The report is fascinating reading, both for the insight it provides into what was by far the largest police deployment in Toronto that summer, and for the unique record it provides of individual incidents.

Policing the 1973 mall involved cooperation of several different units within the Metro Toronto Police force. During business hours, police presence was assured mainly by the 23 officers of 52 Division’s Foot Patrol Unit, one of the last units of its kind in a city policed almost entirely by scout car.<sup>218</sup> Plainclothes officers were also deployed, although in more limited numbers, to focus on offences like pickpocketing and prostitution. According to Telford, daytime patrols had “no real problem” maintaining order on the mall, although they reported large numbers of “undesirables,” including panhandlers, religious proselytizers, musicians and street vendors. Effective that year, the powers that police had traditionally used to limit those activities had been curbed. Revisions to the Criminal Code in 1972 had removed three vagrancy offences: wandering in public without means of support, being a common prostitute, and begging. All three were considered unconstitutional

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<sup>214</sup> “Minutes, Pedestrian Mall Technical Committee, Dec. 8, 1970,” CTA, P037427-5.

<sup>215</sup> “Informal meeting—police surveillance, Apr. 13, 1972,” CTA, 314-88-4.

<sup>216</sup> “A miracle is happening on auto-free Yonge St.,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 12, 1972.

<sup>217</sup> “Report of Chief of Police—Yonge Street Mall, Oct. 16, 1973,” CTA, 527607-4.

<sup>218</sup> Metropolitan Toronto Police Department, *Annual statistical report, 1973* (Toronto: MTPD, 1974).



because they targeted statuses—prostitute, transient—not behaviours.<sup>219</sup> The experience of the mall gave proof to warnings earlier that year from police that their hands were tied when it came to cleaning up Yonge Street.<sup>220</sup> Without status vagrancy offences there was little they could do about so-called undesirables, the report explained, apart from issuing summonses against unlicensed vendors.

There were different challenges after dark. Evenings and weekends, Telford argued, saw police resources stretched to their limits by drunken, disorderly, and sometimes violent crowds. He listed 1074 arrests made on Yonge during the mall; more might have been made, he suggests, if crowds had not “obstructed and menaced” officers performing their duty. Scout cars were frequently unable to navigate the street and were slow in bringing assistance. Telford’s report details fifty-six incidents of confrontation between police and mall-goers during the mall’s 1973 run, usually as the result of an attempted arrest for assault or intoxication. Some are vivid depictions of the challenges of policing the mall:

July 13<sup>th</sup>—11:13 pm. Radio call to assist the P.C. regarding a large fight at the Colonial Tavern and a serious stabbing that had taken place during the fight. A crowd of between two thousand five hundred and three thousand was present, with most of this crowd being hostile towards the police. Officers were tripped as they chased suspects; members of the crowd tried to take the prisoners from the officers; beer bottles and dirt clumps thrown at officers; scout cars blocked by the crowd, and as the cars tried to leave the back doors were opened and the prisoners dragged out. Several calls for assistance were put out and sixty units attended.<sup>221</sup>

These confrontations between crowds and officers, Telford explained, led police to ask for reinforcements. The Emergency Task Force—a heavily armed unit set up to deal with armed suspects and high-risk situations—was detailed to the mall on Fridays and Saturdays for the summer’s duration, logging an average of 140 hours each weekend. Five additional officers were added from other divisions. This nearly doubled police deployment on the mall during peak times. In total, the force spent 16,570 officer hours on the mall that summer, or approximately 200 for each day that it was open. According to Telford, “it was only due to

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<sup>219</sup> Prashan Ranasinghe, “Reconceptualizing Vagrancy and Reconstructing the Vagrant: A Socio-Legal Analysis of Criminal Law Reform in Canada, 1953-1972,” *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, 48 (2010), 55-94.

<sup>220</sup> “Police say hands tied on Yonge St. clean-up,” *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 4, 1973.

<sup>221</sup> “Report of Chief of Police—Yonge Street Mall, Oct. 16, 1973,” CTA, 527607-4.

the assignment of additional police personnel to the Mall that we were able to prevent major disturbances on weekends, and maintain law and order.”

Police felt under siege, and on summer nights maintaining order without confrontation and the deployment of backup seemed an impossible task. Adamson saw this as clear evidence that the street closure “attract[ed] undesirables” and, he thought, created crime.<sup>222</sup> It also tied down his officers in what he saw as a non-essential duty. As political scientist Kenneth Meier points out in his study of the politics of vice, modern urban police forces always have more responsibilities than resources, making their enforcement strategies selective by necessity.<sup>223</sup> In a period of rising crime rates and widespread concern about drugs and violent crime, Adamson argued that deploying 20 or more police per day on the mall was a waste of time: 52 Division was one of the busiest jurisdictions in the city, and both officers there and on the highly specialized Emergency Task Force had better things to do. Adamson hammered home the point that policing the mall was expensive, explaining that in 1973 the cost to taxpayers was just under \$100,000, or around \$530,000 in 2016 dollars. Although this was insignificant in the context of a police budget of nearly \$80 million, it served to further justify his opposition based on wastage of police resources. Following up on more guarded criticism made earlier in the summer, the police chief recommended that the mall be shortened in length, or, even better, completely abolished.

Of course, there were other sides to the story. Adamson did not distinguish between the street closure, the presence of so-called undesirables, and criminal acts: to him they were just faces of the same problem. But it was unclear just how much of the criminality Telford described in his report could be attributed to the mall or its particular street life, and how much was a product of other factors. He acknowledged that most of the disturbances were centred in the entertainment area, with its ten or more taverns, its strip shows, and bright lights. That area

even without a Mall, attracts more than its fair share of people with little to do and who are there for kicks and any type of excitement they can

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<sup>222</sup> “Chief predicts crime rise ‘sure as taxes’,” *Toronto Star*, Dec. 28, 1973, “Yonge mall should be reduced,” *Toronto Sun*, Nov. 7, 1973.

<sup>223</sup> Kenneth Meier, *The Politics of Sin: Drugs, Alcohol, and Public Policy* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 16.

promote. The intersection of Dundas and Yonge Streets has by far the heaviest pedestrian traffic in the evening of any location in Toronto.<sup>224</sup>

Of the fifty-six police-crowd scenes he lists, only six occurred before 7 pm; more than half took place between 12 and 4 am, mostly on Fridays and Saturdays. Furthermore, most of the arrests made on Yonge that summer were for minor offences that clearly reflected the boozy nightlife then available on Yonge. Half—485—of the arrests were for alcohol offences, 183 were for drugs (mostly marijuana) and just a few dozen people were charged with assault or other, more serious, crimes. While summer numbers for other, non-mall years do not exist, comparing Telford's arrest figures to overall statistics for Yonge in 1977 and 1978 suggests that while the mall intensified the situation, it was by no means responsible for creating it.<sup>225</sup> Yonge Street, car-free or not, had a problem with alcohol and rowdiness. That problem was at its most obvious as warm summer weather encouraged loitering and lingering long after closing hours.

Second, the tactics used by police tended in many cases to exacerbate tension between officers and mall-goers and in that way create crime, just as surely as Adamson believed the mall did. Reading Telford's report against the grain, it is clear that police were responding to personal drug use, groups of inebriated youth, or simply shouting in the street with immediate arrests. Other sources confirm that they were also stopping and questioning youth indiscriminately on the mall, and at times "warning them off."<sup>226</sup> These police actions were perceived by observers and the accused as harassment. When attempts were made to argue with police, or observers intervened, police escalated by calling for scout cars and other reinforcements, including the Emergency Task Force. In around one-third of the fifty-six incidents Telford describes in detail, confrontation between crowds and police occurred as a direct result of an earlier arrest. For example,

July 14<sup>th</sup>—1:30 a.m. A near riot situation developed at Yonge and Dundas Streets when [officers] were arresting females on prostitution charges. Around three hundred and fifty people shouted anti-police slogans.

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<sup>224</sup> "Report of Chief of Police—Yonge Street Mall, Oct. 16, 1973," CTA, 527607-4.

<sup>225</sup> "Crime statistics—Yonge St., Oct. 31, 1978," CTA, 579966-25.

<sup>226</sup> See for example this letter of complaint: "T.P. to Archer, Sep. 11, 1972," CTA, 314-88-22.

June 27<sup>th</sup>—11:45 pm. As the result of two men being arrested for robbery on Yonge Street a near riot developed. One youth jumped on an officer's back knocking him to the ground, and another officer was attacked by the crowd. This situation resulted in the arrest of twelve persons, for Assault Police, Obstruct Police, and Cause a Disturbance.

This is not to blame police for the problems they describe, but to point out that their tactics of policing the mall had a hand in creating them. Strict enforcement and escalation were sure methods—tried and tested in Yorkville just a few years previously—of creating resentment and, potentially, riots.

But while the media gave Adamson's criticism of the mall front-page treatment, they left little room for opposing opinions. Since the previous winter, Yonge's sleaze and criminal depravity had been making the news as a vocal minority began to mobilize to clean up the sex industry. Police depictions of the mall as lawless fit well into this narrative. Following the release of Telford's report—Adamson made it public by incorporating it into a submission to the Police Board of Commissioners, and it went from there to council—the *Toronto Star* dramatically referred to the mall as “an 84-day orgy of lawlessness,” and that memorable phrase sparked a renewed debate of the merits of the street closure.<sup>227</sup> It also gave Adamson ammunition in his lobbying of the provincial government—later taken up by the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police—to push for the reinstatement of the vagrancy offences removed from the Criminal Code in 1972.<sup>228</sup>

### **An appeal to democracy**

Police statements blasting the mall and growing dissatisfaction among merchants prompted a renewed discussion of the future of the project. It turned out that the mall still had its defenders. After the *Toronto Star* published a series of articles and letters critical of the mall, some members of the public did rally to its defence. In letters citizens praised the mall for its vibrant atmosphere and people-friendly environment. One called Yonge “a carefree oasis of trees and flowers, fountains and park benches in the middle of a concrete city”; another found it “throbbing” with life. A Toronto architect wrote chastising the *Star* for its

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<sup>227</sup> “Police Call Mall an 84-Day Orgy of Lawlessness”, *Toronto Star*, Nov. 9, 1973.

<sup>228</sup> “Yaremko to Kerr, Dec. 7, 1973,” “Pilkington to Kerr, Nov. 28, 1973,” AO, B223692, “Operations – Pedestrian Malls.”

“slanted, biased” take on Yonge, which he thought gave the impression that “people coming to the mall would be abused, insulted, robbed, and possibly molested.”<sup>229</sup>

As the summer 1973 mall closed, William Archer called criticism by police “grossly exaggerated and overplayed,” and pointed out that there had been very few substantiated complaints about youth criminality to date. The public favours the mall “four to one,” he went on to claim—and then quickly began to prepare a survey which he hoped would prove just that.<sup>230</sup> The question of just what the public thought of the mall was a crucial one, as Archer knew. In an era marked by widespread debate over the goals and practices of urban planning, Toronto’s pedestrian malls had been marketed as a project strongly in the public interest. Animated by the political climate of the time—increasingly weighted towards community-based democracy—they were planning experiments designed *for* people, *by* people. After all, hadn’t the organizers announced on opening day in 1971 that “[t]he judge and jury for the success of the mall will be the people of Toronto”?<sup>231</sup> That year, both surveys and sheer numbers of mall goers seemed to provide unequivocal approval. But was that still the case in 1972 or 1973? As was the case with the citizen’s campaign against the sex industry, it was always difficult to evaluate what Torontonians, outside of a vocal few, actually thought of the malls.

This was all the more relevant given that a new council and mayor had taken over in 1973, bringing with them a mandate for change. Members of council who had been outliers in the previous administration suddenly found themselves part of a reformist majority. That heterogeneous group was often divided on key questions, but its size gave moderate Mayor David Crombie considerable leeway in assembling support for individual policies.<sup>232</sup> While it would take the new government several years to lay out its vision for the downtown, from the start it was clear that priority would be given to keeping the central core “a people place,” and curbing the unrestricted use of the automobile downtown.<sup>233</sup> The spirit of the

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<sup>229</sup> “I find life throbbing on the mall, Torontonian says,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 15, 1973; “Stop knocking Yonge St. mall, architect says,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 25, 1973.

<sup>230</sup> “Questionnaire, 1973 Yonge Street mall, Oct. 1973” CTA, 527607-4; “TO’s downtown mall ending third year,” *The Province*, Sep. 24, 1973.

<sup>231</sup> “Press release, May 26, 1971,” CTA, P037427-5.

<sup>232</sup> For an overview of Crombie’s first year in office, see Jon Caulfield, *The Tiny Perfect Mayor* (Toronto: Lorimer and Co., 1974).

<sup>233</sup> “We need to get people out of cars, Crombie says,” *Toronto Star*, Dec. 28, 1972.

anti-Spadina campaigners was firmly entrenched in city government, beginning the institutionalization of urban design and community consultation ideas that had been current in planning circles for decades.

This new approach manifested itself in renewed interest in the state of Yonge Street, and paths to revitalizing it and the entire downtown core. In late 1972 David Crombie made a public appeal for input on the state of Yonge Street, and “what could be done to make it a better thoroughfare”: prelude to a highly-publicized campaign to “clean up” the street. The mall was one possible solution, although there was already discussion of whether it was in fact making the street *worse*, rather than improving it. Not long after, there was a push within the reform caucus to make a decision about making the mall permanent.<sup>234</sup> Moving towards a permanently car-free Yonge was always a part of William Archer’s plan, but given the unprecedented criticism of the mall that summer, he felt strongly that it was an inopportune time to consider the question. His approach continued to be conservative, calling for one more, longer, mall in 1974 and further studies before any decision was made.<sup>235</sup>

On that question and others Archer butted heads with the new, younger city council.<sup>236</sup> As a result, his ambitious 1973 survey of 1700 “persons, firms, and organizations” affected by the mall was never completed. In October he abruptly quit the organizing committee (unlike in 1971, this time was for good) citing frustration with council’s interference in mall planning.<sup>237</sup> In his place, council appointed first-time councillor David Smith as mall coordinator. In spring 1974, against the loud objections of William Archer, the city hired a group of researchers to conduct a full study of the mall and the possibility of making it permanent.<sup>238</sup>

### **Merchants divided**

Meanwhile, downtown merchant group the Downtown Council was also trying to advance its own policy on the future of the mall. Like Archer, its pro-mall members were concerned

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<sup>234</sup> “Yonge strip crackdown,” *Toronto Sun*, Dec. 29, 1972; author’s interview with David Crombie, Feb. 11, 2014.

<sup>235</sup> “Slow and easy on the Yonge mall,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 7, 1973.

<sup>236</sup> “Archer sees Bay St trolleys as threat to Yonge St. mall,” *Toronto Star*, Sep. 25, 1973.

<sup>237</sup> “Archer to City Exec., Oct. 30, 1973,” CTA, 527607-4.

<sup>238</sup> “City oks study of Yonge mall,” *Toronto Star*, May 16, 1974.

with establishing a base of support, through surveys and votes, that would justify continuing the experiment. In the face of indictments of the mall as a factor in Yonge's deterioration, unequivocal support from area merchants was perhaps the only way to ensure that outcome. However, they found creating a consensus much more difficult than expected. In contrast to the nearly unanimous support (with the notable exception of Simpson's department store) showed by businesses affected by the first 1971 mall, in subsequent years interest in the project had flagged. In 1972 a survey by the Council showed that nearly one in three (23 of 72) merchants on the extended mall were opposed to continuing the experiment, citing competition from vendors, increased shoplifting, and expenses incurred for extra staff, decorations, and the voluntary mall levy.<sup>239</sup>

Opposition was particularly stubborn on the Dundas-Gerrard strip, where store owners complained vigorously about control problems like panhandling. By mid-1973, in addition to long-time opponents like Simpson's department store, there was a distinct anti-mall lobby within the Council, led by steakhouse owner Harry Barberian. Division within the group made for tense meetings, as Barberian and his supporters attempted to rally other members against the mall. He too made an appeal to democracy, claiming that the group's executive had "bullied" store owners into supporting the project and calling for a fresh survey of Yonge businesses; as proof he went to the press with the results of his own poll, which he claimed saw nearly half of 80 respondents against the idea.<sup>240</sup> A week later, the Council obliged with a questionnaire on which they promised to base their future stance on malls. The tone was urgent: "there has been a great deal of controversy surrounding this year's mall," wrote President Peter Clark, "[w]e cannot state emphatically enough the need for your reply."<sup>241</sup>

The results were more negative than expected. Of the 132 businesses who responded, 58 (44%) were against future closures. On the entertainment-oriented section of the strip, those in favour were slightly in the minority, and it seems, were mostly bars and restaurants profiting from the operation of beer gardens and street cafés on the mall. Of

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<sup>239</sup> "Survey results, Dec. 29, 1972," CTA, 314-89-5 and "Surveys, 1972," CTA, 314-88-8.

<sup>240</sup> "Downtown Council meeting minutes—pedestrian mall, July 23, 1973," CTA, 314-89-4; "Merchants against 3-month Yonge St. mall, restaurateur claims," *Toronto Star*, Feb. 20, 1973.

<sup>241</sup> "Survey results, Aug. 15, 1973," "Mall questionnaire, Aug. 1, 1973," CTA, 314-89-2.

course, the results might have been different if the area's mini-cinis and body rub parlours had responded—very few did. In fact, in 1973 the Downtown Council only boasted one active member representing the burgeoning sex industry—flamboyant Starvin' Marvin's owner Arnold Linetsky—and in his characteristic style he opposed anything (including street closures) that allowed his smaller competitors to thrive. It was becoming apparent that, in 1973, the mall did not have the strong mandate among merchants that it could boast just a year or two before. This was evident in the increasingly guarded public statements of Downtown Council President Peter Clark on the future of the mall. "The concept of a mall is fantastic," he explained, "but it has to be workable...No one wants this to turn into another Yorkville." He went on to suggest that the city buck the trend of the previous three years and create a shorter mall on Yonge in 1974.<sup>242</sup>

### **Smoke and traffic**

The original terms for reference for the Yonge Street mall had emphasized that it was an experiment in fitting a pedestrian-only street (or streets) into traffic system built around the private car.<sup>243</sup> In 1970-71 this aspect of the project was much talked about: as I discuss earlier, a wide range of people saw malls as a way to challenge the automobile, both symbolically by removing them from well-known streets, and practically by making it a bit more pleasant to walk around. And anti-pollution activists had been very active in promoting the first mall, working hard to have their role in popularizing the idea acknowledged. From another perspective, Metro Commissioner of Roads and Traffic Sam Cass state that he was prepared to "tolerate" the malls but warned that the result would be inefficiencies, snarl-ups, and delays on already overburdened downtown streets.<sup>244</sup> Aware of the influence of Cass and other transportation officials, William Archer and the mall's Technical Committee devoted untold hours to minimizing the closure's impact through diversions and special regulations.

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<sup>242</sup> "T.O.'s downtown mall ending third year," *The Province*, Sep. 24, 1973, "Downtown merchants' head expects a smaller mall in 1974," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 20, 1973.

<sup>243</sup> "Public Works Commissioner to Committee, Aug. 17, 1970," CTA, 47197-10.

<sup>244</sup> "Report of Transportation Committee, Feb. 18, 1971," CTA, 83496-12; "Suggestions of permanent downtown mall just jumping to conclusions, Cass says," *Globe and Mail*, Jun. 3, 1971.



However, in the wake of police and media revelations about the mall's control problems, hardly anyone was talking about cars. In part, this was because discussion of the mall was dominated by criticism of the way its public space was used, and this tended to obscure other aspects of the experiment. But other factors were at work, too. After making considerable efforts to make pollution awareness part of the first 1971 mall, Pollution Probe had largely given up on the experiment. While their relations with mall organizers were cordial, Archer's committee were not receptive to their attempts to turn the mall into a forum for public education, and had rejected most of their proposals (including plans to make a documentary film about the mall) as detracting from the mall's purpose as a people place.<sup>245</sup> By 1972 Pollution Probe was also changing as an organization. In just a few years it had expanded from a small, student-led core to a group with twenty-five paid staff members, and largely renounced its previous focus on attention-grabbing public events and street theatre in favour of research and policy formulation.<sup>246</sup>

In the absence of Toronto's most important anti-pollution group, there was still interest in the relationship between the mall and the growing problem of automobile pollution. In 1972 researchers from the Ontario Ministry of the Environment measured Carbon Monoxide (CO) levels on Yonge both during and after the street closure. They pointed out that the mall seem to provide a very local sort of pollution abatement, something that Pollution Probe had predicted when it proposed Leave the Car at Home Week in 1970. Pollution levels that averaged an acceptable 5-7 parts per million during the mall increased dramatically when traffic was allowed back on the street, exceeding safe levels set by the province nearly half of the time.<sup>247</sup> More extensive readings taken the following summer found averages of well over 40ppm, prompting the authors to conclude that "it was undesirable to spend more than two hours walking or working" on downtown streets like Yonge—except, of course, during the pedestrian mall.<sup>248</sup> But while the press

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<sup>245</sup> "Pollution Probe presentation, Apr. 30, 1971," and "Operations Committee meeting, Apr. 8, 1971," CTA, P037427-5.

<sup>246</sup> Ryan O'Connor, *The First Green Wave*, 117.

<sup>247</sup> Ministry of the Environment, Air Management Branch, *Report on Carbon Monoxide, 381 Yonge Street, Fall 1972* (Toronto, 1972), CTA, 314-89-2.

<sup>248</sup> York-Toronto Tuberculosis and Respiratory Disease Association, *Carbon Monoxide in Downtown Toronto* (Toronto: May, 1974).

reported on their findings, unlike in 1970-71 the conversation was not tied to a larger narrative about pedestrians, cars, and the fight against pollution.<sup>249</sup>

The political context of transportation planning had changed, as well. Premier Bill Davis' 1971 decision to cancel the Spadina Expressway and stop provincial funding of future expressway projects left Metro Toronto's regional transportation plan in tatters. Supporters of the Spadina route at Metro had claimed that it would reduce congestion, increase pedestrian safety, and even abate pollution downtown.<sup>250</sup> In one stroke, that important link was lost. Perhaps more importantly, Davis' announcement and the bitter fight that preceded it destroyed Metro's previously strong mandate for comprehensive planning, already weakened by the resistance of Toronto politicians and planners to arterial road widenings and other interventions in the central city. In its place transportation planners were left to reconcile what they described in a 1973 report—tellingly called *Transportation Alternatives*—as two “incompatible aspirations”: for stability and restrictions on the automobile in the central city, and for increased mobility by car in the suburban boroughs.<sup>251</sup> New studies would have to be undertaken, new plans drawn up; in the meantime, Roads and Traffic Commissioner Sam Cass admitted that he and colleagues were left confused and uncertain about the future, not just on individual questions like the viability of pedestrian malls, but on the fundamental goals they should be working towards: “At this moment, we don't know in what direction we're heading.”<sup>252</sup>

This helps to explain Cass' virtual silence in the mall debate, even as other officials, including the Chief of Police, spoke their opinions forcefully and argued in the interests of their department. Studies of the effects of the mall on peak hour circulation were undertaken at the city and Metro levels, finding (unsurprisingly) that traffic redirected onto neighbouring arterials—especially Bay Street—put them well over capacity and made travel times slower for commuters.<sup>253</sup> But without a clear plan it was difficult to take a stance on the project from a transportation perspective. Roads and Traffic staff warned the public

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<sup>249</sup> “Choke! Splutter! Gasp! Yonge St is hard on your lungs,” *Toronto Star*, Apr. 17, 1973.

<sup>250</sup> “Expressway will reduce noise and pollution, enhance pedestrian safety, Metro planner says,” *Toronto Star*, Mar. 9, 1970.

<sup>251</sup> MTPD, *Transportation Alternatives: A Summary* (MTPD, 1973).

<sup>252</sup> “Traffic planning leads nowhere,” *Toronto Star*, May 10, 1973.

<sup>253</sup> The City People, *The Yonge Street Mall: A Feasibility Study* (Toronto, 1974), 78.

periodically of “chaotic traffic jams” due to the mall, and suggested that it was one thing to close Yonge during the summer, but quite another to consider doing it year-round. But they offered little in the way of sustained criticism, and—for a few years at least—made no attempt to raise the issue of widening Yonge into a proper traffic arterial.<sup>254</sup>

That did not prevent others from weighing in on the traffic issue. A number of individual citizens—including taxi or delivery drivers—wrote to the city or newspapers explaining that the mall disrupted their usual driving habits downtown.<sup>255</sup> Socially conservative Scarborough politician and Toronto Transportation Commission Chairman Karl Mallette also criticized the mall. While Yonge had been specifically chosen for the mall because it had a subway line and no major aboveground transit links, closing it to cars did force the diversion of two bus routes, and increased traffic on neighbouring streets. As a result, TTC officials argued after 1973’s mall, bus service was “continually disrupted”; Mallette would imply that this represented putting the interests of a few mallgoers ahead of the many commuters who relied on the service.<sup>256</sup>

### **The enclosed city**

In the background to all of this public debate over street closures, other types of pedestrian accommodation were encountering much less scrutiny. By fits and starts, since the late 1960s plans for vertical separation of traffic were being implemented in the downtown core, much along the lines suggested by the 1969 *On Foot Downtown* report.<sup>257</sup> South of the commercial strip in the emerging Financial District, Toronto’s development boom was creating an underground city, composed of below-grade retail plazas under towers, linked to the subway and one another by artificially lit corridors. That system of pathways—confusingly often called the “pedestrian mall system”—promised to address many of the concerns of city planners for efficient movement of pedestrians, providing direct movement to and from major destinations without interference from snow, rain, or traffic. They were

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<sup>254</sup> “Chaotic traffic jams expected to follow 1973 Yonge St. mall,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 2, 1973.

<sup>255</sup> See for example “Instead of closing Yonge use side streets for a mall,” *Toronto Star*, July 6, 1972, and “K.W. to Archer, July 16, 1973,” CTA, 314-89-4.

<sup>256</sup> “Mallette hopes he’s seen last of ‘that silly mall’,” *Toronto Star*, n.d. (early 1974).

<sup>257</sup> CT, *On Foot Downtown* (Toronto: 1969). The best description of early history of the PATH is Lindy Goodman, *Streets beneath the Towers: The Development of Toronto’s Underground Pedestrian Mall System* (Toronto: York University Geography Discussion Paper, 1984).

equally attractive from a budgetary perspective, since the system was mostly built and maintained by private interests.

The broom of reform was intended to sweep away the nascent underground system when the municipal government changed in 1972. Tunnels underneath towers seemed to embody an older, efficiency-oriented style of planning, and to directly contradict ideas about public space and urban vitality held by reformers. The shift towards urban design favoured spaces that were heterogeneous, naturally appealing, and interconnected. This explained sympathy for older-style retail areas like the Yonge Street strip, which concentrated uses and people in a way newer urban landscapes did not. In contrast, a 1973 report on downtown transportation argued that

Underground pedestrian malls in Toronto have been designed in a way that completely isolates people from the surface. Contact with streetscape and climatic conditions above ground has been lost and geographical orientation becomes next to impossible...Almost every one of them prides itself in the same array of retail outlets [laid out] in exactly the same way wherever they are located.<sup>258</sup>

In other words, they embodied many of the same problems as dull modernist buildings across the city, and especially suburban shopping malls. The goals behind the closing of Yonge Street—the creation of new civic space, preservation of commercial diversity—seemed unrealizable in the underground mode.

Yet whatever the objections within the new urbanism to the idea of a tunnel system, its growth was not halted in 1973. Because of the need to honour pre-existing agreements, the city continued to participate in tunnel-building between new developments, giving a financial incentive to expand the system at a crucial time. The result was a series of mostly unplanned spaces that were publicly accessible but privately owned and managed. Citizens' right to use them was contingent on individual access agreements and their perceived suitability; workers on their lunch break were of course treated differently from transients seeking escape from the cold.<sup>259</sup> But at this early stage, little attention was paid to the

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<sup>258</sup> "Report of the Congestion Subcommittee, Oct. 15, 1973," CTA, 527927-17.

<sup>259</sup> On the private/public aspect of the system see Jeffrey Hopkins, "Excavating Toronto's Underground Streets: In Search of Equitable Rights, Rules and Revenue," in Jon Caulfield and Linda Peake, eds., *City Lives and City Forms: Critical Research and Canadian Urbanism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 63-81.



*Image 1.9: The underground city, 1973. Toronto's tunnel network, designed most of all for commerce and the efficient movement of commuters, presented a very different pedestrian experience from on-street pedestrian malls. Frank Lennon/Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0116032f.*

channelling of pedestrian traffic into these new environments, apart from a few journalists who speculated whether it was worth trading “crowded sidewalks, congested streets, soot in your eyes and the endless traffic cacophony” for an “antiseptic,” muzak-filled underworld.<sup>260</sup> Even as attempts to build on-street pedestrian space faltered, the enclosed city continued to expand.

### **The end of an experiment**

In June 1974, Mayor Crombie announced, somewhat dramatically, that the fate of the Yonge Street pedestrian mall would be decided that year.<sup>261</sup> He was right. That year's temporary closure, originally intended to last from June to early September, was beset with

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<sup>260</sup> “A hive for Toronto's new WASPs,” *Toronto Sun*, Oct. 28, 1973, “The next place for quiet stroll—UNDER downtown Toronto,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 24, 1968.

<sup>261</sup> “Mall fate hangs on this year Crombie warns,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 18, 1974.

problems from the start. There seemed to be a growing consensus that giving Yonge Street back to the people was more trouble than it was worth.

The pace of development was partly responsible for this verdict. Over the winter of 1973-74 the demolition of several blocks of buildings on the west side of Yonge, slated for inclusion in the Eaton Centre retail and office complex, began. For months—indeed until early 1977—this section of the street would be faced on one side by construction hoardings rather than viable businesses able to participate in the mall. Many of the merchants located on this section of the street had shut their doors as early as 1970 or 1971, and so had not participated in earlier malls. Still, the tear-down created a dramatic gap in the mall's coherence as a Main Street corridor, while in the scale of transformation seeming to embody a threat to its future viability.

Crime and disorder remained the dominant themes in discussion of the mall. Critics within the police force mobilized statistics to argue that in 1974 the closure was another pointless near-riot, an impression the media made little attempt to dispel. Officers in 52 Division and the Morality Squad claimed that “the mall has increased our arrests in everything—drunks, prostitutes, and drugs,” and drew unequivocal links between the closure and the increasingly notorious problems of Sin Strip.<sup>262</sup> Perhaps most harmful to the mall's image was a York County grand jury report that described it as “a blot on Toronto...a crime centre for drug pushing, prostitution, and a myriad [*sic*] of other illegal activities.” It went on to recommend that the mall be permanently discontinued. Grand juries, no longer in operation in Canada, deliberate in secret. But it is clear from the report and memoranda written by the police board that in this case, the jurors— who also called generally for stiff custodial sentences for drug traffickers—relied almost entirely on testimony from police to come to its verdict.<sup>263</sup> That those recommendations bore no legal weight, and that the grand jury was a practically obsolete institution did not make the indictment any less damning in the press. “This mall has become a nightmare” wrote the *Globe and Mail* in

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<sup>262</sup> “U.S. prostitutes invade the mall, police say,” *Toronto Star*, July 19, 1974.

<sup>263</sup> “Grand jury report, Aug. 2, 1974,” “Board of Commissioners to Archer, Aug. 13, 1974,” CTA, 314-89-9.

response to the verdict, and within a week the *Toronto Star* had begun to refer to the project in the past tense.<sup>264</sup>

However, it was not the mall's perceived control problems that cut it short in 1974, but a different issue entirely: a transit strike. In early August negotiations between Metro and the TTC union broke down over wage increases, precipitating a strike that halted buses, streetcars, and subways across the city for the first time in decades.<sup>265</sup> Beginning on August 12, the more than half a million Torontonians who depended on the system to get to work quickly changed their mode of transport. Many walked, others pedalled—bicycle shops reported record sales—but the majority drove, jamming the streets with cars and pushing up downtown pollution levels. Three days later Toronto Council voted nearly unanimously to remove the mall furnishings and planters and re-open the street to cars. William Archer thought this was a mistake, playing into the hands of the mall's critics; in fact, a few councillors opposed to the mall tried to use the opportunity to pass a (quickly defeated) motion banning any future such experiments. Coordinator David Smith, on the other hand, saw an early closure as a way to prevent the public from blaming the mall for traffic congestion downtown.<sup>266</sup> In fact council's decision to return Yonge to normality merely made official what was already taking place: in an attempt to avoid rush hour traffic jams on surrounding streets, cars were edging their way onto Yonge and using its narrow fire route as a shortcut.<sup>267</sup>

### **Liability and provincial power**

One final intervention sealed the fate of car-free summers on Yonge Street. For four years, Toronto had been creating temporary malls based on yearly enabling legislation from the provincial government. Each year, the Davis government had passed a bill indemnifying Metro and Toronto against any claim of damages resulting from the closure of Yonge and other thoroughfares. This was not simply a formality. Just a few years earlier, Ontario's *Expropriations Act* had been amended, strengthening the ability of citizens to claim

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<sup>264</sup> "This mall has become a nightmare," *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 6, 1974; "This is requiem for the Yonge St. mall," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 15, 1974.

<sup>265</sup> "TTC strike set for Monday," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 10, 1974.

<sup>266</sup> "Council rejects bid to prevent all future malls," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 16, 1974.

<sup>267</sup> "Mall will close to help drivers," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 13, 1974.

compensation for actions taken by government.<sup>268</sup> Crucially, the 1968-69 amendments included a clause that clearly formulated—for the first time—the idea of “injurious affection”: that claims for personal or business compensation could be made even when no property was actually expropriated, such as when roads or streets were closed. Early on in mall planning, both Toronto and Metro legal staff gave opinions warning of the importance of that clause for pedestrian mall planning.<sup>269</sup>

If in 1971 exemption from liability was a precaution, within a few years it was viewed by mall organizers as essential. A growing number of merchants directly affected by the closure were claiming losses of business attributed to the mall; after summer 1972, for example, one third of merchants reported that sales were worse than usual during the closure.<sup>270</sup> In a few cases, there was a real threat of legal action. From early on, Simpson’s department store—one of the largest employers and taxpayers in the city—had been opposed, claiming lost business due to difficulties accessing its parking facilities. And in 1972 celebrated music venue the Edison Hotel complained that the entrance to the hotel bar was masked by city planters, and that as a consequence they were losing walk-in business. Communicating through their lawyers, the hotel management warned that they would seek damages if the planters were not removed.<sup>271</sup> As much as organizers tried, it was impossible to close and landscape the street without the possibility of claims of “injurious affection,” spurious or not.

The danger of liability was also brought home by ongoing conflict over pedestrianization in New York City. In 1970, the vice-chairman of Simpson’s wrote to the city warning them of the potential legal consequences of pedestrian malls. He enclosed a clipping from the *New York Times* describing backlash from area businesses to Mayor Lindsay’s temporary closures of Fifth Avenue—the unspoken implication was that Simpson’s could organize similar opposition.<sup>272</sup> A few years later, legal staff directed the city’s attention to a legal action recently launched in New York City. Lindsay’s temporary closures—this time of Madison Avenue, with a view towards a future permanent mall—had

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<sup>268</sup> Government of Ontario, *The Expropriations Act, 1968-69* (Toronto: Queen’s Printer, 1970).

<sup>269</sup> “City solicitor to Committee on Public Works, Sep. 22, 1970,” CTA, 47197-11.

<sup>270</sup> “Survey results, Dec. 29, 1972,” CTA, 314-89-5.

<sup>271</sup> “Edison to Commissioner of Devt, Aug. 1, 1972,” CTA, 314-88-7.

<sup>272</sup> “Porter to Committee on Public Works, Oct. 7, 1970,” CTA, P037427-05.



once again brought vocal protests by merchants. More than one hundred retailers on and around Madison Avenue had brought suit against the city, claiming that Lindsay's experiments in pedestrianizing the street were transforming it into "a commercial disaster area."<sup>273</sup>

By 1973-74, the city's position was that the mall could not function without indemnity against damages. In correspondence with the province, Mayor Crombie warned that lack of such legislation "could open a Pandora's box":

a few merchants who for a variety of reasons have opposed the mall might seize on the opportunity afforded them [to] harass the City with lengthy litigation. Unfortunately, the possibility of a series of such lawsuits would probably amount to the demise of the mall.<sup>274</sup>

This was not a problem so long as the Davis government supported the mall. For the first three years of the project, the province had supplied the annual enabling legislation. Questions had been raised in the legislature, however, about Ontario's ongoing role in the experiment. Why, asked a member of the opposition, was the province "exercising the powers of a municipal council" with its annual bill, instead of empowering Toronto and Metro to manage the legalities of the project itself?<sup>275</sup> Closing Yonge was a municipal decision, and the municipality should bear any consequences.

In fact the Davis government was coming around to the same viewpoint. Early in 1973, in a personal letter to William Archer, the premier expressed his "interest in the success of this project," suggesting that permanent mall legislation was the best way forward. But that draft legislation, which included indemnity against damages, was shelved at Archer's behest; citing the recent legal challenge in New York, he argued that the city was "not quite ready" for permanent mall legislation.<sup>276</sup> Additionally, he wanted time to prepare appropriate provisions for dealing with some of the control problems—especially pamphleteering—experienced on the mall during the past two summers. However, by early 1974 the province's stance had changed: it would no longer provide the city with indemnity

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<sup>273</sup> "Notice of petition—Supreme Court: County of New York, Jan. 9, 1973," CTA, 314-88-22.

<sup>274</sup> "Crombie to White, Apr. 25, 1974," CTA, 47197-10.

<sup>275</sup> *Legislature of Ontario Debates*, Monday, June 11, 1973, Afternoon session (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1973), 2913.

<sup>276</sup> "Davis to Archer, Mar. 19, 1973," "Archer to Meen, Apr. 10, 1973," "Bill 132: Draft, Jun. 4, 1973," CTA, 314-89-6.

against damages, or give the city powers to limit the distribution of handbills on the mall. According to the minister responsible for intergovernmental affairs, John White, this was a cabinet decision based not on any objection to the mall, but on concern that “Metropolitan Council should assume total responsibility for its actions,” and that “a municipality should not be empowered to interfere with freedom of speech.”<sup>277</sup> Following a flurry of correspondence and meetings, the province agreed to pass an enabling bill for that year’s mall—forcing a late opening—but warned that it was the last.

Toronto politicians favouring the mall felt betrayed by the province’s decision. Of course, the legal basis for denying the provision controlling handbills was strong: as Metro Chairman Paul Godfrey noted, there were “serious constitutional issues” with the bylaw.<sup>278</sup> In late 1973 the Deputy Attorney General of Ontario reported to the cabinet that while the province could theoretically empower the city to restrict distribution of printed material, application of that power would be almost impossible given precedents protecting freedom of expression in a range of areas: religious, political, intellectual, news.<sup>279</sup> Similar attempts by municipalities to interfere with the selling or distribution of newspapers and other printed materials—for example, Vancouver Mayor Tom Campbell’s crusade against countercultural newspaper the *Georgia Straight*—had been quashed by courts in recent years.<sup>280</sup> But in the case of indemnity against damages, the case was murkier. On the one hand, it seemed somewhat undemocratic to exempt a municipality from a law—the *Expropriation Act*—recently redesigned to strengthen citizen power in the face of government action. Both Oakville and Niagara Falls, eager to establish their own malls, had been recently denied similar legislation.<sup>281</sup> Yet there were precedents: the establishment of Ottawa’s Sparks Street mall in 1965 had included a provision of indemnity, and more recently so had the *Village of Wasaga Beach Act* (1972).

Several factors seem to have influenced the Davis cabinet’s withdrawal of support for the Yonge Street mall. Earlier debates over the project had raised the question of local

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<sup>277</sup> “White to Godfrey, Apr. 10, 1974,” CTA, 47197-10.

<sup>278</sup> “Province clears way for three Yonge St. malls,” *Toronto Star*, May 24, 1974.

<sup>279</sup> “Callaghan to Kerr, Nov. 29, 1973,” Archives of Ontario (AO), B222281, “Cabinet Committee on Justice – Pedestrian Malls.”

<sup>280</sup> On the *Georgia Straight* see Daniel Ross, “Panic on Love Street: Citizens and Local Government Respond to Vancouver’s Hippie Problem, 1967-68,” *BC Studies* 180 (Winter 2013/14): 7-37.

<sup>281</sup> “Province clears way for three Yonge St. malls,” *Toronto Star*, May 24, 1974.

responsibility and autonomy, a constant theme in 1970s provincial-municipal relations, as it is today.<sup>282</sup> By early 1974, in addition to striking down attempts to control handbills or other literature on the mall, cabinet seemed to be moving away from support for continuing the closures on that basis.<sup>283</sup> More broadly, however, it is also worth remembering the example of the Spadina Expressway. In 1971 the newly elected Davis acted unilaterally to cancel the project, effectively ignoring its approval by local government. That was a bold statement not just about planning priorities—people over cars—but also about responsiveness to the large section of the public actively protesting the freeway. Certainly it was widely seen at the time, as it is now, as “a victory for citizen participation,” with a bit of political calculation—the security of Tory seats in central Toronto—thrown in.<sup>284</sup> Davis’ refusal of legislation for the Yonge Street pedestrian mall certainly did not make headlines in the same way, but was likely influenced by the same attention to public opinion and future electoral fortunes. If early on it made sense to offer what the province considered a legal exception for Toronto’s wildly popular mall, once it was a subject of controversy overt provincial involvement was simply bad politics.

### **A permanent mall?**

At the end of August 1974, the *Toronto Star* published a series of letters on the Yonge Street mall, now two weeks gone. Several pointed out—somewhat sarcastically—that while Yonge was once again open to cars, that change had hardly been an instant solution to the problems ascribed to the closure.

Noise, youngsters bumming around, drunks, prostitution, the drug scene, the handing out of pamphlets...the mall enlarged these problems but certainly did not create them.<sup>285</sup>

In fact, 1974 was only the beginning of the city’s attempts to come to grips with what an increasing number of people saw as the transformation of Yonge Street into Toronto’s own sleazy “Times Square.”<sup>286</sup> Over the next few years it became clear just how complex a

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<sup>282</sup> Robert Bothwell, *A Short History of Ontario* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1986).

<sup>283</sup> “Cabinet Meeting Minute 9-8/74, Feb. 13, 1974,” AO, B222281, “Cabinet Committee on Justice – Pedestrian Malls.”

<sup>284</sup> “Tories, NDP applaud Spadina halt; Liberals split,” *Globe and Mail*, Jun. 4, 1971.

<sup>285</sup> “Why didn’t PM call in the troops?” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 26, 1974.

<sup>286</sup> “Yonge as bad as Times Square,” *Toronto Star*, Jan. 23, 1973.

process that was, one in which the pedestrian streets of 1971 to 1974 played only a small part. The mall was not the source of downtown Toronto's problems—but nor, the last four years of experimentation seemed to have demonstrated, was it the solution.

Over the next few years, discussion of downtown pedestrian malls continued. Increasingly, the conversation about making Yonge more pedestrian-friendly focused on permanent improvements, integrated into the new plan for the core area being developed for the city. But without the daily drama and conflicting interests that characterized the experimental summer malls, the subject did not capture the public interest in the same way. Nor did it lead to any concrete action, despite a range of city officials' commitment to the idea.

In November 1974 the City People, a group of young planners hired to research the project and the possibility of a permanent mall submitted their final report.<sup>287</sup> Ranging over issues from policing to legislation, the document is the most detailed study of the Yonge Street pedestrian malls. Although there was little in it that was truly new, it was effective in setting a framework for discussion because it combined, for the first time, arguments for and against the mall, and studies to back them up, in a single, readable package. The authors urged the city to create a permanent mall on Yonge, citing downtown's high levels of pollution and "acute shortage of open space," and the threat posed to street-level retail on Yonge from competition and rising land values. A mall, they argued, remains the only financially viable way to both create open space and "strengthen and preserve Yonge Street's unique 'Main Street' retail character."<sup>288</sup> Like others before them they attempted to ground their conclusions in an appeal to public opinion: a survey of 2000 mallgoers—with an 88% approval rate—was used to demonstrate popular support, and the 78% of merchants who approved of the "concept of a mall" to show future potential.<sup>289</sup>

The City People report really said nothing new; in fact, in its arguments for the mall, it echoed what planners and citizen urbanists had been saying about pedestrianization for nearly a decade. The crucial difference between the mid-1970s and 1963—when the *Plan*

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<sup>287</sup> The City People, *The Yonge Street Mall: A Feasibility Study* (Toronto, 1974).

<sup>288</sup> The City People, *The Yonge Street Mall: A Feasibility Study*, 5.

<sup>289</sup> The City People, *The Yonge Street Mall: A Feasibility Study*, 36, 49.

for *Downtown Toronto* first introduced the idea of a mall on Yonge—was that the ideas animating their report were now the accepted wisdom at City Hall. That the core should be people-friendly, that public space should be a key consideration, and that pedestrian infrastructure was a path to both those ends: these concepts were no longer at the fringe of planning in Toronto, but its very centre. That had been made clear in the first few months of 1973, when the newly elected city council appointed a citizen task force to work on downtown congestion issues. Quickly, the Core Area Task Force acquired a broad mandate to make recommendations not just on transportation, but on land use, environmental issues, and a range of other subjects.<sup>290</sup> Composed of citizen groups (many allied to the reform movement), chaired by a reform councillor—Colin Vaughan—and able to direct the resources of the Toronto planning department, the task force became the main inspiration for a new *Central Area Plan* (1976) that brought reformist ideas about city building to the heart of planning in the city.<sup>291</sup>

The Core Area Task Force presented the city with a patchwork of pedestrian-friendly ideas, ranging from wider pavement allowances to the installation of moving sidewalks connecting the core and the waterfront. Surprisingly, its members had little to say about pedestrian malls—perhaps because the discussion was already happening at the highest levels—but what they did say was positive.<sup>292</sup> In that context, the City People’s proposal for a permanent mall on Yonge seemed to come at the perfect time, despite ambivalence engendered by the temporary closures. Even in 1974, city officials concerned with improving Yonge were inclined to think that the summer malls were not a failure; rather, they were improperly implemented, and with the right changes to approach and technique could be made to work. In fact, some still thought Yonge could be the site of “the most attractive and best administered mall in the country.”<sup>293</sup>

What would that ideal permanent mall look like? The bulk of suggested changes were in two areas: legislation/enforcement and design. In the case of the former, nothing

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<sup>290</sup> “Core Area Task Force Progress Report #1, July 10, 1973,” CTA, 527927-17.

<sup>291</sup> See White, 275. CTPB, Central Area Task Force, *Report and Recommendations* (Toronto, 1974).

<sup>292</sup> “Report of Subcommittee on Environmental Quality, Oct. 15, 1973,” “Report of the Congestion Subcommittee, Oct. 15, 1973,” CTA, 527927-17.

<sup>293</sup> “Report of Commissioner of Development, Mar. 26, 1975,” CTA, 201288072-1; author’s interview with David Crombie, Feb. 11, 2014.

truly innovative was proposed: the problems of provincial legislation and the dubious legality of prohibitions on panhandling and leafletting remained. The City People further suggested that the Metro Police form a special “mall patrol unit” of officers trained to operate on foot. Their main design idea was to divide the permanent mall into two sections, north and south, with the section between Gerrard and Dundas being a “semi-mall,” with a traffic lane open in each direction. This was very much in keeping with the changing practices of mall planning in North America: by the mid-1970s many cities were concerned that pedestrian areas were isolated from surrounding streets or inaccessible by public transit. In order to mediate those concerns, malls were hybridized to include one or two lanes of traffic or transit.<sup>294</sup> In the case of the Yonge Street strip the concern was less about circulation, and more about control: a steady but slow flow of traffic would prevent build-up of crowds and give police vehicles easier access to the area. South of Dundas to Wellington, the street would resemble the full closures of previous summers: pedestrian-only with east-west crossings open to traffic. The closure would be implemented incrementally, beginning with the southernmost stretch, in effect following the pattern set by William Archer in 1971.<sup>295</sup>

Whatever the appeal of these ideas to politicians and city officials, the Downtown Council did not seem convinced. They expressed exasperation with the city’s lack of coordination and wavering commitment to not just consulting with, but actually listening to, Yonge merchants, in their view the most important stakeholder in discussion of the street’s future. In a scathing deputation to council and, later, a more measured official submission, the Downtown Council made it clear that its stance on pedestrian closures had not changed. While smaller malls on side streets could be considered, they thought a new closure of Yonge Street would add to their problems. Their first priority, they explained, was the long-discussed clean-up of the sex industry, and that a mall was only possible “[i]f and when Yonge Street’s problems are ironed out.”<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Kent Robertson, *Pedestrian Malls and Skywalks: Traffic Separation Strategies in American Downtowns*, 25, 45.

<sup>295</sup> The City People, *The Yonge Street Mall: A Feasibility Study*, 9-11.

<sup>296</sup> “Downtown Council-The City of Toronto’s Consideration of Malls, Apr. 1975,” CTA, 145944-1.

That comment proved prescient. In spring 1975, after reading the City People report and official responses to it, Toronto Council established a Yonge Corridor Improvement Committee, composed of merchants, citizen groups, and city representatives, with a broad mandate to create plans to improve and revitalize the street. In its expansive terms of reference it resembled nothing so much as a miniature Core Area Task Force dedicated to one thoroughfare.<sup>297</sup> The committee's well-intentioned efforts to build consensus for street improvements continually foundered. Members discussed a range of ideas, including plans for the closure of tiny east-west Dundas Square to create a permanent marketplace for street vendors.<sup>298</sup> But there was internal dissent: it took some time to convince merchant representatives that the committee was not in fact dedicated to convincing them to accept a permanent Yonge Street mall.<sup>299</sup> More broadly, everything the committee did was overshadowed or side-tracked by the larger issues being debated in reference to Yonge, and in particular the sex industry and the Eaton Centre development, by then rapidly nearing completion.

## **Conclusion**

For a few years, the idea of pedestrian malls promised to transform Yonge Street, and Toronto's downtown. In the 1950s and 1960s they were a second-tier planning idea, endorsed in principle but rarely given attention by a development-oriented city government. But in the context of growing popular interest in fighting pollution and planning centred on people—not cars—the persistent calls of small businesses on Yonge for a public revitalization effort were heeded, and channeled into a bold experiment in opening the street to pedestrians. In the context of citizen opposition to the Spadina Expressway, and growing support for the municipal reform movement, the mall came to symbolize a positive vision of the city many wanted Toronto to be: a “people place,” a better version of the faltering or fallen downtowns of cities like Detroit, Buffalo, or even New York. It was also seen as a path to revitalizing and preserving Yonge Street's dense, early twentieth-century

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<sup>297</sup> “Report 17 of Committee on Public Works, Apr. 29, 1975,” CTA, 201288072-1.

<sup>298</sup> “Yonge Corridor Improvement Committee minutes, Jun. 1, 1977,” CTA.

<sup>299</sup> “Meeting notes, Aug. 15, 1975,” CTA, 201288072-1.

retail streetscape, threatened by redevelopment, rising rents, and growing competition from suburban shopping.

After the success of the first mall in 1971, the project expanded, closing the street to cars for longer periods each year, and growing to include not just the respectable shopping area near Queen, but the entertainment-oriented (and increasingly disreputable) section of Yonge from Dundas to Gerrard. The mall became a fixture of downtown life, providing both Toronto residents and visitors with a new kind of public space, space that was used both in familiar and new ways. Mallgoers were treated to a spectacle that included all the possibilities and problems of downtown life, from the mundane to the bizarre, as well as the concerted attempts by area merchants to demonstrate and inspire pride in the street through entertainment. Torontonians voted with their feet in favour of the experiment, filling the street with crowds and reinforcing the unpredictable, somewhat transgressive atmosphere of the whole project. People supported the mall for a range of sometimes conflicting reasons: because it was good for business, provided new public space for all to use, was exciting, brought families back downtown. Many observers were certain its appearance marked a watershed in the city's development.

The Yonge Street mall promised to help the city's increasingly suburban population rediscover the joys of shopping and strolling Main Street. In that respect, it was part of a larger wave of interest in revitalization through pedestrian space occurring in cities across the continent. Other urban centres, particularly in Canada, paid close attention to the fortunes of the Yonge Street mall. Yet while the mall was successful at bringing people downtown—Yonge rarely lacked crowds, with or without the mall—organizers proved unable to control just what version of "downtown" they experienced. Carefully design treatments aimed at producing a safe, "free and easy," or family atmosphere on the mall met resistance from the wide variety of people and uses that populated the space. Young people, whether locals or transients, found it a cheap and exciting place to meet, investing the space with a youthful, sometimes rebellious, feel. Street vendors, panhandlers, evangelists, and prostitutes saw the street's crowds as a unique opportunity to do business.

From 1972 onwards the mall was increasingly caught up in discussions of sex industry on Yonge Street. Body rub parlours, adult cinemas, and strip shows all benefited from the concentration of potential customers on the mall; they also fed opposition to the



scheme. Perhaps more damning was the assertion by police in 1973 that the mall was an “orgy of lawlessness,” where officers were barely able to contain youth rowdiness and disorder. Rising crime rates and societal anxiety surrounding the category of youth made the teenagers and twenty-somethings attracted to Yonge seem a further threat to its character. This was heightened given that the mall coincided with the summer season, when warm temperatures and a break from school encouraged hitchhiking and gathering and lingering in public spaces. People began to ask if the pedestrian mall was helping the street—or hastening its decline.

By 1974 enthusiasm for the experiment had waned. The Yonge pedestrian mall no longer seemed so much a symbol of the promise of the future as a reminder of the problems of the present. The citizen urbanists and reformers who had supported it early on now found themselves in power at City Hall, and were channelling their energies towards larger issues, including community planning and controls on private development. Malls were seen as an important concept—and a component of their new vision of downtown—but not a practical means of transforming the city. With provincial support withdrawn and Yonge Street merchants increasingly discontent with the scheme, temporary closures were halted. The idea of a permanent pedestrian street, very much in line with the new planning philosophy taking shape in Toronto, continued to be discussed, but without any real hope of implementation.

This was in some ways predictable. In the 1960s and 1970s city after city in North America, from Fresno to Montréal, had placed isolated pedestrian zones in the heart of their cities. Victor Gruen, widely referred to as the “father of the pedestrian mall,” had warned as early as 1964 that

Introducing *one* pedestrian mall into a city core area without taking the necessary steps to improve circulation and provide automobile storage space, only serves to multiply [downtown] troubles instead of eliminating them.<sup>300</sup>

Cities that shut traffic out of downtown streets without changing the larger traffic system all shared this risk. Modernist to the core, Gruen believed that pedestrian zones could only

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<sup>300</sup> Victor Gruen, *The Heart of Our Cities: The Urban Crisis, Diagnosis and Cure* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 223.

thrive in the context of a comprehensively planned city centre. That kind of planning opportunity was rare. Certainly it was never a possibility in fiscally conservative, densely developed Toronto, either in the heady days of modernist planning or the years of municipal reform; nor was it an option in most North American cities. This placed North American pedestrian malls in a vulnerable position, as isolated pockets of pedestrian-only space in street grids dominated by the automobile.

The temporary malls that opened Yonge to foot traffic from 1971-74 did not lead to a permanent closure, but they certainly had an impact on the city. First, much like the Spadina Expressway debates, they put into stark relief the differing priorities that Toronto and Metro Toronto had for the core. Metro, speaking on behalf of the wider urban region, believed that Yonge Street should play the role of arterial thoroughfare, part of a larger, rationalized grid of streets that would provide crucial support to the expressway system. This was all the more important in the wake of the cancellation of the Spadina route into downtown. Meanwhile, Toronto saw the core primarily as a place for people, and considered its first priority when dealing with Yonge the preservation of its character as a Main Street shopping area. That was particularly clear after the 1972 election of a majority-reform government; but the same vision of downtown is apparent in planning circles throughout the 1960s.

Intergovernmental relations affected the experiment in another way. In Canada cities lack constitutional standing, relying instead on provincial law for their limited powers. This became particularly clear in the debates over both the Spadina Expressway and the pedestrian mall, as the province in each case bypassed both levels of municipal government to make its own judgement as to what was in the public interest. In a way, those two provincial interventions bookend Toronto's ambitious pedestrianization experiment. Of course, in both cases it was easier for the province to act without offending democratic sensibilities when Metro and Toronto were unable to speak with a unified voice.

Second, the summer malls brought new attention to Yonge Street, both positive and negative. The attraction of a car-free summer stroll precipitated a rediscovery of the street by the Toronto public, a number of whom normally visited the downtown core only occasionally. Many loved the experience, and found both the street and the mall attractions they could be proud of. Others expressed shock and dismay at what they saw as the

advanced state of Yonge's problems, including most notably commercialized sex, and the undesirable clientele it seemed to attract. This was picked up in the press, and became an important issue in the 1972 municipal election. As the next section of this thesis describes, the mall was a key factor in making the condition of Yonge Street one of the most talked about issues in Toronto by 1973.

Finally, the pedestrian malls reaffirmed the city's desire for public space, and its appreciation of small-scale disruption of normally rigidly separated streets. People enjoyed the Yonge Street mall, and even as criticism mounted continued to flock there in large numbers. The most successful aspects of the experiment began to be duplicated across the city: if in 1971 there were only two outdoor cafés serving beer in the city—both on the mall—by 1974 there were 60 across Metro.<sup>301</sup> Meanwhile street closures, hardly ever attempted on major streets before the 1970s, slowly started to become a typical feature of Toronto summers, as the mall concept was put into action in neighbourhoods across the city by business improvement associations, residents' groups, and ethnic cultural organizations. In the 2010s, there are more than 300 such closures for parades and community events each year, and on most summer weekends multiple miniature malls attract the same dense crowds as Yonge Street did four decades ago. If after 1974 Toronto could no longer come to the mall, to a certain extent, the mall still came to Toronto.

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<sup>301</sup> "Outdoor drinking and dining spots blossom in warm summer sun," *Toronto Star*, Jun. 29, 1974.

## 2. Toronto the Good?: Vice and Virtue on the Yonge Street Strip

*I take a walk along Yonge Street  
Good times are bought and sold*  
—“Long, long time to get old,” Ian Tyson (1970)

Toronto’s summer pedestrianization experiments focused public attention as never before on Yonge Street’s entertainment scene, once again in evolution to keep pace with changing tastes and economic circumstances. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the stretch of Yonge Street between Gerrard and Dundas became the epicentre of Toronto’s booming sex industry. In response to liberalizing sexual mores, the availability of high-traffic rental spaces, and consumer demand, entrepreneurs selling sex in a variety of forms set up shop in the area. By 1972 adult bookstores, peep shows, strip clubs and body rub parlours dotted block after block of Yonge. The area, already well-known for its bright lights, became nationally (in)famous for its public embrace of commercial sexual entertainment. Observers coined a new name for it, building on the old: Sin Strip. Musicians, filmmakers, and poets used it as a backdrop for hard luck stories and explorations of inner-city life. Meanwhile, in response to citizen activism and concerns about urban decay, Toronto politicians labelled Sin Strip a problem area and attempted to mobilize political support to clean up or renew the area.

This chapter traces the short but widely publicized life of Sin Strip, a product of 1960s permissiveness and Toronto’s development boom that disappeared amid a wave of conservative reaction in the late 1970s. Through journalistic accounts, the comments of prominent citizens, and their own personal experience of the street, Torontonians quickly came to love (or love to hate) Sin Strip. By 1972 ongoing discussions about the future of Toronto’s downtown inevitably featured comment on the state of Yonge, whether it merited being cleaned up, and why. Over the next four years Torontonians debated what should—or could—be done about the perceived problem. Citizens mobilized through churches, communities, and as individuals to pressure the city to act. Their activism on the issue was just part of a larger conservative reaction to the loosening of laws and public attitudes towards sex, alcohol, and other perceived vices: they felt the liberal 1960s had

gone too far. Sin Strip provided a place where these more abstract concerns about social change could be localized and rooted in place. Despite the fact that the criminal law was a federal responsibility, opponents of the sex industry targeted the municipal government because they saw it as both more accessible and more responsive to citizen activism.

Others were critical of proposals to regulate the sex industry, questioning whether the authorities had a right to legislate morality and asserting their right to a free market in sexual entertainment. In an era when citizen participation and local democracy were considered cornerstones of the new municipal politics, both opponents and defenders of Sin Strip deployed notions of democratic good and citizens' rights to bolster their arguments. In newspapers and letters to elected officials, these two groups of citizen activists raised important questions about public morality, censorship vs. liberty of expression, and the role of local government. They also affirmed the special importance of Yonge—Toronto's Main Street—to their understandings of the city. Both sides saw downtown Yonge as one of Toronto's most important public spaces, with a key role to play in its identity and future.

Starting in 1973, a consensus began to build both in Toronto and Metro Toronto Council that *something* had to be done about Sin Strip. A group of enterprising pro-clean-up politicians at both levels of government began to look for policy tools they could use to regulate the sex industry, and tried to further rally public opinion to their side. Body rub parlours—which many saw simply as fronts for prostitution—were singled out as the first targets of any clean-up campaign. From the start, the goals of containing or eliminating commercialized sex and revitalizing the neighbourhood were tightly bound together: shutting down Sin Strip was seen as a necessary condition of arresting downtown decline.

But the powers of both the city and metropolitan government were limited, and the police consistently argued that they lacked the resources and judicial support to act effectively. In this context, the various solutions proposed to the Yonge Street "problem" were largely ineffective. This would change in the summer of 1977, as two significant events—the publication of a city report attacking the sex industry and the highly-publicized murder of 12-year-old shoeshine boy Emanuel Jaques—created massive public support for action. Proponents of a clean-up took advantage of the opportunity to orchestrate a large-scale crackdown on Yonge that drove many of its sex shops out of business. By the end of

1977, they were declaring a victory on Yonge, and already planning the next steps in an ambitious revitalization plan.

This is the first history of Sin Strip. While the issue inspired massive media coverage and analysis at the time, scholars have written almost nothing about it since.<sup>1</sup> A 1981 MA thesis by Yvonne Ng describes how media, notably the *Toronto Star* and *Toronto Sun*, turned Yonge Street's burgeoning sex industry into spectacle with exposés, lurid photos, and outraged editorials.<sup>2</sup> This contributed, she argues, to a wave of moral panic that swept Toronto following the murder of Emanuel Jaques in 1977. Public outrage was harnessed to crack down on the area's sex workers and shops; it also provided support for a larger nationwide campaign against pornography. This understanding is echoed in the work of scholar of prostitution Deborah Brock.<sup>3</sup> Since it originated in the 1970s, the theory of moral panic has often been used to understand the anxieties surrounding youth culture, prostitution and perceived sexual deviance, or drug use.<sup>4</sup> In an episode of moral panic, public concern about a perceived social problem becomes disproportionate through the intervention of "moral entrepreneurs," interest groups and the media, often resulting in a repressive response from the state.

Aspects of this account help us understand what happened on Yonge Street in the 1970s. But there is more to the story. In this chapter I draw on a wide range of sources to recreate the debates surrounding Sin Strip in the 1970s and track how they influenced government policy. Like Ng and Brock, I underline the influential role played by the media in the debate. And the story of Sin Strip features no shortage of would-be moral entrepreneurs or incidents of disproportionate state response to the perceived problem. But focusing on the language of moral condemnation often applied to the sex industry, and supposing a

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Robert Miles, "Mean Streets: The wages of sin is backlash," *Maclean's*, Sep. 5, 1977. Numerous other citations follow in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Yvonne Chi-Ying Ng, "Ideology, Media, and Moral Panics: An Analysis of the Jaques Murder" (Criminology Masters Thesis, University of Toronto, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Brock, *Making Work, Making Trouble: Prostitution as a Social Problem* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), esp. 25-43.

<sup>4</sup> The concept was first explored in detail in Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1971). For more recent examples of its application to Canadian history see Catherine Carstairs, *Jailed for Possession: Illegal Drug Use, Regulation, and Power in Canada, 1920-1961* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), ch. 1.

direct link from that rhetoric to state repression, ignores both the nuances and contradictions of public debate, and the complexities of the operation of the local state.

It also risks de-historicizing the episode by removing it from its spatial context. The Yonge Street strip was one of the most significant public spaces in Toronto in the 1970s, both through the multiple ways it was used by a broad cross-section of the population, and by its ubiquity in the arts and representations of the city's identity. Throughout this chapter I stress the special symbolic value of the area, a factor that made the debate over the sex industry about much more than moral concerns. It was also about the management of public space and its different uses, in a place where any change was viewed as impacting not just the street, but the city as a whole. As such, Yonge Street was a space which was both subject to powerful behavioural norms and the ideal place to perform transgression of them. There is much to be gained by looking at Yonge in its context as a key site in the downtown of a changing metropolis; equally, study of this single site allows us to better understand the city growing and changing around it in the 1970s. The rise of the suburbs, the development boom, the sexual revolution, social conservatism, reformist municipal politics, and fear of urban decay; all of these larger themes are present in the four or five block microcosm of the Yonge Street strip.

Sin Strip was an intensely local problem, anchored to a specific and well-known place. But it was also inevitably influenced by larger national and cultural issues. It appeared and operated in the legal grey area created by the new attitudes towards sex and sexual expression that developed in North America in the 1950s and 1960s, on a downtown commercial strip that was slowly being transformed by downtown redevelopment. The same patterns were at work in Vancouver's gentrifying West End and on Montreal's iconic rue Saint-Catherine.<sup>5</sup> Citizens' responses to Yonge were shaped by their understandings of larger urban issues. To some the area's excitement and action identified Toronto as a great North American city. For others, the sex industry was harbinger of urban decay, crime, or Americanization, just the latest in a series of victories for the "permissive society" that were unravelling the social fabric. Both opponents and defenders of Sin Strip justified their

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<sup>5</sup> See Daniel Francis, *Red Light Neon: A History of Vancouver's Sex Trade* (Vancouver: Subway Books, 2006) and Danielle Lacasse, *La prostitution féminine à Montréal, 1945-70* (Montreal: Boréal, 1994).

opinions with appeals to democracy, their right to enjoy or use public space, and the central place of Yonge Street to Toronto's identity. Similar discussions were happening across Canada, as municipal authorities under pressure from local residents attempted to use their limited powers to fill in perceived gaps created by the recent loosening of the Criminal Code.<sup>6</sup> Throughout North America, in fact, cities from Winnipeg to New York were grappling with their own "erogenous zones," and their efforts would serve as reference points for people in Toronto.<sup>7</sup>

### **Toronto the Good?**

There has been a market for sex in Toronto since its earliest days as a city. That fact became an issue of public concern during the social purity campaigns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as reformers and their critics investigated and debated the issue of prostitution in the city.<sup>8</sup> In 1898, social observer C.S. Clark wrote an ironic commentary on local social mores entitled *Toronto the Good*, playing on the city's recently acquired nickname. In that book, Clark observed that the city—which then had a population of 200,000—had dozens of "houses of ill-fame" where men could discreetly pay for sex.<sup>9</sup> He described streetwalkers as a regular feature of downtown street life:

At nights any time after eight o'clock in the summer, and from seven in the winter these girls pass up and down Yonge street and along Queen west ... [and] make themselves conspicuous.<sup>10</sup>

In 1915, Toronto followed the lead of cities like New York in empowering a commission to take a full survey of immorality in the city. Its report identified, among other problems, a burgeoning number of massage parlours offering "abominable and unspeakable" services,

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<sup>6</sup> Deborah Brock, *Making Work, Making Trouble: Prostitution as a Social Problem* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) explores the late 1970s and early 1980s construction of prostitution as a social problem across Canada. See also Francis on Vancouver.

<sup>7</sup> I am indebted to James Clapp for the term. Clapp, "'X' Marks the Spot: The Problem of the Erogenous Zone in the American City," *Revue française d'études américaines*, 36 (1988), 225-34.

<sup>8</sup> See Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> C.S. Clark, *Toronto the Good: The Queen City of Canada as it is* (Montreal: Toronto Publishing Company, 1898), 86-92.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.



which, as Alan Hunt has observed, may have been coded language for oral sex.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, even as increasing censorship controls made seeing erotic or explicit films nearly impossible, sex guides and pornographic images circulated discreetly at all levels of society.<sup>12</sup> And from the 1930s onwards striptease and burlesque were a minor but well-known part of Toronto's live entertainment scene. Men lined up in the evening to see both local and touring dancers perform theatrical numbers at venues like the Casino Theatre on Queen Street, the Lux on College, and Spadina's Victory Burlesque.<sup>13</sup>

There was something fundamentally different about Yonge Street in the 1960s and 1970s, however. The postwar sex industry was both larger in scale and much bolder in tone than anything that had existed previously. Rather than keeping to back streets and hotel bars, there it was concentrated on just a few blocks for everyone to see. Bright neon and signage advertised "Topless girls," "Sex aids," or "Nude massages." Touts patrolled the sidewalk in front of strip clubs, and women sat in the doorways of body rub parlours calling out to prospective clients. There was little that authorities could do to limit this activity, and Yonge's sex entrepreneurs knew it.

### **Sexual revolution**

Toronto was by no means the only place where this was happening. In the 1960s and 1970s, sex-related businesses were proliferating in cities across North America. Rather than consciously avoiding the attention of the public (and the authorities) as they had since at least the early 1900s, they were instead opening up in downtown areas where foot traffic and visibility were highest. Perhaps the most famous was the area around Times Square and Forty-Second Street in New York—sometimes referred to as "the Dangerous Deuce"—but cities from San Francisco to Montreal also had their own districts where locals and visitors

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<sup>11</sup> Toronto Social Survey Commission, *Report of the Social Survey Commission* (Toronto: Carswell, 1915), 17; Alan Hunt, "Measuring Morals: The Beginnings of the Social Survey Movement in Canada, 1913-1917," *Social History/Histoire sociale*, 35:69 (2002), 188n62.

<sup>12</sup> The Ontario *Theatres and Cinematographs Act* (1911) established a board of censors and set strict controls on the exhibition of films in the province.

<sup>13</sup> Deborah Clipperton, "Work, Sex, or Theatre? A Brief History of Toronto Strippers and Sex Work Identity," Emily van der Meulen, Elya Durisin, Victoria Love, eds., *Selling Sex: Experience, Advocacy, and Research on Sex Work in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 30-31.

could see “the sexual revolution writ large on the urban landscape,” often in unmistakable neon signage.<sup>14</sup>

As the term “sexual revolution” suggests, this was a period in which sexual values were in flux.<sup>15</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, if not earlier, a social consensus had developed in North America that placed the monogamous, heterosexual marriage—preferably with children—at the centre of gender relations and society. The law, social convention, and religion all acted to confirm the idea that deviations from this norm were immoral, dangerous, and, in the case of homosexuality, criminal. In the 1960s and 1970s this consensus, always crumbling at the edges, fell apart. In its quest for self-fulfilment and liberation, the baby boom generation—and women in particular—rejected the assumption of premarital chastity and domesticity, and to a certain extent the stigma attached to sexual expression. Men and women could still marry, and did in great numbers; but they wanted to do so on their own terms, and women wanted above all to control when—and if—they had children. Naturally, sexual liberation was closely tied to the political struggles for women’s, and later, gay rights.

Not just young people, but society at large re-evaluated its attitude towards sexual expression. There was a growing public awareness that reading or watching pornography was not necessarily harmful; in fact it could be just another expression of a healthy sexual appetite. Between 1965 and 1975, legal controls on pornography in both Canada and the United States relaxed as judges applied this new community standard to individual cases.<sup>16</sup> Explicit materials—especially gay pornography—continued to be seized, but overall, prosecution for obscenity became more difficult and hence rarer. This was certainly the case in Ontario at the time that Sin Strip began to develop on Yonge Street. Likewise, the law on prostitution and homosexuality changed, although not to the same extent. In 1968 and 1972 amendments to the Canadian Criminal Code decriminalized homosexual acts (between two adults in private, at least) and removed the offence of being a “common prostitute or night

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<sup>14</sup> Josh Sides, “Excavating the Postwar Sex District in San Francisco,” *Journal of Urban History*, 32:3 (2006), 356.

<sup>15</sup> One of the best guides to the complex issue of the sexual revolution is Beth Bailey, in *Sex in the Heartland* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1999). For Canada see Doug Oram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), esp. 248-79.

<sup>16</sup> See Christopher Nowlin, *Judging Obscenity: A Critical History of Expert Evidence* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), esp. 47-132, and Dany Lacombe, *Blue Politics: Pornography and the Law in the Age of Feminism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 21-25.

walker,” otherwise known as Vagrancy C.<sup>17</sup> All of these changes occurred in the context of a national discussion about sexual morality, censorship, and freedom of expression that took shape in every type of media and nearly every community.<sup>18</sup>

As both attitudes towards sex and the laws regulating it changed, demand for adult entertainment and sex-related products increased. Shops selling sexual aids and promoting healthy sexual experimentation popped up in big-city neighbourhoods, and “dirty” books and magazines began to appear in both specialty shops and more unexpected places, like bookstores and supermarket shelves. In the context of the 1960s counterculture, there was something chic or hip about pornography, often precisely because it was transgressive. The nude female form became a staple of countercultural iconography, and from there spread into more mainstream media. Explicit sexuality was almost non-existent in the popular culture of the 1950s (although it was often implicit), but by the early 1970s it was everywhere. Older publications like *Playboy* (1953) became both more popular and more explicit as they competed with new offerings, from *Penthouse* (1969) to smaller, niche publications. In Canada, sales of adult magazines more than tripled over ten years, from 3.5 million in 1965 to more than 13 million in 1975.<sup>19</sup> Along with this new print subculture came a new model of masculinity: the *Playboy* bachelor, defined by his lack of attachments and appreciation of the finer things in life, including the guiltless pursuit of sexual pleasure. It was an ideal to be aspired to, more than an actual lifestyle. Consuming commercialized sex, in its various forms, was to some men an enticing liberation from the constraints of being identified primarily as a breadwinner or husband.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> On the limits of decriminalization of homosexuality in this period, see Tom Hooper, “‘More Than Two Is a Crowd’: Mononormativity and Gross Indecency in the *Criminal Code*, 1981-82,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 48:1 (winter 2014). On vagrancy see Prashan Ranasinghe, “Reconceptualizing Vagrancy and Reconstructing the Vagrant: A Socio-Legal Analysis of Criminal Law Reform in Canada, 1953-1972,” *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, 48 (2010), 55-94.

<sup>18</sup> This sense of a period of vigorous debate over sex is captured well in an episode of CBC’s *Take 30* entitled “What is Smut?”, aired January 15, 1971 and available in the CBC online archives at <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/discover/programs/t/take-30/what-is-smut.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Lance W. Roberts, Rodney A. Clifton, Barry Ferguson, Karen Kampen, Simon Langlois, eds., *Recent Social Trends in Canada, 1960-2000* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 520.

<sup>20</sup> See Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).



*Image 2.1: The east side of the Yonge Street entertainment strip by night, circa 1970-1972. City of Toronto Archives, 1465-312-49.*

Both performance and film followed the trend. Topless dancing spread from San Francisco and other leading-edge cities to regional bars and small towns across the continent.<sup>21</sup> Popular theatre productions like *Hair* brought full-frontal onstage nudity into the mainstream, first in New York (1968) and later on tour in Toronto (1969) and elsewhere. Meanwhile, both hard-core (depicting sex acts) and soft-core pornographic movies gained wider acceptance with higher production values, more coherent stories, and appeals to counterculture cool. The explicit film *Deep Throat* was one of the top fifty grossing films in the United States for nearly two years after its 1972 release, and was even reviewed in *Time* magazine, imparting the stamp of middle-class respectability.<sup>22</sup> In Canada film censorship controls were generally stricter, but nonetheless, soft-core and (heavily) edited hard-core movies were available in theatrical release in major cities by the early 1970s. Young people, women, and curious older couples—people who would never have dreamt of joining the

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<sup>21</sup> See Sides, 355.

<sup>22</sup> Carolyn Bronstein, *Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976-1986* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 63.

“raincoat brigade” in the past—were now flocking to see what one influential critic called “porno chic”.<sup>23</sup>

### **Sin Strip**

With this confluence of changing sexual values, loosening legal strictures, and porno chic, the Yonge Street strip’s new orientation towards sex made sense, both culturally and economically. In the 1950s and 1960s the area was on the leading edge of entertainment in the city, well-known for its music scene, numerous movie theatres, and cosmopolitan cocktail lounges and bars. In this context, adult entertainment was just the latest in a series of innovations designed to keep both locals and visitors coming back on weekends and evenings. In fact, a number of the new sex-related businesses in the area were conversions that had been around in other forms for decades. In becoming Sin Strip, Yonge was in many ways just adapting itself to the times, as it always had.

One of the first changes visible on the street was the conversion of a number of Yonge’s movie houses into “grindhouse” cinemas, showing cheap action, erotic, or exploitation movies continuously from the morning until late at night. Two of the best-known were the Rio and the larger Biltmore, both located on Yonge between Dundas and College. Built to serve the streetcar city as destinations for popular entertainment, both were by the 1960s struggling to attract audiences in the face of newer, more modern competition in the neighbourhoods and suburbs. Their changeover was part of a North American trend of downtown movie theatres adapting to new competition through specialization.<sup>24</sup> From the mid-1960s onwards, instead of offering more expensive new releases, they appealed to a younger crowd by “grinding out” niche films all day. For a few dollars, moviegoers could see a range of B-movies, second-run Hollywood films and soft-core flicks: for example a double bill featuring *Catch-22* and *The Sweet Sins of Sexy Susan*. Since they were open all day, these theatres were also a cheap and convenient way for people with nothing to do or nowhere to go to get inside for a few hours. Low prices meant little was spent on repairs; when the *Toronto Sun* noted that the Rio had an 18-inch hole in

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<sup>23</sup> Ralph Blumenthal, “Porno chic: “Hard-core” grows fashionable—and very profitable,” *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 21, 1973.

<sup>24</sup> See Paul Moore, “Movie palaces on Canadian downtown main streets: Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver,” *Urban History Review*, 32:2 (2004), 3-20.

the screen and a section of the seating roped off for fear of a collapsing roof, it was describing a general trend of declining theatre interiors.<sup>25</sup>

It was a small step from B-movies and erotica to further specialization. The strip's first entirely adult cinema, Cinema 2000, opened in 1969 at Yonge just north of Dundas. It advertised itself as "North America's first commercial video-tape cinema," and used gimmicks like free showings of sex movies to gain publicity and test the boundaries of Canada's weakening obscenity laws.<sup>26</sup> Within a few years Cinema 2000 was joined by several others, and by the mid-1970s there were nine sex cinemas on Yonge.<sup>27</sup> Each marketed itself in its own way. Eros One advertised "super erotic movies in exciting skinemascope," while 21<sup>st</sup> Century Love Cinema, taking a more family-friendly angle, promised that "if our sex educational films do not improve your love life, enjoyment, and happiness in marriage we will refund your admission in full."<sup>28</sup> Along with Cinema 2000, 21<sup>st</sup> Century was one of the largest theatres, with a capacity of over 100 patrons. Smaller operations often had second or third-floor walk-up locations. One of these "mini-cinis"—the Pussy Cat—is described in the terse 1971 report of an Ontario Theatres Branch Inspector:

Cini located on second floor [above] J.J.'s Discount Magazine Store. Admission price is \$2 per adult—no tickets are issued. Seating for 29. 8mm operation with music from a tape player. Screen 40 by 60 inches.<sup>29</sup>

On an even smaller scale, there were peep show booths. At the back of arcades and bookstores operators set up cubicles where patrons could enjoy sex movies in privacy. Typically these booths had a bench, a locking door, and a slot through which patrons could feed coins to keep the film rolling. A quarter bought a few minutes of time. Unlike the theatre-style sex cinemas, where enjoyment was partly derived from the transgressive act of watching sex with strangers, in these cubicles men had an intensely private experience. They closed the door, chose a genre and a film, and masturbated alone. The protocol at

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<sup>25</sup> *Toronto Sun*, Feb. 28, 1980.

<sup>26</sup> "Hundreds clamor to see nude film free," *Toronto Star*, Mar. 4, 1970, "'Vixen' videotapes are seized by Toronto police," *Boxoffice*, Mar. 2, 1970.

<sup>27</sup> "Morality Bureau to Metro Licensing Commission, July 7, 1975," CTA, 103157-2.

<sup>28</sup> "Thrills for the have-nots at the Yonge Street sex cinemas," *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 20, 1973; "21<sup>st</sup> Century Ad," *Toronto Sun*, Feb. 21, 1973.

<sup>29</sup> "Memo to Chief Inspector re: Pussy Cat", AO, RG 56-9 B247549.



Image 2.2: Places of amusement. Funland arcade, on Yonge just north of Dundas Street, offers pinball and video games downstairs, and adult movies upstairs, 1973. Ron Bull/Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0115313f.

peep shows was—with some exceptions discussed later on—to tacitly ignore the existence of other customers.<sup>30</sup>

All of these venues, small and large, promised that a \$2 or \$3 ticket (or the equivalent in quarters) would give patrons access to full, “totally uncensored adult films;” in practice this was true some, but not all, of the time. Until 1975, they were able to circumvent the Ontario Board of Censors by using uncut small-format 8-mm film or videotapes. But the threat of obscenity charges often led them to self-censor, cutting out sex acts and male nudity from their films. This sometimes meant that popular European or American releases shown in Toronto ran to half of their original length, losing any semblance of plot in the process. In the words of one reporter during a visit to the strip, on

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<sup>30</sup> Laurence Senelick, “Private Parts in Public Places,” in William R. Taylor, ed., *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World* (New York: Russell Sage, 1991), 341.

any given night offerings included “everything from feature-length skin flicks to grainy, slot-machine teasers.”<sup>31</sup>

Below or next door to these theatres, shops like Times Square Books and 2 by 4 Poster Shop sold pornographic materials alongside souvenirs, postcards, niche art books and the latest paperbacks. Often adult magazines, movies and prints were displayed in a separate back room or upstairs section marked “Adults Only.” Peep show booths rounded out the possibilities. Like the sex cinemas, these businesses were on the front lines of the battle over the application of obscenity law. Frequent targets of raids by the Morality Squad until at least 1972, they revelled in the countercultural cachet that this gave them.<sup>32</sup> An ad placed by four Yonge Street bookstores in alternative newspaper *Guerilla* stated simply “If you don’t want the Morality Squad reading over your shoulder, don’t browse in these bookstores.” In 1970, one shop sardonically offered a \$1,000 prize for the best essay answering the question “Why Toronto does not need a Morality Squad.”<sup>33</sup>

Another venerable Yonge Street institution, the tavern, adapted itself to stay relevant, switching over from more refined libations like cocktails to draft beer, and offering new entertainments aimed at a younger crowd. The female go-go dancer was a staple of rock and roll shows by the mid-1960s. At venues like Friar’s Tavern and the Coq d’Or, local and visiting bands were flanked by attractive young women dancing on two-by-two-foot raised platforms. The idea of go-go was so ubiquitous that even Eaton’s department store advertised women’s clothes with the exhortation to “Twist to the go-go rhythm!”<sup>34</sup> Within a year or two dancers on Yonge were wearing shorts and pasties, and by 1969 they were often naked from the waist up. “Topless” became the buzzword of businesses up and down the strip as they competed against each other to lure in foot traffic. Bars like the Zanzibar Tavern advertised music performances, psychedelic light shows and continuous topless dancing, from noon until late at night.

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<sup>31</sup> Charles Taylor, “Look what’s happened to Toronto the Good,” *Toronto Life*, Dec. 1972, 48.

<sup>32</sup> “Police arrest stores’ manager, seize 4,000 books as obscene,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 5, 1971.

<sup>33</sup> *Guerilla* 22 Apr. 1971; Jock Carroll, “Yonge St: Canada’s Downtown,” *Toronto Week*, Sep. 26, 1970, 4.

<sup>34</sup> *Globe and Mail*, Sep. 13, 1963. Cited in Deborah Clipperton, “Work, Sex, or Theatre? A Brief History of Toronto Strippers and Sex Work Identity,” in Emily van der Meulen, Elya Durisin, Victoria Love, eds., *Selling Sex: Experience, Advocacy, and Research on Sex Work in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 31.



Meanwhile, several strip clubs opened up promising full nudity, although they were initially limited by the Morality Squad's insistence that dancers wear G-strings. Profits were also restricted by their inability to get liquor licenses until provincial law changed in 1973. Still, at places like Starvin' Marvin's, which opened in 1971, theatrical nudity was much easier to stage than it had been just a few years before. Burlesque dancers in the 1950s and 1960s had been forced to follow a bewildering list of rules set by police and management to avoid obscenity charges. Those at the venerable Victory Burlesque on Spadina Avenue included wearing pasties and full underwear, not communicating with the audience, and not bumping props, lying down, or making "any body movements that in the eyes of the public would simulate an act of intercourse."<sup>35</sup> Few of these rules were being enforced by the 1970s, making the strip scene on Yonge largely self-regulating. This meant the possibility of higher profits for owners, and to a lesser extent for dancers, who could expect to be paid more for performances. But it also led to pressure on dancers to be more and more explicit, to use props, and to encourage audience participation—some felt this was putting them in danger and ruining the profession.<sup>36</sup>

"Look but don't touch" was the mantra in strip clubs. But another type of business encouraged contact between employees and patrons—the body rub parlour. First appearing in 1971-2, these generally small, second- and third-floor operations became the most ubiquitous (and infamous) sex shops on Yonge. By 1974 police had documented 31 of them on Yonge, although they were opening, closing, and changing hands constantly.<sup>37</sup> All promoted an endless number of variations on the massage, given by topless or nude attendants: body shampoos, saunas, body painting, and striptease, as well as more esoteric services like taxi-dances (slow-dancing with a nude partner) or photography. Prices started at \$10-15 for a half-hour massage, and went up quickly with the addition of each service. For example, a reverse rub (giving a massage to an attendant) might cost \$35.<sup>38</sup> Typically, customers came in from the street to a reception area where they could look over the

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<sup>35</sup> Quoted by Robert Fulford, "Crisis at the Victory Burlesk," in W.E. Mann, ed., *The Underside of Toronto* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), 258.

<sup>36</sup> "Two strippers crusade against—yes!—nudity," *Toronto Star*, Oct. 6, 1971. On the positive aspects of the burgeoning strip scene for dancers, see Deborah Clipperton, "Work, Sex, or Theatre? A Brief History of Toronto Strippers and Sex Work Identity," 34-36.

<sup>37</sup> "Inspector Wilson to Emslie, Aug. 20, 1974," CTA, 138398-11.

<sup>38</sup> "Morality Bureau to Metro Licensing Commission, July 7, 1975," CTA, 103157-2.

employees before accompanying one into a series of small private rooms containing massage tables, a sofa for a private striptease, or a tub.<sup>39</sup>

Advertising for body rub parlours sometimes promoted their health benefits—one studio, Caesar’s Palace, boasted a fitness room—but more often used coded language to suggest that patrons might be able to have more than a massage. This included allusions to the exotic—at the Sultan’s Retreat, the attendants were referred to as the “harem”—and phrases like “total massage,” “complete privacy,” and “come with me” that hinted at sexual services.<sup>40</sup> This is not to say that all massage parlours offered so-called “extras,” to clients. But many did, depending on the attendant, the hour, whether they knew the customer, and how much was paid. Publicly, operators crudely claimed that they offered “the sizzle without the steak.”<sup>41</sup> But in fact all of them drummed up business by trading on the suggestion that anything was possible in their private rooms.

Since a large proportion of attendants’ earnings were from tips—they normally paid “the house” around \$20 per client—there was a strong financial incentive to give extras built into the business itself.<sup>42</sup> Women who were willing to masturbate clients or (more rarely) provide other sexual services could make a great deal of money, in a safe environment where they had a measure of control over the transaction.<sup>43</sup> This was a different power dynamic from sex transactions that occurred in bars, hotels, or on the street. Of course there could be pressure from management or clients to go further. One 1970s parlour attendant interviewed by prostitution scholar Deborah Brock describes her transition to offering sexual services:

I worked in a massage parlour for quite a while before I would even give a hand job. I would work either topless or nude. I’d give a massage and make terrific commissions ... [I] thought that I was earning my money quite

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<sup>39</sup> Dutiful Morality Squad officers provided detailed sketches of a typical Yonge St. body rub. “Schematic Drawing of Mr. Arnold’s, 1977” CTA, 47331-3.

<sup>40</sup> The Mayor’s subject files on Yonge contain a number of advertisements for body rub parlours. See for example CTA, 527607-5.

<sup>41</sup> “Body rub parlor owner gets \$4,143 in first week,” *Toronto Star*, Nov. 13, 1974.

<sup>42</sup> “Body rub girl ‘a social worker’ at \$300 a week,” *Toronto Star*, Dec. 11, 1973; author’s interview with Janis Cole, Jan. 28, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> The financial possibilities of this kind of work take centre stage in Holly Dale and Janis Cole’s fascinating short *Cream Soda* (no commercial release, 1975), which depicts the day-to-day workings of a Sin Strip-area parlour.



*Image 2.3: Two body-rub attendants solicit business outside of their parlour on Yonge. Nude massages are advertised at \$15. Photo by street photographer Citatus, mid-1970s.*

honestly. But I would always get grabbed. You get a harder time if you don't do extras ... It was a few years later before I started screwing. I thought, what the hell?<sup>44</sup>

Most sex workers on Yonge operated within the structure of these body rub parlours, or else solicited clients in bars and strip clubs. Some worked directly on the street, but this seems to have been rare outside of the summer and special events like the Yonge Street Pedestrian Mall. During those periods, street prostitution spiked as sex workers were

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<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Deborah Brock, *Making Work, Making Trouble: Prostitution as a Social Problem* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 14.

drawn to the area from as far away as Detroit and Buffalo. In 1974 morality police claimed publicly that as many as half of female prostitutes in the city were American, a descriptor that in this context underlined their status as unwelcome interlopers, and further associated the Strip with American-style urban decline.<sup>45</sup> Ford Drugs, located next door to Zanzibar Tavern, was a well-known spot for johns to meet prostitutes. It operated a 24-hour snack counter that catered to sex workers and late night revellers, and did a brisk business in sex industry essentials—nylons, condoms, cigarettes, nail polish—throughout the day.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, in some peep shows near Yonge and Dundas, male sex workers waited near the private cubicles for clients. By leaving the door to his private cubicle open, a man could signal that he was interested in sex.<sup>47</sup> Generally, however, men selling sex to other men did not frequent Sin Strip. They congregated further north near Yonge and Wellesley Streets, where the city's few gay bars—including the famous St. Charles Tavern—were clustered.

### **Sex work, real estate, and profit**

Yonge's sex-related businesses can be viewed as a transitional use for the street's older building stock, one that did not require extensive improvement by owners and left open the possibility of resale for demolition and redevelopment. By the late 1960s the construction of the Yonge Street subway line and nearby land assemblies for projects like the Toronto Eaton Centre (discussed in the final section of this thesis) had dramatically increased the speculative value of property on lower Yonge Street. According to realtor A. E. Lepage, in 1970 only the financial district had higher commercial land values; many key parcels of land had by that point increased several times in value over the past decade.<sup>48</sup> Despite a significant market correction across the city in the mid-1970s, the overall picture on Yonge Street was very positive. Land was bought and sold based on the dual assumptions that it would yield high rental income and could be sold at significant profit. The prospect of sale for demolition and inclusion in the next major redevelopment project provided landlords with a disincentive to maintaining or improving their buildings, and made them wary of

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<sup>45</sup> "U.S. prostitutes invade the mall, police say," *Toronto Star*, July 19, 1974.

<sup>46</sup> Toronto City Council Special Committee on Places of Amusement, *Report and Recommendations* (Toronto: City of Toronto, 1977), 57-8; author's interview with Janis Cole, Jan. 28, 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Toronto City Council Special Committee on Places of Amusement, *Report and Recommendations* (Toronto: City of Toronto, 1977), 55-56.

<sup>48</sup> A.E. LePage, *Toronto 1975: Real Estate Market Survey* (Toronto: 1976), 12; Richard Baine and A. Lynn McMurray, *Toronto: An Urban Study* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co., 1973), 45.

renting to more stable, capital-intensive businesses. Additionally, there were a range of spaces on offer. By the early to mid-1970s rents as high as \$35 per square foot—on par with prestige shopping developments like the Eaton Centre, under construction next door—were being charged for the best ground floor locations on the strip. Upper floor locations, formerly offices or apartments, were considerably cheaper at around \$5 per square foot, making them ideal for body rub and sex cinema operations.<sup>49</sup>

The fact that sex-related businesses continued to open on Yonge from 1970 through 1977, even when they were being offered short leases on poorly-maintained, high-rent spaces, strongly suggests that they were a good proposition. Operators benefited from the high level of foot traffic on the Strip, and particularly its capacity to attract the tourist and convention trade. There was nowhere better in Toronto for commercialized sex to thrive. This is confirmed by the boasts of Yonge's sex entrepreneurs, even when one allows for a certain level of exaggeration. The services they offered were usually priced well above non-sexual equivalents: for example adult fiction and magazines often retailed for \$3 or more, at a time when the latest *Maclean's* magazine cost only 35 cents. This contributed to impressive receipts. In 1972 the manager of Starvin' Marvin's claimed that the strip club averaged 2,800 customers per week, while the owner of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Love Cinema reported grossing \$200,000 yearly (just over \$1 million in 2016 dollars). A few years later, the owner of a popular body rub parlour claimed a similar income level in a submission to the city.<sup>50</sup>

Of course, most of the work that kept Sin Strip humming along wasn't being done by the owners of these businesses, but by their employees. Some, including clerks in bookstores, theatre ushers, or security in bars and body rub parlours, were men. Teenage boys were hired to hand out coupons and leaflets on the street. But, in an industry built around the appeal of "Girls! Girls! Girls!" it was women's labour that really mattered. Their nakedness and the arousal or satisfaction they might provide to the customer were central to every sex-related business. And it was their bodies that featured prominently in neon and print advertisements. Sin Strip was designed, like other sex districts across North America, as a playground for heterosexual men, where they paid to see, and sometimes touch

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<sup>49</sup> Based on 1978 figures. Barry Lyon, *Yonge Street Revitalization Project* (Toronto: July 1978), Appendix II.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Taylor, "Look what's happened to Toronto the Good," *Toronto Life*, Dec. 1972, 70; "Calculation to Determine Gross Profit, June 1976" CTA, 47331-3.

women's bodies. On Yonge, the Playboy lifestyle could be not just read about, but lived—however briefly—if the price was right.

There were a few exceptions to this gendered division between female workers and male customers. Bars with topless dancers and grindhouse cinemas were part of the larger entertainment scene that attracted men, women, and couples to Yonge. And when theatres like Cinema 2000 screen popular or controversial films—usually to make a statement about censorship—there was a mixed audience there to take part in the transgressive fun.<sup>51</sup> But as much as porno chic broadened the appeal of the explicit, on a daily basis the area's more mundane pleasures were designed for and enjoyed almost solely by straight men. The new leniency towards explicit entertainment did not generally extend to the male body or depictions of gay or lesbian sex, still considered obscene by police and the courts.<sup>52</sup> And there was little to appeal to female diners at the Drawing Room, where businessmen from the nearby financial district lunched on weekdays served by topless waitresses.<sup>53</sup>

Sin Strip was a collection of gendered spaces where straight men and their desires had free reign. Adult bookstores posted signs reading “Men Only” in their adult sections, and, as one clerk described, female customers were as rare as “women in a men's washroom.”<sup>54</sup> Despite the assertions of operators to the contrary, journalists who visited peep shows or sex cinemas on an average day describe the audience as entirely composed of men.<sup>55</sup> Needless to say, the clientele of body rub parlours was exclusively male, although they were a varied bunch: regulars and out-of-towners, professionals and labourers, students and over-60s.<sup>56</sup> The strip was located just blocks away from the city's main hotels and convention facilities, meaning that many of the men who patronized its businesses were one-time customers in town for a weekend business event or meeting.

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<sup>51</sup> Huge crowds lined up outside of Cinema 2000 in 1970 for a free showing of Russ Meyer's *Vixen* (1968). “The City/So that's what the censors cut from films,” *Toronto Star*, Mar. 26, 1970.

<sup>52</sup> See Nowlin, 110.

<sup>53</sup> Jack Batten, “The New Nudity Exposed,” in W.E. Mann, ed., *The Underside of Toronto* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), 309.

<sup>54</sup> “The Yonge St. ‘Strip’,” *Toronto Star*, May 11, 1973.

<sup>55</sup> See for example “Thrills for the have-nots at the Yonge Street sex cinemas,” *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 20, 1973.

<sup>56</sup> “Body rub girls expose issue of law, morals,” *Toronto Star*, Dec. 11, 1973.

## The action is on Yonge

By around 1969 it was clear that Yonge was changing. Torontonians were curious about the street's new entertainment scene. Was the sex district just harmless fun? Or a blight on the city? A series of interventions by journalists, politicians, and local merchants ensured that by late 1972 the state of downtown Yonge Street was an issue of intense public interest.

As always, Torontonians had an appetite for stories about Yonge, and over the next few years journalistic exposés in every major local paper gave readers first-hand accounts of nights spent on Sin Strip. Their tone was generally positive, celebrating the quirky and carnivalesque aspects of the area. A front page article in the *Star* in 1969 urged readers to check out the "Saturday night action" on Yonge, where "hordes of people swarm up and down the street through a carnival atmosphere of neon and noise."<sup>57</sup> A 1970 feature in the *Telegram's* weekly magazine called the area "the Times Square of Canada, the busiest, noisiest, gaudiest street in our history and a magnet for money."<sup>58</sup> The reference to Times Square, of course, referred not to the sanitized tourist mecca of today, but to the gritty, frankly sexual entertainment district that was famous across the continent in the 1960s and 1970s.

For readers unfamiliar with the area, they were careful to explain just what and where the entertainment district was, something that would no longer be necessary a few years later, when the campaign against the sex industry was underway. Then the intrepid reporter took the reader through a tour of the Yonge strip and its various offerings. This included—and usually highlighted—the area's adult attractions: a strip show at the Zanzibar, a visit to the 18+ section at Times Square Books, and a few minutes feeding quarters into a peep show booth. But it also meant seeing live music, talking to street vendors, and visiting a discount store. In one writer's words, "the strip has a pastime to suit every preference," and there is a sense in these articles that the sex industry is just one part (albeit a major one) of Yonge's eclectic downtown scene.<sup>59</sup> Some found little charm in the dancing or adult movies they paid to see, or in the strange characters they met lurking on

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<sup>57</sup> "It's the Yonge Street Strip for the Saturday night action," *Toronto Star*, Sep. 20, 1969.

<sup>58</sup> "Yonge St.-Canada's Downtown," *Toronto Week*, Sep. 26, 1970, 4.

<sup>59</sup> "The strip has a pastime to suit every preference," *Globe and Mail*, July 13, 1971.

Yonge. Crotchety music critic Jack Batten mused that sex was just a cover for a lack of talent: Yonge Street bars were using topless go-go dancers to distract attention from mediocre musical performances.<sup>60</sup> However, the overall tone of these early journalistic forays into Sin Strip night life was open-minded curiosity.

That changed in 1972, as events attracted public attention to Sin Strip and triggered the first calls for something to be done about its rapid development. As discussed in the first section of this thesis, the Yonge Street pedestrian malls of the early 1970s were both popular and controversial. Tens of thousands of Torontonians came down to Yonge daily to shop, stroll the pedestrianized street, watch outdoor entertainment, and visit its sidewalk cafés and beer gardens. Early on, the press proclaimed the scheme “a miracle,” and asked when the city would have the courage to make it permanent.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, there were some dissenting voices, especially after the mall moved north to include the Sin Strip area in August of 1971. Citizens and the press complained that the area’s unsavoury characters, commercialized sex, and rowdy crowds had ruined the family atmosphere of the mall.<sup>62</sup>

Several prominent Torontonians questioned the direction the street was going in, and asked that the city look into entirely revamping the area. This reflected a larger conversation about development and revitalization that had been going on in Toronto since the 1940s. As land values rose and the city’s population grew, a number of politicians, businesspeople, and developers considered Yonge’s low-rise, early twentieth-century built landscape antiquated and a poor use of space. Following the completion of the New City Hall building and public square just west of Yonge in 1965, and as plans for a massive super-block development on the Eaton’s lands between Dundas and Queen took shape, they proposed that other areas of Yonge be torn down and rebuilt along more modern lines. Respected journalist and CBC executive Knowlton Nash stated frankly that the city should “get rid of that honky-tonk trash heap masquerading as downtown Yonge St.” and replace it with something more imaginative and befitting of a major city.<sup>63</sup> Former Mayor Phillips considered Yonge Street’s current uses a waste of valuable property. He envisioned a

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<sup>60</sup> “The music doesn’t redeem the raunchy toplessness,” *Toronto Star*, Jan. 3, 1969.

<sup>61</sup> “The mall: Seven-day miracle that changed Toronto,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 5, 1971; “Yonge mall success—‘why not forever?’” *Toronto Telegram*, May 31, 1971.

<sup>62</sup> Chapter 2 provides more details on the Yonge Street pedestrian malls and their reception.

<sup>63</sup> “A city in need of a new ‘main drag’,” *Toronto Star*, Jan. 2, 1971.



massive redevelopment program by private enterprise that would turn the area into “the Fifth Ave. of Canada,” rather than its Times Square.<sup>64</sup>

It makes sense then, that the state of Yonge Street became an election issue in the 1972 Toronto mayoral race. Over the course of a few months, it moved from the political margins into the mainstream. The idea of a “clean-up” on Yonge was first raised by fringe candidate Don Andrews, one of the founders of the extreme right-wing, anti-immigration group the Western Guard. From the start of the race, Andrews made getting rid of “the pornographers and sexual deviates” on Yonge one of the main planks of his platform, along with cracking down on that other den of iniquity, Rochdale College.<sup>65</sup> While Andrews was never a serious contender for mayor, through his speeches and pamphlets the idea entered the campaign as an issue for debate—albeit a minor one—and was picked up by other candidates. In November, Ward 2 councillor Tony O’Donohue, then considered a front-runner for the mayoralty, added stopping the deterioration of Yonge to his law-and-order, family-oriented agenda. He argued for forming a committee of local merchants and citizens to investigate the sex industry on Yonge and possible actions that could be taken.<sup>66</sup> Clearly, both men believed that Toronto voters wanted to see the powers of the municipal government used to confront the rise of the sex industry on Sin Strip. Centrist reform candidate David Crombie, who won the post of mayor after a close race, also made statements supporting some kind of a clean-up.

One final intervention, this time by area merchants, brought Yonge firmly onto the agenda of the incoming municipal government and stimulated debate in the city’s newspapers. In early December 1972 the business group the Downtown Council sent a report entitled *Problems of Downtown Yonge Street* to the newly elected government and the press.<sup>67</sup> The report put into writing ideas that had been percolating among small Yonge Street businesspeople for the past few years. As they watched the development of Sin Strip, and heard of grandiose plans for the redevelopment of the area, small merchants were concerned that they would be squeezed out of existence.

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<sup>64</sup> “Yonge Street 1972: Critics call for a facelifting,” *Toronto Star*, Feb. 12, 1972.

<sup>65</sup> “Dennison showed lack of leadership, challengers charge,” *Toronto Star*, Nov. 7, 1972.

<sup>66</sup> “O’Donohue: Let’s clean up the Yonge St ‘strip,’” *Star*, Nov. 23, 1972.

<sup>67</sup> Downtown Council, *Report on the Problems of Downtown Yonge Street* (Toronto: 1972).



*Image 2.4: Flyers and coupons advertising sexual services, and in particular nude body rubs, were ubiquitous on Yonge Street. This ad was mailed to the mayor by its recipient, a downtown office worker, in 1973. City of Toronto Archives, 1512-565.*

Many of their concerns centred on the expansion of the sex industry on Yonge, and specifically the “mushrooming of mini-theatres and topless massage parlours” that had occurred over the past few years. According to the report, these sex-related businesses were simply bad neighbours. They accepted short-term leases, changed hands frequently, and seldom did anything to maintain the buildings they rented. This was contributing to the general decline of the quality of Yonge’s commercial space. It was also providing income to absentee owners who, the Council argued, were buying up Yonge Street properties in speculation of further redevelopment in the near future. Peep shows and body rubs attracted only a niche clientele, while their very presence in the area drove off regular customers from neighbouring businesses, as well as “citizens and visitors who simply want to enjoy a stroll on Toronto’s main street.” The report took aim in particular at the “aggressive promotion” of sex services through handbills, street signage, and the use of loudspeakers, arguing that tighter controls on advertising had to be put in place.

The concern of the Downtown Council for the health of Yonge Street's small merchants was natural, since their active membership was dominated by business owners from the area. In 1972, ten of twelve members of the group executive owned businesses on Yonge, including Vice-President Sam Sniderman of Sam the Record Man, and the operator of Le Coq D'Or Tavern at Yonge and Dundas.<sup>68</sup> These businesspeople were careful to distinguish between their own "established businesses," that obeyed municipal regulations and paid taxes on time, and the less community-minded mini-cinis and body rubs that were popping up all around them. This allowed established entertainment venues like Le Coq D'Or—which regularly featured topless dancers—to separate themselves from the new arrivals.

Yonge Street has always been colourful and entertainment-oriented and we have no quarrel with that particular image. However, we are seriously concerned with the direction that is being taken by some of the newly-added colour and entertainment.

The report strongly urged a ban on handbills and loudspeakers, and firmer enforcement of public health, sanitary, and building code regulations in the area. It framed merchants' objections to the sex industry in economic terms—in other words, in terms of how it affected the viability of the strip as a shopping destination. That was, and would remain, the chief concern of downtown merchants. But the report also made a nod to civic pride, insisting that more was at stake than a few blocks of businesses. Because Yonge is the city's main street and one of the first places seen by visitors, the problems described in the report "if they remain unchecked, can and will detract from the reputation Toronto now enjoys" as a big North American city without big city problems.

*Problems of Downtown Yonge Street* received general approval in the press, with some reservations. A *Toronto Star* editorial agreed that "the Yonge St. 'strip' is a tawdry place, contemptible to people of sensibility." But it was also so safe, the paper argued, "that unescorted women can walk there at midnight without fear"—a far cry from the dangers of New York's Times Square. The editorial went on to warn that efforts to clean the street up must be moderated by respect for differing tastes and moral standards. While noise and

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<sup>68</sup> "Downtown Council: Officers and Directors for 1972," CTA, 47197-11.

handbills might require new municipal regulations, the city should be cautious in looking for stronger weapons to use against sex-oriented businesses. Above all,

no wholesale suppression should be invoked to bring the street in line with middle-class tastes and values: we still live in a democracy, and tolerance is a necessary element of it.<sup>69</sup>

This concern for balancing tolerance with moral standards anticipated the demands of the next phase of opposition to Sin Strip: the citizens' campaign to clean up the sex industry.

### **Citizens mobilize**

In this way, through journalist exposés, the experience of the Yonge pedestrian malls, and the statements of prominent Torontonians, the idea that downtown Yonge Street was changing—and by many accounts for the worse—became rooted in the public imagination. On the heels of the Downtown Council's report, a citizens' campaign against Sin Strip was organized. Inspired by moral concerns, civic pride, and fears of downtown decline, Torontonians mobilized to demand that the newly elected municipal government act to contain or eliminate the commercialized sex on Yonge. This gave continued life to discussions about the future of the area, while raising important questions about public and private morality, right to public space, and censorship.

The citizens' campaign was initially sparked by comments made by newly elected Mayor David Crombie. Associated with nearby Ryerson Polytechnical Institute since the early 1960s, Crombie knew the area well and was sympathetic to the concerns of the Downtown Council. He also recognized that the issue of the state of Toronto's most iconic street was an important one for Torontonians.<sup>70</sup> Here was a chance for the mayor, who had run on a platform of consensus-building and community involvement in government, to put his political philosophy to the test.<sup>71</sup> Soon after his election Crombie agreed to organize a meeting between downtown merchants and his executive. And during one of his first radio

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<sup>69</sup> "Yonge 'strip' tawdry, not perilous," *Star*, Dec. 27, 1972.

<sup>70</sup> Author's interview with David Crombie, Feb. 11, 2014.

<sup>71</sup> The best account of Crombie's campaign and first year in office is in Jon Caulfield, *The Tiny Perfect Mayor* (Toronto: Lorimer and Co., 1974), 19-37.

interviews he expressed interest in taking action to help solve the problems described by established Yonge Street merchants.<sup>72</sup>

Populist, contrarian tabloid the *Toronto Sun* saw an opportunity in Crombie's interest in the issue. Established in 1971, the *Sun* sold itself as an independent voice for the average working citizen, and soon succeeded in capturing a fifth of Toronto newspaper readers.<sup>73</sup> A week before the new mayor took office, the paper printed a front-page feature on Sin Strip.<sup>74</sup> It included the usual profiles of the operators of sex cinemas and strip clubs, and a laudatory article on one area landlord who refused to rent his storefronts to body rub parlours "at any price." There was also a short message from the mayor, asking Torontonians to write him about "the present state of the Strip and what could be done to make it a better thoroughfare." Crombie hoped, through reaching out to the public, to rally support for the Downtown Council's recommendations.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, the *Sun* knew that a clean-up of downtown Yonge would appeal to its largely conservative readership, and actively pushed the issue. A week later, in a luncheon speech to the Lions Club, Crombie reiterated his intention to clean up Sin Strip, while warning that it was a complicated issue that balanced "free expression versus public welfare."<sup>76</sup>

That speech and the mayor's call for public input inspired a stream of letters from *Sun* readers: 68 arrived in Crombie's office by the end of the first week of his mayoralty. But this became a torrent in mid-January 1973, as two developments pushed the issue further into the spotlight. First, a number of Metro Toronto churches began to mobilize to call for a crackdown on the Yonge Street strip. Second, letters and editorials published in all three Toronto newspapers in January took widely different stances on what to do about Yonge Street, prolonging and enlarging the discussion. By the end of March, the mayor had heard from more than a thousand concerned citizens, including 343 personal letters, 300 form

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<sup>72</sup> "Downtown Council to Crombie, Dec. 11, 1972," and "B.T. to Crombie, Dec. 11, 1972," CTA, P041796-1. Note that in order to protect the privacy of citizens who wrote to the mayor, they will be identified only by their initials or neighbourhoods.

<sup>73</sup> The *Sun* had risen from the ashes of the *Telegram* just a year before. See "New Toronto morning paper," *Toronto Telegram*, Oct. 15, 1971. Circulation figures from Audit Bureau of Circulations, *ABC Factbook, 1971/1972 and 1975/1976* (Toronto: ABC, 1973 and 1976).

<sup>74</sup> "Yonge strip crackdown," *Toronto Sun*, Dec. 29, 1972.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Crombie, Feb. 11, 2014.

<sup>76</sup> "City will act if merchants won't," *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 5, 1973.

letters, and dozens of small petitions. In the era before e-mail and online petitions, this was a significant public outcry: as Crombie wrote in response to one letter, “In the whole history of the mayor’s office there has never been so much mail.”<sup>77</sup> Preserved in the mayor’s files, these letters provide a unique chance to understand how and why Torontonians mobilized against Sin Strip. Along with letters to the editor, newspaper editorials, and the public statements of prominent Torontonians, they influenced the opinions of decision-makers in government and shaped the contours of a lively public debate that would last for several years.

The people who wrote to the mayor about Yonge Street during the winter of 1972-73 were a varied group.<sup>78</sup> Geographically, most lived throughout the city of Toronto in its pre-megacity boundaries. But more than a hundred also wrote from North York, Scarborough, and other municipalities that made up Metro Toronto, and from communities even further away, including Mississauga, Brampton, and even Kitchener. A few even wrote from places as far afield as San Francisco, Cleveland, or Vancouver. This dispersion drives home the point that people living across the greater Toronto area felt a sense of ownership of Toronto’s downtown. For some living in neighbouring cities it was commuting downtown for work that established the connection; others mentioned that they had grown up in Toronto or had lived in the city in the past. But many simply felt that Yonge Street, where they shopped, strolled, and went out—if only occasionally—was their downtown as much as it was anyone else’s. In one woman’s words, “Despite the Mississauga address, I consider Toronto as my city.”<sup>79</sup> Because people like her felt they had an interest in the area’s future, it was only natural for them to call upon the Mayor of Toronto to act, even though they lived outside of the jurisdiction of his administration.

Several Toronto neighbourhoods were particularly active, in different ways. One was North Toronto around Eglinton and Yonge, which produced the highest number of personal letters, form letters, and petition signatures. Socio-economically the area was solidly middle-class, with a lower proportion of non-English-speaking immigrants and higher

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<sup>77</sup> “Crombie reply draft, Jun. 25, 1973,” CTA, 527607-5.

<sup>78</sup> The discussion below relies on information found in the letters themselves, compiled into a spreadsheet before being visualized and analysed using the Google Fusion application.

<sup>79</sup> “P.L. to Crombie, July 26, 1973,” CTA, 527607-5.

income level than most other Toronto neighbourhoods. It had a history of vocal participation in city politics, including a successful lobbying campaign just a few years prior to minimize the impact of the construction of the Yonge subway extension on local homes and green spaces.<sup>80</sup> It was also where Crombie lived and the ward he had represented as alderman from 1970-72. Residents knew the mayor, sometimes personally, and expected him to respond.

Another cluster of concerned citizens was closer to Yonge, in the Sherbourne and Wellesley apartment zone, a world away socio-economically from North Toronto. In that lower-income, densely populated area, dozens of residents in several buildings signed form letters to the mayor that were distributed by local church members. They wrote comparatively fewer personal letters, suggesting that while they were supportive of the campaign, they were both less personally engaged and less comfortable setting their own thoughts to paper than the residents of North Toronto. Across the city, other geographic clusters appeared as churches organized their congregants and campaigners went door to door to rally support. For example, the Centennial United Church on Dovercourt Road was the epicentre for a petition that acquired 43 signatures, the vast majority of whom lived within a few blocks of the church itself.

Citizens did not always include personal information in their letters. But a few patterns still emerge. First, where it is possible to verify, women outnumbered men by around fifty percent. Married adults outnumbered single people: many signed letters as husband and wife, or mentioned that they wrote out of concern for their children. The style of some letters clearly indicated that their author was university-educated and used to expressing themselves in writing; others wrote with difficulty, crossing out words and committing grammatical errors and spelling mistakes. Only a few identified themselves as students or as young people. A number wrote on business stationery, or otherwise mentioned that they were professionals or small business owners. But overall, it was much more common for letter-writers to identify themselves primarily as taxpayers, “Christians,”

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<sup>80</sup> Jay Young, “Searching for a Better Way,” 263-69.

parents, or simply “concerned citizens.” As I explore below, the content of their letters reflected the different identities they adopted when writing to the powers-that-be.

### **A street for all the people**

“The present condition of the Yonge Street Strip is a downright disgrace,” opened one man’s letter to the mayor.<sup>81</sup> Like so many others who took the time to write, W.M. from North Toronto thought that downtown Yonge was being ruined by the rapid expansion of the sex industry.

Day by day [the strip] is becoming filled with sex shops, pornographic literature mills, body rub houses and skin-flick palaces. It has become exceedingly seedy and the noise from street loudspeakers grates upon the ear...Quite frankly I’m inclined to avoid walking along Yonge Street between College and Queen Streets unless I absolutely have to.

Of the 343 personal letters about Yonge that the mayor received during the winter of 1972-73, 286 expressed similar negative sentiments about Sin Strip. They often repeated the phrases used in the mayor’s statements, or otherwise informed him that it was reading the *Sun’s* feature on the sex industry that had motivated them to write. They told Crombie in no uncertain terms that they considered Yonge to be “awful,” “deplorable,” and even “an open sewer running down the middle of the city.”<sup>82</sup> Overwhelmingly, they interpreted Crombie’s interest in public input about Yonge as proof that he agreed with them. After all, hadn’t the mayor called Sin Strip a “growing cancer” in his speech to the Lions Club? That he had hemmed and hawed about due process and self-regulation mattered little, and many offered their support to any attempt made by the new administration to clean up the area.

Citizens’ substantive complaints centred on the street’s body rub parlours, strip clubs, adult bookstores, and sex cinemas. Most opponents of Sin Strip had not been inside any of these businesses. There were a few notable exceptions. A man named W.W., who wrote to the mayor from the Salvation Army men’s hostel on Sherbourne Street, explained that he had “spent considerable time walking up and down both sides of Yonge St,” and had been into a number of sex-oriented businesses.<sup>83</sup> He enclosed a ticket stub for entry to a

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<sup>81</sup> “W.M. to Crombie, Dec. 29, 1972,” CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>82</sup> “L.R. to Crombie, Jan. 4, 1973,” CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>83</sup> “W.W. to Crombie, Mar. 22, 1973,” CTA, 527607-6.



night club, a description of the strip show he saw, and a list of 21 businesses on Yonge that he thought should be shut down. But apart from W.W. and a few other citizens—all male—letter-writers wrote from the sidewalk, so to speak, basing their knowledge of what went on inside on newspaper accounts and their own assumptions.

As a result, most letters focused on the day-to-day, street-level aspects of sex-related businesses. There was some concern for the deterioration of the area's built environment. The Downtown Council had warned in its report on Yonge Street entertainment that short-term tenants were doing little to maintain the older, low-rise buildings in which they had set up shop. They also pointed out the rising amount of litter on the street. Citizens' letters to the mayor echoed these complaints, drawing attention to the lack of garbage bins in the area, to the shabby state of many buildings, and to the streetscape's desperate need for a face-lift.

More often, writers focused on the experience of visiting Yonge. They argued that the strip had acquired a non-stop, carnival "Midway" atmosphere—and unlike reporters writing about the area a few years earlier, they did not consider this a positive thing.<sup>84</sup> These were people who expressed no desire to visit a body rub parlour or strip club, and instead saw Yonge as a place to shop, dine out, or see a film. But, they argued, the invasion of the area's sidewalks by promotions and spill-over from sex businesses threatened their enjoyment of those activities. Some complained about the loudspeakers and televisions used to advertise strip clubs, sex cinemas, or other services. For example, one young woman described as "revolting" the "small crowds of men cackling and passing ridiculous comments, huddled around the outdoor television sets outside the strip joints on Yonge," where they could watch poor-quality live feeds from the stage show.<sup>85</sup> Others focused on the touts or body rub attendants who solicited passers-by to enter their establishments, and on the teenagers hired by sex businesses to pass out handbills.<sup>86</sup>

All of this, letter-writers argued, had made walking down Yonge Street unpleasant—if not dangerous—for the average citizen. People stated that while they had formerly

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<sup>84</sup> "M.G. to Crombie, Jan. 15, 1973," CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>85</sup> "S.M. to Crombie, Jan. 3, 1973," CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>86</sup> See for example "J.B. to Crombie, Feb. 26, 1973," CTA, 527607-6. Like J.B., a number of citizens included examples of these handbills with their letters.

enjoyed spending time on Yonge, that was no longer the case. Gone were the good old days of the 1950s and 1960s when “the shops were interesting, the street was quiet and the sidewalks were clean.”<sup>87</sup> Instead, writers reported shock and disgust. They often situated their feelings and opinions about Yonge in narratives where the conditions on the street took them by surprise. One woman wrote that

it has been some time since I was downtown, but Saturday the opportunity availed itself. I did not find the walk along the “Strip” the pleasure it once was. I found signs of nudes on the sidewalk advertising “skin” shows (much to the embarrassment of my 12 year old son) and loudspeakers blaring music in most store doorways much to my aural discomfort.<sup>88</sup>

Another, a downtown businessman, related the following story in January:

My wife and family met me downtown for a dinner out and to look at the Christmas windows. [They] were subjected to aggressive advertising and were handed handouts advertising the strip joints and were subjected to the blaring loudspeakers advertising their wares. Following this we decided not to take our family downtown on Yonge St in the future.<sup>89</sup>

These anecdotes served to emphasize the authors’ current outrage about Yonge, and the contrast they saw between its past and present states. Something had gone wrong, they argued, when the average Torontonians could not enjoy the city’s main street on a Saturday afternoon.

In this way, an appeal for the democratic use of public space ran through the winter 1972-73 debates about Yonge. People argued that Toronto’s downtown was for the enjoyment of all. Nowhere was this truer than on Yonge, the street that defined the city’s downtown core. An eloquent letter printed in the *Toronto Star* asked, “To whom does Yonge St. belong?”

In recent years we have come to think of it as a street that belongs to all of the people. It was a street upon which people of all ages, walks and life were given to promenading...All of this is threatened with a major change in which the storefronts along Yonge St. are turning into a few types of enterprises catering only to certain groups of people.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> “L.R. to Crombie, Dec. 29, 1972,” CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>88</sup> “R.B. to Crombie, Dec. 29, 1972,” CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>89</sup> “R.D. to Crombie, Jan. 17, 1973,” CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>90</sup> “Yonge St. must be for all the people, says Toronto man,” *Toronto Star*, Jan. 27, 1973.

Others took up this idea in their letters to the mayor. Describing themselves as speaking for the “average citizen”—even the “silent majority”—they claimed a right to use and enjoy Yonge Street. Their use of the second term is telling. Popularized by Richard Nixon during his first term in the presidency, the “silent majority” referred to the great mass of Americans whose common-sense conservative voices were too often drowned out by a radical few. Clearly, some Torontonians saw themselves in this populist attack on political activism and the permissive society which became a conservative trope in the 1970s and 1980s. Why, they asked, should the tastes of a fringe minority take precedence over those of everyone else? In their view, that was exactly what had happened on Sin Strip. “Give us back our downtown,” one woman asked Crombie, adding that the majority of Torontonians did not share the interests of Yonge’s clientele, and “we resent the imposition of their ways on ours.”<sup>91</sup> Later, this argument would be deployed as a rebuttal to calls for freedom of expression, a common-sense response to a good principle taken too far.

#### **“Perverts, hippies, crumbs and creeps of all kinds”**

Who was this fringe minority taking over the downtown? Many citizens considered the men and women who frequented downtown Yonge members of a broad social category of undesirables. Like Rochdale College and Yorkville before it, the strip area was seen as geographical locus for many of the bad habits and delinquent behaviours associated with youth and sexual liberation.<sup>92</sup> Added to that were the ranks of sex workers and their regular customers, who were seen by conservatives as desperate, sad, or maladjusted men.<sup>93</sup> Some citizens included homosexuals in their list of sexual deviants, prefiguring the homophobia that would engulf Sin Strip in 1977. E.H., a young woman living in Forest Hill, wrote in her letter to David Crombie that

[s]cum breeds scum, dirt draws the worms...The pornography and junk shops draw perverts, hippies, crumbs and creeps of all kinds and around Wellesley Street—queers (I think you know what I mean).<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> “S.P. to Crombie, Jan. 16, 1973,” CTA, P041786-2.

<sup>92</sup> On Yorkville, see Stuart Henderson, *Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto in the 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), esp. 242-70.

<sup>93</sup> See for example “Thrills for the have-nots at the Yonge Street sex cinemas,” *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 20, 1973.

<sup>94</sup> “E.H. to Crombie, Jan. 10, 1973,” CTA, P041796-1.

*Toronto Star* columnist Henry Morgan put it more eloquently: "Public pornography attracts what some might call a 'low' element, more rightfully called criminals."<sup>95</sup> A letter in the *Catholic Register* similarly warned that Yonge's offerings were responsible for an increase in "muggings, purse snatching, rape and robbery."<sup>96</sup> In the anything-goes atmosphere encouraged on Yonge, conservative Torontonians believed, criminals could find both safety in numbers, and plenty of easy marks.

Some women saw Sin Strip focus on the nude female form and sale of sex as an incitement to sexual violence. Exposure to pornography, they argued, over-excited men while encouraging them to view women as sex objects. This could lead to some men acting out their unfulfilled fantasies, stirred up by a strip show or sex film, on strangers. S.P. from Scarborough wrote that she had "yet to see the woman's side presented in this male-dominated issue". Sexual entertainment, she believed, created serious danger for women visiting the downtown alone:

The end result of this mass stimuli usually takes place elsewhere, in a quiet park or dark street. How often have we read of women being attacked on their way home at night? Rape and allied crimes are increasing, according to the Police.<sup>97</sup>

Certainly this view was encouraged by the harassment or catcalls experienced by some women who visited downtown Yonge alone. M.N., a female employee of a large downtown insurance company who walked on Yonge Street daily, wrote that:

I have found that the street has changed drastically in the past 2 years. At one time I could comfortably window shop on my lunch hour without fear of being accosted or offended in any manner. This is no longer the case.<sup>98</sup>

Another recalled the shock and embarrassment of being mistaken for a prostitute while walking on the strip at night. A woman who described herself as "22, attractive," wrote that during her last visit to Yonge and Dundas to see a film, she had been propositioned while

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<sup>95</sup> "Yonge and foolish," *Toronto Star*, Jan. 5, 1973.

<sup>96</sup> "Downtown Toronto," *Catholic Register*, May 21, 1973.

<sup>97</sup> "S.P. to Crombie, Jan. 16, 1973," CTA, P041786-2.

<sup>98</sup> "M.N. to Crombie, Dec. 13, 1972," CTA, P041796-1.

waiting for the bus home, forcing her to take a taxi. As a result, she was “unable to feel relaxed on the main street...of the city of my birth.”<sup>99</sup>

Women like these three typically did not identify in their letters as feminists, and expressed little solidarity for the women who worked on Sin Strip. Nonetheless, they saw the issue in gendered terms. One wrote angrily denouncing the hypocrisy of men who visited places like Starvin’ Marvin’s, while their wives were at home raising their children: “it seems whatever the ‘men’ want these days they get, imagine how a lot of women feel, exploited to the very end.”<sup>100</sup> In their characterization of the sex industry as being fundamentally about men exploiting women for their pleasure, these women anticipated the powerful feminist critique of pornography that would become hegemonic in Canada during the 1980s.<sup>101</sup>

Dozens wrote identifying themselves as parents, often listing the ages of their children and arguing that they were particularly vulnerable to being corrupted by Sin Strip and the clientele it attracted. They pointed out that the strip businesses that were particularly attractive to young people were located chock-a-block with sex businesses. Record shops like Sam the Record Man and A & A Records attracted hundreds of teenagers on the weekends and after school. And then there were the arcades, some of which offered separate areas with peep shows, and they were widely reputed to be places where youth were offered drugs or recruited for sex work. Indeed, police statements associated the presence of pinball machines with increased rates of crime and advised the City to restrict their use.<sup>102</sup> Parents of children who attended school near downtown Yonge were particularly active. The nearest public school was 1.5 km away, but two private Catholic schools were located much closer to Yonge. In early February St. Michael’s Choir School, just a block south-east of Yonge and Dundas, sent a letter home to parents asking for them to support the anti-Sin Strip campaign, and this prompted a number to write to the city. One father wrote of his two children that “twice daily they are exposed to this strip and also to

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<sup>99</sup> “D.B. to Crombie, Dec. 30, 1972,” CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>100</sup> “P. to Crombie, Jan. 5, 1973,” CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>101</sup> Dany Lacombe, *Blue Politics: Pornography and the Law in the Age of Feminism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 6.

<sup>102</sup> “Deputy Chief to Heap, July 26, 1976,” reproduced in Toronto City Council Special Committee on Places of Amusement, *Report and Recommendations* (Toronto: City of Toronto, 1977), 85-86.

the bums and perverts that automatically hang around such places.”<sup>103</sup> A concerned mother asked

What is the point of trying to instil some sense of moral well-being into one’s children when constantly having to walk down Yonge Street makes them think that “body rubs with exotic oils by topless beauties” is the norm?<sup>104</sup>

More pragmatically, a grade six student at the Choir School wrote the mayor stating it was “rather annoying not to be able to go to your favourite snack-bar (the back exit leads to a strip-house).”<sup>105</sup>

### **Big city problems**

Looming behind this concern over danger on Yonge was a strong cultural association between downtown urban areas and crime in 1970s North America. By the mid-1960s social scientists, legislators, and the media in the United States had identified an “urban crisis” at work in their inner cities, characterized by unemployment, decaying streetscapes, increasing racial segregation, and a rising crime rate.<sup>106</sup> While Canada was spared many of the worst aspects of this phenomenon, it nonetheless had a noticeable influence on how Canadians thought about criminality and the city. Their concerns were exacerbated both by evidence that the crime rate was rising sharply—it would continue to do so in nearly all categories until the early 1980s—and by media sensationalism.<sup>107</sup> The *Toronto Sun* regularly ran lurid features warning that Toronto could go the way of hollowed-out, dangerous American cities like Detroit. And in late 1973 the front page of the *Toronto Star* headlines read that a crime rise was “sure as taxes” in the New Year.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> “R.K. to Crombie, Feb. 7, 1973,” CTA, 527607-6.

<sup>104</sup> “A.W. to Crombie, Feb. 6, 1973,” CTA, 527607-6.

<sup>105</sup> “Student to Crombie, Jan. 8, 1973,” CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>106</sup> Robert Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of US Cities* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) is one of the best case studies of this phenomenon and its prevalence as a way of thinking about the city.

<sup>107</sup> Valerie Pottie Bunge, Holly Johnson, Thierno Baldé, *Statistics Canada: Exploring Crime Patterns in Canada* (Ottawa: Minister of Industry, 2005), 8-12.

<sup>108</sup> “‘Our streets won’t be safe’,” *Toronto Sun*, Feb. 5, 1973; “Chief predicts crime rise ‘sure as taxes’,” *Toronto Star*, Dec. 28, 1973.



Image 2.5: Images linking commercialized sex and decline filtered north across the border from the United States. New York City's 42<sup>nd</sup> Street sex strip, just blocks from Times Square, 1977. Boris Spremo/Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0118356f.

This had a powerful effect on how people thought about Yonge Street's apparent descent into criminality. Newspapers published editorials and letters asking whether "Yonge Street is degenerating into another Times Square-Broadway area?"<sup>109</sup> More than sixty people who wrote the mayor asked similar questions, making anxious comparisons to the crime-ridden downtowns of cities New York, Buffalo, San Francisco, and Detroit. Several enclosed newspaper articles they had read about Times Square or San Francisco's Tenderloin.<sup>110</sup> There was a sense that Canadians had an opportunity to avoid, or learn from, the mistakes made by these larger cities in letting crime and urban decay take hold. After all, Toronto was different. Even amid the anti-Sin Strip furor, editorialists boasted that it was still "the safest big city in North America," and even the "most civilized."<sup>111</sup> American sources generally agreed. Just a year later, *Harper's* magazine dubbed it "the city that works"; American tourism to Toronto grew quickly during the early 1970s.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>109</sup> "Yonge as bad as Times Square," *Toronto Star*, Jan. 23, 1973.

<sup>110</sup> See for example "M.K. to Crombie, Jan. 17, 1973," CTA, P041786-2.

<sup>111</sup> "Can Toronto keep on being safe?" *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 20, 1973.

<sup>112</sup> Convention and Tourist Bureau of Metropolitan Toronto, "Press release, Aug. 4, 1972," CTA, 527605-1.

Letter-writers echoed this civic pride. “The citizens of Toronto are justifiably proud of their city,” began one of the most widely distributed form letters against Sin Strip. “Despite the considerable growth of the last decade the city has remained reasonably clean and free from crime”.<sup>113</sup> Others pointed to the city’s avoidance of American-style social conflict, and to the politeness and basic decency of its citizens. However, they argued, those qualities were being put in jeopardy by Sin Strip. There was a subtle anti-Americanism behind these sentiments, and indeed a few citizens who wrote the mayor stated that they viewed the sex industry as an American import, “an insidious thing that has been creeping in steadily [from] without the country.”<sup>114</sup> It didn’t help that several Sin Strip businesses were owned by American transplants—including one of the first body rub parlours, Relaxation Plus—or that others, like Times Square Books, traded on their American content to attract customers.

### **A society in decline**

The sense that Yonge’s current state posed a moral and physical danger found its most strident support among religious Torontonians. A substantial minority, mobilizing through Toronto-area churches, understood the appearance of the sex industry in the heart of Toronto as part of a larger decline in moral standards in Canada. These self-identified “God-fearing citizens” and “concerned Christians” launched a campaign within a campaign, accounting for nearly half of the communications sent to Mayor Crombie that winter.

To religious opponents of Sin Strip, the sex industry presented both a spiritual and a temporal danger. Obscenity was a sin in and of itself. But it was also inseparable from a host of other perceived social problems, including, but not limited to, homosexuality, violent crime, drug use, alcoholism, and laziness. Like social conservatives across North America, Toronto’s concerned Christians viewed the battle against pornography holistically, as just one front in a war for the preservation of a society built around Judeo-Christian values. Any concession on one issue risked opening the gate to the others. In this way, commercialized sex could be seen, in the words of *Sun* columnist and former Mayor of East York True Davidson, as a “poison being openly purveyed [to] the body politic,” that would weaken

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<sup>113</sup> “Form letter 2 to Crombie, Jan. 1973,” CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>114</sup> “W.L. to Crombie, Jun. 21, 1973,” CTA, 527607-5.



already fragmenting moral standards and lead the most vulnerable to crime.<sup>115</sup> Increases in drug arrests, loosening liquor laws, and even the slovenly sartorial standards of the day's youth could all be deployed as evidence that this was a generalized trend.

In both Canada and the United States, this religious critique of obscenity and sexual liberation was an important—although rarely decisive—social force during the liberal 1960s and 1970s. Its ferocity was only increased by the general sense among social conservatives that they were an embattled minority in a society changing far too rapidly for its own good. The “liberal element,” wrote one citizen from Don Mills to the mayor, has “had full sway for about ten years now and we’ve only gone downhill.”<sup>116</sup> This sense that liberal values had gone too far helped drive what some scholars have called the “conservative sixties”, foreshadowing the resurgence of social conservatism in both Canadian and American politics during the following decades.<sup>117</sup> It also fuelled a surge in the popularity of evangelical Christianity, even as mainline Christian churches were losing congregants at an alarming rate. This was most evident in the United States, where *Newsweek* would declare 1976 “the Year of the Evangelicals,” but the effects were also evident north of the border.<sup>118</sup>

The religious mobilization against Sin Strip began soon after the mayor's public appeal for input in the *Sun*. During the first week of January 1973, members of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, a network of ten evangelical Toronto churches, began a campaign that they hoped would bring out “tens of thousands of people” in support of a Yonge Street clean-up.<sup>119</sup> Congregants in Alliance churches were asked to write the mayor with their feelings on the issue; meanwhile, one minister wrote to dozens of churches across the city asking for them to organize similar drives. Their letter urged like-minded individuals to write

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<sup>115</sup> “Let's stop flaunting our moral diseases!” *Toronto Sun*, Jan. 16, 1973.

<sup>116</sup> “A.K. to Crombie, Feb. 9, 1973,” CTA, 527607-6.

<sup>117</sup> See David Farber and Jeff Roche, eds., *The Conservative Sixties* (New York: P. Lang, 2003). This point is also explored in the American context in Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); for Canada see Dany Lacombe, *Blue Politics: Pornography and the Law in the Age of Feminism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 21-23.

<sup>118</sup> Bruce Douville, “The Uncomfortable Pew: Christianity, the New Left, and the Hip Counterculture in Toronto, 1965-1975” (York University: history PhD thesis, 2011), 479-80.

<sup>119</sup> “Now is the time to act, say churches,” *Toronto Sun*, Jan. 5, 1973.

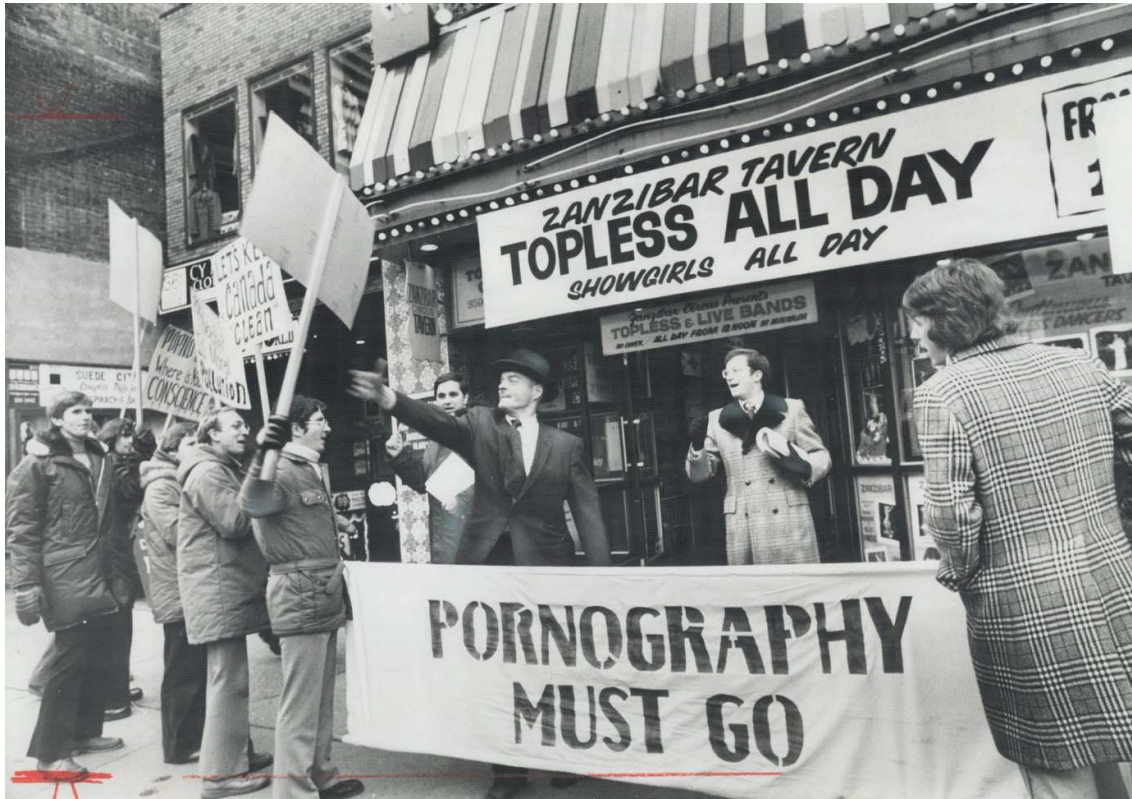


Image 2.6: Anti-pornography protesters scuffle with the doorman outside Zanzibar Tavern and the Top Hat Club, December 1975. Boris Spremo/Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0011733f.

to the mayor, providing his address as well as three simple rules: “1. The more letters, the more influence. 2. avoid using unfounded statements. 3. be concise.”<sup>120</sup>

Over the next three months twenty-one Toronto Protestant churches heeded this call to action. On successive Sundays in January, ministers preached sermons against Sin Strip. At the Jarvis Street Baptist Church, one of Toronto’s most venerable evangelical congregations, Pastor H.C. Slade railed against Yonge’s moral decadence in a sermon entitled “Toronto’s Sin-Lane To Ruin.”<sup>121</sup> Making allusions to the desolation made of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, he described an investigative walk down the nearby strip made in the company of two policemen:

There are at least eleven places which you can call nothing but “Vice Joints,” “Dens of Iniquity,” “Hell Holes,” and “Soul Traps,” designed by the Devil to bring to ruin the minds and lives of our young people...The operators of

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<sup>120</sup> “Avenue Rd. Church to Toronto churches, Jan. 5, 1973,” CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>121</sup> “Toronto’s Sin-Lane To Ruin,” *Gospel Witness*, 51:22 (Jan. 25, 1973).

these vile and debased places are trafficking in the characters and souls of humans for one thing only; that is, money.

Slade went on to describe this situation as an “opportunity for Christian service,” which he considered to include fighting body rub handbills with gospel tracts, demonstrating in front of sex cinemas, and lobbying the municipal government to crack down on the sex industry.

Following these sermons, congregations organized according to their size. A letter of support to the mayor from the west end Japanese United Church bore 80 signatures; meanwhile, a women’s bible circle at Parkdale Baptist Church wrote representing fifteen voices.<sup>122</sup> Many churches distributed a form letter provided by the Christian and Missionary Alliance to their members to sign and mail themselves. In a few different forms, nearly 300 of these letters found their way to the mayor’s office over the next few months. Some were printed on church stationery, or even copied out by hand; all conveyed the same “moral point of view” on Yonge: “The continuation of this pornography and immorality in our city is going to bring an unprecedented moral decadence and rise in crime which I do not want associated with Toronto.”<sup>123</sup> Meanwhile, some Christian opponents of the sex industry took to the streets to send their message. They included both the bearded young men of Christian service group Emmaus who paraded in sackcloth to protest Toronto’s “worldly ways,” and the smartly dressed men and women of the International Family Association, who marched up and down the strip holding a banner reading “Pornography must go.”<sup>124</sup>

### **The right to choose**

Meanwhile, Crombie’s comments about Yonge began to draw a critical response. Although they were slower to mobilize, a number of Torontonians were prepared to defend Sin Strip’s existence. Only five percent of letter-writers—just over forty people—were against a clean-up campaign on Yonge. They sent no form letters, and organized no petition drives. Instead they appealed to the mayor on the basis of individual freedoms. Responsible adults had the right to patronize Sin Strip, just as the proprietors of sex businesses had the right to offer

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<sup>122</sup> “Japanese United Church to Crombie, Jan. 9, 1973,” CTA, P041796-1; “Parkdale Baptist Church to Crombie, Feb. 14, 1973,” CTA, 527607-6.

<sup>123</sup> “Form letter 1 to Crombie, Jan. 1973,” CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>124</sup> “Vigil against ‘Ways of the World’ (photo),” *Toronto Star*, Apr. 21, 1973 and “Pornography must go (photo),” *Toronto Star*, July 5, 1975

what the public wanted. W.C., a man living in the west end, spoke for most of these concerned citizens when he wrote:

May I point out that in a democracy one has freedom of choice...I believe in the right of each mature person choosing for himself what he wishes or does not wish to read and see.<sup>125</sup>

Writers like W.C. saw danger in the prospect of the municipal government attempting to regulate entertainment on the basis of morality, even when they did not personally approve of Sin Strip. Picking and choosing what people could do for fun smacked of dictatorship, they argued, and was well beyond the mandate of the municipal government.

A number took a more personal approach, arguing that their own enjoyment of the area would be diminished if the sex industry was cleaned up. To these citizens, like those who considered the sex industry a blight, Yonge was important, but for different reasons. They saw the street's current incarnation as one of the few colourful, exciting areas in what was otherwise a dull city. A young, single man named C.K. described the strip's colour and sleaze as evidence that Toronto was becoming a major metropolitan cultural centre. His whole social life revolved around Yonge, he said, and it was one of few places where Toronto the Good was able to burst out of its traditional conservatism.

Surely you remember the Toronto of ten years ago – conservative, dull, oppressive, out of tune with the people's fiddle...my attitude towards the trends on Yonge Street is one of qualified elation.<sup>126</sup>

A woman living close to Yonge stated that she and her husband chose to live in the downtown core for its excitement, and asked

Have you ever walked down Yonge St. in the summer, or on the weekends? Obviously not! It is packed with people from the suburbs who do not have our area's character and colour. Yonge St. has become another meeting place for the people.<sup>127</sup>

In this view of the city, Toronto's downtown was its cultural heart, providing the life and excitement that its humdrum suburbs could not. In some people's view, the anti-Sin Strip agitation was a classic example of the conservative suburbs trying to assert their will over

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<sup>125</sup> "W.C. to Crombie, Dec. 30, 1973," CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>126</sup> "C.K. to Crombie, Jan. 11, 1973," CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>127</sup> "M.R. to Crombie, Jan. 12, 1973," CTA, P041796-1.

the whole city. "Imagine for a moment, all Toronto as bland as [its] suburban areas—a big city needs its Strip," explained one man. He went on to argue that the majority of Torontonians liked Yonge just the way it was, urging the mayor not to listen to the "moral righteousness" of a well-organized minority.<sup>128</sup>

One or two men who wrote took a very different approach, identifying themselves as regular customers of Yonge's strip clubs, adult bookstores, and body rub parlours. They described these businesses as a natural outlet for desire, patronized "not by sexual deviants, but by the average guy who may be spending the night downtown with his buddies or by visiting businessmen who may want to let their hair down a bit."<sup>129</sup> Rejecting being labelled as perverts or crumbs, they defied the mayor to find anything wrong with their moral character.

The debate was joined in public as well, as several prominent Torontonians spoke up against the mayor's comments and what they saw as the ensuing moral crusade. One outspoken public figure was Barry Callaghan, a professor and author known for his work on the literary journal *Exile*. In a series of remarks printed in the *Toronto Star*, Callaghan complained that Crombie was "making cheap-shot moral appeals" on the Yonge issue, and speculated whether Toronto had "voted in an Allan Lamport in bellbottoms."<sup>130</sup> Five years earlier, as a city councillor, ex-mayor Lamport had led a campaign to label Yorkville's hip youth a "social disease."<sup>131</sup> Days later, acclaimed writer Pierre Berton took a similar stance, calling Crombie's idea "stupid" during a chance meeting that was reported on the front page of Toronto newspapers.<sup>132</sup> Berton was a well-known advocate for freedom of expression who had publicly denounced film censorship and police harassment of Rochdale College over the past two years.<sup>133</sup> He would reiterate his view in radio and television interviews over the next few weeks.

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<sup>128</sup> "G.G. to Crombie, Jan. 5, 1973," CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>129</sup> "R.B. to Crombie, Jan. 8, 1973," CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>130</sup> *Toronto Star*, Jan. 10, 1973.

<sup>131</sup> Stuart Henderson, "Toronto's Hippie Disease: End Days in the Yorkville Scene," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 17:1 (2006), 218.

<sup>132</sup> "No Crombie crackdown on Yonge Street," *Toronto Star*, Jan. 13, 1973.

<sup>133</sup> See for example "Idea of censorship abhorrent, writes author Pierre Berton," *Toronto Star*, Dec. 29, 1972.

The two writer's comments—and the responses they provoked—injected a new element into the debate. Some approved of their stance. At an open forum at Holy Trinity Anglican Church, just steps from the Strip, Crombie was criticized for starting the whole debate, and opening the door to a moral crusade.<sup>134</sup> Others were hostile to the writers' intervention. Several journalists questioned why Berton and Callaghan's views were being given so much media attention. Others criticized them as elites, injecting a populist, anti-elitist tone into the debate. *Globe and Mail* writer Bruce West put down the "Great Ones" as knee-jerk liberals who were out of touch with society.<sup>135</sup> A day later, an editorial in the *Sun* mused:

Funny how the Mayor's "clean-up" promise affected different people. The average person seemed to approve – but the **intellectuals**, the city's **beautiful people**, reacted shrilly and indignantly. To them Crombie's "campaign" smacked of censorship and was a threat to basic freedoms. Pshaw!<sup>136</sup>

The back-and-forth between the two writers and newspapers inspired dozens of people to write the mayor—more than fifty mentioned it in their letters. They strongly identified with the "average person" described by the *Sun*, and with the characterization of the two writers as precious know-it-alls. "Please do not allow yourself to be intimidated by the likes of Pierre Berton," wrote one citizen from Scarborough.<sup>137</sup> "The majority will applaud you if you stand up to the Poo-Bahs," wrote a Toronto couple, taking up the label applied to Berton and Callaghan by Bruce West.<sup>138</sup> Numerous letters pointed out that Berton lived in Kleinberg, north of Toronto, and that his tune would change pretty quickly if he spent more time in the city. In response to the two writers' rejection of censorship and assertion of individual liberties, conservative opponents of Sin Strip retorted that they had rights, too: the right not to be harassed, the right to enjoy public space, and the right to safety in the downtown core. In one woman's words,

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<sup>134</sup> "No Crombie crackdown on Yonge Street," *Toronto Star*, Jan. 13, 1973.

<sup>135</sup> "The Great Ones," *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 15, 1973.

<sup>136</sup> "Clean up Yonge," *Toronto Sun*, Jan. 16, 1973.

<sup>137</sup> "E.H. to Crombie, Jan. 16, 1973," CTA, P041786-2.

<sup>138</sup> "K.W. to Crombie, Jan. 15, 1973," CTA, P041786-2.

Pierre Burton [*sic*] quibbles about civil rights but we have some civil rights too, and one of them surely is to be able to shop on our favourite street with our children, without having our senses assailed by filth.<sup>139</sup>

### **What kind of clean-up?**

The size and ferocity of the citizens' campaign against the strip surprised nearly everyone, including Mayor Crombie. At the height of the campaign, in mid- to late January, his staff were overwhelmed by the task of sorting and responding to the letters he received. Early letters received fulsome personal responses, but within a few weeks those had mostly been replaced by form letters. Crombie went to great efforts to clarify his position on the issue in the press. But he also continued to solicit public input. During a call-in show on local multicultural radio station CHIN FM, the mayor answered questions about his intentions. His comments, he said, had been misinterpreted, both by critics like Pierre Berton who claimed he was exceeding his brief, and the hundreds of citizens who saw his interest in the issue as a call to arms. He explained that he had no desire to legislate morality, just to clean up the public aspects of the street, including lewd advertising and noise pollution. If the merchants could do it themselves without city intervention, all the better.<sup>140</sup> Like the Downtown Council, the mayor distinguished between the area's established entertainment venues and the newer businesses whose sole source of revenues was sex entertainment.

A number of those who were calling for a clean-up agreed with the mayor. They considered banning street advertising, loudspeakers, and closed-circuit TVs a good compromise between improving the street and protecting freedom of expression. "Mayor Crombie is right in wanting to tone down Yonge," wrote one citizen to the *Toronto Star*; however, he added that "no rational urbanite" would ask that Sin Strip be entirely removed.<sup>141</sup> "Most of Toronto's citizens don't give a tinker's dam (*sic*) about what goes on behind closed doors on Yonge Street," exclaimed another, "what they object to is being subjected to the importuning of skills."<sup>142</sup> Others argued that while the sex industry should

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<sup>139</sup> "S.P. to Crombie, Jan. 16, 1973," CTA, P041786-2.

<sup>140</sup> "Crombie's Yonge St. hornet's nest," *Toronto Sun*, Jan. 18, 1973; "Mayor favours self-discipline," *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 15, 1973.

<sup>141</sup> "Crombie right to tone down Yonge St.," *Toronto Star*, Jan. 23, 1973.

<sup>142</sup> "D.M. to Crombie, Jan. 15, 1973," CTA, P041786-2.

be tolerated, it had no place on the city's main street. Several dozen people suggested relocating the body rub parlours and strip clubs to somewhere outside of the commercial district—their ideas included the waterfront, the suburbs, and (in one case) Pierre Berton's home town of Kleinberg.<sup>143</sup>

"Strip joints, massage parlors and book stores advertising 'adult movies' and selling pornographic literature must be closed!", stormed one minister in a letter to the mayor.<sup>144</sup> Alongside those citizens concerned with balancing competing rights, there were many who considered Sin Strip's sex entrepreneurs to have no rights at all. In particular, religious opponents of Sin Strip were much less disposed to consider relocating the sex industry or simply limiting its ability to harass passers-by. They considered the Yonge clean-up to be fundamentally about the moral health of Canadian society, and saw any concession to the sex industry to be a foot in the door for other problems. No distinction was made between topless go-go dancers and body rub parlours. Writers like the C.'s, a couple from Rexdale, called on the mayor to "eradicate this cancer now, before it spreads," and asked for police powers to be used to lock up the Strip's purveyors of filth.<sup>145</sup> They thought the mayor was missing the point with his focus on external advertising. A citizen living in the Regent Park area asked:

How can we possibly expect to cure this social malignancy if we do not get to the root cause of it which is certainly on the inside of these buildings – the outside is mere window dressing!<sup>146</sup>

Seeing Crombie's early statements about the issue—as they were reported in the media—as very much in tune with this objective, many claimed that they were disappointed by his "reversal." They perceived the mayor's attempts to clarify his statements as backing down in the face of liberal opinion. "Did Pierre Berton's slap on the wrist have anything to do with it?" asked one man.<sup>147</sup> Reiterating their support for a crackdown, they pleaded with the mayor to do what was right on Yonge.

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<sup>143</sup> See for example, "A.B. to Crombie, Jan. 13, 1973," CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>144</sup> "J.M. to Crombie, Dec. 29, 1972," CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>145</sup> "C.'s to Crombie, Feb. 11, 1973," CTA, 527607-6.

<sup>146</sup> "L.B. to Crombie, Jan. 15, 1973," CTA, P041796-2.

<sup>147</sup> "Disappointed in Crombie's reversal on the Yonge St. issue: Torontonians," *Toronto Star*, Jan. 24, 1973.



## Local, city, and metropolitan solutions

The wide-ranging action demanded by opponents of Sin Strip did not come in 1973, for several reasons. First, public commentary on the issue was loud, but divided. Torontonians had made it clear to all concerned that the issue of the sex industry on Yonge Street was important to them. Local merchants and a vocal minority of citizens strongly supported action of some type by local government. But there was also very public criticism of the mayor's plans. Despite anti-Strip campaigners' efforts to define their stance as that of the average citizen or the silent majority, David Crombie and other city leaders were not convinced that they represented most Torontonians. The mayor would later express disappointment that there was not "broad public support" for a clean-up campaign in 1973.<sup>148</sup> A deputation from the Downtown Council felt rebuffed when it met with Mayor Crombie's Executive Committee at the end of January and was told that any action was being postponed until a full report on the legal tools available was received from the city solicitor.<sup>149</sup> Clearly, the City of Toronto was going to take time to develop a considered policy on Yonge. In the meantime, Crombie encouraged local businesspeople to find solutions among themselves.

Second, there was the question of distribution of powers among the city's different levels of government. Since 1953 Toronto and surrounding suburbs had been bound together in the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto.<sup>150</sup> Metro's council and executive had taken up many of the powers that had formerly belonged to its member communities, including policing, licensing, and planning. In David Crombie's words, while the mayor of Toronto maintained immense symbolic power—this was in part what had prompted so many citizens to choose to write to him—the City's capacity to take unilateral action was essentially limited to controlling land uses.<sup>151</sup> Even with the support Crombie was eventually able to gain from Toronto City Council, it seemed more and more that any meaningful

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<sup>148</sup> "Crombie statement re: Yonge, Aug. 11, 1977," CTA, P043017-8; Crombie interview, Feb. 11, 2014.

<sup>149</sup> "City committee puts up appeal to alter 'messy color' downtown," *Toronto Sun*, Jan. 25, 1973.

<sup>150</sup> Albert Rose, *Governing Metropolitan Toronto: A Social and Political Analysis, 1953-1971* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

<sup>151</sup> Crombie interview, Feb. 11, 2014.

action on Sin Strip would have to come from Metro Toronto. Metro, for its part, would likely have to turn to the province for the necessary legislation.

In this way, over the next few years, until early 1977, the police, local merchants, and three levels of government searched for the appropriate tools for solving what many perceived to be the problem of downtown Yonge Street. A vocal minority continued to press the mayor for action—between the spring of 1973 and 1977 he received hundreds more letters from citizens. One new actor in the campaign was the Toronto Council of Women, the local branch of the largest and oldest women’s organization in Canada. With support from affiliates across Ontario, the Toronto group launched a petition drive that gathered 8,500 signatures on a letter calling for more regulation of body rub parlours and sex cinemas. Meanwhile, the Toronto police declared in April that they had found proof that American organized crime was gaining a foothold on Yonge, attracted by the estimated \$10 million that was earned yearly on Sin Strip.<sup>152</sup> And the press continued to run lurid exposés of the sex industry, and while keeping the debate raging by soliciting public input. “Sordid or folksy, city’s Yonge St. divides opinion,” stated one *Toronto Star* headline.<sup>153</sup> By 1975, the sordid side was getting decidedly more attention.

### **Policing priorities**

Many citizens who wrote the mayor pointed to the police as the best weapon to be used on Yonge. But, as hinted at earlier, policing was not the panacea they thought it could be. Faced with limited resources and growing responsibilities, and convinced that Yonge’s sex industry was not a threat to public safety, the Toronto Police—with the notable exception of the Morality Squad—limited their activities on Yonge to “showing the flag” and maintaining order. In doing so, they effectively sanctioned the existence of Sin Strip, just as police in decades past had created *de facto* red light districts across the continent through a policy of “toleration and control.”<sup>154</sup> For this reason, many of the attempts by other authorities to act on Yonge were explicitly designed to make up for what they saw as a gap in police enforcement of the criminal law.

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<sup>152</sup> “Organized crime tries for takeover of our Sin Strip,” *Toronto Star*, Apr. 28, 1975.

<sup>153</sup> “Sordid of folksy, city’s Yonge St. divides opinion,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 4, 1975.

<sup>154</sup> Francis, *Red Light Neon*, 51-54.

The downtown Yonge strip had a heavy police presence compared to other areas of Toronto. Downtown Yonge Street ran through the centre of 52 Division, one of the smallest but busiest police precincts in Toronto. The area typically accounted for a large percentage of the city's prostitution, narcotics, and public drunkenness offences. For example, in 1973, more than 600 prostitution arrests were made in 52 Division, accounting for 39% of the city's total. The percentages for drugs and liquor offences were 24% and 34%, respectively.<sup>155</sup> However, in terms of non-vice offences—assault, murder, rape, robbery—in the early 1970s it was no different from other downtown divisions.

Unlike most other police districts in Toronto, 52 Division still maintained a foot patrol unit, with a strength of 33 officers in 1973. As a result, Yonge between Queen and Bloor was visited daily by cops “on the beat,” as well as the scout cars that had replaced that older style of policing nearly everywhere else in the city. At certain times—evenings and weekends, and during the summer pedestrian malls—plainclothes officers and even the emergency task force were also deployed on the strip.<sup>156</sup> The main goal of this day-to-day police presence in the area was the maintenance of public order. Apart from moments of disorder during the pedestrian mall summers, by almost all accounts it was successful in this aim.

Policing commercialized sex was a separate matter. Since the 1880s, the boundaries of acceptable entertainment in Toronto had been patrolled by the Morality Department of the Toronto Police. Established in 1886, the department's original mandate was to police “cruelty to women, children, and animals, desecration of the Sabbath, indecent exposure, and, of course, unlicensed drinking dens.”<sup>157</sup> Gambling, prostitution, and obscene literature were soon added to its remit. Alongside investigating those offences, over the next few

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<sup>155</sup> Statistics drawn from Metropolitan Toronto Police Department, *Annual statistical report, 1973* (Toronto: MTPD, 1974).

<sup>156</sup> “Report 37 of the Committee on Public Works, Nov. 26, 1973,” CTA, 527607-4. I discuss policing the mall in more detail in chapter 2.

<sup>157</sup> Desmond Morton, *Mayor Howland: The Citizen's Candidate* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1971), 37.



*Image 2.7: A rare photograph of beat cops on patrol on the east side of Yonge Street near Dundas Street. Note two police officers questioning men at left of photograph, and at right under Ford Drugs canopy. Photo by street photographer Bob Whalen, likely 1972.*

decades the Morality Department would develop into what historian Greg Marquis has describe as a “key social service” in the City of Toronto.<sup>158</sup> The department’s officers used their public authority to mediate and solve domestic conflicts outside of the courts, including thousands of cases of domestic abuse each year. With the development of other social services from the 1930s onwards, this function was removed from the Morality Department’s purview; however the department’s officers maintained a proprietary attitude towards public morality in the city, and continued to see themselves as its best arbiters.

By the late 1960s the Morality Bureau was still a significant force within the larger Metropolitan Toronto Police Department. It employed 39 officers and possessed six cars, making it the one of the largest special units within the larger police force of over 3,000

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<sup>158</sup> Greg Marquis, “The Police as a Social Service in Early Twentieth-Century Toronto,” *Social History/Histoire sociale*, 25:50 (November 1992), 338.

officers.<sup>159</sup> Its formal responsibilities included the regulation of obscenity, prostitution, drugs, gambling, and other urban vices. They were extremely active in the Yonge Street entertainment area. Bookstores, bars, theatres, and other places of business could count on weekly visits to gauge whether the entertainment and materials offered were acceptable or obscene. Reports made by morality officers reveal that they kept tabs on the opening and closing of businesses, on the prices charged for peep shows or massages, and on possible breaches of the law. Adult bookstores were provided with lists of unacceptable materials, and threatened with raids and obscenity charges if they did not pull them from their shelves.<sup>160</sup> The bureau's head from 1969, Inspector John Wilson, aggressively positioned himself as Toronto's chief censor, pursuing charges against several area bookstores and even overruling the Ontario Board of Censors to ban further showings of bizarre and not particularly explicit erotic comedy *Can Hieronymous Merkin Ever Forget Mercy Humppe and Find True Happiness?* (1969).<sup>161</sup>

Yet despite its tough stance on obscenity, the Morality Squad proved unable to do more than limit certain aspects of Sin Strip. As described earlier in this chapter, the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s were characterized by reform of the Criminal Code of Canada and ongoing debates over obscenity and prostitution laws. Community standards were in flux, and this new permissiveness soon trickled down to the enforcement level. By 1972 this could be felt at the level of enforcement on Yonge. Strip shows were largely self-regulating, and both sex cinemas and adult bookstores were pushing the limits of what they could display to customers in court. Morality officers continued to seize books and films and make arrests, but they were much less confident in securing convictions than before.<sup>162</sup>

Body rub parlours presented a different problem. Police were well aware that many of Yonge's growing number of massage joints offered sexual "extras" to customers; six Morality Squad officers seem to have been detailed to the specific duty of investigating body rubs.<sup>163</sup> But acquiring evidence of this was difficult. Officers on routine visits had to get

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<sup>159</sup> Metropolitan Toronto Police Department, *Annual Statistical Report 1968* (Toronto: MTPD, 1969). By comparison, the Break and Enter unit had 22 members, and the Murder squad 12.

<sup>160</sup> "Police arrest stores' manager, seize 4,000 books as obscene," *Toronto Star*, Jun. 5, 1971.

<sup>161</sup> "The Morality Squad inspector who polices what we see," *Toronto Star*, July 19, 1969.

<sup>162</sup> The press was conscious of this. See "The Yonge St. 'strip'—it's there because courts can't define obscenity," *Toronto Star*, May 11, 1973.

<sup>163</sup> "Body rub parlours range from the tawdry to businesslike," *Toronto Star*, Jul 26, 1974.

past warning buzzers, peepholes, and other measures put in place by operators to slow them down.<sup>164</sup> And police in plainclothes were instructed by superiors not to disrobe during visits, which hampered their ability to operate undercover.<sup>165</sup> A 1977 police report summed up the difficulties officers investigating body rub parlours faced from the start:

The female attendants will not discuss services until a \$20.00 fee has been paid and the customer is in the session room. The customer is asked to strip, and in some cases, take a shower. He also has to produce identification and the attendant will check through his wallet. If she is satisfied the customer is not a police officer, she will then discuss 'extras' (offers of sex).<sup>166</sup>

The alternative was to launch full-scale raids of parlours, which occurred infrequently throughout the 1970s. But this required the devotion of significant manpower resources—six to eight officers per raid—and as a result was a costly way to lay charges that might carry as little as a fine of a few hundred dollars for those convicted. The legal question of whether parlours were private or public places was still open, which had bearing on whether bawdy house charges could stick.<sup>167</sup> Police reports indicate that in 1976, for example, officers operating on Yonge laid 43 charges for keeping a bawdy house, 20 for being an inmate of a bawdy house and 43 for showing obscene films. Only a few meaningful convictions resulted, however: most of the accused received small fines, suspended sentences, or probation.<sup>168</sup>

The story of public sex work was in some ways similar. Since the replacement of the vagrancy provision of the criminal code with a “soliciting” offence in 1972, police lost their primary weapon in regulating prostitution in public places.<sup>169</sup> By 1977, Metro Police Chief Harold Adamson was arguing that his force was “powerless” to stop street prostitution. He claimed that this situation—like that of panhandling on Yonge—would only change with the return of vagrancy legislation.<sup>170</sup> This was somewhat exaggerated. The difficulties of securing convictions on the new offence of soliciting were very real, especially after 1974, when Ontario courts began to ask for proof that prostitutes had annoyed or harassed a

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<sup>164</sup> “Buzzers give warning—Body-rub parlor control is sought,” *Toronto Star*, Nov. 28, 1973.

<sup>165</sup> “He’s brains behind Yonge St. fight,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 13, 1977.

<sup>166</sup> “Chief to Metropolitan Board of Commissioners of Police, Sep. 8, 1977,” CTA, 47331-1.

<sup>167</sup> “Body rub girls expose issue of law, morals,” *Toronto Star*, Dec. 11, 1973.

<sup>168</sup> “Inspector Stirling to Sparrow re: places of amusement, Apr. 27, 1977,” CTA, 47331-1.

<sup>169</sup> For more on this see Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution, *Pornography and Prostitution in Canada* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1985).

<sup>170</sup> “Police say hands tied on Yonge St. clean-up,” *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 4, 1973; “Powerless to deal with prostitutes – chief,” *Toronto Star*, Dec. 9, 1977.

prospective customer. But Toronto police continued to devote considerable resources to policing street prostitution, using a near-constant uniformed police presence and frequent arrests to discourage the trade. This was visible on Yonge and even more noticeable in the area east of Sin Strip, between Church and Sherbourne Streets, where the highest concentration of sex workers was. In one typical year beginning in mid-1976, the police laid 893 soliciting and 297 loitering charges in the two areas.<sup>171</sup> According to police statistics, only 30% resulted in a conviction, and those that did were typically punished with a \$100 fine. The experience of being questioned, arrested, and released by the police became an unavoidable part of street sex work and acted to limit its scope.

It is important to remember, as Kenneth Meier points out in his study of the politics of vice, that police always have more responsibilities than resources.<sup>172</sup> At a time when public concern over violent crime, the drug problem, and even street prostitution was high, it makes sense that pursuing relatively more difficult charges against Sin Strip businesses was a lower priority for the Toronto police. Obscene and sexual activities on Yonge were taking place indoors, and offering little in the way of danger to the general public. Janis Cole, who observed and filmed the day-to-day life of body rub parlours on Yonge in the mid-1970s, recalls that the police visited parlours regularly, but only to determine that there were no difficult customers or problems spilling out onto the street.<sup>173</sup> This relatively cordial relationship with sex business employees fits well with the force's prioritization of maintaining order and safety over launching relatively unproductive investigations of the sex industry. Of course, if new legal tools became available or massive political pressure were brought to bear, that could quickly change.

### **Self-regulation**

While police complained that their hands were tied, one of the first interventions to result from the clean-up campaign came from Yonge Street merchants. Following a meeting with the mayor and his executive in early January 1973, the Downtown Council decided to try to put his suggestion of "self-regulation" into action. In an open letter delivered to area shops,

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<sup>171</sup> "Chief to Metropolitan Board of Commissioners of Police, Sep. 8, 1977," CTA, 47331-1.

<sup>172</sup> Kenneth Meier, *The Politics of Sin: Drugs, Alcohol, and Public Policy* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 16.

<sup>173</sup> Cole interview, Jan. 28, 2014.

they asked operators to tone down their sidewalk displays, cut down on noise, and stop passing out the handbills that were offending shoppers and clogging the area's gutters.<sup>174</sup> They met with some success, at least on the issue of noise pollution. By April they were able to boast in their newsletter that 23 out of 29 offenders had removed their sidewalk loudspeakers. A list of those unwilling to cooperate had been passed along to the city. Citing the numerous deputations they had made to the municipal government, they asked "who has done the most effective thing concerning the Yonge Street problem? The Yonge Street merchants themselves!!" Just a page later, however, this congratulatory tone was absent as the Council acknowledged that Yonge still had a handbill problem.<sup>175</sup>

In fact, the issue of advertising was one of the first on which the owners of Sin Strip businesses decided to state their own case. On the heels of their letter to area merchants, a lawyer representing two area massage parlours wrote the Downtown Council to present his clients' point of view. He challenged the idea that body rub handbills and loudspeakers were creating an unpleasant atmosphere, and criticized the Council as unrepresentative.<sup>176</sup> He also made the point that handbills were necessary to the functioning of his clients' businesses, since all three major Toronto papers had recently either rejected or imposed limits on advertising sex-related businesses in their pages. In the case of the *Sun*, that decision had been made just ten days prior. Prior to launching a crusade against Yonge, the tabloid had printed an entire page of ads for sex businesses—mostly on Yonge—in each issue. But in its "clean up Yonge" editorial of January 16, the paper (somewhat self-righteously) announced a change of policy.<sup>177</sup>

The Downtown Council's campaign against sidewalk advertising managed to take some loudspeakers off the street, and it prompted at least one Sin Strip business owner—Arnold Linetsky, of Starvin' Marvin's burlesque—to join the group. Sex businesses refused to stop distributing handbills, however, although a few of them decided to make a nod to civic responsibility and add messages like "Keep Toronto clean and beautiful. Please do not litter" to the margins of their handbills.<sup>178</sup> But overall it failed to do much to answer established

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<sup>174</sup> "Downtown Council to Yonge merchants, Jan. 16, 1973," CTA, P041786-2.

<sup>175</sup> "Downtown Council newsletter, Apr. 1973," CTA, 527607-5.

<sup>176</sup> "G. to Downtown Council, Jan. 25, 1973," CTA, P041786-2.

<sup>177</sup> "Clean up Yonge," *Toronto Sun*, Jan. 16, 1973.

<sup>178</sup> Various handbills, CTA, 138398-11.



merchants' concerns. Their lobbying continued—by spring 1973 the Council had sent deputations not just to the mayor and his executive, but to the city's Urban Renewal, Housing, Fire and Legislation Committee, and Metro Toronto's Police and Licensing Commissions. And beginning in late 1973 both the City of Toronto and Metro began to look seriously at their options for regulating Sin Strip.

### **Zoning for (and against) sex**

At the city level, it became clear that there were only a few policy measures available. This was clearly outlined in a 1974 report made to the mayor by the City's Commissioner of Development on the Sin Strip issue.<sup>179</sup> The report mentioned a number of avenues that his department had investigated, stretching to the limits (and beyond) of the city's powers. All attempted to use the City's power over land uses as a proxy for regulating undesirable businesses; all but one turned out to be blind alleys. The first possible approach was historical preservation. At the time, the Province of Ontario was developing legislation that would eventually become the *Ontario Heritage Act* (1975). Among other things this legislation would allow the city to designate streetscapes like Yonge's for architectural preservation. However, the author cautioned, this would likely act only to prevent conversion of facades and visible deterioration of historic strip buildings. A second approach was to use a bylaw to designate Yonge as a special "Redevelopment Area," under the *Ontario Planning Act*, which would allow the city, in theory, to expropriate and resell area buildings for private development. This was an extreme measure, and had been controversial each of the three times it had been used over the past two decades. For an administration elected on a platform of slowing the development boom, it was a non-starter.

The only policy that was seriously considered by the City that year was the last: zoning. The report suggested that the city's zoning bylaw could be amended to restrict body rub parlours to certain types of commercial districts. This meant they would need special permission to open up in areas, like Yonge, that were close to residential development. In this way their spread could be limited, and they could eventually be dispersed from Yonge

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<sup>179</sup> "Development Report to Crombie, Aug. 22, 1974," CTA, P043017-5.

into peripheral commercial districts. Parallels were drawn to the way other “noxious uses”, such as polluting industrial plants, had been confined to specific zones and kept out proximity to residential neighbourhoods. Since its beginnings, zoning law has been an important tool used by municipal authorities to shape the development of neighbourhoods and bar certain activities from occurring in them. In the 1970s, amid a resurgence of community politics in Toronto and other Canadian cities, it was among other things a weapon used to maintain the integrity—and property values—of gentrifying downtown neighbourhoods where single-family homes were still the norm.<sup>180</sup>

Other actors within the city endorsed the zoning approach, and suggested that it also be applied to other sex-related businesses. Alderman Reid Scott, a member of the mayor’s Executive Committee, led the initiative. In January 1974, and again in October, the issue came up for debate in Toronto City Council. At the second meeting members heard a report from the Planning Board suggesting that “massive use prohibitions throughout the City except within a limited ‘exempt’ area, may form an effective answer [to] the spread of pornographic uses.”<sup>181</sup> They also heard from several councillors and residents’ associations who suggested that body rub parlours were beginning to open up outside of the Yonge Street area, threatening a city-wide problem.

In recommending the use of zoning to combat Sin Strip, city officials and politicians cited the example of two other cities. Both Boston and Detroit had attempted to regulate commercialized sex through the use of zoning ordinances, although their methods and intent were quite different. In Detroit, a 1972 “Anti-Skid Row Ordinance” passed by City Council dictated that no new sex business could open within a thousand feet of an existing one, and those that did required permission from a majority of residents living nearby. A few years later, a major court victory would permit the city to apply this regulation to already-established sex businesses. The result was dispersal of a formerly concentrated red-light district. In Boston, the approach was exactly the opposite. City authorities designated a two-block area in the downtown already dotted with sex businesses as an “adult entertainment zone,” and encouraged new peep shows, massage parlours and strip clubs to

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<sup>180</sup> See David Ley, *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>181</sup> “Buildings and Development Report No. 30,” CTA, 47331-3.

open there. The area, referred to as the “Combat Zone,” became infamous nation-wide, and by 1976 was widely condemned after a rise in the crime rate and the sensationalized murder of a Harvard football player in the area.<sup>182</sup> As the idea of a zoning change came to Toronto Council in fall of 1974, this was in the future. During that meeting and in later discussions Boston, and subsequently Detroit, were held up as examples that the city might be able to learn from.<sup>183</sup>

Council’s response was to vote nearly unanimously to declare intent to change the city’s zoning bylaw. Within a year, they hoped, the law could be changed and the first step towards breaking up Sin Strip accomplished. Yet two major obstacles appeared that hampered both the creation of zoning amendment and any implementation. First, defining what types of businesses were banned was complicated. The old categories of “places of amusement” and “commercial clubs” would have to be redefined much more precisely than before. A balance needed to be struck between zoning out sex businesses and not restricting other, similar uses, including therapeutic massage parlours, first-run cinemas, pool halls, and arcades. That took time to develop. Second, the idea of an “exempt area” struck many as the first step towards a legal red-light district. There was never public agreement as to whether this was a good idea, or if so, where it would be located. Some would later suggest the largely-undeveloped eastern waterfront, or the area around King and Parliament Streets; others the Toronto Island.<sup>184</sup> In the end, no councillor was willing to consider the prospect of a Toronto Combat Zone opening in their ward. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, even with a new zoning bylaw in place—which finally occurred in September 1977—unlike Detroit, the city did not possess the power to force existing businesses to conform. In other words, short of new powers being granted to the city by the province, existing sex businesses would be unaffected by the law.<sup>185</sup>

While a zoning bylaw was being formulated and re-formulated, the city tried a different tack: an inspections blitz. This tactic was a way to “show the flag,” and

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<sup>182</sup> Josh Sides, *Erotic City: Sexual Revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 150-151.

<sup>183</sup> “Buildings and Development Report No. 30,” CTA, 47331-3; “Reid Scott asks zoning to control pornography,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 29, 1976; Toronto City Council Special Committee on Places of Amusement, *Report and Recommendations* (Toronto: City of Toronto, 1977), 105-109.

<sup>184</sup> “Transfer sleazy commerce to Island,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 6, 1975.

<sup>185</sup> “Commissioner of Planning to Crombie, Oct. 21, 1977,” CTA, P030120-11.

demonstrate that the authorities were concerned about a specific type of business; it also offered a chance to use strict bylaw enforcement to impede the functioning of those businesses.<sup>186</sup> On Yonge, the city targeted body rub parlours, which were considered the least stable type of business in the area and the most likely to be in violation of city regulations. In August 1974 the Commissioner of Development called a meeting with representatives from the Fire, Health, Buildings, and Development Departments.<sup>187</sup> Using a list of sex businesses obtained from the police Morality Department, those departments carried out a series of inspections of Sin Strip body rubs that saw thirty-two properties visited by four inspectors (one from each department) in just a few days. Unsurprisingly, they found violations of city codes: defective electrical systems, dirty washrooms, even “animal excreta” on a staircase landing.<sup>188</sup> Inspectors noted that a number of upstairs body rub parlours seem to have been using the flat roofs behind their operations to store garbage, sometimes up to 20 bags. One written order was issued by municipal staff, and dozens of minor violations dealt with through oral instructions. Perhaps more importantly, however, the city had shown its willingness to use its powers—albeit limited—to make life difficult for Sin Strip businesspeople.

### **Licensing**

In this context, it seemed like any significant legislative action on Sin Strip would have to come from the metropolitan level of government. Parallel to the City of Toronto’s investigation into zoning, Metro Toronto began to look at its own powers. In part this was triggered by the persistent lobbying of the Downtown Council. But there were other factors. Mayor Crombie and the City of Toronto’s concern for the issue had a significant impact. In 1973 Toronto members still occupied 12 of 32 council seats, and 5 of 11 spots on the influential executive led by Chairman Paul Godfrey. When they had the support of at least one of the larger boroughs, they could play a decisive role in decision-making, avoiding the suburbs-city divide that plagued Metro on issues like transportation.<sup>189</sup> On the issue of

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<sup>186</sup> I have written about this elsewhere. See “Panic on Love Street: *Citizens and Local Government Respond to Vancouver’s Hippie Problem, 1967-68*,” *BC Studies*, no. 180 (Winter 2013/2014), 11-41.

<sup>187</sup> “Memorandum on body-rub parlours, Aug. 22, 1974,” CTA, 138398-11.

<sup>188</sup> “Inspection report on Provocative Place, Sep. 12, 1975,” CTA, 138398-11.

<sup>189</sup> “Allocation of seats unfair, boroughs charge,” *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 8, 1973; Crombie interview, Feb. 11, 2014.

regulating sex businesses, that support came first from conservative North York Mayor Mel Lastman. For Lastman and other suburban leaders, downtown Yonge was Toronto's problem. But body rub parlours, which had begun to open up not just on the downtown strip, but further up Yonge, on Eglinton Avenue, and on other major thoroughfares, were everyone's problem. Inspired by complaints from his constituents, in summer 1973 Lastman in his typically flamboyant style "declared war" on the estimated 20 massage businesses that had opened in North York over the past year.<sup>190</sup> Other borough politicians would soon follow suit, making one important aspect of the perceived Sin Strip problem—the body rubs—a truly metropolitan issue.

By focusing on body rub parlours, Metro Council both headed off many concerns about censorship and managed to unite both suburban and city politicians. By late 1973 there was a broad consensus in Council that Metro should use its powers as a municipality to regulate or even ban body rubs within its bounds. There were only a few dissenters, downtown councillors like John Sewell and Karl Jaffary who saw the issue as a distraction from more important issues like housing. Yet, like the City of Toronto, Metro found itself hampered by its relatively limited legislative and enforcement capability. Still very much a creature of the province—like all Canadian cities—the statutes that defined the limits of Metro's powers could only be altered by the Ontario Government. As a result, the first stage of Metro's campaign against body rubs was to petition William Davis' Progressive Conservative government at Queen's Park. A November report by the Metro Solicitor outlined several different amendments that could be proposed to the province.

At first, their attempts were rebuffed. At an animated meeting in December, Metro Council voted to ask the province for the power to prohibit body rub parlours, except for those offering medical or therapeutic treatment, entirely.<sup>191</sup> That would require changes to the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto Act that the province—although not Metro's legal advisors—thought went well beyond its legal authority. In effect, the Attorney-General viewed Metro's proposed ban as a thinly-veiled attempt to legislate morality. "It is common knowledge that the purpose of this general prohibition of otherwise lawful activity is to

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<sup>190</sup> "Lastman declares war on body-rub parlors," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 31, 1973.

<sup>191</sup> Metro Council *Minutes*, (Dec. 12, 1973) CTA.

suppress the use of body rub parlour facilities for immoral purposes,” he wrote in a legal opinion relayed to Metro Council in May.<sup>192</sup> But, he went on to argue, the suppression of immoral activity is clearly the province of the criminal law, and so under federal jurisdiction.

Undaunted, Metro returned just two months later with a new rationale and end goal for legislation. Instead of banning body rubs, they would license them, just as they did dozens of other regulated businesses, including taxi cabs, fishmongers, chimney repairmen, and bakeries. And the law would not be enacted for reasons of morality, but to ensure health and safety standards and protect legitimate massage parlours. Those were real concerns to some. In particular, since the beginnings of the erotic massage business in Toronto, registered massage therapists had complained that their reputation was being tarnished by the new arrivals. “Topless body rub studios are extremely opposite to professional health studios,” wrote the owner of a downtown health studio to the mayor in early 1973.<sup>193</sup> He went on to plead for politicians and the media to visit his studio to see for themselves. Interviewed by the *Toronto Star*, the director of the Ontario College of Massage speculated on the possible side-effects of an untrained massage: “A girl rubbing against the direction of the blood flow—we know this has happened in those places—can cause varicose veins,” he warned.<sup>194</sup> And there were doubtless customers who had complained of the lack of cleanliness in body rub parlours, many of which were set up in cramped, badly renovated upstairs spaces. But the real purpose behind Metro’s proposal seems to have been to drive body rub parlours out of business by creating a licensing that was so strict as to make their continued operation unprofitable.

The province deliberated for a year on Metro’s request for power over “licensing, regulating, governing and inspecting massage parlours,” through changes to the Municipal Act that governed city powers across the province.<sup>195</sup> Then, in early June 1975, Premier Davis called a meeting with city politicians, at which he announced that the government would push the necessary legislation through the House by the end of the month. He explained to the press that he saw the amendment as part of a bigger campaign against the

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<sup>192</sup> “White to Joy, May 22, 1974,” CTA, 47331-3.

<sup>193</sup> “R. to Crombie, Jan. 12, 1973,” CTA, P041796-1.

<sup>194</sup> “Body rub parlours range from the tawdry to businesslike,” *Toronto Star*, Jul 26, 1974.

<sup>195</sup> “Joy to White, July 31, 1974,” CTA, 47331-3.

problem of permissiveness, an issue on which people “expected the government to show some leadership.”<sup>196</sup> Davis may have made the snap decision to grant Metro’s request as part of a larger strategy aimed at heading off defeat in a fall election. As one journalist noted somewhat cynically at the time, the premier’s new war on permissiveness was a worthwhile distraction from inflation, pollution, and the other larger economic and social problems voters blamed on his administration.<sup>197</sup> The Yonge Street issue was being revived in the Toronto press in 1975, and was a natural choice for Davis to prove his law-and-order credentials. A series of articles that spring and summer in the *Toronto Star* explored the ins and outs of life on the strip, and generally concluded that the area was rotten to the core.<sup>198</sup> With a circulation of over 400,000, the *Star* was the city’s largest daily and a powerful influence on local politics. Moreover, after the Local Council of Women’s spring petition, there seemed to be new life in the anti-Sin Strip campaign. Following the premier’s announcement, David Crombie optimistically predicted to journalists that the Yonge Street strip would be cleaned up within a year under the new bylaw.<sup>199</sup>

The body rub amendment to the Municipal Act passed on July 8, 1975, and Metro Toronto moved quickly to use the new powers it granted them. Within a month a committee composed of police, health, planning and licensing officials had prepared the first draft of a licensing bylaw. On the basis of expedience, Chairman Paul Godfrey and the drafting committee argued against holding public meetings to discuss the law.<sup>200</sup> Instead, it was discussed twice in Metro committees before being enacted on August 26<sup>th</sup>. Bylaw 137-75 was 24 pages long, and full of complicated provisions that would drastically limit the way body rub parlours conducted their business.<sup>201</sup> Two conditions were particularly significant. First, the law stipulated significant fees for owning and operating a body rub: \$3,000 in total per year, with \$50 in additional fees to be paid by each attendant. This was well in excess of the license fees paid by registered masseurs (\$15) or other legitimate professions. Second, it limited the number of licenses to be granted to 25, although there were perhaps 100 body

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<sup>196</sup> “Davis to let Metro license body rubs by the end of June,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 10, 1975.

<sup>197</sup> “Politics and pornography: The Yonge Street clean-up,” *Globe and Mail*, July 5, 1975.

<sup>198</sup> See for example, “The Strip: a peek behind the neon signs,” *Toronto Star*, May 10, 1975, “Rotten fruit on the money tree,” *Toronto Star*, July 2, 1975.

<sup>199</sup> “Crombie sees Yonge strip clean in year,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 11, 1975.

<sup>200</sup> “Godfrey memo re: licensing, Aug. 12, 1975,” CTA, 47331-3.

<sup>201</sup> Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, *Bylaw 137-75 (1975)*.

rubs active in Metro at the time, a third of which were on Yonge. Other important sections required parlours to strictly limit advertising, close by 1 am, clean common areas regularly, and remove locking doors and other hindrances to entry, a measure that would make it easier for police and inspectors to visit unannounced. Persons working in a parlour were also liable to medical examination “at any time,” which presumably included testing for sexually transmitted infections. The strict terms of the bylaw were meant to be a penalty in and of themselves; but violation also meant financial penalties, and the possibility that the business would lose its license or face an injunction forcing it to close.

This draconian law—the *Globe and Mail* called it “Mr. Godfrey’s War Measures Act”—attracted criticism almost immediately.<sup>202</sup> Parlours were given 60 days to apply for a license, and a total of 21 did during that time.<sup>203</sup> But two obstacles soon appeared to implementing the bylaw. The first was a problem of definition. Rather than applying for costly licenses, many operators decided it would be easier to change slightly the name and nature of their business. After all, the key attraction of the body rub for male customers had never been the massage: it was the prospect of having a private encounter with an attractive, nude woman, with the possibility of sexual satisfaction. That situation could—and did—occur under other circumstances. So in mid-1975 a number of body rub parlours closed, only to re-open as nude encounter parlours, photography studios, or other similar businesses. This problem had been predicted by both some Toronto politicians and Metro legal staff. Toronto (and Metro) Councillor John Sewell had called the bylaw ineffective because it failed to make allowance for just such a tactic. He illustrated his point by wearing a t-shirt that read “License nude ping-pong” to Metro Council meetings.<sup>204</sup> Metro counsel George Rust D’Eye was also aware of the problem, and wrote to the province asking them to consider a broader amendment to the Municipal Act to give the city more leeway in the future.<sup>205</sup> He had also begun to look into ways of licensing all types of sex entertainment businesses as “places of amusement.”

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<sup>202</sup> “Control—but with extras,” *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 18, 1975.

<sup>203</sup> “List of body rub owner applications, Aug. 10, 1976,” CTA, 47331-3.

<sup>204</sup> “Owners get 60 days to comply with Metro body rub law,” *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 27, 1975.

<sup>205</sup> “Rust D’Eye to Dick, Jun. 10, 1975,” CTA, 47331-3.



The second obstacle to implementation was a legal challenge launched by Sin Strip businessmen themselves. Arnold Linetsky, owner or operator of several Sin Strip businesses—including Starvin’ Marvin’s and body rub parlour Mr. Arnold’s—was the central figure in their campaign. He was also one of the best known of Toronto’s sex industry entrepreneurs. When journalists writing about Sin Strip wanted an insider’s perspective, they often turned to Linetsky, who never failed to provide a colourful quote or common-sense defence of the industry. In August 1975 he led a challenge to the new bylaw, describing himself as president of the Yonge St. Adult Entertainment Association and claiming to represent ten Sin Strip businesses. Even before Metro’s bylaw was drafted, he vowed to fight it in court on their behalf. “I don’t care if they try to knock out some of the small, sleazy operations,” he explained, “but with the kind of money I make, they won’t legislate me out of business.”<sup>206</sup> Linetsky would elaborate on the Association’s stance during a deputation to Metro’s Legislation and Licensing Committee to protest the new law.<sup>207</sup> Much like members of the Downtown Council, he attempted to present sex merchants as legitimate businessmen with a stake in good relations with the community and government. Linetsky explained that he and his colleagues were not opposed in principle to regulation, since that would help drive “fly by night” operations out of the business. But they objected to thirteen different aspects of the law that they saw as “punitive” and intended at driving “legitimate law-abiding businessmen out of business”. These included the high fees and limited number of licenses, restrictions on tips and paying in advance, and mandatory closing at 1 am.

The Association’s criticisms had little influence on the final form of the bylaw, leading Linetsky to launch a court challenge in September 1975 seeking to quash it as discriminatory and in bad faith. In particular, he argued that since his business took in 30% of its income between 1 and 8 am, the law’s stipulated closing hour of 1 am amounted to a knowing prohibition on his type of business.<sup>208</sup> Over the next few months he would continue to argue his case, despite ongoing personal legal troubles stemming from a conviction on obscenity charges.<sup>209</sup> There was a strong element of self-promotion in Linetsky’s campaign

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<sup>206</sup> “Fight vowed by body rubs on crackdown,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 11, 1975.

<sup>207</sup> “Linetsky deputation text, Aug. 19, 1975,” CTA, 103157-2.

<sup>208</sup> “Linetsky affidavit, Sep. 23, 1975,” CTA, 47331-3.

<sup>209</sup> “Blue movie man jailed for three months,” *Toronto Star*, Oct. 10, 1975.

against the bylaw. Not long after announced his legal challenge, he suggested confidentially to Metro staff that if he and other established businesses were given preferential treatment, he would postpone or withdraw his appeal.<sup>210</sup> And he revelled in the temporary celebrity that the case gave him. In an unexpected turn of events, he and another Yonge Street businessman—Peter Budd, of Funland Arcade—would challenge two reform councillors for their seats in downtown Ward 6 in the 1976 elections. Neither came close, but both ran credible campaigns that emphasized common-sense conservatism—although not moral regulation—downtown growth, and, most of all, kicking out the “socialist, idealist” reform caucus.<sup>211</sup> That they had the resources to run spoke to the success of their businesses; that they chose the reformers as their targets underlined how the issue of a Yonge clean-up refused to split along conservative/progressive lines. It had been first raised by a (centrist) reform Mayor and trumpeted by a conservative daily, and was now being pushed by suburban conservatives and downtown progressives in equal measure.

Linetsky was not the first person to challenge the right of Canadian municipalities to regulate sex in their downtowns. Earlier that year, the city of Prince George had been chastened in a BC court for denying a man named Joseph Payne a business license on the grounds that his sex boutique would harm the town’s “moral welfare.” Payne’s victory was doubtless an inspiration for Linetsky’s legal advisors.<sup>212</sup> While Linetsky’s appeal was eventually unsuccessful, as the case made its way to the Supreme Court of Ontario all attempts to prosecute businesses for violating the body rub bylaw were blocked. The more than 25 cases prepared by Metro staff under the law could not be brought to trial until Linetsky’s challenge was resolved.

### **Tragedy and crackdown, 1977**

By 1977 Sin Strip had inspired a flurry of reports, memoranda, and meetings from the media and three levels of government, but very little in the way of concrete action. The police continued to operate as a regulatory force on the strip, but their primary concern remained maintaining order. Support for a clean-up had grown among city politicians since the

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<sup>210</sup> “Biggart to Godfrey, Oct. 6, 1975,” CTA, 103157-2.

<sup>211</sup> “Reform caucus seems to have Wards 6, 7 locked up,” *Toronto Star*, Nov. 27, 1976.

<sup>212</sup> Payne won his case provincially in 1975 and the verdict was confirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada two years later. *Prince George (City of) v. Payne*, [1978] 1 S.C.R. 458.

citizens' mobilization of 1973, but both Toronto and Metro had found it difficult to find the right tools for controlling or regulating the sex industry. It seemed that each time they returned to the issue with a new approach, their momentum was dissipated by legal challenges, slow intergovernmental communication, and lack of resources. Meanwhile, Sin Strip managed to thrive. In April the Eaton Centre shopping mall—touted by many as a major step towards revitalizing Yonge Street—opened its doors at the south end of the entertainment strip. But its presence had had no discernible effect on neighbouring porn theatres and peep shows, and body rub parlours dotted streets in every Metro suburb from Etobicoke to Scarborough. However, the situation would change drastically during spring and summer of 1977.

In March 1977 two developments improved the city's enforcement options on Yonge. First, the challenge brought by the Yonge St. Adult Entertainment Association to Metro's body rub licensing bylaw was finally withdrawn. It had stalled prosecutions under the law for eighteen months, creating a backlog of cases and giving Sin Strip parlours ample time to rebrand as nude encounter parlours. A few had applied for licenses—and five were issued after somewhat theatrical hearings in front of the Licensing Commission—but most sex businesses ignored the law. In late March, the first prosecutions under the bylaw began to proceed, leading to nine convictions for “body rub owner – no license” in provincial courts over the next four months.<sup>213</sup>

Second, Metro Council began to work on legislation that would broaden the range of businesses subject to the body rub licensing regime. Under a new bylaw passed that month, licenses would be required not just for massage parlours, but for all “places of amusement offering nude services.”<sup>214</sup> Pending provincial approval, this would give Metro the ability to regulate nude photography studios, nude encounter parlours, nude dancing studios, and any and all other variations on the theme. Legal staff were also looking into ways that the bylaw could be used as a basis for “injunctive relief” against Sin Strip businesses. This meant, essentially, asking courts for orders that would prevent sex shops that had been convicted from reopening their doors. Metro's lawyers were unsure if this tactic could work;

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<sup>213</sup> “Rust D’Eye to Joy, Aug. 19, 1977,” CTA, 47331-3.

<sup>214</sup> Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, *Bylaw 57-77* (1977).

but if it did, it would give them a new way to interfere with the income of Sin Strip business owners. Most importantly, public support for a Yonge clean-up increased dramatically during the summer of 1977. By August events had brought new constituencies into the campaign against Sin Strip, and strengthened the resolve of those who had been involved in the campaign since the winter of 1972.

### **The *Places of Amusement* report**

The return of Sin Strip to centre stage in municipal politics—where it had been briefly in both 1973 and 1975—began with the publication of a scathing report on the sex industry by three Toronto councillors. Reform councillors Susan Fish, Allan Sparrow, and Pat Sheppard were asked by council earlier that year to investigate Yonge, and recommend initiatives that could be taken by all levels of government to “regulate the location, size, method of operation, concentration, advertising, ownership, and operators” of sex shops and arcades.<sup>215</sup> While their mandate was criticized by some—the *Toronto Star* called it a “useless look into other cities’ porn”—their final report was widely publicized and presented the case against Sin Strip in its most comprehensive form to date.<sup>216</sup> It was also striking proof that the powerful reform group in city politics, initially sceptical of Crombie’s calls for a clean-up in 1973, was firmly in favour of municipal action on Yonge.

“Effectively, nude service establishments are public nuisances,” the authors explained in the introduction, “and the tenor of this report is to treat them that way.” The main thrust of the report was to characterize Sin Strip as a problem, not of morals, but of downtown decline. Yonge’s sex shops, they argued, were “the catalysts to the degeneration of Yonge Street and surrounding neighbourhoods,” a problem that “if left unchecked, could permanently damage this City.” The massage parlours, sex cinemas, and arcades on Yonge were entrenched on Yonge, and had brought with them crime, physical decay, and other serious impediments to public enjoyment of the downtown. In this view they echoed the Downtown Council and the many Torontonians who had written the mayor complaining that the sex shops had taken Yonge away from the people.

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<sup>215</sup> Toronto Council *Minutes* (Jan. 31, 1977), CTA. Toronto City Council Special Committee on Places of Amusement, *Report and Recommendations* (Toronto: City of Toronto, 1977).

<sup>216</sup> “For a useless look at other cities’ porn,” *Toronto Star*, Feb. 11, 1977.

There were some new elements to their analysis, however. Much like the anti-development activists I describe in the third section of the thesis, the authors of the report saw the first task of opponents of the sex industry to be uncovering in detail the patterns of ownership, methods, and practices that made them successful. Citing data retrieved from assessment rolls and other sources, the three councillors identified a small group of landlords, owners and operators as the root of the problem. These men and women—mostly men—ran sex businesses strictly for profit, often as investment properties, and without any thought for the health or future of the neighbourhood. The key players on Sin Strip included Arnold Linetsky—who owned or operated two strip clubs and three massage parlours through four different companies—and the Martin family, who ran 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cinema and three massage parlours. Using a tactic of naming and shaming, the report identified more than fifty proprietors of sex shops on Yonge by name and address.

The authors emphasized how the various Strip businesses reinforced one another, and were increasingly integrated into common networks of ownership that made them hard to dislodge. This interconnection also helped them to manufacture a market for their services through cross-promotion. For example, peep shows were installed at the back of arcades, and body rub parlours solicited customers in sex shops and adult bookstores. In this way, the authors argued, nearly every business on the entertainment strip facilitated prostitution. If it didn't happen onsite, it would occur upstairs or next door in another associated business. The report also asserted that not only was much of the money being earned on Yonge going to absentee owners, but those owners were directly connected to more serious crime. Included in an appendix was a letter from Ontario Provincial Police Commissioner H.H. Graham in which he stated that “the profits from body rub parlours, prostitution, etc. were being used to finance more serious types of crime, such as the distribution of drugs.” Members of the “principal organized crime family in Buffalo” had ties to the Strip, and, the authors speculated, the area was “ripe for further exploitation.”

This narrative of American “invasion” of Toronto's downtown had, of course, surfaced before. The Morality Squad had long argued that sojourning female American prostitutes were encouraging the growth of the Sin Strip scene. Citizens frequently associated Yonge's sex district with American influence, something that certain businesses—Times Square Books, for example—played up to through advertising strategies and displays

of flags or other paraphernalia. Unconfirmed accusations of mafia involvement in the profitable sexual entertainment scene served to further identify it as something “foreign” to Toronto, not just morally but literally. In a time of rising nationalism and concern for the American urban model this could be powerful ammunition.

The solutions proposed by Fish, Sparrow and Sheppard were familiar to anyone who had followed Toronto and Metro’s halting attempts to regulate Yonge since 1973. As David Crombie explained during our conversation, the report didn’t say anything new, but instead put together a broad range of existing ideas and plans into one coherent text.<sup>217</sup> The councillors recommended that Toronto’s zoning law should be reinforced to limit the spread of sex businesses and pinball arcades, Metro’s licensing bylaw should be tightened up and consistently prosecuted, and that the province and federal government should investigate the area’s links to organized crime. It called out the province for dragging its feet on enabling Metro’s latest requests for legislative powers and the authority to request injunctions. From the police it asked for stricter enforcement of existing laws against sex-related businesses and street prostitution, including weekly inspections of businesses and an end to police fraternization with prostitutes.

The media picked up on the report’s uncompromising tone and copious research, and generally agreed with its conclusions. The *Sun* re-launched its anti-Sin Strip campaign, using the same populist tone that it had employed in 1973 to rail against civil libertarians:

A reason why Toronto is getting the reputation of being one of North America’s most wide-open, anything-goes, porn-prone cities, is the lobby that feels any form of censorship or control is only a step removed from gas ovens and concentration camps...The asses. If good literature and fine art can ennoble—surely pornography and smut can debase!<sup>218</sup>

Right alongside it, this time around, was the *Toronto Star*, which over the next few months became a powerful advocate for a Sin Strip crackdown. In a series of articles the paper reprinted large chunks of the report, bookended by editorials that called the Strip “a blight on Toronto” and declared that it was “time to clean up Yonge St.”<sup>219</sup> Only the *Globe and*

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<sup>217</sup> Crombie interview, Feb. 11, 2014.

<sup>218</sup> “Sin city?” *Toronto Sun*, Jun. 8, 1977.

<sup>219</sup> “Yonge St. a blight on Toronto,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 7, 1977, “It’s time to clean up Yonge St.,” *Toronto Star*, July 26, 1977.

*Mail* was cautious, as it had been since the beginning of the Sin Strip debates, arguing that the report was alarmist and recommended action well beyond the scope of the situation. "City Council and other levels of government are really being asked to take up arms, moral arms, against the character of a neighbourhood...We don't like the approach."<sup>220</sup>

The owners of Sin Strip businesses were critical of the report. Arnold Linetsky called the idea that Yonge was run by organized crime "ridiculous," adding that the barriers to entry into the business were so low that no one needed that kind of backing.<sup>221</sup> A few weeks after its release, the litigious Linetsky would bring launch a suit against the authors of the report for defamation of character, asking for an astronomical \$250,000 in damages.<sup>222</sup> Another sex merchant interviewed by the *Sun* argued that the problems on Yonge were really the fault of just a few "bad apples". Meanwhile, arcade owner Peter Budd retained counsel to express his anger at having his reputation smeared by the report. In a long submission to the city his lawyer protested the report's "innuendo and misrepresentations," including the assertion that his businesses were linked to body rub parlours simply because they shared the same building.<sup>223</sup> By that criteria, he argued, A & A Records and Swiss Chalet were equally guilty. But this criticism of the report did little to stop the building of momentum behind increased city action on Yonge.

Letters supporting the report's recommendations of "fast and comprehensive" legislative action began to pour into the mayor's office. Since 1973, apart from the massive petition collected by the Council of Women, the mayor had received perhaps 300 letters on the subject. Suddenly, in June and July more than 400 letters and phone calls poured in. Once again, the vast majority were in favour of a clean-up. Some of those who wrote were familiar from the campaign of 1973, including the Salvation Army and anti-pornography campaigners like the North Toronto-based Canadians for Decency. But new constituencies began to mobilize that had given the issue little attention in previous years. One was the Confederation of Resident and Ratepayer Organizations (CORRA), an umbrella association that represented dozens of middle-class neighbourhood groups in Toronto and had been

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<sup>220</sup> "Pushing Yonge Street towards propriety," *Globe and Mail*, Jun. 13, 1977.

<sup>221</sup> "Body rub boss cites bad apples," *Toronto Sun*, Jun. 7, 1977.

<sup>222</sup> "City Solicitor to Exec, Aug. 2, 1977," CTA, P043020-1.

<sup>223</sup> "McMurtry remarks, July 4, 1977," CTA, P043017-6.

influential in keeping moderate reform councillors in power. The support for the report of residents' groups like CORRA or the North Jarvis Community Association—representing a densely populated neighbourhood just east of Yonge—sent a clear signal that the clean-up campaign was engaging a larger constituency than in the past.<sup>224</sup>

Building on what Councillor Pat Sheppard called the “impetus” created by his report and this public outcry, in early July David Crombie and Toronto councillors met with the Attorney-General to discuss ways of “fast-tracking” prosecutions of Yonge Street sex-businesses within the provincial courts and pushing the idea of injunctive relief.<sup>225</sup> The next day, the police established a task force to coordinate enforcement on Yonge, bringing officers from 52 Division and the Morality Bureau under the same command for the first time.<sup>226</sup> A committee was also set up by Toronto Council—with Crombie as chairman—to implement the report’s recommendations. “We can’t wait forever for the other levels of government to act,” Crombie told journalists, explaining using court-ordered injunctions to “padlock” sex shops might be the “bold stroke” needed to clean up Sin Strip. A few days later he publicly criticized Premier Davis for ignoring the city’s request for powers to deal with the “yawning cesspool on Yonge.”<sup>227</sup> As his rhetoric became more and more dramatic, a few Toronto citizens responded with concern. One wrote to the *Star* that Crombie’s approach “smacks of totalitarian dictatorship,” adding that that kind of thinking by public officials was a greater danger to society than selling sex.<sup>228</sup> But their voices were outnumbered in June and July by pages of letters from Torontonians who were “appalled” by the state of Yonge, and demanded action along the lines of the report.<sup>229</sup> Momentum for a clean-up was growing.

### **The shoeshine boy**

Just days later in that hot summer, Toronto was rocked by a tragedy that seemed to confirm the worst fears of opponents of Sin Strip. In New York City “Son of Sam” killer David

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<sup>224</sup> “CORRA to Crombie, Jun. 15, 1977,” “NJCA to Crombie, July 14, 1977,” CTA, P043017-6.

<sup>225</sup> “McLaughlin to Crombie re: meeting with AG, July 5, 1977,” CTA, 579966-26; “Sheppard to Implementation Committee re: injunctions, July 28, 1977,” CTA, P043017-6.

<sup>226</sup> “Chief to Board of Commissioners of Police, Sep. 8, 1977,” CTA, 47331-3.

<sup>227</sup> “Crombie’s answer to city’s sex shops: Lock ‘em up,” *Toronto Star*, July 22, 1977; “Davis dallying on sex clean-up: City,” *Toronto Star*, July 26, 1977.

<sup>228</sup> “Crombie stand smacks of dictatorship: Reader,” *Toronto Star*, July 27, 1977.

<sup>229</sup> See for example “Appalled, disgusted by Yonge St. sex, citizen charges,” *Toronto Star*, Jun 15, 1977.





*Image 2.8: A shoeshine boy (not Manuel Jaques) plying his trade on Yonge's sidewalks, summer 1972. By street photographer Charles Dobie.*

Berkowitz had killed again on July 31; and now Toronto had its own gruesome, senseless killing to contend with. On August 1, police found the body of 12-year old Portuguese-born shoeshine boy Emanuel Jaques on the roof of Yonge Street massage parlour Charlie's Angels. Missing for four days, Jaques had been lured away from his stand with the promise of extra cash, before being raped and murdered by four area men. Three of them were casual employees of the body rub parlour, performing odd jobs for operator Joe Martin Jr. in exchange for rooms in the building. They were arrested the same day the body was discovered—one gave himself up at 51 Division—and their gruesome crime was front-page news across Canada. The *Toronto Star* and *Sun* provided daily coverage of the story for a week, interviewing the boy's grieving family and citizens who expressed outrage at his senseless death. The *Sun's* editorial on the crime—"Sin Strip Victim"—set the tone for media coverage. It called Jaques "a victim of Yonge St.," and called for the city to "purge it of at least *some* of the porn, smut, sin."<sup>230</sup>

Torontonians were shocked by the crime, by the youth of its victim and the perceived depravity of his killers. This was not the first time a child had been abducted,

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<sup>230</sup> "Sin Strip Victim," *Toronto Sun*, Aug. 3, 1977. Emphasis in the original.

assaulted, and killed in downtown Toronto.<sup>231</sup> But for those who had followed the debates about Yonge's changing character, there was a powerful symbolism to Jaques' death. The street's shoeshine boys, who set up shop on the Yonge Street strip each year in warm weather, were an iconic part of its image. The sex industry, it seemed, had destroyed not just a young, innocent life, but one of the most visible aspects of the Strip's storied reputation as "a people place," and Toronto's "main street." From the first reports of Jaques' death, his murder was inextricably associated with the larger decline of the area, and the perceived failure of all levels of government to do something to clean up the area. Some saw parallels to the murder spree of New York killer "Son of Sam," who had been terrorizing New York City since the previous year. As a result, public outcry was fierce. The day after the boy's body was discovered, staff at the mayor's office scrambled to record messages from the more than 200 people who telephoned to voice their opinions on the issue. Secretaries summarized their reactions for the mayor:

Outrage at tragedy which many feel could have been prevented...grief for the loss of a young child...anger at why the gov'ts haven't taken action before this.<sup>232</sup>

Callers blamed Jaques' parents for allowing him to work alone on Yonge, and the area's sex businesses for creating an atmosphere moral decay; but most of all they blamed the city and the police for dragging their heels on the clean-up. Stacks of letters followed, dwarfing even the 1972-73 campaign in number. Within a few weeks more than eight hundred people had personally written the mayor on the issue, and over 3000 had signed petitions calling for Sin Strip to be cleaned up. Many of their arguments were familiar from the citizens' campaign of 1972-73, which had in many ways set the tone for the clean-up debate. But there were some important differences.

The 1977 mobilization against the sex industry touched individuals and communities that had not taken part in earlier efforts. As with the reaction to the *Places of Amusement* report, religious conservatives and well-organized North Toronto citizens took advantage of the resurgence in interest to reiterate their positions. Many of their letters and calls had the

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<sup>231</sup> Most notably, in 1973 9-year old Kirk Deasley was found dead in the Ford Hotel, just a few blocks west of the Strip.

<sup>232</sup> "Memo re: calls about Yonge, Aug. 8, 1977," CTA, P043017-7.

added element of rage at the city for dragging its heels. “The Yonge St. Strip was supposed to be cleaned up four years ago,” wrote one angry man. “You + I are as guilty of murdering that little twelve year old child, as the sick animals who were allowed to carry out that dreadful deed,” wrote a woman from Mississauga who had followed the issue for years.<sup>233</sup> There was often a note of triumphalism or “I told you so” to their letters. One woman, a hairdresser from North Toronto, wrote that she had spoken personally to the mayor in 1974 about the issue, and “As events have proved I was correct.” Attached to her letter calling for an end to “continuing debates” and a beginning of action, she attached the signatures of 30 of her clients who felt the same way.<sup>234</sup> As in earlier years, women—and especially mothers—represented an important percentage of those who wrote or called; during the first week, they accounted for 70% of all communications. Many began their comments like Mrs. D. Clarke, who wrote in the *Star* that as mother of a 13-year old son she felt she shared Mrs. Jaques’ grief.<sup>235</sup> Even Tony O’Donohue, who had championed a clean-up in his unsuccessful mayoral campaign in 1972, returned to the debate. He wrote angrily in the *Toronto Star* that Toronto’s new title should be “City of Shame.” “When will the slumbering majority wake up and clean up our whole system?” he asked.<sup>236</sup>

But for many others, Emanuel Jaques’ murder was a rallying cry to engage in a debate that, for whatever reason, they had not been a part of before that summer. Personal and community connections to the Jaques family mobilized several new constituencies. Children familiar with the Jaques family circulated a petition that bore nothing but a messily scrawled “YONGE ST. SIN STRIP” at the top. Dozens of the family’s neighbours in working-class Regent Park, a housing project a few minutes east of the strip, signed on to the letter before delivering it by hand to City Hall; 75 of them would later rally in front of City Hall to demand action.<sup>237</sup> A woman who worked at Wendy’s Hamburgers at Yonge and Dundas explained what a blow the crime had been to the community of workers on that section of Yonge, where Emanuel and his friends were well-known. She stated that

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<sup>233</sup> “T.G. to Crombie, Aug. 5, 1977,” CTA, P043017-7; “M.I. to Crombie, Aug. 1, 1977,” CTA, P043017-6.

<sup>234</sup> “W.W. to Crombie, Aug. 3, 1977,” CTA, P043017-7.

<sup>235</sup> “Slaying ‘terrible for a mother’,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 10, 1977.

<sup>236</sup> “‘City of Shame’ is Toronto’s new title,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 6, 1977.

<sup>237</sup> “N.K. petition, Aug. 8, 1977,” CTA, P043017-8.

Anybody who has anything to do with the corner of Yonge and Dundas (that is, lives there, works there or just hangs around there) loved that little boy and is heartbroken...Nobody smiles, and the past few days have been spent with people crying and walking around with red eyes...So many people have been promising for so long to do something about that "Sin Strip." But now it's too late.<sup>238</sup>

Meanwhile, Toronto's Portuguese Canadians took the tragedy especially to heart. As historian Gilberto Fernandes explores in a recent article, the death of Emanuel Jaques was a pivotal moment in the "political maturation" of Canada's largest Portuguese community. It galvanized thousands who did not normally engage in politics to speak their minds, and forced politicians at all three levels of government to recognize the community's electoral potential.<sup>239</sup> Thousands of dollars were raised for the Jaques family in just a few weeks through grassroots fundraising campaigns. Members organized a massive public funeral for the boy, drawing 4,000 mourners to the west end neighbourhood that was the centre of Portuguese Toronto. A few days later, a crowd estimated at 15,000 persons—many carrying banners and signs in Portuguese—rallied in front of City Hall and Queen's Park to express their anger. Community organizer José Rafael addressed the crowd, who responded to his speech with angry calls for justice. The people at the rally refused to leave Queen's Park until addressed by a member of the government, forcing acting Mayor Arthur Eggleton to frantically search the legislature for someone willing to speak to them. The provincial secretary for resource development was cheered when he emerged to promise that the government was looking into the matter.<sup>240</sup> Community members also visited the mayor in his office, called, or wrote him.

Elements of the city's Greek and Italian communities also expressed their solidarity with the stance of Toronto's Portuguese. It seemed that Jaques' death had touched a nerve among recent immigrants who felt discomfort with the "permissive society"—to use the words of the Italian Canadian Congress' local delegate—but had hesitated to speak out about the issue previously.<sup>241</sup> A number of letters received by the mayor were written in

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<sup>238</sup> "H.C. to Crombie, Aug. 3, 1977," CTA, P043017-7.

<sup>239</sup> Gilberto Fernandes, "'Beyond the 'Politics of Toil': Collective Mobilization and Individual Activism in Toronto's Portuguese Community, 1950s–1990s," *Urban History Review*, 39:1 (2010), 59-72.

<sup>240</sup> "Angry crowd seeks revenge for Emanuel," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 9, 1977.

<sup>241</sup> "P.L. to Crombie, Aug. 11, 1977," CTA, P043017-8.



*Image 2.9: On August 8, 1977, a week after the Jaques murder, a crowd of thousands of angry demonstrators from the Portuguese Canadian community marched on City Hall and the provincial legislature demanding justice for his death. Many held signs calling for the death penalty for his murderers. York University Libraries, Clara Thomas Archives, Domingo Marques Fonds, ASC1744.*

Italian or Portuguese, testimony to the urgent need that these communities felt to speak out, even when they could not be confident of having their opinions understood.

There was an angry, even violent new tone to the anti-Sin Strip campaign following Emanuel Jaques' death. Some of those who mobilized called for the death penalty for the four men accused of his murder: demonstrators at the City Hall rally carried effigies of his killers, and signs depicting them hanging from a gallows.<sup>242</sup> One man who identified as an Italian immigrant and the father of four told the mayor that if he were Jaques' father, he would murder all four men himself. The day after the body was found, another man telephoned both David Crombie and Metro Toronto staff, threatening that if nothing was done about Yonge he would solve the problem himself by detonating bombs on the Yonge Street strip.<sup>243</sup> This kind of visceral, emotional response to the murder is captured well in

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<sup>242</sup> Fernandes, 66.

<sup>243</sup> "Mayor's office note, Aug. 3, 1977," CTA, P043017-7.

Toronto writer Anthony De Sa's *Kicking the Sky*, a fictionalized account of the summer of 1977 from the perspective of the city's Portuguese community. The adults in his story see Jaques' death as a betrayal of their immigrant dreams. "We clean their houses. We mind their children," asks an angry member of the Portuguese community. "For what? For this? For them to do this to one of our children? This is not why we came." Meanwhile, children of Emanuel's age see their freedom to roam around the city limited by their frightened parents.<sup>244</sup>

This anger and fear also translated into homophobia. In the wake of the tragedy, the adolescent protagonist of De Sa's book watches teenagers from his neighbourhood set out for downtown to beat up *paneleiros*—"faggots"—in the Yonge area. In fact, at the time of the Jaques' killing the city's gay community struggled to fight back against assertions that they were somehow responsible for the crime. Newspapers identified at least one of Jaques' accused killers as gay, and publicized that he had turned to a local gay rights activist, George Hislop, for advice before turning himself in to the police. Police and the media persistently described the boy's death as the result of a "homosexual orgy", or as a "homosexual murder," further strengthening the links drawn by some between his death and Toronto's gay community.<sup>245</sup>

For some Torontonians, those tenuous links were enough to inspire calls for the re-criminalization of homosexuality and a crackdown on gay clubs and social spaces. Gay organizations spoke out, explaining that members of their community were as shocked as other Torontonians by the slaying, and arguing that "the gay community cannot be held responsible for some of its members just as all heterosexuals cannot be held responsible for the actions of some."<sup>246</sup> Nonetheless the association persisted. The Jaques case was one of several incidents that contributed to police and public hostility to Toronto's gay community in the late 1970s, and served to justify the massive raids on bathhouses—an important queer social space—conducted by the police in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>247</sup> Another was the ill-timed publication—just a few months after Jaques' death—in gay community

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<sup>244</sup> Anthony De Sa, *Kicking the Sky* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2013).

<sup>245</sup> "Homosexual backlash feared," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 3, 1977.

<sup>246</sup> "Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario press release, Aug. 9, 1977," CTA, P043017-8.

<sup>247</sup> Tom Hooper, "The Bathhouse Raids of 1981," (public lecture) Yorkville Library, Toronto, Nov. 2013.

newspaper the *Body Politic* of an article entitled “Men loving boys loving men.”<sup>248</sup> The text was widely perceived as an apology for paedophilia, prompting a series of attacks in the *Sun* as well as police raids of the newspaper’s offices.

Not just Toronto’s gay community, but the operators and employees of Sin Strip businesses were wary of the effects of the crime on their public image. The normally outspoken Arnold Linetsky was mostly silent; instead it was the Martin family, owners of the body rub parlour where Jaques’ body was found, who pushed back against calls for a crackdown. Family spokespeople expressed regret, but in the same breath warned that the crime could destroy the businesses they had built up over seven years on Yonge. Journalists revelled in the insensitivity of Joe Martin Jr. and Sr., and their comments comparing their loss of business to the Jaques family’s loss of a son were widely reported.<sup>249</sup>

### **A political opportunity**

This massive outpouring of support and outrage came at a crucial time for pro-clean-up politicians like Crombie and Godfrey. Where there had previously been public criticism of the new methods they had devised for regulating Sin Strip, there now to be seemed to be widespread approval. Coming as it did in the midst of their attempts to reignite a clean-up campaign, Emanuel Jaques’ death was a political opportunity that neither Toronto nor Metro would miss.<sup>250</sup> One of David Crombie’s principal advisors explained that he had been waiting for months for an incident that would broaden public support on the issue:

Ironically, we didn’t have to develop one. The murder accomplished that. Three weeks ago Crombie was a fascist for trying to clean up the street: now he’s ineffectual for not doing it sooner.<sup>251</sup>

The issue gave opponents of the sex industry support to deploy the legal tools they had been developing over the past four years, as well as valuable political leverage in their lobbying campaign at Queen’s Park. Just a week before the crime David Crombie had complained to journalists that the province was dragging its feet on providing support for the city’s plans. Now William Davis’ government was on the defensive, as critics asked why

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<sup>248</sup> Gerald Hannon, “Men loving boys loving men,” *Body Politic*, 39 (Dec. 77/Jan. 78).

<sup>249</sup> “Sex-shop slaying may kill the Strip,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 4, 1977.

<sup>250</sup> Crombie interview, Feb. 11, 2014.

<sup>251</sup> “He’s brains behind the Yonge St. fight,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 13, 1977.

he and Attorney-General Roy McMurtry had done so little to respond to Toronto politicians' concerns. A spokesperson for the province admitted to reporters a few days after the murder that the Davis government had been "taking it on the chin" over the issue, before attempting to shift the blame for the situation onto the shoulders of Toronto and Metro.<sup>252</sup> Indeed, following Jaques' murder, all levels of government were eager to prove that they had been active in the fight against Sin Strip well before the crime. Metro staff did their best in reports to the chairman to "refute the allegation that [they] were guilty of delay."<sup>253</sup>

This rush to demonstrate engagement with the issue meant additional resources were available at all levels. Both Toronto and Metro moved quickly to exploit this situation, putting into action many of the tactics and legislative tools they had developed over the past four years to regulate the sex industry. The crucial difference from previous attempts was that, in August 1977, public pressure ensured extensive provincial and police cooperation with their efforts. This turned the imperfect policy tools put together by Toronto and Metro into a formidable arsenal. Suddenly police and city staff were willing to devote extensive man-hours to raiding and inspecting Yonge Street businesses, and the province was prepared to reserve a special court and prosecutor to process the resulting cases. Charges under Metro's licensing bylaw or the criminal code could be brought quickly to trial, and upon conviction business owners served with injunctions to prevent their re-opening. The law would be applied strictly, and repeatedly, until Sin Strip's sex shops were forced to close their doors.

The direction taken by this crackdown demonstrated once and for all the real purpose of the body rub and places of amusement licensing measures taken by Metro. They were not meant to regulate health and safety at those businesses, but to provide pretexts to shut them down. In the bellicose words of Metro Chairman Godfrey, the clean-up meant "the beginning of an end for the sex industry that has scarred the face of a great city."<sup>254</sup> He exaggerated somewhat, but it was clear that municipal government action was intended to do more than apply licensing standards. Over the next month police and city inspectors launched a blitz of raids and surprise inspections that meant most Sin Strip businesses were

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<sup>252</sup> "Councils could have hit sex shops: Ontario," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 9, 1977.

<sup>253</sup> "Joy to Godfrey, Aug. 24, 1977," CTA, 47331-1.

<sup>254</sup> "The war is on – City raiding Yonge's sex shops," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 11, 1977.



harassed on a daily basis. The scale was much larger than during previous periods of heightened enforcement. Unsurprisingly, body rub and nude encounter parlours were once again singled out for extra attention.

### **Rigorous enforcement**

Police were the most active city agency during this crackdown. The Chief of Police, reporting on his force's work on Yonge, countered the criticism that "it took the murder of a twelve year old boy to make the force take action" by arguing that his force had been employing a "rigorous enforcement policy" for months.<sup>255</sup> There was some truth in this. Even before establishing a joint 52 Division-Morality Bureau task force to deal with the entertainment strip a month earlier, the police had already begun intensifying raiding area businesses to lay prostitution and obscenity charges. Between 1972 and the end of 1977, even as the numbers of street prostitution arrests increased, the force laid a total of only 43 prostitution charges on workers and operators of Yonge Street sex businesses.<sup>256</sup> But their rate of enforcement increased dramatically in 1977. During the first six months of that year, 74 arrests were made, and 144 charges laid. In July alone, under the new unified task force, there were 62 arrests and 120 charges laid. In August, after the news of Jaques' death, 107 arrests and 182 charges, mostly for prostitution offences but also for obscenity and drugs offences. In this context, the August crackdown was just an intensification of the recent trend of the police taking a harder line on selling sex on Yonge. Some elements were new, however: following Jaques' death, it seems that police increased the attention they paid to minors congregating on the strip. Patrols in the area were increased, and hundreds of teenagers were questioned and warned by police. Police paid particular attention to boys seen near or in the company of "suspected homosexuals," a practice that underlines the extent to which the Jaques killing was interpreted as homosexual predation within the force.<sup>257</sup> Overall, in the wake of the murder the Toronto police were more active on Yonge Street than they had been at any time since the Second World War.

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<sup>255</sup> "Chief to Metropolitan Board of Commissioners of Police, Sep. 8, 1977," CTA, 47331-1.

<sup>256</sup> Statistics drawn from several police reports, with attempts to avoid discrepancies by cross-verification. "Inspector Stirling to Sparrow re: places of amusement, Apr. 27, 1977," "Acting Inspector Shaw to Rust D'Eye, Sep. 8, 1977," "Chief to Metropolitan Board of Commissioners of Police, Sep. 8, 1977," CTA, 47331-1.

<sup>257</sup> "Chief to Metropolitan Board of Commissioners of Police, Sep. 8, 1977," CTA, 47331-1.

Other city staff also contributed to the harassment of Yonge Street body rub parlours and other sex shops. Both Toronto and Metro mobilized city inspectors to look for various bylaw infractions and evidence of prostitution so that charges could be laid for violating Metro's licensing bylaws.<sup>258</sup> Fire Department officials carried out 18 inspections in the first week after Jaques' death, and by August 19<sup>th</sup> the Toronto Medical Officer of Health reported that his staff had inspected 21 massage parlours, and found 66 infractions, from lack of a first-aid kit to unsanitary floors. But the most effective effort was that of the 20 licensing inspectors detailed by Metro to go over Yonge with a fine-toothed comb. They both accompanied police on raids—visiting 33 businesses and helping lay a total of 54 charges in August—and visited massage parlours undercover to find evidence of prostitution and violation of the licensing bylaw. Unlike police, these inspectors were not immediately recognizable by their haircuts or familiar faces, and were not barred from removing their clothing in the course of inspections. Over the next few months staff would conduct over two hundred inspections of Sin Strip businesses.<sup>259</sup>

Rigorous enforcement had an immediate effect on Sin Strip. Both police and inspectors knew that the arrests or complaints they made might not result in significant penalties for the accused; but their repeated visits had a powerful deterrent effect. Within four days, Charlie's Angels massage parlour was closed, its vandalized door padlocked and its signs removed. By August 15<sup>th</sup> five others had shut their doors voluntarily. A lawyer who worked with sex industry businessmen explained that the city's crackdown, including "daily raids" of their premises, had made it impossible to stay open.<sup>260</sup> There were fewer customers, and after multiple arrests and the threat of fines, female employees were wary of showing up for work. Crucially, not just employees but operators and owners were also facing legal action. Approximately half of the prostitution and bylaw infraction charges were laid on the men who ran Yonge's sex industry, and not only the women who worked for them. Better organized than their employees and able to hire counsel, some responded. A

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<sup>258</sup> Inspection statistics draw from "Charges laid as a result of Police-MLC Co-operation, Aug 25, 1977," "Chief to Crombie, Aug 10, 1977," and "Medical officer of health to Crombie, Aug 19, 1977," CTA, 47331-1.

<sup>259</sup> "Yonge St. Implementation Committee interim report, Oct. 28, 1977," CTA, 47331-2.

<sup>260</sup> "Body rub shops give in to raids and close down," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 15, 1977.

lawyer acting for the Martin family condemned the brutal methods used by police during their raids. He complained that Morality officers—several were mentioned by name—were

entering these premises refusing, despite requests, to identify themselves or to produce search warrants. On several such occasions, these officers have broken down doors and terrorized the occupants of these establishments...such police activity is common place in a “police state” but should not be condoned in this locality.<sup>261</sup>

Joe Martin Sr.—who himself faced fifteen bawdy-house charges from police raids—continued to lead an erratic defence of Yonge’s body rubs and sex cinemas. At a press conference two weeks into the crackdown, he accused Toronto politicians and police of “a political conspiracy against the adult entertainment industry,” and of using the pretext of regulation to harass businesses like his out of existence. He threatened that if the persecution continued, he would publish a list of names of politicians who had used the sexual services offered at his shops.<sup>262</sup>

That list was not forthcoming, and Martin’s protests did little to halt the wave of closings on Yonge. To follow up on evidence acquired by police and inspectors, Metro hired a special prosecutor, Morris Manning, a prominent former member of the Ontario Attorney-General’s staff. Through cooperation with the province, a special courtroom at Old City Hall and a judge were reserved to hear the cases he prepared. Manning announced that he was ready to use any and all tools available to shut down Sin Strip sex shops. It would prove difficult to successfully prosecute their operators. The 93 cases he launched for violation of Metro’s licensing bylaw resulted in nothing more severe than a \$1,000 fine.<sup>263</sup> Attempts to use the largely untested 1943 provincial Disorderly Houses Act, which gave judges the power to shut convicted bawdy houses, did not in most cases survive the scrutiny of the courts. Requests for injunctions against the owners of sex shops were more successful; and the overall effect of Manning’s repeated court actions, bluster, and promises of future legal proceedings was undeniable. By the end of October, out of the forty sex-related businesses that were operating on Yonge in July, only four were still in operation. Thirteen were closed by injunctions, and two under the Disorderly Houses Act; but many others closed voluntarily

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<sup>261</sup> “B.S. to Chief of Police, Aug. 4, 1977,” CTA, P043017-8.

<sup>262</sup> “Will expose politicians, Strip operators says,” *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 19, 1977.

<sup>263</sup> “Manning interim report to Godfrey, Nov. 10, 1977,” CTA, 47331-2.

to avoid harassment and comply with work orders issued by various city departments. Most would not re-open.<sup>264</sup>

## Conclusion

It was striking, in comparison to 1973 or 1975, how few people were willing to publicly defend Sin Strip's right to exist in summer and fall 1977. A number of citizens wrote the mayor or newspapers in opposition to the calls for the reinstatement of the death penalty that peppered citizen protests in August. And some commentators, including the *Globe and Mail*, questioned whether Metro's obsession with using all legislation available—even probably “unconstitutional” statutes like the Disorderly Houses Act—was going too far in its quest for a clean-up.<sup>265</sup> But defenders of civil liberties were largely silent in the weeks and months following Emanuel Jaques' killing, and very few were willing to critique the crackdown on Strip sex shops itself.

That situation would change in late 1977 and early 1978, as city politicians—and particularly Metro Chairman Paul Godfrey—attempted to broaden the terms of their war against the sex industry. Buoyed by early success, Godfrey and other Metro Council members began to push for a larger anti-prostitution, anti-pornography campaign. Among their suggestions, endorsed by Ontario's Attorney-General and the chief of police, was the reinstatement of the vagrancy offence as a weapon against street soliciting.<sup>266</sup> One of the first to speak out against the idea, somewhat ironically, was Allan Sparrow, one of the authors of the *Places of Amusement* report published in June. Sparrow, like many downtown politicians, was wary of seeing the campaign to clean up Yonge degenerate into a kind of “moral crusade.” He denounced Godfrey's call for further police powers, foreshadowing the downtown-suburb split that would characterize Metro Toronto's response to prostitution over the next decade.<sup>267</sup>

Whatever claims by authorities to the contrary, it did take the murder of a 12-year-old boy to launch the clean-up of Yonge that some citizens had been demanding since 1972.

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<sup>264</sup> “Yonge St. Implementation Committee interim report, Oct. 28, 1977,” CTA, 47331-2.

<sup>265</sup> See for example “Padlock on Yonge Street,” *Globe and Mail*, Sep. 1, 1977.

<sup>266</sup> “Ontario may ask for federal help to stop vagrancy on Strip,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 11, 1977.

<sup>267</sup> “Sparrow press release, Sep. 2, 1977,” CTA, P043020-1.

The publicity given to the *Places of Amusement* report just six weeks earlier also had an important impact. The tools that Metro and Toronto had developed over five years to tackle the issue only proved adequate in conjunction with a massive display of force by police and city inspectors, and the fast-tracking of court proceedings by the province. Without those added factors, the proposed clean-up would not have been as successful or complete. And indeed previous attempts, in 1973 and 1975, had been met with police scepticism and a visible lack of cooperation from the province. The massive growth of public support for action on Sin Strip in August 1977 was a political opportunity for clean-up proponents like David Crombie and Paul Godfrey, and they took it. Advocates of a strong stance on the sex industry in other cities did likewise: in Daniel Francis' history of prostitution in Vancouver, he records how Emanuel Jaques' murder was used to exhort police and politicians to crack down on strip clubs, massage parlours, and on-street prostitution, lest a similar murder occur there.<sup>268</sup>

That fall, some in Toronto warned that the dramatic changes achieved on Yonge over the past few months might be temporary. Urban affairs columnist David Lewis Stein asked what was next. "Will the people come back?" he wondered, warning that it was harder to rebuild than to destroy. Politicians, he explained,

figure they look good making thundering speeches about the evils of commercial sex and the prostitution industry. And after they've finished orating, they go back to sleep.<sup>269</sup>

In a report to council, Toronto's Yonge Street Implementation Committee expressed similar concerns about the durability of current changes on the street.

Only through highly concentrated efforts by the City Departments, the Police Department and the Licensing Commission were most of these temporary closures achieved. In the Committee's view, existing legislation does not guarantee that there will not be a renaissance of these uses on Yonge Street or in other parts of the City.<sup>270</sup>

The committee went on to make a series of recommendations aimed at stopping the sex industry from returning, and at shaping the long-term growth of downtown Yonge

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<sup>268</sup> Francis, 96-97.

<sup>269</sup> "We'd better act now – Yonge is dying," *Toronto Star*, Nov. 6, 1977.

<sup>270</sup> "Yonge St. Implementation Committee interim report, Oct. 28, 1977," CTA, 47331-2.

Street in a positive direction. In a sense, they were right: some aspects of the sex industry did return, including a few peep shows, and the following years would see continued public concern over street prostitution in the area. But in the larger view, something had changed definitively on downtown Yonge Street. Sin Strip had been driven out of business, leaving behind vacant storefronts and re-launching public debate over the future of downtown Yonge. What would replace entertainment and vice as the area's defining characteristics?

Citizen campaigners, members of the press, and a number of political figures devoted tremendous effort between 1973 and 1977 to orchestrating a clean-up of downtown Yonge Street. And while they were successful in asserting their own view of what was and was not acceptable in that important public space, in the larger city they had little success in checking the growth of commercialized sex. The sex industry did not disappear from Toronto with the crackdown on Sin Strip. The closure of Yonge's sex businesses likely increased the number of women in the downtown core who were forced to turn to street prostitution for income. Over the next decade, the downtown area east of Yonge—soon referred to as “the Track”—became a focal point for debates over how to police prostitution. The main themes of the Yonge debates were taken up again: citizens, and especially local residents, called for stricter enforcement, the police complained their hands were tied by the weakened criminal law, and politicians on both sides of the discussion argued that larger principles were at stake. One new factor was the mobilization of sex workers themselves as a lobby group that would influence the discussion. Immediately in the wake of the crackdown on indoor sex work on Yonge, women from the industry began to organize in groups like BEAVER (Better End All Vicious Erotic Repression) to call for the legitimization and decriminalization of the sale of sex.<sup>271</sup>

On the metropolitan scale, the body rub business was only temporarily affected by the crackdown. Within a few years parlours were popping up again in North York, Etobicoke, and indeed nearly everywhere except Yonge. Local reaction was fierce, at times: for example, in 1979 a parlour that attempted to open near Yonge and Eglinton was destroyed by arson after a vigorous residents' campaign.<sup>272</sup> But, ironically, Metro's licensing regime,

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<sup>271</sup> Margaret Dwight-Spore, “Speaking up for our sisters: Decriminalization of prostitution,” *Fireweed* 1:1, 23-26. See also Brock, *Making Work, Making Trouble: Prostitution as a Social Problem*, 40-43.

<sup>272</sup> “Protests, fire end plan for body rubs,” *Toronto Star*, Apr. 8, 1979.

devised to eliminate body rubs, would provide a framework—and later a degree of legal protection—for their eventual expansion through the city. Four decades later, 25 body rubs are licensed to provide sexual services, and dozens more do so under the pretext of holistic therapy licenses. In retrospect, by the late 1970s Toronto had proven that it was willing to tolerate the sex industry—just not on its main street.

This suggests a larger point that can be made about the public debate on vice on Yonge Street. It was as much about a specific place and its meaning for Torontonians as it was about the sex industry. Talk about the latter tended to narrow in scope from 1975 onwards, and became more than anything about “how” and “when” will Toronto clean up Yonge, rather than “why” and “to what ends.” The larger questions about the issue that cropped up in the late 1960s and early 1970s—questions about censorship, the place of sex workers in society, and where the massive market for sexual services came from—tended to be displaced as politicians and media tried to mobilize support. Certainly they were not answered. But people’s engagement with the significance of Yonge continued, and from that perspective the Sin Strip debate was expansive and wide-ranging. Starting from the basic premise that the street was a public good, people employed a variety of identities and arguments in an attempt to shape its future. Toronto’s attempts to tackle Sin Strip tell us a great deal about the functioning of the sex industry, citizen activism, and local government; but they also give us insight into the different ideas about downtown, Yonge Street, and public space that set the boundaries for the debate.

### 3. "A New Heart for Old Toronto": Building the Toronto Eaton Centre

In spring 1945, as the war in Europe drew to a close, Torontonians turned to Eaton's department store to see what the future held for their city. Over the course of a month, 67,000 people visited the fourth floor of the company's elegant College Street location, where, well above the hustle and bustle of Yonge Street, the "City for Tomorrow" was on display.<sup>1</sup> In advertising that effortlessly blended the vocabularies of retail marketing and urban planning, visitors were promised a glimpse of

The Toronto of the future...planned as a whole instead of a random-growing mass...with proper housing adequately spaced...Green Belt Parks...rapid transit system, super-highways, and widened streets...a Toronto transformed from deterioration into modern comfort and convenience!<sup>2</sup>

Entering through a decorative gateway, visitors toured a series of models, photographs, and diagrams based on the ambitious plans of the Toronto Transit Commission and the city's new Planning Board. Highlights included a fifteen-foot bird's-eye view relief map of the proposed Yonge Street subway route, and carefully constructed models of several "redevelopment areas" showing older, unplanned structures replaced by orderly apartment blocks, parks, and other modern amenities.<sup>3</sup> This was conservative Toronto's version of "Futurama," the urban utopia conjured up by General Motors at the 1939 World's Fair in New York, in which civic progress was identified strongly with the harnessing of modern technology for public benefit. Much of what was presented was never tried, let alone constructed; still, under the lights of Eaton's retail palace, the future looked bright.

In the heady atmosphere of postwar reconstruction, Eaton's became invested in Toronto's civic affairs and the future of downtown to an extent difficult to imagine for any retailer today. The City for Tomorrow of 1945 was followed by exhibitions celebrating the new subway line's completion (1954) and the design competition for a new city hall and

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<sup>1</sup> "City for Tomorrow attendance, n.d. Apr. 1945," AO, Eaton's Fonds, B294488, "1943-1945 Store Attractions." I am indebted to Lizabeth Cohen, "Buying into Downtown Revival: The Centrality of Retail to Postwar Urban Renewal in American Cities," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611 (May 2007): 82-95 for inspiration.

<sup>2</sup> "Eaton's College Street: City for To-morrow," *Toronto Star*, Mar. 21, 1945.

<sup>3</sup> "Photographs, n.d. 1945," AO, Eaton's Fonds, B294488, "1943-1945 Store Attractions."



civic square (1958). Eaton's executives, like those of competitor Simpson's, served in key roles on the 1960s Redevelopment Advisory Council, a "brain trust" formed by the city to inform planning and encourage new downtown construction. But by far the most significant of the company's interventions was the Toronto Eaton Centre, an office and retail complex centred on its extensive landholdings around the intersection of Yonge and Queen Streets.<sup>4</sup> First discussed in the mid-1950s, the Centre's planning and construction would stretch across two decades, involving the company and the civic administration in a complicated and changing relationship. Similar stories were playing out in Vancouver, Montréal, and cities across the country as an unmatched urban land bank made Eaton's a major player in land development nation-wide. In the American context, historian Lizabeth Cohen has called for more research into the role of major retailers in downtown redevelopment and urban renewal: this is a case study that, I would argue, speaks to just how productive that line of investigation can be.<sup>5</sup>

This section places Yonge Street and the Eaton Centre at the heart of postwar debates over the rebuilding of downtown Toronto. If interventions like pedestrianization and clean-up campaigns aimed to save or improve downtown, proponents of redevelopment sought to replace it. Their vision for Toronto's commercial centre and the aging residential areas that surrounded it was one of creative destruction to eliminate obsolete structures and activities and usher in prosperity and modernity.<sup>6</sup> State of the art urban forms would both house and symbolize the city's economic success. In a way, this was nothing new: modern construction techniques and volatile property markets had been shaping the city's densely-built core for decades.<sup>7</sup> What was different, especially from the early 1960s onwards, was the speed and scale of change, and the unprecedented extent to which municipal government became invested in encouraging and regulating this urban

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<sup>4</sup> This is the first detailed narrative of the Centre's history. Existing accounts are short, and mostly focus either on architecture or the political debates of 1966 and 1972. See Eberhard Zeidler, *Building Cities Life: An Autobiography in Architecture, Volume 1* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2013), 167-87 and John Sewell, *The Shape of the City: Toronto Struggles with Modern Planning* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 139-45.

<sup>5</sup> Cohen, "Buying into Downtown Revival."

<sup>6</sup> See Max Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> On late nineteenth and early twentieth-century redevelopment see Gunter Gad, Deryck Holdsworth, "Corporate Capitalism and the Emergence of the High-Rise Office Building," *Urban Geography* 8:3 (May-June 1987): 212-231 and Christopher Armstrong, *Making Toronto Modern: Architecture and Design, 1895-1975* (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).

transformation. Downtown Toronto's postwar renovation is a story not just of capital transforming the city, but also of attempts to define and impose the public interest on that process.

Eaton's, as a powerful landowner, corporate citizen, and lynchpin of Yonge Street retail, played a crucial role in this drive to modernize. The Eaton Centre originated both in the company's considerable retail ambitions and in the efforts of the municipal administration to promote redevelopment as a path to increased tax revenue, social wellbeing, and the achievement of modernist planning goals. It was a profit-oriented endeavour that became a vehicle for civic goals and virtues, and for a time seemed to exemplify the idea of private-public partnership for urban progress. Much of what follows focuses on that vision. But as the idea of partnership lost its lustre, the project took on other meanings: a refinement of the urban shopping mall, the final blow for old Yonge Street, a battleground between citizen activists and the emerging "corporate city."<sup>8</sup> Throughout, the Centre's scale and unique location—straddling the city's retail and government districts, and including several major historic properties—made it one of the most contested commercial developments in Toronto, and perhaps Canadian, history. It played a significant role in carving out a political space for architectural preservation and anti-development activism in Toronto; political fortunes in at least two municipal elections were made, or broken, by public attitudes towards the project.

After nearly two decades of planning and negotiation, the first phase of the Toronto Eaton Centre opened in 1977. The result was a dramatic restructuring of downtown space that would continue throughout the following decades. Streets were closed, acre after acre of older buildings demolished; patterns of life and work were erased or reconfigured. On the busiest stretch of Yonge Street, four blocks of small shops, offices, and services were replaced by an enclosed shopping, office, and entertainment megastructure under centralized corporate control. The latest in construction technologies and design were used to encourage pedestrian traffic to abandon Yonge's scruffy, crowded sidewalks for the Centre's bright, climate-controlled central arcade, which like all shopping malls mimicked an idealized Main Street space. Just as its planning and construction were shaped by the

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<sup>8</sup> James Lorimer, *The Developers* (Toronto: Lorimer & Co., 1978), esp. 279-336.

interaction of municipal, citizen, and corporate objectives, the urban spaces of the Centre were at once popular, accessible, and intensely regulated, blurring the lines between public and private in the interest of increased market share.<sup>9</sup> The Eaton Centre, and projects like it, literally remade the downtown.

In both the United States and Britain, the postwar redevelopment of the central business district has a rich and growing historiography.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, relatively little has been written about the rebuilding of Canadian downtowns in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, or the relationships between private and public actors that brought it about.<sup>11</sup> Yet by any account, during those decades medium to large-sized Canadian cities were transformed, as office buildings, urban shopping malls and institutional complexes replaced the older streetscape. This changed how urban centres functioned, who worked, shopped, or lived in them, the role they played in the economy. It also altered their look, juxtaposing brick, wood, and stone with glass, concrete, and steel and fostering a “vertical expansion of downtown” that has been, along with the spread of suburbia, one of the defining features of twentieth-century North American urbanism.<sup>12</sup> No Canadian city was affected more by

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<sup>9</sup> Contemporary observers were rightly concerned by this development, and wrote about it. See for example “Death of a main drag,” *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 10, 1979. Lizabeth Cohen has written about the impacts of the “commercialization of public space” entailed in similar mall developments for political and civic life. Cohen, “From town center to shopping center: The reconfiguration of community marketplaces in postwar America,” *American Historical Review* 101:4 (1996): 1068.

<sup>10</sup> For recent overviews of work on the US, much of it connected to urban renewal policies, see Eric Avila and Mark H. Rose, “Race, Culture, Politics, and Urban Renewal,” *Journal of Urban History* 35:3 (March 2009): 335-47 and Samuel Zipp, “The Roots and Routes of Urban Renewal,” *Journal of Urban History* 39:3 (May 2013): 366-91, and Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). On postindustrial redevelopment see Tracy Neumann, *Remaking the Rust Belt: The Postindustrial Transformation of North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). In Britain see Simon Gunn, “The rise and fall of British urban modernism: planning Bradford, 1945-1970,” *Journal of British Studies* 48 (2010): 849-69; Peter Shapely, “Civic pride and redevelopment in the post-war British city,” *Urban History* 39:2 (May 2012): 310-28; and Otto Saumarez-Smith, “Central government and town-centre redevelopment in Britain, 1959-1966,” *Historical Journal* 58:1 (2015): 217-44.

<sup>11</sup> There are exceptions from an earlier period of interest in the development process, including Robert Collier, *Contemporary Cathedrals: Large-Scale Developments in Canadian Cities* (Montréal: Harvest House, 1975), James Lorimer, *The Developers*, Donald Gutstein, *Vancouver Ltd.* (Toronto: Lorimer & Co., 1975). More recently see Don Nerbas “William Zeckendorf, Place Ville-Marie, and the Making of Modern Montreal,” *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 43:2 (2015): 5-25, and Richard White, “Urban Renewal Revisited: Toronto, 1950 to 1970,” *Canadian Historical Review* 97:1 (spring 2016): 1-33, Rhodril Windsor Liscombe, “A study in Modern(ist) urbanism: planning Vancouver, 1945-1965,” *Urban History* 38:1 (2011): 124-49, and Robert Lewis and Paul Hess, “Refashioning urban space in postwar Toronto: the Wood-Wellesley redevelopment area, 1952-1957,” *Planning Perspectives* 31 (2016): 563-84.

<sup>12</sup> Gunter Gad, Deryck Holdsworth, “Corporate Capitalism and the Emergence of the High-Rise Office Building,” *Urban Geography* 8:3 (May-June 1987): 212-231.

this change than Toronto, which emerged from the period as the country's business and commercial centre, with its largest concentrations of corporate headquarters, white collar jobs, and financial transactions, all housed in a substantially rebuilt downtown.<sup>13</sup>

To what extent did this process parallel or differ from what was happening elsewhere in the world? Recent scholarship on postwar urbanism has highlighted its foundations in a transnational dialogue on renewal and rebuilding.<sup>14</sup> The Toronto Eaton Centre was just one of many dramatic interventions to remake the urban landscape in the postwar decades. Like other urban mega-projects of the era, the Eaton Centre was shaped by capital and urban expertise working across national borders, in accordance with international ideas and practices. Particularly influential was a shifting roster of American and European professionals with extensive experience in downtown redevelopment projects in the United States, including shopping mall pioneer Victor Gruen, modernist tower-builders Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, and real estate speculator William Zeckendorf. Much of what these consultants saw in Toronto fit with their previous experience: downtown interests concerned by suburban competition, a civic administration eager to promote growth, retail and office construction at the heart of a redevelopment strategy.<sup>15</sup> Yet if the ideas were mostly imported, their application was strongly contingent on circumstances specific to Toronto and Canada. Growth partnerships between business and politicians, celebrated as the driver behind American efforts at downtown rebuilding, proved to be elusive and fraught with complications.<sup>16</sup> In what follows, local factors—broad-based citizen engagement, Eaton's concern for its position as a corporate citizen, the complexity of Yonge's ownership patterns and built landscape—would play the decisive role.

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<sup>13</sup> Gunter Gad, "Downtown Montreal and Toronto: Distinct Places with Much in Common," *Canadian Journal of Regional Science* 22:1,2 (spring-summer 1999): 143-170.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> On the pivotal role of retail in the rebuilding of American downtowns, see Lizabeth Cohen, "Buying into Downtown Revival: The Centrality of Retail to Postwar Urban Renewal in American Cities," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611 (May 2007): 82-95. More generally see John Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in North America 1940-1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) and Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*.

<sup>16</sup> See Tracy Neumann, *Remaking the Rust Belt: The Postindustrial Transformation of North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 45-73.

## Eaton's: A local and national institution

The department store occupies an important place in the histories of business, consumption, gender, and labour in Canada.<sup>17</sup> From the 1890s through to the 1940s, companies like Eaton's, Simpson's, and Dupuis Frères became the country's largest retailers, dominating markets through chains of centrally located stores and impressive mail-order operations. As elsewhere in the world, they played an important role in developing new patterns of work and consumption that affected a wide cross-section of the country's growing urban population. In this chapter I consider the department store—and specifically Eaton's—in another light: as an actor wielding considerable power in urban development. While narratives of the company's rise and fall abound, comparatively little attention has been paid to this aspect of its operations.<sup>18</sup>

Established in 1869, Eaton's made the intersection of Yonge and Queen Streets into the heart of Toronto's retail district. As its business expanded, competing retailers like Simpson's and Woolworth's were drawn to the vicinity, forming Yonge's backbone as the city's pre-eminent commercial strip. By 1900 Eaton's, marketed as "Canada's Greatest Store," provided more than 300,000 square feet of retail space devoted to goods ranging from clothing to bicycles to paintings. The company employed thousands, and with yearly sales of \$5 million was one of the busiest department stores in North America.<sup>19</sup> Eaton himself was hailed as Canada's pre-eminent merchant prince, and when he died in 1907 the *Globe* speculated that "[t]here is hardly a name in Canada [with] the possible exception of the Prime Minister, so well known to the people at large as that of Mr. Timothy Eaton."<sup>20</sup> Taking advantage of urbanization and economies of scale, in the 1920s Eaton's rapidly expanded its operations, buying out smaller competitors and acquiring or building branch

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<sup>17</sup> The literature on department stores is vast. The best overview for Canada is Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> In addition to Belisle, *Retail Nation*, there are Joy Santik, *Timothy Eaton and the Rise of his Department Store* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), and Bruce Allen Kopytek, *Eaton's: The Trans-Canada Store* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 24-25.

<sup>20</sup> "Death Comes Suddenly to Mr. Timothy Eaton," *The Globe*, Feb. 1, 1907.

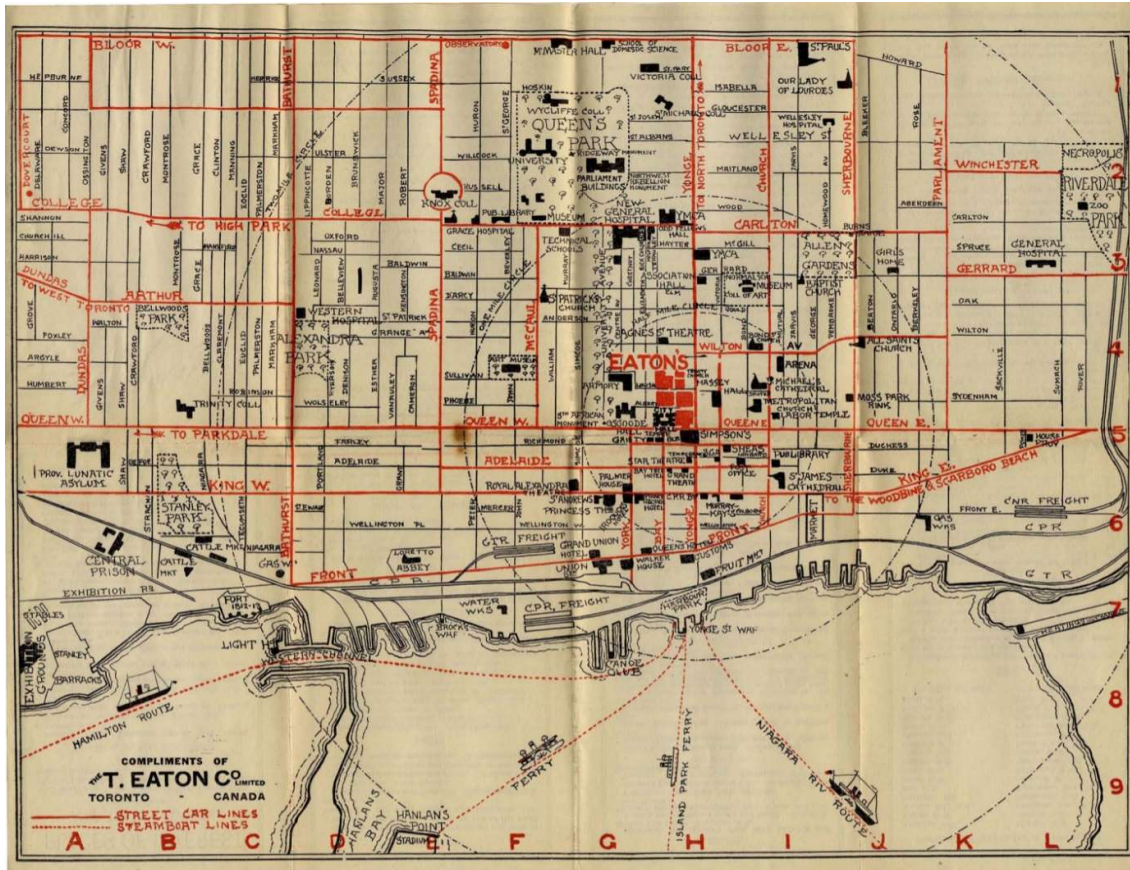


Image 3.1: This map from a 1910 Visitor's Guide and Map of the City produced by Eaton's shows the company's landholdings in red. Note both their central location and the map's portrayal of Eaton's—and Yonge—as the heart of the city. Streetcar lines in red indicated the means most people used to reach the store. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, 917.13541 V309.

stores across the country. Control of the company remained in the hands of the Eaton family; privately held T. Eaton Co. had no shareholders to consult or placate.

By this point, Timothy Eaton's self-promotion was mostly true: the largest retailer in Canada and one of the largest in the world, at the beginning of the Great Depression his company employed 25,000 workers and took in seven percent of the country's retail spending. Eaton's ubiquitous catalogues and advertising projected a vision of progress and material comfort that resonated with many Canadians. As historian of consumption Donica Belisle observes, the company worked hard to weave itself into both local communities and larger national narratives of progress.<sup>21</sup> In Toronto, the company was a commercial

<sup>21</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 52-4.

institution. The Eaton family was firmly entrenched in Toronto's elite, their influence extending beyond the company and its thousands of employees through philanthropy, political connections, and the Methodist faith. In Toronto Eaton's was perhaps best-known for its artful window displays and the yearly Santa Claus Parade, which wound its way through downtown Toronto to finish in front of the Eaton's store. Somewhere between a Christmas pageant and a circus, the parade was Canada's foremost commercial spectacle, watched by thousands of sidewalk spectators, and followed by many more across the country.<sup>22</sup>

### **A downtown landowner**

Commercial success accelerated accumulation of a land empire in downtown Toronto. The company began to acquire property in blocks adjoining its store to the north and north-west, constructing stables and a mail-order building.<sup>23</sup> By the mid-1920s Eaton's department store occupied all but a small portion of its block, and stood eight storeys, with an impressive windowed frontage along Yonge Street. Nine more buildings had been added to the company land bank, including garages, two imposing factories producing clothing and other goods, and an annex with additional floor space for the overcrowded store. Befitting the company's retail position, this was the largest collection of private holdings in the downtown commercial core. It would soon expand further, as the company set its sights on building a larger and more impressive flagship store one kilometre north at the intersection of College and Yonge Streets.

Plans for the Eaton's College Street store embodied the near-boundless optimism that had accompanied decades of expansion; as such, they are a direct antecedent of the Eaton Centre.<sup>24</sup> The site was a nine-acre parcel of land on the west side of Yonge south of College Street, quietly assembled by the company in the years prior to the First World War. Negotiations with the City began as early as 1916; however, plans for the actual project

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<sup>22</sup> Steve Penfold, "The Eaton's Santa Claus Parade and the Making of a Metropolitan Spectacle, 1905–1982," *Social History/Histoire sociale* 87 (May 2011): 1-28.

<sup>23</sup> The gradual growth of Eaton's property in the vicinity is outlined in sketches prepared for the company in 1966. "Expansion: Eaton Centre Ltd., Jan., 1966," CTA, 148530-16.

<sup>24</sup> On the project see Mark Osbaldeston, *Unbuilt Toronto: The History of the City That Might Have Been* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2008), 158-63 and Allen Kopytek, *Eaton's*, 229-50.

were not released until 1928.<sup>25</sup> They called for a seven-storey art deco inspired department store building that would dwarf any other in Canada—“the last word in modern building,” according to the *Globe*. The company negotiated a land exchange with the city that saw the closing of Buchanan Street to create what was perhaps Toronto’s first “superblock” development. In exchange for the transfer of land it offered concessions to the city’s program of street improvement, including land allowances to widen Yonge and other surrounding streets and straighten out several complicated intersections. A more ambitious plan, which included a thirty-two storey skyscraper perched on top of the store, was quietly shelved amid the financial shock of the depression.<sup>26</sup> A few chunks of property acquired during the company’s land assembly were sold off, including notably the site of Maple Leaf Gardens, Toronto’s “cathedral of hockey,” built in 1931. Others were held by the company for future sale, or in some cases used to finance corporate expansion through the issue of tens of millions of dollars in mortgage-backed bonds.<sup>27</sup> Property ownership would remain a central component of Eaton’s business, but its larger ambitions to reshape the downtown core were deferred.

### **Rebuilding the city**

The postwar period would create new opportunities. Scholars of mid-twentieth-century urbanism have identified a trans-Atlantic “ethic of city rebuilding” that had an important impact on cities across North America, Europe, and beyond.<sup>28</sup> During the 1940s and 1950s a broad consensus emerged that bold planning initiatives were needed to solve longstanding problems of the modern industrial city, including slum housing, congested streets, and lack of open space. To that list was soon added the subject of this section, the modernization of the central business district to counteract the increasing suburban dispersal of people, commerce, and work. Advocates of urban transformation were aided by new construction

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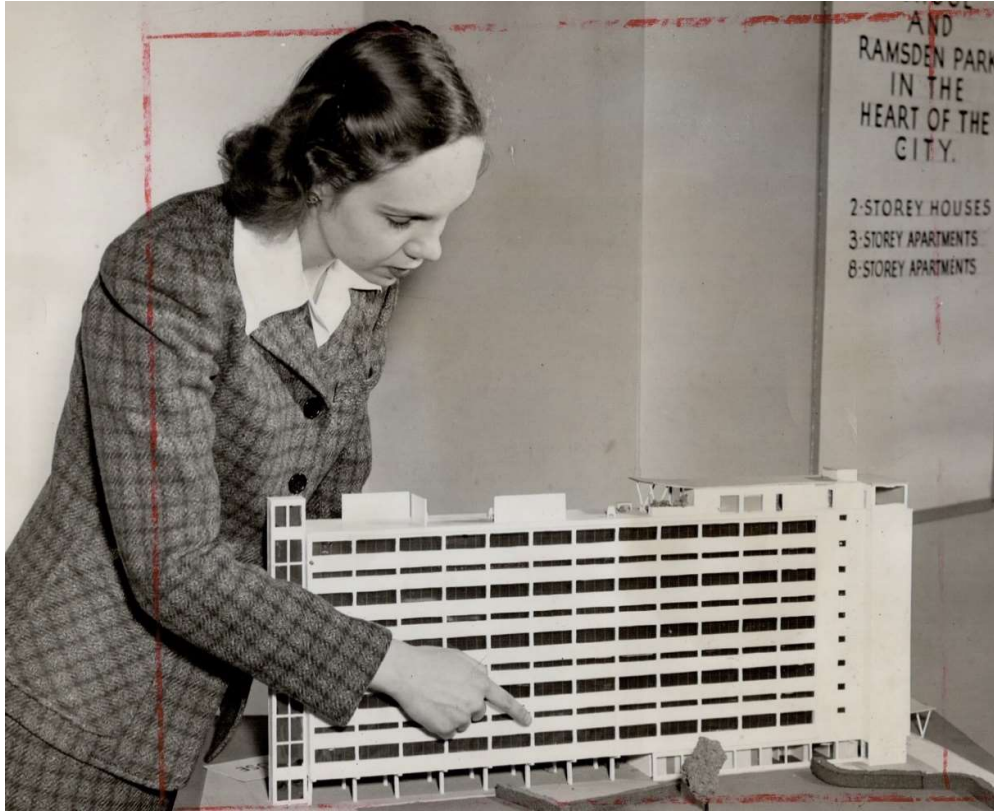
<sup>25</sup> “Big Departmental to be All-Canadian,” *Globe*, Nov. 16, 1916.

<sup>26</sup> “Great Eaton Store Will Be Last Word in Modern Building,” *Globe*, July 14, 1928, “Buchanan Street Will Be Closed,” *Evening Telegram*, July 16, 1928, “Eaton’s Huge Store to Tower 670 Feet Above Street Level,” *Globe*, Nov. 14, 1928.

<sup>27</sup> “T. Eaton debentures are offered today,” *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 11, 1929, “The T. Eaton Realty Co. \$25 million bond issue will be offered soon,” *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 13, 1948.

<sup>28</sup> The phrase belongs to Samuel Zipp, “The Roots and Routes of Urban Renewal,” *Journal of Urban History* 39:3 (2012), 367. See also Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011).





*Image 3.2: Visitor Betty Schondelmeyer examines a model apartment building at the City for Tomorrow exhibit at Eaton's College Street, March 1945. Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0111439f.*

technologies, the expertise of the planning profession, and an interventionist postwar state; also by the very real desire of many citizens to live in better, cleaner, more comfortable circumstances than they had during fifteen years of depression and war.<sup>29</sup> For most Canadians that dream would be deferred until the 1950s, when economic growth allowed them to begin to take part in the postwar prosperity already enjoyed in the United States.<sup>30</sup>

In Toronto as elsewhere, urban utopias abounded in these years, whether the City Planning Board's 1943 *Master Plan* or the reports of the citizen-led Toronto Reconstruction

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<sup>29</sup> In Canada, rebuilding cities was inextricable from the formation of the welfare state. See Peter McInnis, "Planning Prosperity: Canadians Debate Postwar Reconstruction", in Greg Donaghy, ed., *Uncertain Horizons: Canadians and Their World in 1945* (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1997), 231-59 and Douglas O'ram, *The Government Generation: Canadian intellectuals and the state, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), ch. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

Council and its successors.<sup>31</sup> What was lacking was a clear path to realizing them. The City had historically been both fiscally conservative and skeptical—perhaps even hostile—to grand ideas and interference in the disposition of private property through the market. In the early 1900s a series of City Beautiful-inspired plans, including new boulevards, monuments, and public spaces, had been quietly “lost in management.”<sup>32</sup> The widening of Yonge Street, discussed by the City of Toronto since the 1920s, was continually blocked by the scale of the property expropriations needed to put it into effect.<sup>33</sup> This trend seemed to continue with the unceremonious shelving of many of the proposals presented in the City for To-morrow exhibition, with the notable exception of underground rapid transit, paid for by the Toronto Transit Commission from its wartime surplus. Yet by the early 1950s attitudes were clearly changing. Suburban expansion was proceeding at such a pace that a new and more dynamic layer of government, the municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, was required to provide infrastructure and regulate the subdivision of new neighbourhoods.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, a consensus was beginning to develop in Toronto that modernization of the older city was of prime importance to the city’s future.

The terms “redevelopment” and “renewal,” used almost interchangeably, entered into the city’s lexicon around this time, imported from the United States.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the best-known urban legislation in postwar North America was Title I of the *United States Housing Act*, which allowed for significant federal funding for “slum clearance and urban redevelopment,” after 1954 referred to as “urban renewal.”<sup>36</sup> By the mid-1950s this program had financed dozens of major rebuilding projects across the United States, with federal funds providing the glue for partnerships between local government and business

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<sup>31</sup> On the former see Richard White, *Planning Toronto* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2016), 27-58, on the latter two groups Kevin Brushett, “‘People and Government Travelling Together’: Community Organization, Urban Planning and the Politics of Post-War Reconstruction in Toronto, 1943–1953,” *Urban History Review/Revue d’histoire urbaine* 27:3 (1999), 44-58.

<sup>32</sup> James Lemon, “Plans for Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Toronto: Lost in Management,” *Urban History Review/Revue d’histoire urbaine* 18:1 (1989), 11-31.

<sup>33</sup> See the earlier discussion of pedestrian malls for more on this.

<sup>34</sup> Albert Rose, *Governing Metropolitan Toronto: A Social and Political Analysis, 1953-1971* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

<sup>35</sup> If newspapers are any barometer, they entered common parlance in Toronto not long after their use in the American *Housing Act* in 1949 (redevelopment) and 1954 (renewal). Richard White, “Urban Renewal Revisited: Toronto, 1950 to 1970,” 6 makes a similar observation.

<sup>36</sup> John Teaford examines Title I in “Urban Renewal and its Aftermath,” *Housing Policy Debate* 11:2 (2000): 443-65.

interests. Many of the areas affected were home to functioning communities, inhabited predominately by lower-income, often black, Americans. Their clearance to build expressways, office towers, and new housing meant not just the renewal of the aging city, but a reorganization of race and poverty in urban space, both reinforcing old disparities and helping forge new solidarities. The bulldozer—and its citizen opponents—became one of the most evocative and enduring symbols of this era in urban policy.<sup>37</sup>

Canadians watched with keen interest. In Toronto, social reformers and city authorities had long been concerned with the cramped, unhealthy living conditions they had identified in inner-city neighbourhoods like St. John's Ward and Cabbagetown, widely referred to as slums.<sup>38</sup> In 1934, at the height of the Depression, a provincial report identified poor housing conditions as the most pressing social problem facing Toronto, envisioning a bold process of environmental renewal:

as we evacuate those factories and hovels, we must raze them and bury the distressing memory of them in fine central parks and recreation centres...devoted to the physical and mental improvement of our people.<sup>39</sup>

After the war, rehousing the poor remained a pressing concern—indeed *the* pressing concern for many social critics—and efforts to do so became integral to discussions of postwar social reconstruction.<sup>40</sup> Among Canadian cities, Toronto would lead the way in slum clearance and the construction of public housing with Regent Park (1947-57), the nation's first large-scale public housing development and at 1289 apartment units its largest.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> One early and influential critique of renewal was Martin Anderson, *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal, 1949-1962* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1964). See also Eric Avila and Mark H. Rose, "Race, Culture, Politics, and Urban Renewal," *Journal of Urban History* 35:3 (March 2009): 335-47.

<sup>38</sup> See Sean Purdy, "Industrial Efficiency, Social Order and Moral Purity: Housing Reform Thought in English Canada, 1900-1950," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 25:1 (1997), 179-211, and "Building Homes, Building Citizens: Housing Reform and Nation Formation in Canada, 1900-20," *Canadian Historical Review* 79 (Sep. 1998): 492-523

<sup>39</sup> Herbert A. Bruce, Chairman, *Report of the Lieutenant-Governor's Committee on Housing Conditions in Toronto, 1934* (Toronto, 1934), foreword.

<sup>40</sup> Kevin Brushett, "'People and Government Travelling Together': Community Organization, Urban Planning and the Politics of Post-War Reconstruction in Toronto, 1943-1953," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 27:3 (1999), 44-58.

<sup>41</sup> Albert Rose, *Regent Park: A Study in Slum Clearance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), Kevin T. Brushett, "Blots on the Face of the City: The Politics of Slum Housing and Urban Renewal in Toronto, 1940 - 1970", PhD thesis (Queen's University, 2001).

Economic concerns were also fundamental. To the voices of advocates of public health and access to housing were added those of the considerable number of local politicians whose felt it was their duty to maintain a healthy municipal tax base. Canada's municipal system leaves cities almost entirely dependent on property taxes for their budget. In the 1950s Toronto received approximately 80% of its revenue through commercial and residential taxes; Metro Toronto received substantial provincial grants for infrastructure and education, but taxes still accounted for more than half of its operating budget throughout the period.<sup>42</sup> As a result, the drive to increase the pool of taxable property—more politically palatable than raising the rates—in order to fund new projects or simply service debt, was never far from the minds of civic officials. This was nothing new, and had in fact been one of the bedrocks of municipal government in a city whose political culture combined periodic interventionism with populist fiscal conservatism.<sup>43</sup> However, as the rapid redevelopment of the Toronto suburbs drew investment capital away from the central city, this priority was put into sharp relief.

From the 1940s forward, the pursuit of an expanded assessment became more scientific than ever. After fifteen years of near-inertia, the City's expenditures were growing, roughly doubling between 1945 and 1953 and again between 1953 and 1961. This new interventionism, which included expenditures on renewal projects, was predicated on a dynamic tax base. Toronto's first *Official Plan* (1949) mapped a broad swathe of the older city where most buildings were old and their condition considered poor. The key idea operating here was one of "best and most economic use of land" a judgement made based on a series of calculations that included contrasting services provided by the City against taxes paid, and the assessed value of buildings against the value of the land they sat on.<sup>44</sup> Here what was considered was not the current, but the *potential* tax value of the property. From that perspective, uneconomic uses were a kind of tax avoidance, and a breach of the social contract of municipal government. In the mid-1950s, the City's newly constituted

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<sup>42</sup> City of Toronto, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Finance* (Toronto: various years) and Metro Toronto, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Finance* (Toronto: various years).

<sup>43</sup> Harold Kaplan, *Reform, Planning, and City Politics: Montreal, Winnipeg, Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 604-46.

<sup>44</sup> CTPB, *Third Report and Official Plan* (Toronto, 1949), 23. I am grateful to Richard White for pointing out these budgetary concerns. See "Urban Renewal Revisited: Toronto, 1950 to 1970," *Canadian Historical Review* 97:1 (Spring 2016), 10-11.

Planning Department conducted a comprehensive condition survey of the older city, as part of the preparations for a new urban renewal study, the first in Toronto to use that term. They established that eight percent of the city's residential stock required replacement, and a further 40% some other improvement. On retail strips and in the downtown core, their careful surveys of block after block of commercial buildings discovered a great many in "poor" or "fair" condition.<sup>45</sup> Most municipal politicians would agree that it was the City's duty to encourage the redevelopment of these lands—the question was how to do so.

For a time, the establishment of a Canadian urban renewal program, funded through the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) from 1948, offered the promise of financial backing for the replacement or improvement of these huge tracts of uneconomic buildings. However, as a recent reassessment of the period argues, federally funded urban renewal would have only a small impact on the urban landscape in Toronto.<sup>46</sup> A modest \$225 million in urban renewal funding was disbursed through the CMHC between 1948 and 1973, of which Toronto received a share of \$18 million.<sup>47</sup> Even supplemented by funding from other levels of government—most of the cost of Regent Park was assumed by the City—that did not approach the value of private building permits issued in the city in any single year during the period. New housing, including an increasing number of apartment blocks, was going up, but it was mostly being built by private initiative.<sup>48</sup>

### **Private-public redevelopment**

Advocates of renewal knew this, and some found the limits placed of federal funding frustrating. In 1956, the *Toronto Star* lauded the urban transformations taking place in the United States, contrasting them with Toronto's own rebuilding efforts:

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<sup>45</sup> Advisory Committee on Urban Renewal, *Urban Renewal: A Study of the City of Toronto, 1956* (Toronto: Community Planning Association of Canada, 1956), 4 and *passim*.

<sup>46</sup> Richard White, "Urban Renewal Revisited: Toronto, 1950 to 1970," *Canadian Historical Review* 97:1 (Spring 2016), 4.

<sup>47</sup> Jeffrey Patterson, "Housing and Community Development," in John Miron, ed., *House, Home, Community: Progress in Housing Canadians* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 327.

<sup>48</sup> Funding statistics from Jeffrey Patterson, "Housing and Community Development," in John Miron, ed., *House, Home, Community: Progress in Housing Canadians* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 327. The estimated value of buildings erected in the City of Toronto in 1950 is \$55 million; in 1960 \$107 million. James Lemon, *Toronto since 1918: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: Lorimer & Co., 1985), Appendices: Table XII.

While Toronto frets and wonders where the money is to come from, American cities have for seven years been doing something about “downtown blight”—that seemingly inevitable disease of modern city life which produces slums, gives motorists ulcers, and sends shopkeepers out into the suburbs. From the “high-riser” apartment projects of New York to the multi-lane expressways of Los Angeles, some 297 projects are currently underway in 195 centres to redevelop blighted areas.<sup>49</sup>

But while they hoped for more expansive federal interventions, most in Toronto accepted the general premise that rebuilding could never be a case of the state going it alone—and perhaps that was best. Instead, they saw the future in forming public-private relationships between public authorities and land developers. “Private enterprise,” stated the City’s 1956 renewal report, would be “the City’s partner in building new neighbourhoods for good living and creating commercial and industrial areas of a high standard.”<sup>50</sup> By necessity, that model would apply most of all to the central business district, where there was little chance of federal support for commercial renewal projects.<sup>51</sup> The idea that private capital and the public interest could be aligned to create a modern downtown would become a powerful motivating force in 1950s and 1960s Toronto.

The City’s first efforts at establishing private-public partnerships failed. A 1952 bylaw championed by pro-development councillors designated two pockets of downtown—the larger included three blocks near the intersection of Yonge and College—as “redevelopment areas.”<sup>52</sup> This allowed the City to employ powers under provincial planning law to expropriate the commercial and residential properties within these areas for resale to private developers, a practice already common in Title I renewal in the United States. Interestingly, an Eaton’s subsidiary, International Realty, seems to have been involved in the selection of the larger of the two pockets—Wood-Wellesley—where it had extensive landholdings it wished to see developed. Previously, expropriation powers had been employed sparingly, chiefly for public projects like infrastructure or public housing; this was the first case in postwar Toronto, and likely Canada, in which they were proposed to directly

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<sup>49</sup> “How U.S. government leads in civic redevelopment,” *Toronto Star*, Jan. 7, 1956.

<sup>50</sup> Advisory Committee on Urban Renewal, *Urban Renewal*, 20.

<sup>51</sup> There were exceptions, including notably Hamilton. Margaret Rockwell, “The Facelift and the Wrecking Ball: Urban Renewal and Hamilton’s King Street West, 1957–1971,” *Urban History Review/Revue d’histoire urbaine* 37:2 (2009): 53-61.

<sup>52</sup> CTPB, *Wood-Wellesley Development Area First Report* (Toronto: 1952). This is also discussed in MTPB, *Urban Renewal Study*, 158-63.

facilitate a private venture.<sup>53</sup> What is most fascinating about the 1952 bylaw and later experiments with redevelopment areas is that they firmly established redevelopment as a public goal that could be achieved by facilitating private profit.

But while Eaton's proxies and other pro-redevelopment actors succeeded in lobbying for the redevelopment area designation, the business of actually fostering development there proved much more complicated. First, local residents considered it a violation of their property rights, and were quick to point out that theirs was not a "blighted" area requiring renovation. Their cause as property owners was taken up by a growing number of politicians skeptical of City interference in development, including Councillor William Dennison, who lived locally. Second, while there had been initial interest in the idea, private land developers proved wary of entering into an agreement on the terms offered by the City. In 1957 the designation would be rescinded, leaving behind a great deal of paperwork, but only a few smaller-scale developments that likely would have happened with or without the City's controversial intervention. This early dispute, along with the expropriation of housing for Regent Park, set a pattern for Toronto politics over the next two decades. Pro-growth politicians generally held the mayoralty and the balance of power; however, they were vigorously opposed by councillors who denounced their collusion with business and lack of respect for the common taxpayer. This conservative localist tendency—one scholar calls it "neo-populist"—could not be ignored, particularly at election time, when all councillors were vulnerable to the charge of placing city-level concerns ahead of those of their constituents.<sup>54</sup>

### **Downtown's new centre**

However, the short-term failure of the City's first forays into partnership did not dim its hopes of modernization. In another crucial pocket of downtown, the civic administration hoped to lead by example. Although seldom described in those terms, Toronto's New City Hall and Civic Square (1940s-1965) project had all the hallmarks of a major urban renewal

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<sup>53</sup> This is discussed briefly in White, "Urban Renewal Revisited: Toronto, 1950 to 1970," and in more detail in Robert Lewis and Paul Hess, "Refashioning urban space in postwar Toronto: the Wood-Wellesley redevelopment area, 1952–1957."

<sup>54</sup> Harold Kaplan, *Reform, Planning, and City Politics: Montreal, Winnipeg, Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 611.

project in the American style: large-scale expropriation of private property; a radical modernist simplification of form; huge cost overruns.<sup>55</sup> It envisioned fulfilling longstanding plans to replace the city's monumental but cramped 1899 City Hall at Queen and Bay Streets with newer, larger premises just to the west, as well as a significant new public square. The site chosen for the project encompassed around five blocks—thirteen acres—of the densely-built St. John's Ward, for decades one of Toronto's main immigrant receiving areas and the home to its small but successful Chinatown.<sup>56</sup> By 1949 most of the land for the project had been assembled using municipal powers of expropriation, at a cost of several million dollars to the City. Plans for a civic square had been approved in the same 1947 plebiscite as that other great Toronto rebuilding project, the first phase of Regent Park; however, it would take nearly a decade before the city hall portion of the plan was securely funded with a budget of \$18 million. In the end, the civic complex and related projects would cost the City well over \$60 million, making it one of the largest public redevelopment projects undertaken in postwar Canada.<sup>57</sup>

Newly elected Mayor Nathan Phillips played an important role in making the project a reality. Phillips, first elected Mayor of Toronto in 1954 after 28 years in council, was a lawyer and long-time Progressive Conservative who incarnated the dynamism and faith in progress of the dominant faction of postwar Toronto politicians. In 1953 he campaigned on a vigorously pro-development platform, promising not just a rapid start on Civic Square, but also to expand urban renewal, public transit, and low-cost housing.<sup>58</sup> That he was Jewish and commanded substantial support in the city's slowly diversifying northern and western districts played no small role in his becoming the city's first non-Protestant Mayor, or, as he liked to style himself, "Mayor of all the people."<sup>59</sup> Once in office, Phillips would make the modernization and transformation of the downtown one of his main priorities, beginning

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<sup>55</sup> An excellent telling of the project's history is Christopher Armstrong, *Civic Symbol: Creating Toronto's New City Hall, 1952-1966* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015). As the title suggests, Armstrong considers it mostly in terms of architectural innovation and civic pride.

<sup>56</sup> On the Ward see John Lorinc, Michael McClelland, Ellen Scheinberg, Tatum Taylor, eds. *The Ward: The Life and Loss of Toronto's First Immigrant Neighbourhood* (Toronto: Coach House, 2015).

<sup>57</sup> "Notification of plebiscite," *Toronto Star*, Dec. 19, 1946. "Is the Eaton project 10 years too late?" *Toronto Star*, Jun. 22, 1966

<sup>58</sup> "Phillips for Mayor," *Telegram*, Dec. 4, 1954.

<sup>59</sup> His selective but very readable autobiography is Nathan Phillips, *Mayor of All the People* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967).



with the years of negotiation and consensus-building required to begin construction on New City Hall.

The abandonment of an old, cramped “Victorian pile”—as one editorialist dubbed it—in favour of a modern new civic complex was always intended to do more than solve problems of space and logistics.<sup>60</sup> To civic boosters like Phillips, rapidly-growing Toronto had a bright future ahead of it, and it was only fitting that it should possess public buildings that incarnated that dynamism. As a symbol of progress, the New City Hall was without equal in the postwar city. Numerous commentators, both then and since, have seen the project as Toronto’s coming of age, or a marker of its entry into the ranks of the world’s great cities.<sup>61</sup> More pragmatically, this massive public investment in downtown was also intended as an example. In the wake of the project’s funding in 1956, and the selection of Finnish architect Viljo Revell’s distinctive two-towered plan in the 1958 design competition, hopes were high that private investors would follow the city’s lead with large-scale, ambitious redevelopment of the surrounding area. Just as the replacement of deteriorating inner-city housing with apartment towers and open spaces symbolized residential urban renewal, the New City Hall project would symbolize the redevelopment of the commercial core. From its conception, New City Hall was intended, as Mayor Phillips put it, to “spark redevelopment in a manner and to an extent which is today difficult to conceive.”<sup>62</sup> Even before it began construction in the early 1960s, great hopes were pinned on the project as the catalyst for a downtown transformation.

All future planning for the downtown core would have to take the civic centre development into account. That imperative was quickly felt in the city’s rebuilding efforts, which reached out south and west of the New City Hall site. Despite a growing sense that Wood-Wellesley had been a failure, in 1958 the commercial block immediately south of the future Civic Square was designated a redevelopment area.<sup>63</sup> The concern was to replace “a

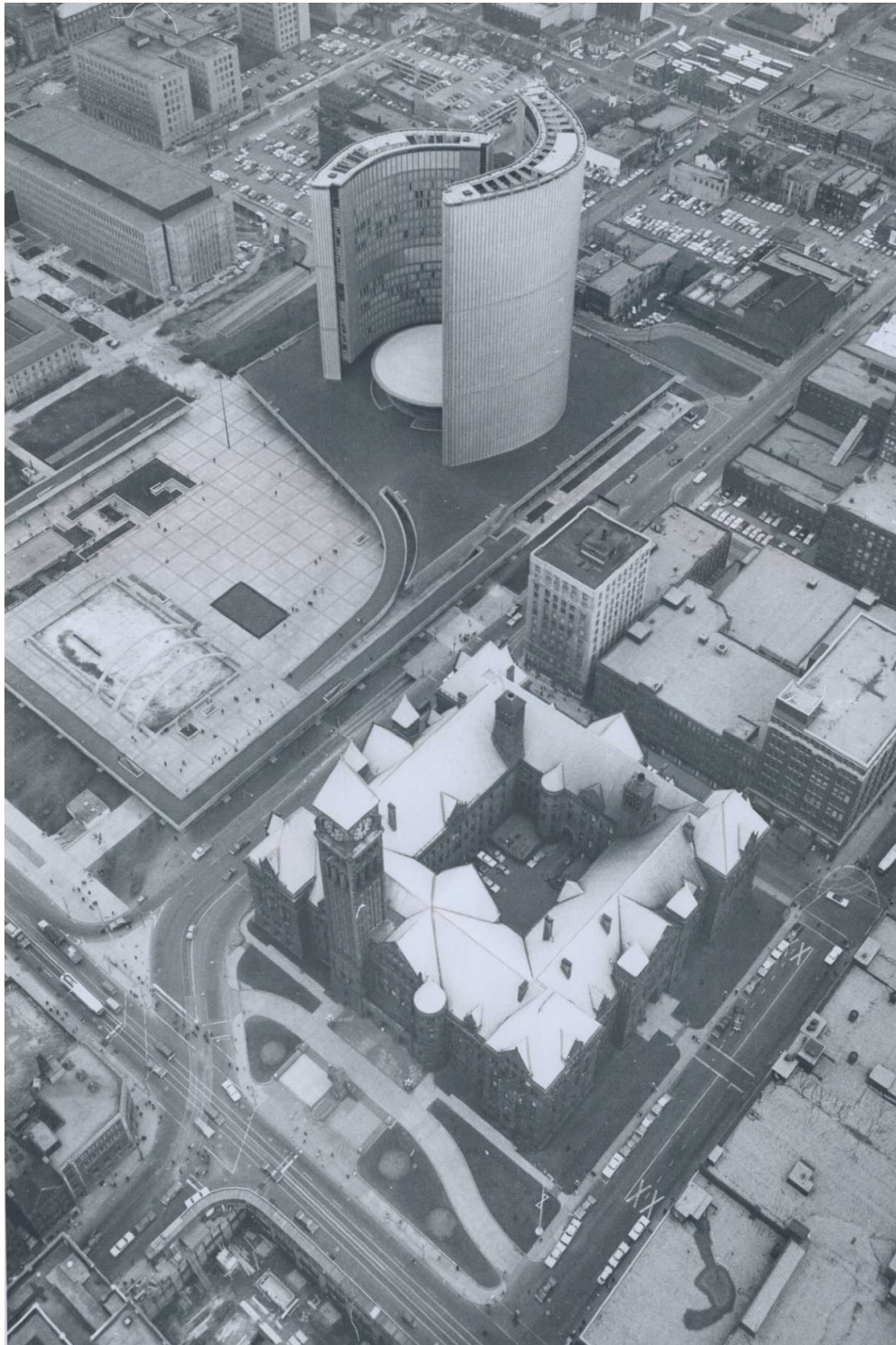
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<sup>60</sup> “New City Hall Vitrally Needed and Long Overdue,” *Toronto Star*, Dec. 3, 1955.

<sup>61</sup> For example, Robert Fulford, *Accidental City: The Transformation of Toronto* (Toronto: Macfarlane Walter & Ross, 1995).

<sup>62</sup> Nathan Phillips, *Mayor of All the People* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), 149.

<sup>63</sup> See MTPB, *Urban Renewal Study: The Role of Private Enterprise in Urban Renewal* (Toronto: MTPB, 1966) for a thoughtful discussion of these and other efforts.



*Image 3.3: Toronto's New and Old City Halls, 1966. The Eaton's Queen Street store is in the bottom right corner. Boris Spremo/Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0111382f.*

motley assortment of stores, restaurants, hotels and theatres, many housed in old buildings,” with something more fitting as a counterpoint to the new civic buildings, an intervention suggested to the city by the jury adjudicating the architectural competition for the New City Hall.<sup>64</sup> While the owners and operators of those businesses vigorously opposed expropriation, their fate seemed sealed given the tremendous political momentum behind the civic redevelopment project.<sup>65</sup> In fact it would take more than a decade to redevelop the block into a mixed hotel-commercial complex, at great expense to the City.

### **Project Viking**

It was in the midst of the Civic Square project that the City began to investigate a redevelopment partnership with Eaton’s. Here planning staff, rather than pro-development politicians, took the lead. By 1956 they were considering the west side of Yonge from College to Queen Street as another possible redevelopment area, both because of its aging, mostly low-rise streetscape and its excellent rapid transit links, including east-west streetcar lines and three stations on the new Yonge subway line. Furthermore, unlike other stretches of the street, including the east side, one landowner controlled more than half of the private property within the area’s bounds: Eaton’s. With their characteristic attention to detail, planners prepared land use, assessment value, and building condition plans for the area, and began to sketch out renewal plans.<sup>66</sup>

Particular attention was paid to the area bounded by Dundas, Queen, Bay and Yonge Streets. Measuring 23 acres in area, it was divided into six irregular city blocks. The red brick 1899 City Hall occupied the entire south-west square, the main Eaton’s store most of the south-east. In the centre, the largest block tightly ringed Trinity Square and historic Holy Trinity Church (1847). All told, the area was divided into approximately 100 individual lots of land, occupied by buildings varying in size from 12-storey Eaton’s factories to narrow, 20 by 100-foot storefronts just a few storeys tall.<sup>67</sup> The latter were clustered mainly along Yonge and stretches of Bay Street, and serviced by unmaintained mid-block lanes. The small to

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<sup>64</sup> CTPB, *Plan for Downtown Toronto*, 32, and CTPB, *South Side of the Civic Square* (Toronto, 1958).

<sup>65</sup> “Merchants howl ‘Foul!’ over city’s Queen St. seizure,” *Toronto Star*, Mar. 7, 1959.

<sup>66</sup> The relevant planning file is CTA, 331388-2.

<sup>67</sup> Property data drawn from Nirenstein’s National Realty Map Co., *Business Section, City of Toronto* (Springfield, MA.: Nirenstein’s, 1956). Available online through the University of Toronto Map & Data Library at [bit.ly/1D6Am3p](http://bit.ly/1D6Am3p).

mid-sized businesses that occupied them included shoe shops, barbers, jewellery stores, and a tea room—all, planners argued, uses ““generally inappropriate for the very heart of the city.”<sup>68</sup>

This densely-built and varied landscape was in many ways typical of the unplanned, lot-by-lot construction that characterized prewar urban development in Toronto. But to focus solely on goings-on at ground level is to miss the distinctive way of seeing behind the whole business of renewal. In their redevelopment studies, planners mapped and measured to make cityscapes and patterns of life within them legible.<sup>69</sup> In the case of the six blocks in the Bay-Yonge-Dundas-Queen rectangle, ownership—invisible from street level—was the key criteria. Of the 23 acres under study, ten were occupied by Eaton’s various services, storage facilities, and administrative buildings. The city controlled a further eight acres—Old City Hall and internal streets—meaning that before any efforts at assembly, three-quarters of this vast area were already under the control of parties (presumably) amenable to participating in redevelopment. From that perspective, this was a landscape ripe for intervention.

Director of Planning Matthew Lawson was enthusiastic about the possibilities presented for a major redevelopment of downtown retail. In a letter to the head of Eaton’s property department, W.D. Byam, he explained the how the scheme could fit into the larger planning objectives for the core, and the advantages provided by the company’s vast real estate portfolio.

[W]e in this office believe that the erection of a downtown shopping core would be of enormous advantage to Toronto. The present centre was built on a layout which does not lend itself to present-day needs, whereas a new one could be both efficient and attractive...Where Toronto is almost unique is that without undergoing extensive wartime destruction or major upheaval, it is in a position to achieve this objective.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> “Building Condition—University, College, Yonge, Queen, 1956,” “CTPB Memorandum – Project Viking, Jun. 9, 1958,” CTA, 331388-2.

<sup>69</sup> For the concept of “legibility” I draw on James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>70</sup> “Lawson to Byam, Sep. 11, 1956,” CTA, 331388-2.

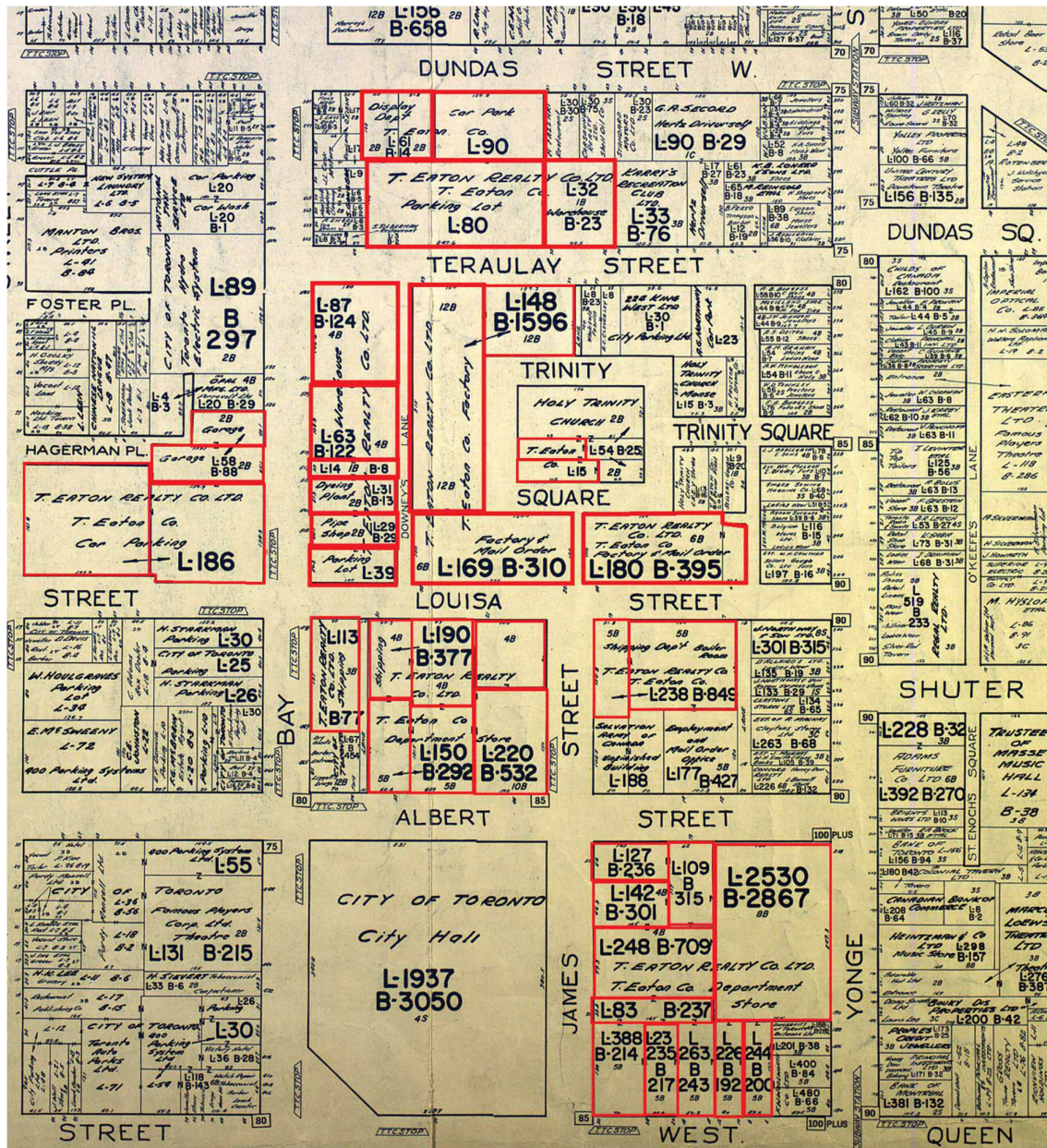


Image 3.4: Yonge Street and the Eaton's lands. Outlined lots belonged to the company by the 1950s. Old City Hall is at the bottom left, the Eaton store at the bottom right, Holy Trinity Church in its square in the centre. Note the dense, narrow lots that make up most of the area and the wide variety of businesses, especially on Yonge. Adapted from Nirenstein's National Realty Map Co., Business Section of Toronto, 1956. University of Toronto Map & Data Library.

One of the chief allures of the project was its sheer scale: thinking big was a crucial component of mid-century modernist planning and architecture.<sup>71</sup> Another was location. Lawson also made it clear that the importance of the Eaton's lands was increased by the maturing plans for new civic buildings just to the west. In a later memorandum he would elaborate on the idea of a downtown divided into quadrants, intersecting at the "new fulcrum of downtown activities" created by the civic square.<sup>72</sup> In that geography, the Eaton's lands are the core of the north-east, or retail quadrant. When redeveloped, he emphasized, they should be "complementary in design" to the Civic Square to the west, forming part of a perimeter of prestige buildings around the new construction.

In preparation for meetings with Eaton's representatives, planning staff sketched out several redevelopment plans.<sup>73</sup> In their earliest versions they are rough and unfinished, but suggest that planners envisioned the redevelopment of the Eaton's lands in parallel with other projects, including a renewal scheme just to the north called Cathay Square. That plan would have seen the city's old Chinatown—already partially demolished to make way for the civic square—reconstituted in a new, comprehensively-planned superblock on the west side of Yonge between Gerrard and Dundas Streets.<sup>74</sup> By mid-1958, however, a more detailed plan had been produced. It now had a name, "Project Viking," in reference to Eaton's iconic house brand of clothing and appliances.<sup>75</sup> It was a radical reimagining of the area along modernist lines, a rare example of the kind of comprehensive planning that city planners urged (but could seldom practice) in the downtown core.

Planners were vague as to how the remaining land for the scheme, several acres held by multiple private owners, would be acquired. In 1956, Lawson made it clear to Eaton's that there was a possibility of the City using expropriation to prepare the way. But over the next two years he backed away from that stance, perhaps as a result of his criticism of Wood-Wellesley, the City's first experiment in putting this planning at the service of power private development. During a 1957 meeting he emphasized that "any use of

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<sup>71</sup> John Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern Architects and Urban Transformation, 1954-1972* (London: Routledge, 2007), ch. 6.

<sup>72</sup> "CTPB Memorandum – Project Viking, Jun. 9, 1958," CTA, 331388-2.

<sup>73</sup> "University College Yonge Queen Redevelopment study #1 & #3, Jun. 1956," CTA, 331388-2.

<sup>74</sup> "Commercial redevelopment: College-Yonge-Bay-Queen, Jun. 7, 1957," and "University College Yonge Queen Redevelopment study #1 & #3, Jun. 1956," CTA, 331388-2.

<sup>75</sup> "CTPB Memorandum – Project Viking, Jun. 9, 1958," CTA, 331388-2.

redevelopment powers should be for a previously-determined public purpose,” and should not include a commitment to a specific developer.<sup>76</sup> By the next year in the Viking plans his recommendation was that special powers be avoided entirely in the Bay-Yonge-Queen-Dundas block; instead land assembly should take place quietly and before any public announcement was made that would cause values to rise.<sup>77</sup> In that case, the City’s role would be to provide planning and design expertise, as well as negotiate the transfer and closing of several small internal streets.

Viking would have been the largest redevelopment project in Toronto’s history. It was clearly inspired by developments in the United States and Europe, including the postwar British shopping precinct and planner Victor Gruen’s widely discussed 1956 plans for central Fort Worth, both of which emphasized pedestrian plazas, retail arcades, and the mixing of commercial and recreational or civic spaces.<sup>78</sup> The broad outlines of the scheme were for a modernist, mixed-use superblock bounded by Bay, Yonge, Dundas, and Queen Streets, to be constructed over a space of twenty years. Internal streets would be closed, except for a new loop road off Bay Street for deliveries and parking access. On the east side of the block, the Eaton’s store would be expanded in stages to reach a size of 1,500,000 square feet, or five times its original size. In what was the most grandiose aspect of the project, the new store would be balanced by four skyscraper office blocks lining Bay Street, each twenty-two or more storeys tall and situated in a landscaped courtyard. Interestingly, planners’ architectural point of reference for those buildings was the new Imperial Oil office tower on St. Clair West (1957), a domino-shaped block built according to plans rejected for the New City Hall in 1955. Viking, in other words, would have flanked Revell’s distinctive civic buildings with four also-rans.

In total, the scheme would add nearly three million square feet of office and retail space to the core, accounting for a quarter of the total forecast by planners for 1980.<sup>79</sup> Ambitious; but transformative ambition was combined with an obvious concern for

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<sup>76</sup> “Commercial redevelopment: College-Yonge-Bay-Queen, Jun. 7, 1957,” CTA, 331388-2

<sup>77</sup> “Notes on meeting, May 31, 1956,” “CTPB Memorandum – Project Viking, Jun. 9, 1958,” CTA, 331388-2.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Shapely, “Civic pride and redevelopment in the post-war British city,” *Urban History* 39:2 (May 2012): 310-28; Victor Gruen, *The Heart of Our Cities: The Urban Crisis: Diagnosis and Cure* (New York: Reinhold, 1964), 214-20.

<sup>79</sup> CTPB, *The Changing City*, 19.

preserving or improving existing structures. Historic Old City Hall is excluded from even the later stages of the scheme, and the position of Holy Trinity Church is perhaps improved by the addition of a pedestrian path running south from Dundas Street that effectively made it the heart of the superblock complex. Surprisingly, there is no mention of expropriating the existing retail strip on the west side of Yonge Street, meaning that the new Eaton's store would be fronted along its length by (much smaller) competitors. In fact, Viking called for an increase in the number of small shops in the area, since the Dundas-Trinity Square pedestrian way was conceived of as an outdoor shopping street, much like those later proposed for the Gerrard Street Village, Chinatown, and Kensington Market.<sup>80</sup> As in Gruen's plans for Fort Worth, cars would be pushed out to the edges of the project, and further pedestrian access would be provided by elevated walkways and a footbridge over Bay Street to the Civic Square.

### **Eaton's plans its future**

In May 1956 Eaton's representatives met with Matthew Lawson and University of Toronto planning chair Gordon Stephenson to discuss preliminary ideas for the area. Why Stephenson was there is a fascinating unknown: a former acolyte of modernist pioneer Le Corbusier and Canada's foremost expert on urban renewal, he may have been invited to provide Eaton's with context or information on the possibilities of government funding for the proposal. Certainly his presence, fresh from being hired to conduct Halifax's urban renewal study, would have lent credibility to the whole endeavour.<sup>81</sup> At that meeting Eaton's presented a few broad criteria for revising the plans, including information about the desired size of its new store, much of which was incorporated into the Viking scheme drawn up for 1958.

Eaton's gave away little of its own intentions in these meetings, maintaining its established tradition of corporate secrecy and centralized decision-making.<sup>82</sup> But behind the scenes, the company was deeply invested in planning the future of Toronto operations. This

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<sup>80</sup> See the previous chapter on pedestrian malls.

<sup>81</sup> "Notes on meeting, May 31, 1956," CTA, 331388-2. On Gordon Stephenson see Jill L. Grant and Marcus Paterson, "Scientific cloak/romantic heart: Gordon Stephenson and the redevelopment study of Halifax, 1957," *Town Planning Review* 83:3 (2012): 319-36.

<sup>82</sup> Bruce Allen Kopytek, *Eaton's: The Trans-Canada Store*, 115.



stemmed in part from the simple practicality that its downtown physical plant was in poor condition. By the mid-1950s, Eaton's was acutely aware of the state of its main store, parts of which were by then more than fifty years old. Loyal shoppers wrote to complain that it was cramped and insufficient in space. In 1958 Eaton's executives noted that local tabloid *Hush* had called the store "shabby" and in need of a facelift; other observers contrasted it with Simpson's more elegant and spacious premises across the street.<sup>83</sup> Worse, engineering assessments of the complex had pointed out serious structural weaknesses, increasing the risk of fire or collapse.<sup>84</sup> Other nearby buildings were in similar condition. Even as city planners were examining the Eaton's holdings as a potential redevelopment area, the company was already at work concentrating and rationalizing its non-retail operations in more modern buildings on less valuable land. To that end, in 1956 it had opened a sprawling, 1.1 million square foot warehouse and service complex in the city's northern suburbs.<sup>85</sup>

As that move suggested, there was a larger geographic and financial dynamic at work. In 1954, the company had commissioned a report on its local operations by influential United States redevelopment consultant and mall builder Larry Smith.<sup>86</sup> Smith's research highlighted the fact that, since the late 1940s, Eaton's and other downtown retailers had been losing ground to suburban alternatives. The company's share of sales—20-30% to residents of all areas of the city, and approximately half of the department store market—remained larger in absolute terms than any other single business. But it was shrinking quickly relative to shops in plazas and commercial strips in new suburban neighbourhoods. That trend could only continue, Smith argued, emphasizing the importance to Eaton's future of carving out a space in this emerging market. But there is no mention in Smith's report of abandoning or closing the traditional downtown stores. In fact, Eaton's accepted his recommendation that suburban development be matched by downtown expansion, and by the time Viking was prepared was committed to tearing down and rebuilding the Queen Street store at an estimated cost of \$15.5 million—very close to the price then being

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<sup>83</sup> "Wonder if John David Eaton...," *Hush*, Jun. 14, 1958.

<sup>84</sup> "Reports re structural condition of Main Store, 1955-60," Eaton's Fonds, Archives of Ontario (AO), B381767.

<sup>85</sup> Bruce Allen Kopytek, *Eaton's: The Trans-Canada Store* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2014), 278.

<sup>86</sup> Larry Smith & Co.: Toronto: Preliminary Report, Vol. I & II, Feb. 17, 1954," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381767.

negotiated for New City Hall.<sup>87</sup> This faith in the future of downtown would hardly waver over the next decade of planning.

Matthew Lawson encouraged Eaton's to respond before the completion of the New City Hall design competition, perhaps hoping that the project could be featured alongside that announcement. Ever cautious, the company explained that while it realized "re-development of the downtown was highly desirable," it could not commit until it had conducted its own studies.<sup>88</sup> The immediate reason seized on by the company's board was the planners' treatment of their new flagship store. Nowhere else in Canada had Eaton's (or another major department store) considered building a downtown branch that did not face onto a major shopping street, was accessed primarily by subway and pedestrian paths, and was flanked by small retail shops on two sides. Project Viking was an urban shopping centre designed by planners without significant business experience, and it showed. Still, a few months later, reconstruction of the main store was put on hold while Eaton's Head Office considered more ambitious schemes.<sup>89</sup>

### **The entrepreneur developer**

No downtown development on the scale of Viking existed in Canada in the 1950s, or would for nearly a decade. Still, there was one project—not yet built—that could point the way for Eaton's: Montréal's Place Ville-Marie. As presented to the public in 1956, it proposed to transform a four-acre CNR site in the heart of Montréal into one of North America's most impressive office and shopping complexes, and Canada's most valuable commercial property.<sup>90</sup> Completed amid growing nationalist aspirations for Québec modernization, Place Ville-Marie was in fact hailed not just locally, but nationally as transformative, a symbol of modernity, expert planning, and progress. Municipal administrations across the country saw in its apparent success a model for the remaking of their own central cities. Even before construction had begun, the development's signature building—a 42-story

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<sup>87</sup> "Main store re-construction summary, n.d. 1959," AO, Eaton's Fonds, B381767-1.

<sup>88</sup> "Eaton's to Lawson, Sep. 5, 1958," CTA, 331388-2.

<sup>89</sup> "Controller's Office re: Toronto Downtown, Aug. 28, 1959," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381767.

<sup>90</sup> "\$125 million project for Montreal," *Globe and Mail*, Oct. 13, 1956.

cruciform tower set in a wide square—was being deployed in print advertising to symbolize modernity and Montréal and Canada’s bright futures.<sup>91</sup>

As historian Don Nerbas has argued, Place Ville-Marie was also revolutionary in another way: it represented a new paradigm for large-scale real estate development in Canada.<sup>92</sup> Never before had a project of such magnitude been so deftly financed through borrowing, advance rents, and the manufacturing of prestige; value seemingly created out of thin air. The man who conceived and drove the process forward, American developer William Zeckendorf, was a pioneer in his industry, proposing bold schemes for urban renewal in dozens of American cities. Zeckendorf viewed real estate primarily as a financial services industry, and his heavily debt-leveraged projects produced impressive results and profits, although his publicly traded company, Webb & Knapp, often teetered on the brink of bankruptcy.<sup>93</sup> Grandiose and highly publicized, the planning and execution of Place Ville-Marie were watched by investors and pro-growth politicians both domestically and abroad; nowhere was this more the case than in Toronto. A long-time competitor in business, federal politics, and hockey, Toronto often used the larger but slower growing Québec metropolis as a yardstick for measuring its own success. Such was the case in the 1950s and 1960s, as Montréal Mayor Jean Drapeau was lauded for his deft encouragement of downtown redevelopment and other prestige construction projects.<sup>94</sup>

In fact, both the City of Toronto and Eaton’s were following Webb & Knapp’s expansion to Canada closely. Planners met with Zeckendorf’s representatives on several occasions in 1956 to outline their renewal plans for Queen-Bay-College-Yonge, and mentioned his company to Eaton’s as a possible partner in developing its downtown properties.<sup>95</sup> Webb & Knapp’s enthusiasm for the project seems to have inspired city planners as they drew up the Viking Plans.<sup>96</sup> Meanwhile, by 1958 Eaton’s was in discussions with the developer on several projects, including a large suburban mall in Toronto. William

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<sup>91</sup> “For a modern Canada on the move,” *Toronto Star*, Oct. 20, 1958.

<sup>92</sup> Don Nerbas, “William Zeckendorf, Place Ville-Marie, and the Making of Modern Montreal.”

<sup>93</sup> Nerbas, 10. See also William Zeckendorf with Edward McCreary, *The Autobiography of William Zeckendorf* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970).

<sup>94</sup> See for example “Building Boom, Canadian Style,” *Business Week*, Feb. 23, 1957, or “Montreal’s Leafy Spaces Make Toronto’s Just a Plain Square,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 28, 1962.

<sup>95</sup> “Notes on meeting, May 31, 1956,” CTA, 331388-2.

<sup>96</sup> “Chronological Record Eaton Centre, 1966,” Eaton’s Fonds, AO, B382473.

Zeckendorf, ever the self-promoter, also dropped hints that he was negotiating a large redevelopment project for Toronto's downtown. This was Viking. Welcomed as a conquering hero by the city's business community, he stated in a speech to developers and real estate investors that he "hoped to be doing comparable operations [to Place Ville-Marie] in Toronto very shortly."<sup>97</sup> However, beyond these vague pronouncements there were no signs of action. Growth boosters in Ontario's capital were left wondering when such exciting developments like those taking place in Montréal or even London, Ontario would finally come to the centre of their city. The editors of the *Globe and Mail* likely spoke for many when they wrote, referring to Place Ville-Marie, that

There is something splendid about this scheme, in which all of us as Canadian may take pride. But to Toronto people there will be a note of regret that we are unable to dream as grandly...Many cities have been developing civic centres, but the leadership which produces the reality of these things does not seem to exist in Toronto. When will we wake up?<sup>98</sup>

### **The Toronto Redevelopment Advisory Council**

Waking the city up to the possibilities of downtown transformation was precisely the goal of politicians like Mayor Phillips. He was one of many politicians who felt that public efforts to make the core "as attractive as possible for developers" were simply not enough.<sup>99</sup> In 1957, a motion in Toronto Council observed that while

the necessity of the redevelopment of some sections of downtown Toronto is obvious to all...several attempts by the City Council to encourage developers to become interested [in those areas] have not met with success.<sup>100</sup>

The solution initially proposed was the formation of a "representative citizens' committee" made up of community and business groups—churches, labour, ratepayers' associations, business groups, newspapers—to advise the City on the best ways to foster more successful redevelopment. Presumably the committee's diverse composition would also help create political will for public participation in the development process. As originally discussed,

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<sup>97</sup> "Redevelop Here, Zeckendorf Hints," *Globe and Mail*, Apr. 10, 1958.

<sup>98</sup> "Great plans in Montreal," *Globe and Mail*, Sep. 3, 1957.

<sup>99</sup> *Globe and Mail*, July 18, 1955.

<sup>100</sup> "Establishment of Citizens' Committee on Redevelopment, Feb. 4, 1957," CTA, 506520-6.

then, the Toronto Redevelopment Advisory Council (RAC) would be something of a repeat of the citizen groups set up during the 1940s reconstruction push, organizations that had foundered in their attempts to build civic consensus for reconstruction plans.<sup>101</sup> Or, perhaps, it would be another Planning Board, with a particular focus on development. There was some interest in this idea, and groups ranging from the Bloor District Business Men to the Toronto Real Estate Board wrote to the City to express interest in sending a representative.

In fact, under the guidance of Nathan Phillips and its first chairman—Simpson’s Vice-President G. L. Burton—the RAC ended up as something altogether different: a handpicked group of business elites with a broad mandate to liaise between private interests and the city on nearly any downtown planning or development issue. Or, in the more flowery language of its terms of reference, to

study, recommend action and assist in the progressive renewal of the downtown areas of Toronto so that the heart of the Metropolitan area develops on an economically sound basis as a handsome efficient business and cultural city centre.<sup>102</sup>

It was emphasized that the main thrust of this future renewal would come from private sector development, and that the role of the RAC was, as one journalist put it, to create “the climate in which million-dollar deals can be born.”<sup>103</sup>

Rather than the latest in a long line of Toronto citizens’ committees, the RAC was a local adaptation of a distinctly American model. Beginning in the 1940s, cities across the United States had wasted little time in forming pro-growth partnerships between business and political elites to initiate commercial urban renewal.<sup>104</sup> In perhaps the best-known example, Pittsburgh industrialist Richard Mellon and his Allegheny Conference of business leaders worked closely with local Democratic boss David Lawrence to redevelop the city’s

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<sup>101</sup> Kevin Brushett, “‘People and Government Travelling Together’: Community Organization, Urban Planning and the Politics of Post-War Reconstruction in Toronto, 1943–1953,” *Urban History Review/Revue d’histoire urbaine* 27:3 (1999), 44-58.

<sup>102</sup> “Terms of Reference: City of Toronto RAC, Jan. 20, 1960,” CTA, 506520-6.

<sup>103</sup> “Three years to find the man,” *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 7, 1960.

<sup>104</sup> John C. Teaford, *The Metropolitan Revolution: The Rise of Post-Urban America* (New York: Columbia, 2006), 54.

core, a process widely described at the time as the “Pittsburgh Renaissance.”<sup>105</sup> Phillips would later admit that his vision for the RAC was inspired by the example of Pittsburgh’s redevelopment, which was mostly driven by state, local, and private capital, rather than by recourse to federal Title I renewal funds.<sup>106</sup>

The Mayor’s redevelopment “brain trust” was finally assembled in 1959, and its announcement was an important component of Phillips’ inaugural address for 1960. The RAC’s roster read like a miniature of the Allegheny Conference, and a who’s-who of the city’s Anglo-Canadian business elite. Its 15 members were all men, and all top executives (none below the rank of vice-president) from a range of major downtown companies, including three banks, several trust companies and insurance firms, and Eaton’s department store.<sup>107</sup> A number, including Burton, had held high-ranking commissions in the Second World War. Unsurprisingly, to many this reeked of backroom politics and the old boy network. Toronto labour leaders called the RAC “big business gathered together to divide the spoils,” while *Star* columnist Ron Haggart pointed out that nearly any sizeable downtown development would involve lands owned by the companies they controlled, giving rise to conflicts of interest. There was a push in Council—deftly defeated by the Mayor—to create a more representative membership, and so forestall the perception that the RAC gave big business special access to City Hall.<sup>108</sup>

But special access to City Hall was precisely the point of the RAC. Phillips and Burton saw the most-criticized aspects of the group—its exclusiveness and members’ personal involvement in downtown business—as its greatest strengths. They were under no illusions that it was representative of the body politic, instead seeing RAC members as an elite able to simultaneously balance deeply implication in their work with a public-spirited objectivity. Its members had a great stake in the city—Burton often remarked that their businesses paid 60% of downtown taxes—but he believed they could be counted on to serve as private

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<sup>105</sup> Edward Muller, “Downtown Pittsburgh: Renaissance and Renewal,” in Joseph Scarpaci and Kevin Patrick, eds., *Pittsburgh and the Appalachians: Cultural and Natural Resources in a Postindustrial Age* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), 7-20.

<sup>106</sup> Phillips, *Mayor for all the People*, 153; John Teaford, “Urban Renewal and its Aftermath,” 456-59.

<sup>107</sup> “Burton to Mayor and Council, Jan. 20, 1960,” CTA, 506520-6.

<sup>108</sup> “Toronto Brain Trust Approved by Council,” *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 2, 1960; “This divorce would be a shattering blow,” *Toronto Star*, Feb. 2, 1960; “Wants other groups to aid plan council,” *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 30, 1960.

citizens. The group's meetings would be strictly secret, both to promote efficiency and to ensure that potential investors were assured of confidentiality. Burton contrasted this model favourably with the broader citizens' group originally proposed, which he argued would not only have lacked knowledge and contacts, but been riven by internal discord and the pressures of "special interests" in public meetings.<sup>109</sup> As Burton would argue in a 1963 speech to the Canadian Club, "redevelopment and the future of a city should not be made a political football."<sup>110</sup> To the elite, interventionist RAC, petty politics and factionalism were brakes on the city's progress; but the group promised to transcend them in the public interest.

### **The RAC at work**

The RAC's efforts to create a climate sympathetic to development were varied. They began with a crash course in the latest in redevelopment theory and practice, heavily weighted towards the American example. Downtown redevelopment expert Larry Smith (a trusted advisor to Eaton's by this point) was invited to Toronto to speak to members in 1960, and a few months later the group toured five American cities—Newark, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, and Pittsburgh—where downtown renewal projects were underway. This was the first of several such fact-finding trips organized by the RAC, which saw them welcomed by local civic officials and their counterparts in the business community. The RAC was just one of dozens of delegations from cities across Canada, the United States, indeed the world interested in learning about, and perhaps emulating the dramatic interventions underway in postwar American cities.<sup>111</sup> Still, Burton and others recognized important differences between Toronto and the communities they visited. In 1962 he explained that "we do not have generally such vast blighted areas or slums and do not have such difficult racial problems"; nor did they have access to the general federal financing that had underwritten renewal south of the border. Nonetheless, the group was inspired by what it saw, and

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<sup>109</sup> "14 Executives Join Redevelopment Group," *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 21, 1960; "Burton to Mayor and Council, Jan. 20, 1960"; "Notes: RAC meeting with Exec, Jan. 18, 1963," CTA, 506520-6.

<sup>110</sup> "Burton: Planning for Progress: The Heart of Toronto, Feb. 4, 1963," CTA, 506520-6.

<sup>111</sup> Tracy Neumann, *Remaking the Rust Belt: The Postindustrial Transformation of North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 2-3.

particularly by the broad, entrepreneurial role given to business leaders in both planning and implementing downtown transformation.<sup>112</sup>

The RAC had two major official projects during its first few years of operation. First, it played a significant role in shaping the development of the City of Toronto's first detailed area planning study, the *Plan for Downtown Toronto* (1963).<sup>113</sup> That document, with its emphasis on gradual redevelopment, pedestrian movement, and functional separation of uses owed a great deal to the careful modernism espoused by Matthew Lawson and his planning staff. But it also reflected extensive consultation with the RAC, who from 1961 onwards had provided background studies on downtown business, feedback on rough drafts of the plan, and, eventually, input on prioritizing its many recommendations.<sup>114</sup> Through its participation, the plan became invested with the faith in corporate citizenship and private initiative that characterized the RAC and its models in the United States. It outlined a future in which business interests—and specifically large corporations headquartered in the city—would play the determining role in downtown's transformation. Naturally, in keeping with the partnership model developed by City planners, those private efforts would be guided and facilitated wherever possible by planning expertise.

But in addition to cooperating with planners, the RAC also played a part in circumventing them. In 1962, the advisory group helped influence the decision by City Council to form a division called the Development Department, with a mandate to promote and expedite new building projects.<sup>115</sup> This would effectively entrench the boosterism embodied by the RAC in the city bureaucracy, the next logical step if the group's formation is viewed as an attempt to create a second, more effectively pro-development planning apparatus for downtown.<sup>116</sup> Planners made poor salesmen, as Project Viking (among others) had made abundantly clear, and they were liable to slow projects down in the search for concessions to planning objectives. Meanwhile, politicians were felt to lack the professional

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<sup>112</sup> "Burton to Mayor, Apr. 21, 1960", "RAC Programme of Studies, Feb. 27, 1962," see also "1965 RAC Tour Report, Oct. 29, 1965," CTA, 506520-6.

<sup>113</sup> CTPB, *Plan for Downtown Toronto* (Toronto: CTPB, 1963).

<sup>114</sup> "Plan for Downtown Toronto Progress Report, n.d. (1967)," CTA, 506520-6. On the authors of the 1963 plan see White, *Planning Toronto*, 160.

<sup>115</sup> "Burton to Council, Feb. 27, 1962," CTA, 506520-6.

<sup>116</sup> This was suggested as early as 1960. "He Shuffled His Feet in a Measure of Mayoral Misery," *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 2, 1960.



expertise required to liaise with land developers and their staff on their own terms. Supporters of the Development Department like future Mayor Donald Summerville envisioned its head as “a super-salesman” expertise who would do everything in his power to promote investment.<sup>117</sup> Chief among his tasks would be helping to usher specific development projects through planning reviews and the complications of zoning—systems put in place precisely to slow down and regulate such projects. Their eventual choice, Walter Manthorpe, was a planner from Britain, who surprisingly shared common ground with Matthew Lawson on many substantive issues.<sup>118</sup> But he settled well into his role as development facilitator. After five years with the City, Manthorpe would leave his role as commissioner to work for development group Meridian, transitioning seamlessly from public to private practice thanks to the excellent relationships he build with development firms during that time.

### **A growth boom**

There was plenty of work for Manthorpe’s Development Department. From the late 1950s onwards, the pace of private development in Toronto was quickening. During the decade following the 1952 Wood-Wellesley project, 12% of the city was torn down and reconstructed, typically to much higher densities. In the downtown core the pace was even faster, with fully one-quarter of the building stock redeveloped during this period.<sup>119</sup> At the southernmost end of the Yonge Street commercial strip, a number of retail and entertainment uses were displaced by midrise office construction. Most visibly, in 1955 the Victorian Yonge Street Arcade, the city’s only such arcade and home to 20 shops, was demolished, and a few years later replaced with a ten-storey office building. In addition to the New City Hall, Civic Square, and municipal courthouse, between 1960 and 1965 thirteen major office developments were completed, representing 3.5 million square feet of office

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<sup>117</sup> “18 Bid for Job as ‘Super salesman’,” *Toronto Star*, May 17, 1962.

<sup>118</sup> Simon Chamberlain, “Walter Manthorpe, Commissioner of Development (1962-67),” *City Planning* 3:2 (Fall/Winter 1985): 2-6.

<sup>119</sup> Larry Bourne, *Private Redevelopment of the Central City* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967), 175.

space.<sup>120</sup> This was a significant boost to the City's redevelopment agenda, on pace to greatly exceed planners' 1959 forecast of 10 million square feet by 1980.<sup>121</sup>

These new developments would contribute substantially to the municipal tax base, all the more so since Toronto taxed commercial properties at a higher rate than residential. But from a planning perspective, they embodied little of the ambitious vision elaborated for the core. Most were simple block towers between 10 and 20 storeys tall that sat on relatively small lots, lacking the scale, new open space or aesthetic coherence with their surroundings envisioned by comprehensive planning projects like New City Hall or Viking. These buildings, insofar as they conformed to the increasingly generous zoning laws fought for by growth-boosting politicians, were largely outside of the oversight of city planners. Given the group's secretive practices, it is nearly impossible to determine the extent—if any—of the RAC's influence on any of these developments. Still, the overall climate for downtown development was extremely optimistic, and there was no end in sight. By 1967 influential real estate firm A.E. LePage Ltd. was forecasting continued "overwhelming growth" and investment in Toronto's downtown for years to come.<sup>122</sup>

There was one notable exception to the pattern of piecemeal development created by the boom: the Toronto Dominion Centre, announced to great fanfare in 1964 for the superblock bordered by Bay, York, Wellington, and King Streets.<sup>123</sup> The new headquarters of the Toronto Dominion Bank, built in partnership with developer Fairview, was not the first bank tower to grace that corner; but its great size and spare, modernist style—designed by internationally renowned architect Mies van der Rohe—set it apart from the surrounding city. Plans for the nine-acre site called for a large pedestrian plaza flanked by two sheer black, unadorned glass and steel towers 44 and 55 storeys tall. It was Toronto's answer to Place Ville-Marie, and perhaps the first of the city's "contemporary cathedrals," widely seen as a monument not only to corporate ambition but to civic progress.<sup>124</sup> The RAC seems to

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<sup>120</sup> Development Department, *Major Developments Completed, 1960-70* (Toronto: Development Department, 1971).

<sup>121</sup> CTPB, *The Changing City*, 19.

<sup>122</sup> A.E. LePage Ltd, *Real Estate Market Survey, Metropolitan Toronto, 1967* (Toronto: A.E. LePage Ltd., December 1967).

<sup>123</sup> "Toronto to Get Tallest Skyscraper Outside N.Y.," *Toronto Star*, Apr. 10, 1964.

<sup>124</sup> Robert Collier, *Contemporary Cathedrals: Large-Scale Developments in Canadian Cities* (Montréal: Harvest House, 1975).

have been involved from the early stages of planning, through TD Bank President Allan Lambert, a founding member. In his memoir, Nathan Phillips argues that the RAC was a prime mover in the project's scaling up from corporate headquarters to complex.<sup>125</sup> Certainly Allan Burton's championing of the Centre applied a veneer of public purpose to the project: in one speech to the Canadian Club in 1963 he hailed it as a model for downtown development, thanking Lambert and his partners for their "faith in Toronto's future."<sup>126</sup> Eaton's was watching, and hoped for a similar reception for the plans now taking shape in its boardrooms.

### **Pressure to act**

The long-awaited arrival of significant downtown redevelopment put pressure on Eaton's to make a decision about its downtown lands. The years 1962-64 saw construction finally beginning on the New City Hall and Civic Square and the TD Centre site to the south. Downtown was visibly transforming, and the window of opportunity offered to the company in the 1950s to lead the way on renewal seemed to be closing. In early 1963, the *Plan for Downtown* was published to sustained media attention and speculation over its vision of a modern central core.<sup>127</sup> Eaton's head office was privy to its contents well before that date, since it participated in the production of the plan through the RAC. Discussing the company's future in Toronto in January 1962, Eaton's executives agreed that the plan's publication would bring with it "considerable pressure" to announce a redevelopment program.<sup>128</sup>

They were correct. In addition to its general emphasis on a future shaped privately led redevelopment, the plan included specific reference to Eaton's important place in that vision. Its section on the Yonge Street shopping district directed attention to the Eaton's lands, calling on the company to take advantage of what it called "an excellent opportunity for redevelopment [of] great public importance," including shopping and "prestige offices."<sup>129</sup> It was one of only a few specific developments mentioned in the document (the

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<sup>125</sup> Nathan Phillips, *Mayor of All the People*, 154.

<sup>126</sup> "RAC Members, 1963"; "Burton: Planning for Progress: The Heart of Toronto, Feb. 4, 1963," CTA, 506520-6.

<sup>127</sup> See for example "Facelift for Downtown Endorsed by Planners," *Toronto Star*, Feb. 2, 1963 and "Progress Report: Private Development," *Globe and Mail*, Nov. 6, 1963.

<sup>128</sup> "Exec. Committee memo re: Toronto CBD, Jan. 29, 1962," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381767.

<sup>129</sup> CTPB, *Plan for Downtown*, 33.

TD Centre was another). In this way, the previously confidential Viking plans were becoming a part of official City planning policy, if only in outline. Planning head Matthew Lawson would later emphasize in media interviews that Eaton's, along with competitor Simpson's, would be the anchors and prime movers of the modernization of the city's retail shopping district.<sup>130</sup> The City would play its part, too, by closing streets and otherwise accommodating the necessarily large scale of their projects.

Pressure was also exerted on the company from other directions. In the summer of 1962 influential author and television personality Pierre Berton called the state of the Eaton's lands Toronto's most glaring example of "unfinished business."<sup>131</sup> In a series of front-page columns in the *Toronto Star* he revealed the existence not only of Viking, but of a second set of plans for the site, prepared by Webb & Knapp's house architect, I.M. Pei.<sup>132</sup> In his analysis, as long as those plans languished in Eaton's filing cabinets, so too would Toronto's prospects for downtown revitalization. Few boosters of downtown renewal had put their case so eloquently. Included were sketches of tree-lined plazas and impressive modernist structures drawn directly from the plans, giving the public its first real glimpse of the scale of redevelopment proposed for the site.

Like many other commentators at the time, Berton hailed Montréal's Place Ville-Marie—officially opened in September 1962—as a paragon of modern downtown planning.

Here is an oasis, seven and one-half acres in size, in a concrete desert—a place where pedestrians may stroll about without the confinement of narrow streets or the harassment of traffic. Here the elegant shops, smart theatres, sidewalk cafes, plazas, promenades, offices, hotel and railway stations are all interconnected as part of a single plan... [Place Ville-Marie] has demonstrated that you can have comfort, dignity, beauty, and profit all at the same time. It is a money-making proposition created by free enterprise with an assist from the city...Its secret is simple: three city blocks, of which the *Place* constitutes one-third, are being developed as a single unit by a single owner.<sup>133</sup>

This glowing assessment of Montréal's redevelopment success was set in contrast to Toronto's apparent inability to create a coherent future of downtown. And yet, according to

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<sup>130</sup> See for example "Facelift for Downtown Endorsed by Planners," *Toronto Star*, Feb. 2, 1963.

<sup>131</sup> "Unfinished business," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 26, 1962.

<sup>132</sup> The first iteration are "W & K: Eaton's Downtown Toronto, Feb. 18, 1960," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381622.

<sup>133</sup> "The lesson of Place Ville Marie 2," *Toronto Star*, Sep. 26, 1962.

Berton, the situation was urgent. Unlike City planners, for whom the 1960s core was “the busy heart of a great city,” Berton saw only a “monument to our own greed and gutlessness...where every square inch has been made to count for a profitable return—but never for human comfort or human dignity.” The only way to reverse the postwar trend of downtown “dry rot” and flight to the suburbs, he argued, was through public-spirited renewal on the scale of Place Ville-Marie.<sup>134</sup> Berton dwelled on Eaton’s hesitancy to commit to a scheme, giving readers the impression that a simple “go!” from company head John David Eaton would suffice to begin construction. “Seldom,” he wrote, “has the fate of one metropolis rested to such a degree on the decisions of a single mercantile enterprise.”<sup>135</sup> The image of the Eaton family holding the keys to the city’s future was a powerful one.

### **The Eaton Centre**

Berton’s information was out of date. By 1962, Webb & Knapp was in serious financial trouble. Its rapid expansion in the 1950s—major real estate deals, the creation of international subsidiaries, an entry into the US hotel business—relied on overly optimistic project appraisals and a constant stream of new investments to meet ever-growing obligations.<sup>136</sup> By 1962, even as Place Ville-Marie neared completion, the company was teetering on the edge of insolvency. Other large publicly traded American real estate companies were in similar straits. Berton’s applause for Zeckendorf’s Toronto plans came months *after* Webb & Knapp had withdrawn from its development agreement with Eaton’s; Zeckendorf would later cite the department store’s lack of vision, but his dire financial situation likely played a more important role.<sup>137</sup> Negotiations with an alternative partner, Canadian Equity & Development, the real estate arm of Canadian industrialist E.P. Taylor’s investment empire, also soon soured.<sup>138</sup> Heavily committed in profitable—and logistically much simpler—suburban projects, Canadian Equity was likely daunted by the cost of land assembly, demolition, and construction, estimated by this point to be between \$150 million

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<sup>134</sup> CTPB, *Plan for Downtown*, 6.

<sup>135</sup> “The lesson of Place Ville Marie 4,” *Toronto Star*, Oct. 11, 1962; “The lesson of Place Ville Marie 2,” *Toronto Star*, Sep. 26, 1962.

<sup>136</sup> “Webb & Knapp trustee’s suit alleges ‘false appraisals,’” *The Appraiser*, May, 1967; Don Nerbas, “William Zeckendorf, Place Ville-Marie, and the Making of Modern Montreal,” 18-20.

<sup>137</sup> William Zeckendorf with Edward McCreary, *The Autobiography of William Zeckendorf*, 197-98; “Head Office summary: Toronto downtown redevelopment, 1964,” Eaton’s Fonds, AO, B381806.

<sup>138</sup> “Letter of termination, July 9, 1964,” Eaton’s Fonds, AO, B381623.

and \$200 million. As one *Toronto Star* reporter would later point out, that was roughly equivalent to half of Canada's contribution to the colossal St. Lawrence Seaway project.<sup>139</sup>

Despite these financial setbacks, by 1964 Eaton's was committed at the highest levels to redevelopment. The internal business arguments in favour of some kind of a Toronto project had been clear for some time; in fact they had changed little since Larry Smith outlined them in the mid-1950s.<sup>140</sup> The poor condition of existing buildings, the need for additional space to capture a larger downtown customer base, and the efficiencies promised by consolidating operations all pointed to new facilities. The company was also eager to take part in the city's development boom, and once again to fulfill its role as Toronto's premier corporate citizen. In August 1964 working titles for the project—Viking, Toronto CBD Project—were abandoned in favour of "the Eaton Centre."<sup>141</sup> The name change was significant. Attaching the storied Eaton's brand to the project ensured a certain level of notoriety, but also a measure of risk. The company and the Eaton family would be clearly identified as the prime movers behind the scheme, and they were to a certain extent staking their reputation on the development's success. This choice of name for the project also invited parallels—drawn in the press once the project became public, but likely at this stage already discussed in the Eaton's boardroom—to another powerful mercantile family that had made its mark in downtown redevelopment: New York's Rockefellers. The comparison was inevitable, all the more so since the colossal Rockefeller Center (1930-39) was privately financed by the family after other major investors pulled out.

If any additional incentive was needed, it could be found in competition with a perennial business rival, Simpson's. RAC founder G.L. Burton's company seemed committed to doing its part to make downtown modernization a reality, announcing in 1964 the construction of a thirty-three story tower facing the Eaton's site, as well as store improvements at a total cost of \$20 million.<sup>142</sup> Eaton's responded quickly with a press release offering congratulations—and the promise that its own (much more impressive)

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<sup>139</sup> "Biggest project since subway, Eaton's to spark citybuilding," *Star*, Dec. 2, 1965.

<sup>140</sup> "Larry Smith & Co.: Toronto: Preliminary Report, Vol. I & II, Feb. 17, 1954," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381767; "Smith financial memorandum, Oct. 13, 1964," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381623, "Exec. Committee memo re: Toronto CBD, Jan. 29, 1962," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381767.

<sup>141</sup> "Chronological history of Eaton Centre, 1967," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B382473.

<sup>142</sup> "Simpson's unveils plans for 33-storey tower," *Globe and Mail*, Oct. 10, 1964.

redevelopment scheme would be made public in due course.<sup>143</sup> In fact, by that point a new set of architectural plans for the site had been completed by Canadian James A. Murray and that doyen of commercial revitalization, Victor Gruen. John David Eaton and the company directors had approved moving forward with the Eaton Centre, and a headhunt had begun for an experienced project manager. There was even talk of opening the new store in time for the company's centenary in 1969.<sup>144</sup>

### **Growing ambitions**

Eaton's had still not made a public announcement regarding the Eaton Centre, but every indication was that the latest plans developed by Murray and Gruen were even more ambitious.<sup>145</sup> In 1958 Viking had surprised Eaton's with its scale; six years later the company was considering a development more than three times larger.<sup>146</sup> The bulk of the new additions were in the form of rentable office space, driven by projections of "general bullishness" in the office market into the late 1960s and beyond. Prestige office rentals would provide the majority of the project's income and help drive its completion.<sup>147</sup> This would require the demolition of nearly the entire superblock bounded by Bay, Yonge, Dundas, and Queen, including the patchwork of properties not yet owned by Eaton's. Also included was yet another change of architects, with renowned office tower builders Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, and Canadian architects and long-time Eaton's consultants Mathers & Haldenby joining the project.

The man hired to manage this growing army of experts was David Owen, in April 1965 named Managing Director of Eaton Centre Limited. A protégé of William Zeckendorf and major player in the Place Ville-Marie project, Owen was one of a small pool of people in Canada with experience of large-scale urban redevelopment. His origins in Vancouver also

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<sup>143</sup> "Press release: Simpson's announcement, Oct. 1964," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381623.

<sup>144</sup> "Eaton Centre presentation to Board, etc., Oct. 6, 1964," and "The Eaton Centre: A Development Proposal by the T. Eaton Co., 1964," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381623.

<sup>145</sup> "\$200 million complex in Queen-Bay area," *Toronto Star*, Apr. 15, 1964.

<sup>146</sup> "Murray & Gruen: The Eaton Centre, Oct. 6, 1964," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B382379.

<sup>147</sup> "Immediate schedule: Eaton Centre, 1965," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381623.



*Image 3.5. The proposed 20+ acre Eaton Centre site is outlined in black, with Yonge running diagonally along its left side. Old and New City Halls are prominent in centre. At the top right looms the first tower of the Toronto Dominion Centre, in the midst of the growing office district. Boris Spremo/Toronto Star, 1967. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0108868f.*

played a role in the decision, given Eaton's reputation as a Canadian retailer and the 1960s climate of growing economic nationalism.<sup>148</sup> Owen's role was to publicize the project, negotiate with government, and coordinate company staff and consultants. One journalist likened him to an "executive producer," and the comparison to a Hollywood film was apt—in the planning stages, there was something unreal, even fantastical about a project like the Eaton Centre.<sup>149</sup> The huge sums of money involved, the complexity of the plans, the transformative urban agenda attached to them—all of it seemed precarious, too grandiose to be true. Confident in his own abilities and in the complex's role ushering in "the Toronto

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<sup>148</sup> A profile of Owen appears in "Design in the sky is for the birds," *Executive Magazine*, Sep. 1967; "Smith to A.Y. Eaton re: CANTEC, May 30, 1964," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381623.

<sup>149</sup> "This man breeds skyscrapers," *Ottawa Citizen*, Nov. 26, 1965.



of the twenty-first century,” Owen brought a cool arrogance to the work of convincing Torontonians to share in that vision.<sup>150</sup>

### **Land assembly**

At the same time, the company moved quickly to assemble the remaining land in the Eaton Centre block, beginning with the small shoe, fur, and clothing stores on the west side of Yonge Street. In mid-1964 Eaton’s purchased for more than \$2 million a batch of ten small properties through Canadian Equity, happy to act as middleman where it had declined to be a development partner.<sup>151</sup> Later that year negotiations began to purchase a further 13 lots from individual owners for just under \$5 million, leaving just a few holdout properties outside of company control. All of these transactions took place through a subsidiary corporation, Sunjam Ltd.<sup>152</sup> Economics dictated that as more information about the Eaton Centre became public, and it became clear that an assembly was underway, the price of remaining properties would rise steeply. That is exactly what seems to have happened in the interval between the two rounds of purchases described above: if 100 feet of low-rise retail on Yonge sold for half a million dollars in 1964, by the next year a comparable stretch of frontage was selling for \$1.7 million. Eaton’s correspondence also suggests that by mid-1965, the company was competing with speculators—including one major bank—to purchase the remaining lots in the assembly. Despite the poor condition of many standing buildings, as the assembly proceeded, the prices the company was asked to pay for remaining parcels skyrocketed to as high as \$100 per square foot, or twice the average price paid during the TD Centre assembly just a few years before.<sup>153</sup>

Sometime in early 1965, Eaton’s began negotiations with the municipal government to purchase Old City Hall.<sup>154</sup> At 2.8 acres, the lot it sat on was approximately the size of the main department store, making it by far the most substantial piece of the superblock not under company control. Many within the civic administration had long viewed the 1899 civic

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<sup>150</sup> “A new look for downtown Toronto,” *Canadian Business*, July 1966; “Organizational chart—Eaton Centre Ltd., 1966,” Eaton’s Fonds, AO, B381623.

<sup>151</sup> “Eaton Centre Ltd.: History of Property Acquisitions, Feb. 15, 1966,” Eaton’s Fonds, AO, B382473.

<sup>152</sup> “The Eaton Centre Ltd.—Formerly Sunjam Corp. Ltd., 1967,” Eaton’s Fonds, AO, B382473.

<sup>153</sup> “Spohn re: Toronto CBD properties, Jun. 7, 1965,” Eaton’s Fonds, AO, B381623. On the TD Centre assembly see Collier, *Contemporary Cathedrals*, 126-27.

<sup>154</sup> “Planning and development report: Toronto CBD, Dec. 14, 1964,” Eaton’s Fonds, AO, B381623.

building as an albatross around the City's neck; the costs of maintaining it were high, and its usefulness for other purposes dubious.<sup>155</sup> In 1956, during discussions of the first iterations of Viking, Mayor Nathan Phillips had personally approached John David Eaton to ask if he would consider buying Old City Hall for future redevelopment.<sup>156</sup> The Eaton's head refused, and the building was instead sold to Metro Toronto as a court and police administrative building. In fact, Metro was also reluctant to take the building over, and it appears Eaton's was reassured over the years that it was still available for purchase and demolition.<sup>157</sup> Metro officials saw the building's sale and demolition as a chance to use Eaton's financing to meet several of their organizational and planning objectives, including the acquisition of modern headquarters for the Metro police and the courts, and the widening and straightening of the crooked Bay and Queen intersection.<sup>158</sup> The latter measure, discussed at various levels of the civic administration since the early 1900s, was a small piece of a larger program of widenings aimed at rationalizing downtown traffic patterns.<sup>159</sup>

Even at this early stage, it was becoming clear that the transfer of Old City Hall and internal streets would be the main point of discussion between the civic administration and Eaton's. Zoning laws dating from the previous decade already allowed for very high densities across the downtown core: as the Development Commissioner would later point out, there was little to stop Eaton's from building a series of office buildings—or any other commercial use—on its lands, with “virtually no site-planning standards.” However, public cooperation was necessary to provide the additional land and interconnections of a superblock.<sup>160</sup> This gave municipal authorities leverage for public involvement through attaching conditions to the sale of this public property. Unlike the assembly of two blocks of Yonge Street retail, however, discussion of the sale of one of the largest and oldest publicly-

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<sup>155</sup> See Christopher Armstrong, *Civic Symbol: Creating Toronto's New City Hall, 1952-1966* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), esp. ch. 2.

<sup>156</sup> Nathan Phillips, *Mayor of All the People* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), 141.

<sup>157</sup> Chronological history of Eaton Centre, 1967,” Eaton's Fonds, AO, B382473 records early contacts with William Allen; “Spohn memo re: Toronto CBD, Mar. 19, 1964,” Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381806-1 indicates Eaton's knew of Metro police interest in selling the building in exchange for alternative premises.

<sup>158</sup> “Minutes of Oct. 13, 1965 meeting,” Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381623.

<sup>159</sup> MTPB, *Report on the Metropolitan Toronto Transportation Plan* (Toronto: MTPB, 1964), 81.

<sup>160</sup> “Manthorpe, The Eaton Centre, Jun. 10, 1966,” CTA, 103165-5.

owned structures in the city could not be kept secret for long. As early as the winter of 1963-64 the press had begun to report rumours of Eaton's interest in the property.<sup>161</sup>

### **Political proxies**

Eaton's maintained a policy of non-committal silence about the project. Information released to the public was tightly managed, and typically channelled through allies within the civic administration. These included Metro Chairman William Allen, an ally of the redevelopment plans since the early 1960s, Development Commissioner Walter Manthorpe, and Mayor Phillip Givens, nicknamed "go-go" Givens for his pro-development efforts.<sup>162</sup> Informal, private meetings between these important public figures and Eaton Centre principals were the norm in 1965 and 1966, as was their advising the company on how best to satisfy the civic administration's demands—sometimes before they had even been made. Company records document that David Owen and Eaton's executives met with William Allen or his representative four times over the spring and summer of 1965, each time coming closer to a mutually agreeable price for Old City Hall.<sup>163</sup> All of this happened well before Allen had any mandate to negotiate; he would get that only in September. At that point, it was again Allen who briefed the press on a general outline of project, using materials supplied by the company's PR consultants.<sup>164</sup> Press coverage of the event captured a certain enthusiasm—Givens spoke of "the greatest development that has ever taken place"—but provided very little real information about it.<sup>165</sup> The *Toronto Telegram* may have put it best:

Eaton's are calling their mammoth \$250,000,000 downtown redevelopment project the T. Eaton Centre. But what it will contain and when it will be started is anyone's guess.<sup>166</sup>

On the basis of very little information, Eaton's concept seemed to have captured the imagination of most city politicians, not the least with the estimated \$14 million in new

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<sup>161</sup> "Eaton's may buy Old City Hall," *Toronto Telegram*, Nov. 13, 1963; "Eaton's, Argus plan mammoth downtown project," *Star*, Apr. 15, 1964.

<sup>162</sup> "Phillip Givens the go-go man," *Globe and Mail*, Nov. 30, 1966.

<sup>163</sup> "History of Old City Hall price negotiations, 1967," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B382473.

<sup>164</sup> "Cockfield and Brown, Sep. 1965," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381622.

<sup>165</sup> "Malls, towers and spaces in Eaton's downtown plan," *Toronto Star*, Sep. 16, 1965, "Building plans to top Rockefeller Centre," *Toronto Telegram*, Sep. 15, 1965.

<sup>166</sup> "How the T. Eaton Centre will change downtown," *Telegram*, Sep. 16, 1965.

taxes that the area would produce yearly once complete. Given that the City of Toronto's 1966 tax levy totalled \$170 million, this represented an unprecedented contribution for a single development project. As one newspaper pundit would later point out, the Centre could cut \$25 from the tax bill of the average home owner.<sup>167</sup> Yet there were critics, including respected Toronto Councillor and Board of Control member William Dennison. Over thirty years in politics, former Commonwealth Co-operative Federation member Dennison was never, in Nathan Phillips' words, "one of the boys": rather, he had built his reputation on opposition to the pro-growth consensus.<sup>168</sup> In 1940s and 1950s debates over downtown apartment construction and public housing he argued against expropriation and derided the redevelopment process as mostly benefiting speculators. His position on the Eaton Centre, long-held but strengthened with an eye for a 1966 mayoral run, was that "Old City Hall is not for sale." Not only did the building have historical value, but its sale practically at cost was an embarrassment for a city that had lately wasted millions in cost overruns on the Civic Square project. In this he found allies among other neo-populists, including the outspoken social conservative East York Reeve True Davidson.<sup>169</sup>

### **Friends of Old City Hall**

Following publication of Eaton's letter of intent to buy Old City Hall in December 1965, this small minority of politicians was joined by other voices. A campaign to save Old City Hall from the wrecking ball coalesced around James H. Acland, professor at the University of Toronto's School of Architecture. Alongside him were a slate of eminent public figures that included Metro planner Hans Blumenfeld, former Governor-General Vincent Massey, and Eric Arthur, elder statesman of Canadian architecture, one of the first group of seven appointed to the City planning board and a collaborator on the New City Hall project.<sup>170</sup> Over the next year, the Friends' campaign would transform the Eaton Centre and the sale of Old City Hall into major public issues, carving out a space in the conversation for increased

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<sup>167</sup> "Manthorpe, The Eaton Centre, Jun. 10, 1966," CTA, 103165-5; Metro Toronto, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Finance, 1966* (Toronto, 1967), 90; "When Eaton's called, no one was home," *Telegram*, May 19, 1967.

<sup>168</sup> James Lorimer, "The Mutation of William Dennison," *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 10, 1972.

<sup>169</sup> "Won't sell city hall, controllers emphasize," *Globe and Mail*, Nov. 14, 1963, "Dennison bid rejected," *Telegram*, Dec. 11, 1965.

<sup>170</sup> Their initial letters to Metro appear in Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381622.

public participation and a politics of urban conservation that would have a major long-term impact on the city's form.

The "Friends of Old City Hall" received the support of a number of Canadian and international architectural or planning organizations.<sup>171</sup> Their fight was important enough within the profession to merit mention in US journal *Architectural Forum* in early 1966.<sup>172</sup> By no means all Canadian architects and planners supported preservation. In February 1966 *Canadian Architect* published a special forum section on Old City Hall, and nearly half of a dozen contributions urged demolition if the plan for the site was strong enough.<sup>173</sup> But the Friends' stance was nonetheless influential, drawing as it did on a sense that Toronto's historic architecture was being indiscriminately destroyed by short-sighted redevelopment. Ally Eric Arthur spoke to a growing constituency when he wrote, in 1964, that

In the march of progress, we have ruthlessly destroyed almost all of our older architecture; street names cherished for a hundred years or more have been altered to suit the whims of the people on the street, and even our most treasured buildings, Fort York, going back to the beginnings of British settlement, have recently been threatened because the historic soil on which they stood interfered with the curvature of a modern expressway.<sup>174</sup>

That realization was by no means confined to urban professionals. Over the previous decade debates over other structures and sites had fostered a politics of heritage preservation in Toronto, as in many other North American and European cities.<sup>175</sup> For many heritage-minded Torontonians, the Old City Hall debate was a continuation of the long fight to save the neighbouring University Avenue Armouries (1891), torn down in 1963 to make way for a new courthouse. Architects and other experts were just one element of an anti-demolition coalition that included retired soldiers, local historical societies, and the United Empire Loyalists.<sup>176</sup> A similarly diverse group of citizens rallied to the Friends of Old City Hall, allowing the group's spokespeople to claim 600 pledges of support by early 1966.<sup>177</sup> Their

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<sup>171</sup> "Friends of the Old City Hall, Jan. 25, 1966," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B253778, F229-162-0-371-1.

<sup>172</sup> "Toronto's other City Hall," *Architectural Forum*, 124:1 (Jan/Feb 1966), 32.

<sup>173</sup> "Odds and Ends," *The Canadian Architect* 11:2 (February 1966).

<sup>174</sup> Eric Arthur, *Toronto: No Mean City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), xv.

<sup>175</sup> Ted Ligibel, Norman Tyler, and Ilene Taylor, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principles, and Practice* (New York and London: Norton, 2009).

<sup>176</sup> "Save-the-armories petition goes to Metro," *Toronto Star*, Mar. 9, 1961.

<sup>177</sup> "Toronto's other City Hall," *Architectural Forum*, 124:1 (Jan/Feb 1966), 32.

ranks included a number of self-proclaimed conservatives who would later take part in the early 1970s campaign to “clean up” the Yonge Street strip. Conscious of the dangers of being labelled as crackpots or a “rent-a-crowd” (in the words of one *Globe and Mail* columnist) Acland and other experts made extra efforts to maintain the group’s identity—and authority—as “informed professionals and community leaders.”<sup>178</sup> They, like Eaton’s, would rely heavily on the perceived ability of urban experts to determine the best course for the future of the city.<sup>179</sup>

In their public statements, letters to the editor, and depositions to council, the Friends of Old City Hall and their allies presented their case for the building’s preservation. The tone ranged from the professorial to the sentimental, reflecting the diverse coalition assembled around the issue. From the architects and planners who acted as public spokespeople, much was made of the building’s unique place in architectural history. Under the years of grime that obscured its stone façade it was “a national monument,” one of the most impressive Victorian buildings in Canada.<sup>180</sup> Support for this view was found in an appeal to professional authority: Old City Hall was one of only three Canadian buildings singled out in the definitive international history of architecture; it was considered one of the best existing examples of Romanesque Revival style in North America; the jury in the New City Hall competition, all renowned architects, had applauded its “rich design” and judged all submissions in relation to it.<sup>181</sup>

Some took a different tack, stressing personal and communal attachments to the building. “This building has meant more to the life of our City than possibly any other” wrote a Scarborough man; others called it a “tangible link to the past,” referencing homecomings from war, celebrations of sporting victories, and the way the building dominated views north along lower Bay Street. Positioning themselves as taxpayers, voters, and concerned Torontonians, these Friends thought a principle, as well as a structure, was at stake. Their

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<sup>178</sup> “Don’t sell—Dalai Lama,” *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 31, 1966. A summary of a 1967 interview with Acland appears in the rich but apparently unpublished report “The Eaton Centre, n.d. 1967,” CTA, 148530-16.

<sup>179</sup> This spoke to a period, rapidly reaching its end, when expertise often had the last word in discussions of the urban future in Toronto, as in other Canadian cities. Stephen Bocking, “Constructing Urban Expertise: Professional and Political Authority in Toronto, 1940-1970,” *Journal of Urban History* 33:1 (Nov. 2006): 51-76.

<sup>180</sup> “Royal Architectural Institute submission, Dec. 6, 1965,” CTA, 148530-16.

<sup>181</sup> James Acland, “Toronto’s Civic Square and the Eaton Centre - II,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 1:1 (May 1966), 52; “Extracts from letter of New City Hall jury of architects, May 13, 1958,” CTA, 103164-10.

concern was that in embracing development and change, the city was losing its formerly strong sense of itself: “How can you measure progress if you have nothing of the past to compare with the present?”<sup>182</sup> There was often a social conservative streak in this criticism, with James Acland and others suggesting at Friends’ meetings that social disorder or delinquency were possible consequence of lack of reverence for the past.<sup>183</sup>

In place of demolition, the Friends argued, Toronto should find a new public purpose for the structure: proposals included everything from an art gallery to an adult education centre.<sup>184</sup> The Eaton Centre concept was attacked, at times in emotional terms. Charges of “philistinism” and “vandalism” were common, but perhaps the most effective critique was that it was incomplete, a product of “haste and improvisation” that did not convincingly demonstrate a need for the Old City Hall site.<sup>185</sup> In December 1965, faced with delegation after delegation opposing demolition and questioning Eaton’s seriousness, Metro agreed to defer a final decision until its planners had reviewed a more detailed development plan for the Eaton Centre.<sup>186</sup>

### **Selling the city of tomorrow**

The March 1966 unveiling of a master plan for the project was Eaton’s chance to regain the initiative. Every aspect was planned and stage-managed, down to the choice of location, a showroom set up “on the company’s own ground” in the recently purchased Yonge Street premises of former competitor Northway’s department store.<sup>187</sup> The centrepiece of the room was a detailed scale model of the development and surrounding area, completed and reassembled on site just days before. Against a backdrop of older, mostly low-rise structures—the city of the past, intentionally made non-descript with darker colouring—the gleaming white towers of the Eaton Centre, along with New City Hall and the new Simpson’s tower, presented a dramatic vision of the city of tomorrow promised two decades before.<sup>188</sup> To a close observer of Yonge Street’s tumultuous redevelopment history, there was a

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<sup>182</sup> “F.C. to Allen and Metro Council, Feb. 28, 1966,” “J.N. to Allen and Metro, Feb. 26, 1966,” CTA, 103164-10.

<sup>183</sup> “Notes re: Friends of OCH, Feb. 22, 1966,” AO, Eaton’s Fonds, B253778, F-229-162-0-371-1.

<sup>184</sup> “Old City Hall, uses, early 1966,” CTA, 103165-4.

<sup>185</sup> “Royal Architectural Institute submission, Dec. 6, 1965,” CTA, 148530-16.

<sup>186</sup> “Dennison bid rejected,” *Telegram*, Dec. 11, 1965, “Planning Commissioner to Metro Exec, Dec. 9, 1965,” CTA, 103165-4.

<sup>187</sup> “Programme March 1, 1966,” Eaton’s Fonds, AO, 253778.

<sup>188</sup> “Now: City of the future,” *Telegram*, Mar. 1, 1966.



*Image 3.6: City of Toronto and Metro Toronto officials, including future mayor William Dennison (with moustache) are shown a scale model of the Eaton Centre by the complex's planners, March 1, 1966. Barry Philp/Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0109989f.*

certain irony in the choice of venue. The eight-storey Northway Building was a product of the same pre-Depression building boom that had spawned Eaton's College Street project. On the tower's completion in 1928 it was applauded for its elegant modernity, and observers hoped that its construction would begin the physical rehabilitation of Yonge Street retail.<sup>189</sup> Less than forty years later, however, all signs pointed to it becoming one of the first casualties of another, more ambitious wave of revitalization.

On March 1 the Eaton Centre model, photo montages, and other planning images were presented to a standing-room only audience of journalists, provincial and city politicians, and senior bureaucrats, accompanied by talks by the project's principals.<sup>190</sup> The presentation was broadcast on the CBC, and the press encouraged to photograph Metro

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<sup>189</sup> "Sinaiticus, The Northway Building, Toronto," *Construction* 21:11 (Nov. 1928), 377-82.

<sup>190</sup> "Standing room only for first glimpse of complex," *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 2, 1966.



and City politicians interacting with the model and discussing its attributes with the Centre's planners.<sup>191</sup> The resulting photos, published in every major Toronto paper, projected a powerful image of collaboration between civic leaders public and private. Later that day the Redevelopment Advisory Council was invited to view the model, and over the next few weeks private showings were held—sometimes as many as four a day—for groups representing every conceivable civil society group or bureaucratic unit in the city, from the Board of Trade to the Assessment Department.<sup>192</sup>

The plan presented was as ambitious as anticipated, expressing the firm faith in progress and comprehensive planning that underlay the entire project.<sup>193</sup> Its authority was underwritten by the stable of experts employed in its conception. “We have subjected our thinking and our objectives for this area,” explained Eaton Centre Vice-President Greg Kinnear, “to appraisal by the finest specialists we could find in Canada and outside of Canada.”<sup>194</sup> The plan envisioned the Bay-Yonge-Dundas-Queen superblock transfigured into a “megastructure” integrating every conceivable downtown function: a hotel, convention centre, transportation hub, retail mall, and four office/residential towers. It was a city within a city, projected to draw 200,000 persons per day to its soaring towers and huge pedestrian spaces. Many of the original ingredients from Viking, including the shopping street and office towers, were once again present, but magnified. A 69-storey tower would give Toronto the tallest building outside of Manhattan, and a five-level enclosed retail centre containing 200 specialty retail shops. A total of nearly eleven million square feet of space was included, allowing David Owen to boast that the project was three times the size of Place Ville-Marie. All of this was promised in two construction phases over fifteen years, at an estimated cost of \$260 million (approximately \$1.8 billion in 2016 dollars). Phase 1 included Eaton's new store and an office building on the site of the Old City Hall—beyond that the timeline was vague.

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<sup>191</sup> “Unveiling plans for the Eaton Centre,” *Toronto File*, Mar. 1, 1966, CBC Digital Archives, [www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/unveiling-plans-for-the-eaton-centre](http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/unveiling-plans-for-the-eaton-centre).

<sup>192</sup> “Schedule for presentation room, Mar. 1966,” and “Memorandum re: Eaton Centre presentation, Mar. 1, 1966,” Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381622.

<sup>193</sup> Description drawn from “The Conceptual Plan for Eaton Centre, Mar. 1, 1966,” CTA, 445061-9 and “Transcript of Mar. 1, 1966 presentation,” CTA, 103165-6.

<sup>194</sup> “Kinnear statement, Mar. 1, 1966,” CTA, 103165-6.

## Urban and commercial objectives

Just a few months before the unveiling, Eaton's directors had met to outline the company's internal objectives for the Eaton Centre project.<sup>195</sup> The tone was set by the first: "Creation of a department store of unrivalled supremacy in Toronto". The company had clearly absorbed and integrated many of the concerns of City planners, and was now comfortable using some of the same language; the list is full of concern for issues like design quality, pedestrian experience, and stimulus to further redevelopment. But, unsurprisingly given Eaton's long history of business success, each objective was also framed in terms of the benefits it offered to the company. Rationalizing traffic patterns, for example, would give the Eaton store "prime accessibility" for shoppers arriving by car; pedestrian improvements would channel foot traffic from the rest of downtown into the complex's shops. In its unabashed ambitions to make the Eaton Centre "the focal point of Toronto," the company seemed confident that public planning objectives could be profitably adapted to commercial ends.

The tone was different at the March 1 unveiling, which emphasized the plan's strong engagement with the public interest. Again and again the project's principals emphasized that this was a development conceived of with much more than Eaton's own goals in mind. "When you have done business in a community for nearly 100 years," Kinnear went on,

you acquire a deep sense of obligation to the people of that community in addition to becoming deeply rooted in it. [That] is why we have not confined our plans to a retailer's basic objectives...but extended them to encompass the entire 22.5 acres bordering the new City Hall and Nathan Phillips Square.<sup>196</sup>

Referencing Viking, he positioned the Eaton Centre as "the culmination of eight years of planning" to make a contribution to the revitalization of downtown Toronto. The Eaton Centre, its planners argued, would rid the core of blight, clearing and replacing 23 acres of "underdeveloped, predominately substandard buildings." That most of those buildings had been either erected or left to deteriorate by Eaton's was not mentioned. Its department store and shopping arcade would revitalize Yonge and Queen—and downtown more

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<sup>195</sup> "Objectives, Dec. 1, 1965," AO, Eaton's Fonds, B381623.

<sup>196</sup> "Kinnear statement, Mar. 1, 1966," CTA, 103165-6.

generally—as the city’s shopping district, pushing back against a decade of suburbanization of commerce. Aesthetically it would complement and accentuate New City Hall, and like that structure become a “recognizable visual symbol of the city as a whole.”<sup>197</sup>

The project would also deliver much needed civic space to Torontonians. “Perhaps the greatest gift of the Centre to the city,” argued consulting planner James Murray,

is the gift of space. Space not empty but lively. Space for the daily tasks of the thousands who work or shop. Space for the enjoyment of those who stroll or rest or play...[S]pace as a setting for great architecture.<sup>198</sup>

With space came life. The Eaton Centre—much like the pedestrian mall experiment a few years later—promised to address the concern that Toronto’s downtown was becoming a desert outside of working hours: Pierre Berton’s “vast, forbidding prison from which we gratefully make our escape at 5 p.m.”<sup>199</sup> Compared to previous iterations, the plan’s detailed treatment of space and pedestrian movement was one of its most novel aspects. At street level, landscaped plazas and courts would set off the larger towers and add to the walkable space provided by the new Civic Square. The Eaton’s store would be linked to retail tenants by a multi-floor glass-domed gallery recalling a European arcade. Most dramatically, the entire complex would be built on a podium—the “Promenade Level”—that allowed “horizontal circulation through the entire project” and beyond. This last addition was the work of Vincent Ponte, another former Place Ville-Marie collaborator whose vision of the “multi-level city centre” was garnering attention across North America.<sup>200</sup> He envisioned the Eaton Centre as the hub of an underground tunnel network that would bind the core’s financial, government, and retail districts into one cohesive whole, ending forever the “fragmented city” of small-scale developments so criticized by city planners.<sup>201</sup>

One final aspect of the plan was its vision of the Eaton Centre as “the crossroads of the transportation system” in Toronto.<sup>202</sup> George Barton, one of North America’s most

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<sup>197</sup> “Murray Statement, Mar. 1, 1966,” CTA, 103165-6.

<sup>198</sup> “Transcript of Mar. 1, 1966 presentation,” CTA, 103165-6.

<sup>199</sup> “The lesson of Place Ville Marie 2,” *Toronto Star*, Sep. 28, 1962.

<sup>200</sup> See Charissa N. Terranova, “Ultramodern Underground Dallas: Vincent Ponte’s Pedestrian-Way as Systematic Solution to the Declining Downtown,” *Urban History Review/Revue d’histoire urbaine*, 37:2 (2009): 18-29.

<sup>201</sup> “Transcript of Mar. 1, 1966 presentation,” CTA, 103165-6.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

eminent urban transportation consultants, described a development that built seamless connections between public transit, roadways, and pedestrian paths. The “gifts” offered by this approach, mostly aimed at pleasing Metro transportation planners, included space to widen Bay, Queen, and Yonge (a particular bugbear of Metro Roads and Traffic czar Sam Cass) by two lanes each, and Dundas by a staggering six lanes, producing a wide boulevard across the central core. Also included were a new underground bus terminal, 2700 parking spaces, and some kind of accommodation for a future Queen Street subway tunnel.

Eaton’s underlined that all of these public interest objectives would be fulfilled by private initiative. But Toronto was required to make a choice between past and future. Old City Hall, whatever its architectural or historical merits, was “the very key to the complex,” and must be cleared.<sup>203</sup> Its continued presence blocked continuity between the Eaton Centre and the growing financial and office district to the south, acting as a physical barrier to comprehensive modernization.<sup>204</sup> The two areas would have to be joined up, with Vincent Ponte’s “hub point” for pedestrian circulation sited within the footprint of the existing building. Above ground the entire block was needed for the construction of a 57-storey office tower.<sup>205</sup> There was an aesthetic argument, as well. If the key to the Eaton Centre’s coherence and beauty was its “architectural integration” with the new civic complex, there too Old City Hall presented an obstacle. It would introduce an element of disruption into an otherwise comprehensive plan, and prevent the dramatic modernist buildings of the Centre from properly framing Civic Square.

Could the razing of an historical landmark be offset by drawing other connections to the past? The Centre’s planners argued that there was a real “sense of history” in their proposals for the development.<sup>206</sup> In the weeks before the March 1 presentation Eaton’s staff were busy making lists of historical figures and incidents that could possibly be associated with the complex. The press kit distributed at the announcement inevitably included a handout on Eaton’s nearly 100-year history of business and good corporate

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<sup>203</sup> “Owen statement, Mar. 1, 1966,” CTA, 103165-6.

<sup>204</sup> For a demonstration of this argument see “A controversial start to the Eaton Centre,” *CBLT Newshour*, Sep. 3, 1978, CBC Digital Archives, [www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/a-controversial-start-to-the-eaton-centre](http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/a-controversial-start-to-the-eaton-centre).

<sup>205</sup> “Transcript of Mar. 1, 1966 presentation,” CTA, 103165-6.

<sup>206</sup> “Transcript of Mar. 1, 1966 presentation,” CTA, 103165-6.

citizenship in downtown Toronto.<sup>207</sup> Following the lead of Viking, the plan claimed that it would preserve and “release the Church of the Holy Trinity from its present environment and return it to a setting in which its battlemented turrets may be seen against the sky.” In place of a tight cluster of factory and warehouse buildings, the Church would be set in a “cloistered garden space”—albeit, as the scale model demonstrated, one hemmed in on three sides by skyscrapers.<sup>208</sup> In the case of Old City Hall, Eaton’s once again offered the compromise hinted at months earlier: the building’s clock tower and the Cenotaph retained, surrounded by a new “Tower Square” appropriate for remembrance ceremonies.<sup>209</sup> Reverence for history could, it seemed, be integrated seamlessly into the city of tomorrow.

### Enthusiasm

Initial response to the March 1 plans was enthusiastic. All three major Toronto newspapers featured lavish spreads on the Eaton Centre, beginning with page after page of photographs, planning sketches, and fawning prose in the March 1 evening edition of the *Telegram*, a publication in which the Eaton family had long held a financial interest.<sup>210</sup> The next day, a *Toronto Star* editorial gave the project its endorsement, arguing that its combination of private enterprise and public initiative would create “a new heart for old Toronto.” The *Globe and Mail* was somewhat more reserved, stressing that the City should drive a hard bargain for the sale of Old City Hall. But it too endorsed the Centre.<sup>211</sup> In a period of high newspaper readership, the stances taken by these papers mattered. A later poll would find that, among Torontonians interested in the project, the dailies were their main source of information: half of a thousand surveyed read the *Toronto Star* daily, and two-thirds either the *Telegram* or *Globe and Mail*.<sup>212</sup> Ripples of the project announcement were felt beyond the local level. Eaton’s used its substantial corporate communications

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<sup>207</sup> “McEachern report on historical names, Feb. 17, 1966,” Eaton’s Fonds, AO, B253778; “The Eaton History, Mar. 1, 1966,” CTA, 103165-6.

<sup>208</sup> “The Church of the Holy Trinity, Mar. 1, 1966,” CTA, 103165-6.

<sup>209</sup> “Transcript of Mar. 1, 1966 presentation,” CTA, 103165-6.

<sup>210</sup> “Now: City of the Future,” *Telegram*, Mar. 1, 1966; “3 Eaton skyscrapers top \$260 million plan for downtown,” *Toronto Star*, Mar. 1, 1966; “Unveil \$260 million Eaton Centre scheme,” *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 2, 1966.

<sup>211</sup> “A new heart for old Toronto,” *Toronto Star*, Mar. 2, 1966, “Eloquent – and spacious?” *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 2, 1966.

<sup>212</sup> Canadian Facts, *A Study of the Attitudes of Metropolitan Toronto Adults Towards the Proposed Eaton Centre* (Toronto, 1966).

network to distribute press kits and information to media across Canada.<sup>213</sup> Beginning with a special edition of internal newspaper *Eaton News*, the company's redevelopment plan was featured in trade and business journals across the continent, often with the assumption its fulfilment was a certainty—"Farewell to Hogtown" wrote the Canadian edition of *Time* just a few days after the Centre went public.<sup>214</sup>

As that headline suggested, nearly every journalistic account of the master plan agreed that its approval by the civic administration was almost certain. City politicians present at the briefing were by no means unanimous, but most spoke glowingly of the plans, and an on-the-spot survey by the *Globe and Mail* found two-thirds favoured their implementation.<sup>215</sup> A number of influential private sector groups also publicly pledged their support for the project. A representation to Metro by the Board of Trade called the Eaton Centre plan "imaginative," adding that "its realization will have a decisive influence upon patterns of future growth and will contribute in substantial measure [to] ranking Toronto among the foremost of the world's cities." As expected, the Redevelopment Advisory Council was also laudatory, underlining the Centre's social and civic benefits and urging that "no obstacle"—clearly a reference to the pile of bricks at Queen and Bay Streets—"should be permitted to forestall it."<sup>216</sup>

Taking advantage of this enthusiasm, Eaton's allies in both levels of municipal government secured agreement to fast-track reports by various departments related to the development. Unsurprisingly, nearly all officials asked to comment on the project gave it their approval: they considered the sale price of Old City Hall fair, the plans sound, and the possibility of integrating the Centre with new transportation improvements exciting.<sup>217</sup> The Metro Property Commissioner and Eaton Centre principals quietly picked up negotiations for the sale of Old City Hall where they had been left off in December.<sup>218</sup> Development Commissioner Walter Manthorpe spoke optimistically of beginning construction by the

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<sup>213</sup> "Eaton Centre press distribution list, Feb. 1966," AO, Eaton's Fonds, B253778.

<sup>214</sup> "Cities: Farewell to Hogtown," *Time* (Canadian Edition), Mar. 4, 1966.

<sup>215</sup> "Most municipal politicians favour development plans," *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 2, 1966.

<sup>216</sup> "BOTMT to Metro, Mar. 17, 1966," "RAC to City, Mar. 11, 1966," CTA, 103164-10.

<sup>217</sup> "Manthorpe Progress report to BOC, Mar. 31, 1966," CTA, 445061-4, "7 city chiefs say yes," *Toronto Telegram*, Apr. 5, 1966.

<sup>218</sup> "Minutes of TEC Ltd. Exec., Mar. 11, 1966," AO, Eaton's Fonds, B381622.

summer, if a development agreement could be drawn up in time.<sup>219</sup> The 1966 Centre was exactly the type of large-scale, privately financed project that the Development Department and the Redevelopment Advisory Council had been established to encourage. Few other cities, argued Manthorpe, had similar opportunities at such minimal cost to the public purse: it was the responsibility of municipal officials to ensure that it was “fully exploited.”<sup>220</sup>

Within the civic administration, the only note of caution came from Planning Commissioner Matthew Lawson, who was opposed to the demolition of Old City Hall. His preliminary report on the Centre was by far the most detailed of those shown to city politicians—it was also the most critical.<sup>221</sup> After summarizing the project’s main features, Lawson set out fourteen points that he argued should shape public participation in the development. These objectives, endorsed by the City Planning Board, ranged from the practical and specific—“direct connections to the subway system” —to the more general—“The centre must be a place of appeal to the public at large...It should be active night and day.” Together, they were Lawson’s answer to the “urban objectives” laid out by Eaton’s during the March 1 presentation, as well as a re-assertion of Viking’s more moderate scale, greater attention to preserving older structures, and more complex, less monolithic open spaces.

### **Renewed criticism**

Rather than silencing critics as Eaton’s had hoped, the release of the master plan seemed to give them fresh ammunition. James Acland, present at the March 1 unveiling, boasted that the Friends of Old City Hall’s campaign was gathering strength.<sup>222</sup> A week later, at a public meeting sponsored by the Community Planning Association, David Owen was greeted with boos and derisory comments from an audience packed with hundreds of Acland’s allies and sympathizers.<sup>223</sup> Similarly, a public meeting of the Metro Executive on March 22 drew a crowd of 250, the vast majority there to express opposition to the sale. Opposition to the

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<sup>219</sup> “Eaton’s can begin centre in summer, board told,” *Telegram*, Mar. 3, 1966.

<sup>220</sup> “Manthorpe: The Eaton Centre, Jun. 10, 1966,” CTA, 103165-5.

<sup>221</sup> “Lawson to BOC, Mar. 29, 1966,” CTA, 103165-4.

<sup>222</sup> “Friends of Old City Hall gaining strength, planner says,” *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 2, 1966.

<sup>223</sup> “600 hoot, laugh at Eaton’s project,” *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 10, 1966.

development was acquiring a certain countercultural cachet: while ratepayers' groups and professional planners spoke their piece in the council chamber, students from neighbouring high schools picketed across the street, waving signs reading, among other things, "Eaton's is culturally bankrupt."<sup>224</sup> Calls to "Save Old City Hall" were now joined by pointed criticism of the project, Eaton's, and its corporate goals.

Noted local architect George Banz called the complex as "a monstrous thing—a huge collection of boxes"; his criticism of the Centre's monumental, square-edged modernist style was soon taken up by others.<sup>225</sup> And those aesthetic concerns were seen as symptomatic of a larger problem: the Eaton Centre was simply badly planned. Ronald Thom, designer of the University of Toronto's acclaimed modernist Massey College (1963), wrote in the *Journal of Canadian Studies* that the master plan was rushed and incomplete. He questioned the placement of its main elements, arguing that it was a kind of "anti-planning" to ignore the Centre's potential to suck the life out of the neighbouring retail area and civic square.<sup>226</sup> Others pointed out that the idea of a transportation hub, hotel, and convention centre near Yonge and Queen was directly counter to recent discussions among Metro and City officials about locating those functions near the railway station. Doubts were raised, too, about the company's ability to find tenants for anywhere close to the 6.5 million square feet of office space it proposed.<sup>227</sup> Was Eaton's serious with its civic-minded urban objectives, or had it simply borrowed liberally from downtown renewal scripts written a decade earlier for use in American cities?

*Toronto Star* columnist Ron Haggart, a long-established critic of the *status quo* in municipal affairs in Toronto, argued the latter, calling the master plan a collection of "magical words and mystical imagery of dreamland cities."<sup>228</sup> There were, he pointed out, no guarantees Eaton's would ever build more than the first phase of the project: in effect, in exchange for a heritage building and substantial public lands, Toronto was being offered a new Eaton's department store and an office tower. The end result would be commercial

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<sup>224</sup> "Old City Hall supporters rally at hearing," *Globe and Mail*

<sup>225</sup> "Architects divided on Eaton's project," *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 4, 1966.

<sup>226</sup> Ronald Thom, "Toronto's Civic Square and the Eaton Centre - I," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 1:1 (May 1966), 51;

<sup>227</sup> "Eaton plan for buses stirs doubts," *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 11, 1966, "The Murchison man who sells for Eaton's," *Toronto Star*, Mar. 10, 1966.

<sup>228</sup> "Would Timothy approve this purple prose?" *Toronto Star*, Mar. 3, 1966.



advantage for the retailer, and not much else. Haggart was a respected and influential Toronto journalist. Not only were the questions he raised discussed in council meetings and newspaper opinion pages, but citizens who wrote to the City on the subject often quoted him or, as Mayor Givens said derisively, “scrawled” their messages on clippings of his column.<sup>229</sup> In subsequent articles, Haggart would continue to examine the project, along the way criticizing Eaton’s allies in the civic administration for backroom dealings and their unquestioned acceptance of the company’s good intentions. Once again, he argued, Toronto’s elected officials had been blinded by promises of tax revenues into considerable flexibility of the public interest<sup>230</sup>

Talk of a pattern of non-performance in urban development would dog Eaton’s throughout 1966. Letters to the editor and old newspaper clippings circulated at council meetings describing the company’s grand ambitions for the College Street store.<sup>231</sup> Haggart and others drew attention to neighbouring Hamilton, where Eaton’s had in 1955 bought a city hall similar in style and age to Toronto’s, promising to include the property in a substantial expansion of its neighbouring store. Although the building was demolished, Eaton’s never followed through on its development plans, citing uncertainty due to a federally funded urban renewal scheme then in the works for the area.<sup>232</sup> As an internal company report later pointed out, Eaton’s had technically not reneged on its agreement; still, the Hamilton saga, with its striking similarities to what was unfolding in Toronto, was not easily explained away.<sup>233</sup>

## **Negotiations**

The tenor and ferocity of these criticisms naturally shaped negotiations between the municipal government and Eaton’s. It was obvious that the sale of Old City Hall might have a significant effect on the municipal elections later that year; political fortunes in Toronto had been made or broken on similarly emotive issues in the past. Additionally, the points raised

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<sup>229</sup> “Metro wants Eaton’s guarantee or ‘no sale’ on city hall,” *Toronto Star*, Mar. 16, 1966.

<sup>230</sup> See for example “William Allen’s role in the Eaton’s plan,” *Toronto Star*, Apr. 6, 1966.

<sup>231</sup> “Two precedents,” *Toronto Star*, Mar. 9, 1966, “Metro demands Eaton’s guarantee project before old city hall is sold,” *Toronto Star*, Mar. 16, 1966.

<sup>232</sup> On that scheme see Margaret Rockwell, “The Facelift and the Wrecking Ball: Urban Renewal and Hamilton’s King Street West, 1957–1971,” *Urban History Review/Revue d’histoire urbaine* 37:2 (2009): 53-61.

<sup>233</sup> “History of other city developments, n.d. 1966,” AO, Eaton’s Fonds, B381622-8.

by Haggart, the Friends, and the planning professionals who intervened could not easily be discounted. In particular, the question of Eaton's intentions—and its ability to complete the project—took on great importance. With the notable exceptions of William Dennison, True Davidson, and one or two others, there were few members of either Metro or Toronto Councils prepared to defend Old City Hall's existence at any cost. But most agreed that the City must be seen to receive a fair deal from Eaton's for the property, and that their partnership had to be based on some kind of guarantee of construction.<sup>234</sup>

With an election looming, it seemed increasingly important for Eaton's to counter the perception that the Eaton Centre pleased politicians, but not ordinary Torontonians. The company hired Canadian Facts, the country's top polling firm, to interview more than one thousand Metro residents in their homes, at great expense. The results demonstrated just how effective both the project's publicists and its critics had been in reaching Torontonians. Of those interviewed, 91% had heard of the Eaton Centre. However, of all of the facts and ideas they associated with the project, the one mentioned most often was "controversy over Old City Hall," ahead even of basic identifiers like "tall buildings" or "shopping mall."<sup>235</sup> A significant majority—two-thirds of respondents—supported the demolition of Old City Hall and fulfillment of the plan as presented in the press. Similar levels of support had been noted in a smaller-scale "man on the street" survey conducted by the *Telegram* months before.<sup>236</sup> Although its methodology was much more rigorous, the Canadian Facts survey suffered from the same bias as the *Telegram's* efforts. Interviewees were asked to weigh Old City Hall's loss against the completion of the Eaton Centre; as Ron Haggart so forcefully argued in his columns, without guarantees that was hardly the question facing the city's elected officials. Still, for the first time Eaton's could clearly demonstrate public approval, and they made the most of it. Publication of the poll was delayed a month until early June, just before a series of important Council meetings. The day after it was released, the

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<sup>234</sup> "Metro Extra (CBC), Apr. 1, 1966," AO, Eaton's Fonds, B381622-8.

<sup>235</sup> Canadian Facts, *A Study of the Attitudes of Metropolitan Toronto Adults Towards the Proposed Eaton Centre* (Toronto, 1966).

<sup>236</sup> "The Old City Hall and the man on the street," *Telegram*, Sep. 15, 1965.

*Toronto Star* reaffirmed its endorsement of the Centre, arguing that there was “no reason to tie up the project in further political debate.”<sup>237</sup>

The compromise eventually arrived at by Metro, Toronto, and Eaton’s was for the company to lease, rather than purchase outright, the Old City Hall site. From the perspective of the civic administration, a lease satisfied the significant minority of politicians who had attacked previous proposals as too soft on Eaton’s: politicians like Councillor Hugh Bruce, who call the previous property exchange proposal “a giveaway” and linked it to other recent episodes of fiscal irresponsibility.<sup>238</sup> It also spoke to the larger question of guarantees. Penalty clauses could be used to ensure that Eaton’s began the development on time, and redeveloped not just Old City Hall, but more importantly its run-down warehouse and factory buildings further north towards Dundas. This was a proper three-party revitalization partnership, politicians argued, in which public objectives would be backed up by force of law. In practice, although a number of clear penalties for non-completion were proposed— forfeiture and escalating rents, among others—the lease proposal that passed Metro Council in June 1966 was noticeably watered-down.<sup>239</sup> As for Matthew Lawson’s carefully-formulated fourteen points, only one was effectively addressed in these early talks. Eaton’s would reduce the height of its Phase I skyscraper so as to better complement New City Hall; but the cost would be the removal of the Old City Hall clock tower and less open space surrounding the Cenotaph.<sup>240</sup> Perhaps most damning for critics of the whole process, once again the details would be left to negotiations occurring well away from the public eye. Ron Haggart called Council’s discussion of the lease “less a debate than it was a series of lectures on the art of self-justification...The fate of the old city hall was determined long ago.”<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> “72% favor centre, survey says,” *Globe and Mail*, Jun. 10, 1966, “Let’s move ahead with Eaton Centre,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 11, 1966.

<sup>238</sup> Minutes of Metro Council, Jun. 24, 1966.

<sup>239</sup> “Manthorpe, The Eaton Centre, Jun. 10, 1966,” CTA, 103165-5; approved instructions for the lease in Minutes of Metro Council, Jun. 24, 1966.

<sup>240</sup> “Eaton’s offers to cut 14 floors—but raze clock,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 14, 1966, “Manthorpe to BOC, Jun. 16, 1966,” CTA, 103165-5.

<sup>241</sup> “Bad deal, bad price, bad government,” *Toronto Star*, Jun. 25, 1966.

## Back to zero

Toronto's 1966 municipal ballot was not exactly the "Eaton's election" prognosticated by Ron Haggart, but the project did play an important role.<sup>242</sup> In his mayoral campaign William Dennison used his stance on Old City Hall to define himself as a candidate cautious about growth and redevelopment, who considered the preservation of neighbourhoods and tax dollars more important than expressways or office towers. This set him apart from his opponents, and in particular incumbent Phillip Givens, who continued to champion the Centre and endorse "dollar planning," the evaluation of development proposals based on the tax revenues they would bring in.<sup>243</sup> Despite not having a single endorsement from a Toronto daily—the *Globe* thought he was out of step with the "dynamic thrust of modern Toronto"—Dennison went on to win, bringing to an end a decade defined politically by three booster mayors. Flushed with victory, one of his first public pledges was to take a harder line in bargaining with Eaton's over Old City Hall.<sup>244</sup> In the short term, it was a serious check on pro-redevelopment politics in Toronto.

Dennison's election also gave new impetus to the Friends of Old City Hall. The group, mostly silent since Metro's decision to lease the building to Eaton's, was beginning to change tactics. In place of an earlier emphasis on detached, expert opinion, the Friends now placed an appeal to democracy at the heart of their campaign. That fall they presented Metro with a list of 1368 supporters of their cause. Interestingly, almost half came from the boroughs, including a large contingent from middle-class, well-organized residential neighbourhoods in North York that would later play an important role in the campaign to clean up Yonge Street.<sup>245</sup> Similarly, in a letter to members James Acland wrote that

a continuing dialogue must be maintained between the citizens of Toronto and the developers of the Eaton Centre...Only you can save our square from being crushed by a badly conceived development scheme.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> "Why they'll call it the 'Eaton's election,'" *Toronto Star*, Jun. 6, 1966.

<sup>243</sup> "The three major candidates for mayor and their visions of the city," *Globe and Mail*, Dec. 1, 1966.

<sup>244</sup> "The fretful candidate," *Globe and Mail*, Oct. 19, 1966; "A barefoot boy from Renfrew who'll be our next mayor," *Toronto Star*, Dec. 6, 1966.

<sup>245</sup> "FOCH: List of supporters by district, n.d. fall 1966," CTA, 103165-2.

<sup>246</sup> "Unfinished civic business for 1966, n.d. fall 1966," AO, Eaton's Fonds, B253778, F229-162-0-371-1.



*Image 3.7: The brick wall of an Eaton's factory building painted with two-foot high letters reading "Save our Old City Hall," April, 1967. By that spring, the Friends of Old City Hall's campaign was gathering momentum again. Don Dutton/Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0011623f.*

William Dennison continued to speak to Friends' meetings in early 1967, raising hopes for project opponents by suggesting he wanted to revisit the Old City Hall decision, if public opinion was with him.<sup>247</sup>

That never proved necessary. On May 18, after several months of media silence, Eaton's abruptly announced that it was cancelling the project. Suddenly not only was Old City Hall saved, but the city's carefully laid redevelopment plans were in shambles. In a long letter to both Metro and the City, John David Eaton reiterated his company's view of the project as a gift to Toronto, while tactfully laying the blame for its cancellation at the feet of the public and civic officials.

As we stated when the conceptual plan was presented, we do not presume to judge for the citizens of Toronto what they want this city to be. The plan which we presented represented our conception – and that of the best

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<sup>247</sup> "Mayor pushes fight to save Old City Hall from wreckers," *Toronto Star*, Jan. 12, 1967.

advisors we could get – of a revitalized downtown core that would inspire and stimulate the growth and redevelopment of our city.

This was a proposal we submitted to the judgement of the people of Toronto...The judgement, while not an outright rejection, does impose conditions we cannot meet.<sup>248</sup>

This dramatic announcement, naturally, was front-page news, with headlines expressing both surprise and disappointment at the decision to cancel the entire project. All three Toronto papers emphasized that this was a significant setback to the city's rebuilding agenda. Some asked if the withdrawal of the proposal was not "an Eaton's bluff" aimed at securing a better price for Old City Hall. Hoping that it was, a day later the City of Toronto acted on Allen's suggestion to strike a special committee tasked with getting the Centre back on track.<sup>249</sup> Meanwhile, in a development bordering on the farcical, William Zeckendorf suddenly reappeared on the scene, creditors at his heels, promising to fulfill the original intentions of the project if the municipal government was willing to expropriate the Eaton's lands.<sup>250</sup> Nothing came of either initiative.

In the wake of the Centre's cancellation, many felt that William Dennison's critical stance on the project was to blame. John David Eaton had hinted as much in his letter, and the idea was taken up by the press.<sup>251</sup> The *Telegram* lamented that "No other city would have piled obstacles in the way of this development...[Dennison and supporters] have set Toronto back years."<sup>252</sup> Perhaps the best example of this view was a fall 1967 *Toronto Life* feature that featured a full-page, bucktoothed caricature of Dennison, whose administration it accused of "bungling" the Eaton Centre and other development proposals with red tape and lack of foresight.<sup>253</sup> Others saw the project's cancellation as confirmation that the Centre had always been too big to be true: it was natural that it would end up in the dustbin with the other "dream towers" and pie-in-the-sky modernization schemes.<sup>254</sup> There was some truth to both observations. But more significant were Eaton's internal

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<sup>248</sup> "J.D. Eaton to Metro, May 18, 1967," CTA, 103165-3.

<sup>249</sup> "Eaton Centre Scrapped," *Toronto Telegram*, May 18, 1967, "Is this an Eaton bluff?" *Toronto Star*, May 19, 1967, "Allen to Dennison, May 19, 1967," CTA, 445061-4.

<sup>250</sup> "Zeckendorf to Dennison, May 29, 1967," CTA, 445061-4, "Zeckendorf says plan won't cost a cent," *Toronto Star*, May 30, 1967.

<sup>251</sup> "When Eaton's called, no one was home," *Telegram*, May 19, 1967.

<sup>252</sup> "Vital for Toronto," *Telegram*, May 20, 1967.

<sup>253</sup> "The Incredible Bungling that Costs Us Millions," *Toronto Life* 1:12 (Oct. 1967).

<sup>254</sup> "An Eaton's catalogue of promised dream towers," *Macleans*, July 1967.

concerns about financing shortfalls and its public reputation, which in combination effectively doomed the project.

There is reason to believe that by early 1967 the Eaton Centre's financing was in disarray. By that point, Eaton's had made significant financial commitments, including more than \$2 million on planning and consultants' fees, and around \$8 million more on land assembly.<sup>255</sup> Additional capital came from the issue, in late 1965, of \$25 million in mortgage-backed bonds.<sup>256</sup> But that was just a drop in the bucket relative to the project's estimated cost of \$250 to 300 million. As a result, between 1965 and early 1967 David Owen and Eaton Centre Ltd. spent considerable time selling their project to both prospective tenants and partners. But of the 16 international investment groups that showed interest, ranging from Metropolitan Life to the Rothschilds, not one produced a tangible offer. Rockefeller Center Inc., an early inspiration for the project, thought the Eaton Centre too ambitious for a city of Toronto's size; others were skeptical of the placement of the Eaton's store or the over-emphasis on office space.<sup>257</sup> These repeated failures to raise new capital, more than any other factor, must have raised significant doubts about the project's viability. Even Phase I, which entailed replacing Old City Hall with a prestige office building that could be leveraged to offset costs (hence Eaton's dogged determination to demolish the building), was beginning to look less attractive. Over the course of 1966 and into 1967 company projections of the income that could be secured with that building dwindled, particularly after Metro made the decision to lease, not sell, Old City Hall.<sup>258</sup> In February 1967 David Owen quietly resigned as manager of the project.

Significant financial problems may have been overcome, as they had been in the late 1950s with Place Ville-Marie, but corporate will to do so was not there. Eaton's restrictions on disclosure of information meant that the company presented a face of confidence to the public, but behind that veneer was a deep ambivalence about the company's role as an urban developer. A great deal of time was spent measuring the potential for the Centre's

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<sup>255</sup> "Eaton Centre Ltd. Balance Sheet, July 31, 1966," B381623.

<sup>256</sup> "Report of Vice-President Finance/Administration, Dec. 1965," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381623.

<sup>257</sup> "Eaton's future in downtown Toronto, Apr. 1969," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381623-4; "Memo re: visit to Rockefeller Center Inc., Feb. 1, 1966," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381623.

<sup>258</sup> "Tremayne: Ground Lease Implications, May 5, 1966," AO, Eaton's Fonds, B381622-8, "Appraisal and recommendations re: Eaton Centre, Jun. 12, 1967," F-229-162-0-377.

unpopularity to translate into negative impacts on the Eaton's brand and sales. Executives read *Canadian Architect*, and instructed their staff to investigate the dozens of individuals and associations that had made deputations criticizing the Centre. Employees attended and reported on meetings of the Friends of Old City Hall, and carefully noted the trickle of letters from Eaton's customers who threatened to take their business elsewhere if Old City Hall was torn down.<sup>259</sup> "The most important point to bear in mind," argued a 1966 PR report,

is the fact that this company is in the retail trade business—not the real estate business. It therefore depends on the goodwill of the general public—all of it. Eaton's cannot consider action on any project with which its name is associated in isolation from this fact. A land developer may be said to have won his point if he has the support of a simple majority of the general public or of a municipal council. This is not the case with Eaton's.<sup>260</sup>

A year later, when the decision to cancel the Centre was made, an internal memorandum argued that this conflict between the roles of retailer and land developer had placed Eaton's in an "impossible position" that could only be resolved by abandoning one of the two roles. The same document expressed skepticism that "any single corporate citizen" could take the lead in downtown redevelopment without seriously damaging its reputation.<sup>261</sup>

### **A new development paradigm**

For Eaton's, the imperative to redevelop was still there. Above and beyond the company's commitment making its mark on downtown Toronto, there were financial considerations. By the late 1960s its main store replacement was now a decade overdue; even more pressing were the significant carrying charges, in taxes and mortgage payments, of its downtown lands, which the company estimated to amount to \$5.5 million yearly.<sup>262</sup> Under a new Chairman—Robert Butler, the first non-Eaton to run the company—Eaton's made it known that it was now searching for developers to purchase its lands and manage construction of a project that, in all likelihood, would not include Old City Hall.<sup>263</sup> If that meant setting aside some of the larger civic goals behind the project, so be it. Where

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<sup>259</sup> "Notes re: Friends of OCH, Feb. 22, 1966," "McEachern to Weatherspoon, Apr. 11, 1966," "Butler to Miss C., Mar. 6, 1967," AO, Eaton's Fonds, B253778, F-229-162-0-371-1.

<sup>260</sup> "Turner appraisal, Feb. 22, 1966," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381622.

<sup>261</sup> "Appraisal and Position Summary, May 19, 1967," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B253778, F229-162-0-373.

<sup>262</sup> "Eaton's future in downtown Toronto, Apr. 1969," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381623-4.

<sup>263</sup> "A re-assessment of downtown redevelopment, Apr. 1, 1968," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381622-11b, "Eaton's future in downtown Toronto, Apr. 1969," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B381623-4.



Eaton's alone had failed, a corporation with deeper pockets and thicker skin, someone able to prioritize the financial viability of the project over reputation, might succeed.

That company was Cadillac Fairview, which by the early 1970s emerged as the largest real estate development company in Canada.<sup>264</sup> Formed from corporate mergers and backed by Cemp Investments, a corporation controlled by Montréal's Bronfman family, it exemplified the new paradigm in urban development then emerging in Canada. With a few important exceptions like the inimitable Webb & Knapp, the building and rebuilding of Canadian cities in the 1950s and 1960s was mostly the work of small to medium-scale entrepreneurs, or businesses, notably banks and insurance companies, building their own offices and facilities.<sup>265</sup> In contrast, in the 1970s it would be national investment corporations run by professional managers that would lead the way. The "buccaneer era," as one southern Ontario developer put it, was over; the growing scale and complexity of construction projects, and particularly downtown redevelopment, required resources and long-term financial commitments available to only the largest enterprises.<sup>266</sup> Vertical integration of planning, financing, construction, and property management roles into one corporation was the norm in these new enterprises, as was public financing through stock offerings. Although Eaton's was Canada's largest retailer, its commitments in other spheres and the limited confidence it inspired as a land developer meant that it lacked the capacity of these new development giants. In retrospect, the company's efforts to "go it alone" on the 1966 Eaton Centre plans belong firmly to an earlier era, in which the corporate citizen was found among the ranks of development entrepreneurs.

The creation of Cadillac Fairview (1973-1975) brought together more than \$1 billion in real estate assets, as well as three firms—Cadillac, Fairview, and former Eaton partner Canadian Equity—that had been behind some of the most successful urban development

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<sup>264</sup> Ira Gluskin, *Royal Commission on Corporate Concentration Study No. 3: Cadillac Fairview Corporation Ltd* (Ottawa: 1976) provides a history and financial overview of the corporation.

<sup>265</sup> Gunter Gad and Deryck Holdsworth observe that in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century banks and insurance companies not only occupied, but built, most large-scale office buildings in Toronto. "Corporate Capitalism and the Emergence of the High-Rise Office Building," *Urban Geography* 8:3 (May-June 1987), 220-28. See also Jeremy Rudin, *The Changing Structure of the Land Development Industry in the Toronto Area* (Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, 1978) 6-9.

<sup>266</sup> *Globe and Mail*, Sep. 21, 1976, cited in James Lorimer, *The Developers*. See also 29-57. Lorimer may exaggerate the dominance of large development corporations, which represented only 15-20% of the industry in the late 1970s, but there is no denying their importance to large-scale, capital-intensive downtown projects.

projects in Canada. Its portfolio included 16,000 residential apartments and 15 major office buildings, including Toronto's celebrated TD Centre complex. But by far the most profitable of its investments was a group of 33 shopping centres distributed across the country.<sup>267</sup> Since the mid-1950s, when Eaton's began to expand beyond its traditional downtown locations, suburban shopping centres and plazas had captured an ever-growing fraction of Canada's retail market. In 1956 there were only six shopping malls with more than 30 shops in the country; by 1973 there were 101, of which fourteen were owned by Cadillac Fairview, by far the industry leader. As in the United States, consumers were drawn to the appeal of modern, climate-controlled shopping streets accessible by car, and it was widely recognized in the development industry that this popularity made malls "money machines" for those who built and managed them.<sup>268</sup>

### **An urban shopping mall**

By the late 1960s North American mall developers and proponents of downtown revitalization had been speculating for years about the viability of transplanting the incredible success of the suburban shopping mall into downtown.<sup>269</sup> Or perhaps *back* into downtown, since the shopping centres of the 1950s and 1960s were themselves modelled on an idealized old-style retail strip complete with all of the benefits—and none of the inconveniences or dangers—of Main Street. One way to make downtown shopping more pleasant was pedestrianization, and that was by 1970 being seriously considered for Yonge; another was enclosure. Wellington Square (1960), Canada's first urban shopping mall, converted a former industrial site in central London, Ontario into a 36-store shopping centre built around a four-level Eaton's store.<sup>270</sup> By building vertically for density, rather than horizontally for sprawl, the massive 50-80 acre footprint of the regional shopping centre could be shrunk down to a manageable size, without sacrificing retail space or doing without parking. As plans for the new Eaton Centre took shape, urban malls were being planned across the United States; closer to home, Fairview was preparing to break ground on the

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<sup>267</sup> Ira Gluskin, *Royal Commission on Corporate Concentration Study No. 3*, 34-35 provides detailed statistics.

<sup>268</sup> Lorimer, *The Developers*, 186-215. They may, however, have been less profitable investments than in the United States. Thomas Hanchett, "U.S. Tax Policy and the Shopping-Center Boom of the 1950s and 1960s," *American Historical Review* 101:4 (Oct. 1996): 1082-1110 compares the two countries.

<sup>269</sup> On this transition see Bernard Freiden and Lynne Sagalyn, *Downtown Inc.: How America Rebuilds Cities* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 61-86.

<sup>270</sup> "Eaton Store Main Feature of London Shopping Centre," *Globe and Mail*, July 23, 1958.

Pacific Centre, a block-sized shopping complex with abutting office tower in the heart of downtown Vancouver. The main tenant of that project—and original landowner of the parcel, former site of the Hotel Vancouver—was, naturally, Eaton’s.<sup>271</sup>

By 1970 Eaton’s had agreed to a similar deal in Toronto. Fairview would buy its lands between Dundas and Queen, and take a majority stake in their redevelopment. The department store and TD Bank would each be minority partners, with 20 percent shares in the project.<sup>272</sup> Despite the close business ties between the corporations, negotiations had been long and complex, involving more than a dozen early designs produced by both the developer and the department store.<sup>273</sup> Fairview brought with it a history of mall building and a strong preference for the profitability of that particular development form. Its planners, including a returning Victor Gruen, recast the project as a refinement of the urban shopping mall, moving away from both Viking’s heterogeneous shopping precinct and the more monumental civic centre of the 1966 Master Plan. A retail arcade or shopping street was a key feature of those earlier plans, but in the new iteration of the Eaton Centre taking shape it became indisputably *the* key feature. One key concession Eaton’s had to make was agreeing to move its store away from the corner of Queen and Yonge, where it had faced off with Simpson’s department store for more than 70 years.<sup>274</sup> Instead, the retailer would be located a few hundred metres to the north, at the less prestigious intersection of Dundas and Yonge; meanwhile Simpson’s would be integrated into the Centre with a covered passageway. For more than a decade, the “dumbbell,” a shopping corridor anchored by two major department stores that drew foot traffic along its length, had been the most successful shopping centre design in North America, mimicking the earlier success of similar Main Street configurations.<sup>275</sup> Fairview had no intention of departing from that profitable script, even if it meant subordinating a decades-old commercial rivalry (and some measure of Eaton’s corporate pride) to good mall planning.

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<sup>271</sup> Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, “A study in Modern(ist) urbanism: planning Vancouver, 1945-1965,” *Urban History* 38:1 (2011), 147-48.

<sup>272</sup> “Fairview to Dennison, May 7, 1970,” CTA, P043164-10.

<sup>273</sup> “15-year history of Eaton’s Toronto CBD, 1969,” Eaton’s Fonds, AO, B253779.

<sup>274</sup> “Eaton’s future in downtown Toronto, Apr. 1969,” Eaton’s Fonds, AO, B381623-4.

<sup>275</sup> On mall designs see Howard Gillette, “The Evolution of the Planned Shopping Center in Suburb and City,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 51:4 (Autumn 1985): 449-60.

## Trinity Church

Initially, this new take on the project seemed to be taking shape in much the same circumstances as the first. Downtown, the 1960s development boom was continuing apace. Even as residential development in the suburbs dropped dramatically, there were few signs of a slowdown in commercial construction downtown; the real estate industry labelled 1969 the “greatest year in history” for office building in Toronto and record growth seemed poised to continue well into the next decade.<sup>276</sup> A Development Department bulletin boasted of two dozen forthcoming projects that would reshape the core, ranging from the very hypothetical redevelopment of 180 acres of railway lands to a cluster of towers and mixed-use complexes already dramatically densifying the intersection of Yonge and Bloor.<sup>277</sup> In other ways, too, observers could be forgiven a sense of *déjà vu*. Once again, in spring 1970, well before Fairview was prepared to go public with its plans, the resurrected Eaton Centre was splashed across the front pages of Toronto newspapers; once again, the demolition of an historic structure was deemed essential to the development. This time it was Holy Trinity Church.<sup>278</sup>

Anglican Trinity Church was built in 1847 as “the Parochial Church of the Poor of Toronto,” endowed by an English visitor who found the city’s lack of free (that is, pew rent-free) churches deplorable.<sup>279</sup> A century later, hemmed in by Eaton’s factories and warehouses, the same concern for social welfare had given it new life as a provider of community services and a meeting place for downtown progressives. By the early 1970s the church and its two outbuildings housed a 24-hour distress centre, a community theatre group, drop-in services for youth, and a free school. Its 250-strong congregation included two aldermen—pedestrian mall coordinator William Archer and historian and heritage advocate William Kilbourn—and other members of what one journalist called (perhaps with veiled anti-elitism) “the cream of Toronto’s articulate, concerned intellectual community, deeply involved in many of the City’s issue’s.” Or, in another memorable formulation,

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<sup>276</sup> A.E. LePage Ltd, *Real Estate Market Survey, Metropolitan Toronto, 1970* (Toronto: A.E. LePage Ltd., 1970).

<sup>277</sup> Development Department, *Development in Toronto: Bulletin 1* (Toronto: 1971).

<sup>278</sup> “Eaton’s wants to demolish church for big project,” *Toronto Star*, May 1, 1970.

<sup>279</sup> Eric Arthur, *No Mean City*, 82. See also C. Ian P. Tate, *Church of the Holy Trinity, Trinity Square, Toronto* (Toronto: 1965).



*Image 3.8: A downtown church. Holy Trinity, looking east towards Yonge Street, 1972. The Eaton's factories loom on the right-hand (south) side. Bob Olsen/Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0110944f.*

they tend to be the sort of citizens who fly ecology flags on the front porch of their houses, and sign anti-Viet Nam war petitions...and play guitars and recorders and use the word 'community' a lot.<sup>280</sup>

Trinity was an early ally to many of the rights-based causes and protest movements that would define the politics of the 1960s and 1970s in Toronto, echoing the efforts of progressive churches across North America to stay relevant and fulfill their mission of serving the social good amid widespread social change.<sup>281</sup> With its location just steps from Yonge Street, it would become a key site in a network of youth and counterculture-friendly alternative social spaces downtown, giving it a rebellious identity that more than once threatened it with disestablishment by the Diocese.<sup>282</sup> In 1968 it billeted newly arrived Vietnam war resisters in its basement; in 1971 hosted fundraisers for the Stop Spadina campaign; in 1972 early gay rights advocates the Community Homophile Association of Toronto (CHAT) used the church for their first public meeting, dances, and early Pride celebrations.<sup>283</sup>

Fairview aggressively pursued the Trinity lands, making several purchase offers for the church and then its outbuildings, and lobbying Toronto politicians to consider expropriating them and several other holdout businesses on Yonge Street.<sup>284</sup> Meanwhile, Eaton's public relations staff urged caution. Their report foresaw that encroaching on Trinity's property could be "a rallying point for professional protesters or political opportunists or Eaton-baiters," and suggested that the company earn credit with the public by moving its buildings brick by brick to another location.<sup>285</sup> This reflected both residual anxiety about the retailer's image since the Old City Hall debacle, and a fundamental misunderstanding of the Trinity congregation and its allies. Rather than knee-jerk protesters or "Eaton-baiters"—the company had viewed the Friends of Old City Hall in a similar light—

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<sup>280</sup> "Church small but powerful pawn in development game," *Telegram*, Feb. 9, 1971; "Jelly sandwiches yowling babies at Holy Trinity," *Toronto Star*, Oct. 16, 1972.

<sup>281</sup> Bruce Douville, "Christ and Counterculture: Churches, Clergy, and Hippies in Toronto's Yorkville, 1965-1970," *Social History/Histoire sociale* 47:95 (Nov. 2014): 747-74.

<sup>282</sup> Author's interview with David Crombie, Feb. 11, 2014; David Churchill, "'American Expatriates and the Building of Alternative Social Space in Toronto, 1965-1977,'" *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 39:1 (2010): 31-44.

<sup>283</sup> Anonymous author, "The Gay Archivist at Work," *Gay Archivist* 9 (1991). Available online through the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives at [www.clga.ca/Material/Records/docs/chatlga9.htm](http://www.clga.ca/Material/Records/docs/chatlga9.htm).

<sup>284</sup> An overview from the church perspective is in "Gibson to Wood re: Trinity Church, Apr. 13, 1971," CTA, P043164-10.

<sup>285</sup> "Public relations position: Toronto CBD, Apr. 30, 1970," Eaton's Fonds, AO, B253778.

they were a well-organized group of citizens with their own vision of downtown redevelopment, and the political influence to secure it a public hearing.

As the success of the Yonge Street pedestrian mall and the anti-Spadina expressway campaign demonstrated, enthusiasm for “planning for people” was high in 1970s Toronto. This was vividly expressed in Trinity Church’s response to Fairview’s offer, which came in the form of its own redevelopment plans, revealed in early 1971.<sup>286</sup> Architect and congregant Gerald Robinson envisioned the closure of Trinity Square (then a right of way partially given over to parking) and adjoining lanes to create a new pedestrianized public space. Older service buildings would be remodelled or moved to create low-rise office and commercial buildings, and to allow room for tree-lined promenades connecting the block to surrounding streets. It was a modern take on a traditional European church square, as well as a chance to make Trinity’s aging premises more functional and financially viable. From a design perspective, the project neatly summarized the consensus among many planners and urbanists who, influenced by critics like Jane Jacobs and the tenets of urban design, had long been searching for ways to open up and humanize the downtown environment. There was much that was reminiscent of Viking, which also identified Trinity Square as an oasis of public space in the heart of a redeveloped superblock.

For Trinity’s congregation and leadership, the principal aim of this \$2.5-5 million development was as much spiritual as corporeal: to use urban expertise to carve out a “people place” in a downtown increasingly given over to impersonal development and the “hustle” of consumer capitalism.<sup>287</sup> Viewed in that light, there were continuities with the church’s progressive stances on issues like gay rights, and its reputation as a safe space for alternative lifestyles and visions of society. In addition to bringing considerable benefits in its own right, church spokespeople saw the new Trinity Square as a protest against projects like the Eaton Centre, which

take a whole city block, clear off all the buildings and people, dig a big hole,  
put all the pedestrians in the hole and call it an underground concourse...  
They want to maximize the return on their commercial investment; we’re

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<sup>286</sup> The plans are summarized in Development Department, *Proposed Fairview-Eaton’s, Trinity Church Development* (Toronto: July 1972).

<sup>287</sup> “Aims and Criteria of the Church of the Holy Trinity, Apr. 21, 1971,” AO, Pollution Probe Fonds, B253237-DE.

trying to create a people place that will bring together a number of human values.<sup>288</sup>

There were some common threads between this proposal and the earlier campaign to save Old City Hall: both had roots in Toronto's educated elite, and expressed strong attachments to built heritage and the history of civic communion it embodied. Both, in different ways, took a moral stance on the development process and the urban future. But by offering a credible counter-proposal to demolition—something the Friends had struggled with—as well as a larger critique of capital's impact on the city, Trinity went much further than earlier opponents of the Eaton Centre. Another crucial difference was that while as citizens the Friends of Old City Hall claimed a place in determining the future of that municipal building, Holy Trinity based its challenge to Fairview on its right to dispose of private property directly controlled by its congregation and the Anglican Church.

### **A new politics of development**

Holy Trinity's counter-proposal was part of a larger shift in the politics of development in Toronto. In the older neighbourhoods that surrounded the central business district, longstanding opposition to apartment tower construction had been reinvigorated by the development boom.<sup>289</sup> Between 1951 and 1966 the city's stock of apartments increased by 36,000—nearly doubling—while 10,000 houses were torn down and not replaced. Over the next five years a further 20,000 apartment units were added in the older city, mostly in areas adjoining downtown.<sup>290</sup> Meanwhile, a larger wave of apartment construction was densifying the new suburbs of Metropolitan Toronto. New residents' groups were formed and old ones strengthened as citizens protested the development industry's aggressive reshaping of their neighbourhoods, which they saw as physically destructive—in that it entailed tearing down often well-built older homes to make way for towers—disruptive of community, and fundamentally undemocratic. In 1968 around two dozen groups banded together to form the Confederation of Residents' and Ratepayers' Associations (CORRA) as their unified voice at City Hall.<sup>291</sup> But most Toronto politicians, while sympathetic when

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<sup>288</sup> "Holy Trinity Church wants to build a downtown 'people place,'" *Toronto Star*, Mar. 13, 1971.

<sup>289</sup> On early opposition to apartments see Richard Dennis, "Interpreting the Apartment House: Modernity and Metropolitanism in Toronto, 1900-1930," *Journal of Historical Geography* 20:3 (1994): 305-22.

<sup>290</sup> CTPB, *Core Area Task Force: Technical Appendix* (Toronto: CTPB, 1974), 292.

<sup>291</sup> "CORRA Constitution 1968, revised 1973," CTA, 140408-3.



these issues arose in their own wards, did little to address them in any systematic way. Local concerns with densification were mostly ignored, or filtered down to city planners, who tried to hold tower projects to a higher architectural standard, and, when they were able to, mediate between residents and developers.<sup>292</sup>

This combination of citizen activism and an apparently unresponsive civic administration made development—and its discontents—the most visible and widely discussed public issue in early 1970s Toronto. It also created opportunities for a new generation of politicians, including future mayors John Sewell and David Crombie, both first elected as councillors in 1969, who sought to channel this citizen mobilization into a political platform based on planning reform and restrictions on neighbourhood redevelopment.<sup>293</sup> A few important symbolic victories paved the way for the reformers' victory in the 1972 elections. In 1970 the City's diminished but still unpopular urban renewal program was effectively ended, providing, like the cancellation of the Spadina Expressway a year later, a powerful (and later much mythologized) example of ordinary people seizing control of the planning process.<sup>294</sup> Also in 1971, in a move which seemed to perfectly sum up the spirit of the moment, a citizen deputation prompted the removal of the Redevelopment Advisory Council's special advisory status at City Hall.<sup>295</sup> The group was not disbanded, but by virtue of the decision would in future have no more formal right to participate in redevelopment issues than any of the dozens of other citizen organizations proliferating across the city.

### **Contesting the corporate city**

Inspired by this citizen mobilization and the rise of reform politics, a systemic critique of the development industry was taking shape in Toronto. Its proponents were a growing number of young journalists, researchers, and activists who saw neighbourhood battles against densification as part of a larger struggle for power in the city. Some based their criticism on direct experience of community organizing; others used research and observation to

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<sup>292</sup> Richard White, *Planning Toronto*, 207-11, 293-94.

<sup>293</sup> See John Sewell, David Crombie, William Kilbourn and Karl Jaffary, *Inside City Hall: The Year of the Opposition* (Toronto: A.M. Hakkert, 1971), esp. 73-106 for narratives of this first reform term.

<sup>294</sup> Graham Fraser, *Fighting Back: Urban Renewal in Trefann Court* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1972) and John Sewell, *Up Against City Hall* (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1972), 14-41 are two firsthand accounts that set the tone for later interpretations.

<sup>295</sup> "City ends business group's special status," *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 18, 1971.

present sweeping portraits of how development worked, and who benefited from its often staggering profit margins. In late 1971, countercultural newspaper *Guerilla* set the tone with a series of articles on the development industry. The authors explained that they were motivated by the

large-scale opposition of many community organizations which had sprung up to stop the razing and rebuilding of their neighbourhoods...[battles] fought on a piecemeal basis, and with an inadequate understanding of the enemy.<sup>296</sup>

In this analysis, the development process was the most visible manifestation of capitalism's unprecedented capacity to transform the environment. The rapid growth of the postwar decades had given large development corporations a near-stranglehold on the urban future, just as it had strengthened the power of capital throughout Canadian society. Suburban sprawl, high-rise apartments, shopping centres, and skyscrapers were all part of what journalist James Lorimer would later call the "corporate city," a profit-oriented urbanism that did little to accommodate community or human potential.<sup>297</sup> In its social and cultural implications, the corporate city bore a strong resemblance to the "system" or "machine" that the 1960s counterculture tried so intently to escape or subvert.<sup>298</sup>

Contesting the corporate city meant mapping its contours, and linking together to stop or moderate its spread. A forerunner in this work was local NGO Pollution Probe's Urban Team, established in 1971 to tackle both the human and environmental consequences of urban development.<sup>299</sup> Another was the Downtown Action project (1971-79), established the same year with a federal Opportunities for Youth grant. Inspired by both academic urban research methods and the New Left principle of community organizing, these organizations worked to inform local groups of the scope of the development threat, and to foster communication between them. A key aspect of this approach was mining industry data and the public record to track land assemblies and

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<sup>296</sup> "Developers Series: A beginning," *Guerilla* 2:26 (Dec. 1971).

<sup>297</sup> James Lorimer, *The Developers*. See also Lorimer, "Citizens and the Corporate Development of the Contemporary Canadian City," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 12:1 (June 1983): 3-9.

<sup>298</sup> On this image of society see Andrew Kirk, "'Machines of Loving Grace': Alternative Technology, Environment, and the Counterculture," in Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 353-78.

<sup>299</sup> Ryan O'Connor, *The First Green Wave: Pollution Probe and the Origins of Environmental Activism* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015), 114-16.

building applications, an approach that both acted as an “early warning system” for residents, and helped make public the complicated logistics and business relationships behind large-scale development.<sup>300</sup> Their work was widely diffused in alternative and neighbourhood media, and in dedicated publications like the Urban Team’s monthly *Whose City?*; later, it would be developed in more depth in pioneering Canadian urban research journal *City Magazine* (1974-92). Anti-development tones were struck in the mainstream media, too. In contrast to the 1950s and 1960s, when Ron Haggart seemed a lone voice in the wilderness, the early 1970s saw both the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail* featuring development-skeptic columnists like James Lorimer, David Lewis Stein, and John Sewell. Editorial endorsements of the project were much more equivocal than they had been five years earlier.<sup>301</sup>

This activism could seldom be separated from the drive for political reform, and not only because some of its most notable proponents enjoyed success in 1970s city politics. Critics of the City’s management of the development boom thought it had fostered a political class mainly concerned with cheerleading growth. Much was also made of the Development Department’s cozying up to industry executives, and former Commissioner Walter Manthorpe’s new role as spokesman for Meridian Developments. In a short, punchy book titled *Toronto for Sale* (1972), David Lewis Stein wrote that elected officials were “trip[ping] over each other in their eagerness to please the developers”; John Sewell would put it even more bluntly, arguing that “City Hall is in fact controlled by the land development industry.”<sup>302</sup> These criticisms stung for long-serving politicians like Mayor William Dennison, who saw nothing wrong with market-led redevelopment in accordance with long-term planning goals. It was in some ways a measure of how much the discussion around development had shifted that former people’s champion Dennison would end his career in 1972 raging against the interference of citizens’ groups, their localism, and inability to see the wider public interest.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> 2008 interview with Marilyn Cox quoted in Ryan O’Connor, *The First Green Wave*, 115.

<sup>301</sup> See for example James Lorimer’s “It’s a champagne time for developers,” *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 20, 1972.

<sup>302</sup> David Lewis Stein, *Toronto for Sale*, 10, John Sewell, *Up Against City Hall*, 165.

<sup>303</sup> “Mayor lists problems: Davis, Holy Trinity, and protest groups,” *Toronto Star*, Oct. 12, 1972.

## Negotiating the public interest

All of this had important consequences for Fairview's rethinking of the Eaton Centre. When concept plans for a 250-store urban shopping mall—by far the largest in Canada—were presented to Council and the public in spring 1971, there was little of the showmanship or optimism of 1966.<sup>304</sup> Fairview's spokespeople would try to downplay the broad implications of the project, arguing that since it was not asking for rezoning—just the closing and transfer of several streets—the civic administration was not dealing with a planning issue, but “a question primarily of traffic, with respect to both people and vehicles”; in other words, a technical problem not requiring extensive deliberations.<sup>305</sup> Despite this assurance, the Eaton Centre quickly became the subject of a broad-based negotiation that clearly reflected the political uncertainty and citizen mobilization of the time.

Holy Trinity's development counter-proposal played a crucial role in this. Not only did the church's congregation challenge the existing Eaton Centre plans, but it did so on the firm basis of undisputed property title that stretched back more than a century. Abrogating this small but formidable community institution's rights to determine the future of its own property was not something the City could do lightly. While a few politicians speculated about using expropriation powers to force Trinity into conformity with Fairview's plan, it soon became obvious that a much more politically palatable solution was to refuse approval until the two parties had reached a negotiated compromise.<sup>306</sup> That decision would give Trinity's left-leaning, people planning-oriented congregation substantial influence over the project; it also served to stall the process of approval by nearly a year, opening it up to other voices eager to assert their own interpretation of the public interest.

Toronto's increasingly urban design-oriented and outspoken planning department did not miss the opportunity.<sup>307</sup> Fresh from a battle with Metro Toronto over a proposal to convert Yonge Street into a commuter arterial, Chief Planner Dennis Barker expressed

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<sup>304</sup> See for example “Developer unveils new Eaton Centre,” *Toronto Star*, Apr. 8, 1971.

<sup>305</sup> “Proposed Fairview/Eaton Development Presentation, July 17, 1972,” *Eaton Centre Briefs 1972* (Toronto: Toronto Public Library, 1972).

<sup>306</sup> Negotiations between the two began in May 1971, just a few weeks after the lukewarm reception of the Fairview plan at City Hall, and continued until February 1972. “Chronological record: Toronto CBD, 1974,” OA, Eaton's Fonds, B382473. On expropriation see “Eaton plan poses tough expropriation questions,” *Toronto Star*, Feb. 9, 1971 and “Mayor says MPPs killed city's chances to aid Eaton Centre,” *Toronto Star*, May 27, 1971.

<sup>307</sup> On changes in the planning staff and their orientation see Richard White, *Planning Toronto*, 273-75.

strong support for a negotiated settlement between Trinity and Fairview. Barker also made public a detailed set of planning objectives for the project area, arguing that it was crucial to establish public goals *before* evaluating the specific merits of the Eaton Centre proposal.<sup>308</sup> In effect, this was a restatement of Matthew Lawson's comprehensive, but mostly ignored, report on the 1966 Centre. It made two principal challenges to Fairview's urban shopping mall: that it be a development with a strong public identity, featuring spaces and design elements that would attract Torontonians to the area for reasons other than shopping; and that it look west to City Hall and east to Yonge Street, connecting, rather than dividing, these two vital areas. Without a rezoning application, planners had no direct role to play in shaping its design. Indirectly, however, these objectives and other interventions by Barker and downtown planner Tony Coombs would have an important influence on the tenor of negotiations between the City and Fairview.<sup>309</sup>

There was a public push for more transparency in the City's handling of the project. In summer 1971, the *Toronto Citizen*, one of several small-circulation publications that facilitated communication among oppositional and community groups, lauded Dennis Barker for his forward-thinking stance, and promised that unless Council opened up to public input on the Eaton Centre, the project would become "the target of a citizen campaign on the scale of the Stop Spadina movement."<sup>310</sup> One of Downtown Action's first actions was to hand out leaflets on Yonge Street warning that "Eaton's is buying our city!": the group urged shoppers to boycott the retailer and make their presence felt at Council meetings until the superblock was developed in a responsible, "people-oriented way."<sup>311</sup> Meanwhile, within Council John Sewell publicly attacked William Dennison and the Development Department for repeated private, un-minuted meetings with Fairview.<sup>312</sup> It was increasingly obvious that the secretive, business-like negotiations and extensive use of political proxies that had characterized the first Eaton Centre could not be repeated in this

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<sup>308</sup> "City's chief planner supports Church of Holy Trinity in its battle against Eaton complex," *Toronto Star*, May 10, 1971; "Objectives for the area bounded by Dundas, Yonge, Queen and Bay Streets, May 11, 1971," CTA, P043164-10.

<sup>309</sup> For an example of planning objectives migrating into Development Department negotiations with Fairview see "Coordination: Eaton-Fairview Project, Apr. 29, 1971," CTA, P043164-10.

<sup>310</sup> "Make Eaton Centre a real city affair," *Toronto Citizen*, July 8, 1971.

<sup>311</sup> "Eaton's leaflet, summer 1971," CTA, Downtown Action Fonds, 62-3-12.

<sup>312</sup> "City Clerk to Mayor re: Sewell's request, Jan. 10, 1971," CTA, P043164-10, "Clerk to Emslie, Mar. 10, 1972," CTA, 527927-20.

new political climate. By 1972 even the most pro-development members of Council were resigned to that fact, and after pressure from CORRA, Pollution Probe, and Sewell agreed to hold public hearings on the project.<sup>313</sup>

### **The Centre and the strip**

Engagement with Fairview's plan turned in large part on its relationship to the Yonge Street commercial strip. This was in contrast to 1966, when discussion of the 1966 Centre had overwhelmingly focused on Bay Street and Civic Square. Then, the placement of public spaces, towers, and underground walkways all emphasized a complex that "faced"—both aesthetically and functionally—west and south. For most observers at the time, the fate of small Yonge Street businesses was an afterthought. The ethic of downtown redevelopment assumed that Toronto's natural progression would be for older uses to give way to more efficient ones; as the Toronto property commissioner stated in a 1966 report on the potential impact of the Centre, only those merchants who showed ingenuity and "changed with the times" could be assured continuity.<sup>314</sup> The views of Yonge Street merchants themselves were almost entirely absent from the discussion; media accounts and communications with the City suggest that while some thought Eaton's redevelopment plans could revitalize Yonge, others saw no place for themselves in the modern future promised by the company.<sup>315</sup>

The situation was different the second time around. With the rediscovery of Yonge as the locus of the city's nightlife in the late 1960s, and the early success of summer pedestrian malls, more attention than ever before was being devoted to the preservation or improvement of the street's unique concentration of small retail and entertainment. In the wake of the first Eaton Centre and amid ongoing battles over street widening, Toronto planners had demonstrated a keen interest in Yonge Street, calling for preservation of the area's heterogeneous low-rise landscape, its sociability and character as a "pedestrian

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<sup>313</sup> "Eaton Centre info no. 1, Jun. 1972," AO, Pollution Probe Fonds, B253237-DE, "Public hearings scheduled on Eaton Centre," *Toronto Star*, Jun. 28, 1972.

<sup>314</sup> "Ribbon commercial businesses and downtown development, Mar. 24, 1966," CTA, 445061-4.

<sup>315</sup> "Notes, deputations to Metro, Mar. 22, 1966," CTA, 103164-10; Businesses welcome proposal by Eaton's as area stimulus," *Globe and Mail*, Sep. 25, 1965.

outdoor place.”<sup>316</sup> This seemed threatened by Fairview’s plans to replace five blocks of Yonge—and approximately thirty small businesses—with an indoor shopping corridor lined with 250 modern retail units. Early sketches suggested a complex that faced neither west nor east, but inwards on itself, leaving the west side of Yonge between Queen and Dundas a windowless, blank wall.<sup>317</sup> At public meetings in 1972 the Downtown Council—rapidly becoming a strong voice for Yonge Street merchants in civic affairs—called for opening the mall up to the street by adding storefronts on Yonge, while avoiding interference with plans for a permanent pedestrian mall.<sup>318</sup>

### **Compromise in the reform era**

The Eaton Centre had become a public-private project, if not in the way its early planners or corporate backers had imagined. Responses to these assertions of the public interest came in several forms. In November 1972, after a long and acrimonious debate, Toronto Council approved a development agreement of unprecedented size and complexity for the Eaton superblock. Over more than 170 pages it bound Fairview, Holy Trinity Church, and Eaton’s to a schedule of demolition and construction and a site plan that included strong building restrictions and significant public space. A second agreement between Fairview and Trinity Church dealt specifically with integration of their two redevelopment projects.<sup>319</sup> Securing these agreements was, somewhat ironically, the last major political success for William Dennison, who had been propelled to office based on his principled stand against the original development in 1966. From another perspective, it was also a kind of vindication of his and the Friends of Old City Hall’s earlier position, since Toronto was now promised both the tax revenue of the Eaton Centre *and* preservation of that historic structure.

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<sup>316</sup> Objectives for the area bounded by Dundas, Yonge, Queen and Bay Streets, May 11, 1971,” CTA, P043164-10.

<sup>317</sup> Development Department, *Proposed Fairview-Eaton’s, Trinity Church Development* (Toronto: July 1972).

<sup>318</sup> “Submission by the Downtown Council on the Eaton/Fairview Project, July 17, 1972,” *Eaton Centre Briefs 1972* (Toronto: Toronto Public Library, 1972).

<sup>319</sup> City of Toronto, *Appendix “A” to the Minutes of Proceedings for the Year 1972* (Toronto: 1973), 4242-415; “Agreement between Church of the Holy Trinity, Fairview Corporation and Eaton’s, Nov. 14, 1972,” AO, Eaton’s Fonds, F299-501-135.

In the background was the fall 1972 municipal election, in which the question of how to manage the development boom was the principal issue.<sup>320</sup> The Eaton Centre agreements were signed just six weeks before a reform majority, led by Mayor David Crombie, swept into office on a platform of neighbourhood preservation and citizen empowerment. The Centre project played a minor but notable role in the campaign, as a citizen coalition that included ratepayer lobby group CORRA pushed for a promise from the incoming government to halt Fairview's project, along with several contentious residential tower developments approved over the past year.<sup>321</sup> Meanwhile, an anti-reform campaign was launched by the Urban Development Institute (UDI), a non-profit group that counted among its members nearly every major player in the Ontario land development industry.<sup>322</sup> In pamphlets distributed to apartment residents, press releases, and media interviews, the UDI cast ratepayer associations and anti-development activists as unrepresentative "pressure groups" whose opposition to densification threatened to halt urban progress and deny tens of thousands of people access to housing.<sup>323</sup>

Fairview played no role in that clumsy and ultimately unsuccessful campaign. From the corporation's perspective, a development agreement with the City that had seemed onerous months earlier was now the main assurance that the project would not be scuttled by reform's rise to power.<sup>324</sup> The new Council spent much of 1973 debating the idea of a "holding bylaw" that would limit large-scale construction downtown while new planning standards were drawn up. As David Crombie explained in a speech to the building industry, citizens and the civic administration

simply must have a say in our rate and style of change. The city's future has to be decided not on the basis of what is most convenient for speculators or developers but on the basis of sound planning and what is in the best interest of the city's people.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> A good critical account of Crombie's campaign and first year in office is in Jon Caulfield, *The Tiny Perfect Mayor* (Toronto: Lorimer and Co., 1974), 19-37.

<sup>321</sup> "Mayor Crombie: We've got to get people out of cars," *Toronto Star*, Dec. 23, 1973.

<sup>322</sup> "Membership Directory, UDI Ontario, May 1971," AO, Pollution Probe Fonds, B253237-UD.

<sup>323</sup> "Special Election Issue," *UDI Views*, Dec. 1972.

<sup>324</sup> "Fairview demurs on development agreement," *Toronto Star*, May 18, 1972; "Wood to Crombie, Sep. 11, 1973," CTA, Downtown Action Fonds, 62-3-12.

<sup>325</sup> "Notes: Speech to Building Owners and Managers Association, Oct. 16, 1973," CTA, 145939-24.



In keeping with the role of the tower—commercial or residential—as symbol of the unregulated development boom, any building over 45 feet in height or 40,000 square feet in area would be prohibited without specific permission from Council.<sup>326</sup> The law, which would prove to be mostly symbolic, was eventually passed in December 1973. By that point a new downtown planning review by the reformist Core Area Task Force was underway, and a number of other changes were being made to the way housing and development policy were handled in Toronto. Most notably, there was a shift in approach to the central core that emphasized residential over commercial development: downtown should be not just a workplace and shopping area, but a place to live and play.<sup>327</sup> Both citizen activists—led by David Lewis Stein’s Better Downtown Planning Corporation—and reform politicians attempted to force the City to revisit the Eaton Centre plans, whether using the holding bylaw or by withholding building permits. Their campaign failed but reinforced for Fairview the importance of producing a design that would not only conform to previous agreements but forestall further challenges.<sup>328</sup>

### **Toronto’s Galleria**

In this context, and after personal pressure from architect and Bronfman heiress Phyllis Lambert (the “P” in Cemp investments, and a major backer of the development), Fairview hired Bauhaus-trained architect Eberhard Zeidler to completely redesign the main shopping mall. Zeidler, known for his interest in complex, street-inspired spaces and futuristic glass-and-metal projects like Ontario Place (1971), recalls caution about involvement in a project that had “such bad publicity” over the five years. The challenge, as he saw it, was reconciling the double imperative of creating a place people wanted to be, and designing a \$250 million development that satisfied a mall-builder’s standard of profitability. Early brainstorming sessions thus included both debates over retail rents per square foot with Fairview executives, and discussions of creating people-centred urban space with Zeidler’s friend and well-known urbanist social critic Jane Jacobs.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> “Chronology: Holding bylaw, n.d. late 1973,” CTA, 145939-24.

<sup>327</sup> See Richard White, *Planning Toronto*, 304-18.

<sup>328</sup> “Better Downtown Planning Eaton Centre memorandum, Jan. 28, 1974,” “Wood to Crombie, Jan. 14, 1974,” CTA, Downtown Action Fonds, 62-3-12; “Citizens’ group seeks scrutiny of Eaton Centre,” *Toronto Star*, Feb. 14, 1974.

<sup>329</sup> Eberhard Zeidler, *Building Cities Life: An Autobiography in Architecture, Volume 1*, 167-68, 175, 182.



*Image 3.9: A model of Eberhard Zeidler's Eaton Centre, 1975. Note the box-like Eaton store at the right (Dundas Street is at the far right), and the tree-lined, pedestrian-friendly treatment of Yonge Street that echoes the pedestrian malls of the early 1970s. Reg Innell/Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0109990f.*

The centrepiece of Eberhard Zeidler's design was an 800 ft long, 125 ft tall glass-roofed shopping arcade stretching from Queen Street to the southern edge of a massive new Eaton's store.<sup>330</sup> Ziedler claimed that this vast skylit gallery, which would become the hallmark of the mall, was inspired by Milan's Galleria Vittore Emanuele II (1877). Renowned in architectural circles for integrating palazzo-like façades with an arching glass roof, the Galleria also fascinated early proponents of the Yonge Street pedestrian mall, who saw it as a model of a people-oriented shopping street. In fact by the 1970s multiple levels and glass roofs were a common feature of prestige shopping malls across North America, including Houston's Galleria and Toronto's Fairview Mall, both opened in 1970. The Toronto Eaton Centre was in that respect a refinement, rather than a major reinterpretation, of a tried-and-true form. In other ways, the Centre was obviously a place of commerce, albeit an airy and well-lit one. It was bracketed by curved-cornered glass and steel office towers thirty storeys in height, with the south tower cutting right through the galleria for several floors. In

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<sup>330</sup> Zeidler, *Building Cities Life: An Autobiography in Architecture, Volume 1*, 165-87.

total, the first two phases of the complex incorporated 3.2 million square feet of built space, on par with Viking but considerably smaller than the 1966 Centre.

Eaton's new flagship, designed mostly by in-house architect E.L. Hankinson, was the largest department store in Canada, with a million square feet of shopping over nine storeys. Seen from the outside, it seemed to adhere to the company's postwar predilection for boxy, practically windowless stores, although it was flanked north and south by glass atriums with plentiful light and street views. Only at ground level, where an arcaded façade of window displays faced onto Yonge Street, was there a hint of the stately, street-facing department store buildings of the past. However, the interior belied that appearance, with an open central court that gave the store a novel sense of grandeur and space.<sup>331</sup>

Perhaps the most striking change in plans, besides the shopping gallery, was the Centre's opening up on Trinity Square and Yonge Street. A key tenet of the development agreement was that streets closed to build the complex would be replaced by three acres of public open space and pedestrian paths; less than in the monumental 1966 design, but considerably more than any subsequent plan. For those on foot, Trinity Church effectively became the heart of the complex. To avoid Trinity Square's complete overshadowing by the mall, construction surrounding it was stepped back and lowered according to complex measurements of height and sunlight that baffled many observers, but would significantly improve the quality of the public space when it was completed.<sup>332</sup> From the square, Fairview was required to build and maintain public rights of way radiating outwards in three directions, dividing the superblock into sections and ensuring some level of connectivity with surrounding streets. These paths would become more and more important as, over the next decades, plans for high-density uses were extended to the western half of the superblock. The Yonge Street façade of the mall was fronted by trees, benches, and a series of stores that opened both onto the street and the mall. These street-oriented features earned Zeidler's design a more enthusiastic reception than any earlier iteration of the Centre, particularly from his fellow architects.

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<sup>331</sup> "Fact sheet: Eaton's, Toronto Eaton Centre, Feb. 1977," AO, Eaton's Fonds, B253779, F229-162-0-395.

<sup>332</sup> "Agreement between Church of the Holy Trinity, Fairview Corporation and Eaton's, Nov. 14, 1972," AO, Eaton's Fonds, F299-501-135, "Stronger guarantees of sun on square sought by Holy Trinity Church group," *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 28, 1972.

## Excitement and nostalgia

After avoiding the spotlight while the Centre's fate hung in the balance, Eaton's now returned to the public eye to place its stamp of approval on the project. In May 1974, corporate newsletter *Eaton News* trumpeted that "After years of on again, off again bargaining it's finally go," as Eaton family members and executives dug the first few spadeful of earth in what would become the Toronto Eaton Centre.<sup>333</sup> In fact it had been "go" for nearly six months, since the start of the massive tear-down of Yonge Street required to build the first phase of the project. There was little pomp or ceremony as workers demolished the former premises of Pollock's Shoes, the Honey Dew Restaurant, and 32 other formerly successful businesses. With a few exceptions, most media attention focused on the technical feats required to prepare the area for gleaming modernity: reducing block after block of Victorian and early twentieth-century brick buildings to a "sea of rubble," and digging up the foundations of Holy Trinity's century-old rectory building and moving it 47 feet to accommodate the west side of the mall.<sup>334</sup> Over the next three years Zeidler's design took shape behind a wall of construction hoardings, culminating in the opening of the mammoth new department store, along with the first phase of the Galleria, in February 1977.

Eaton's marked the occasion with corporate fanfare and a resurgence of the optimism that had defined earlier versions of the Centre. The opening was a major public event, attended by not just the Centre's corporate planners but dignitaries including the mayor and the lieutenant-governor of Ontario. A crowd of thousands packed the mall's huge glass atrium, where they patiently listened to speeches and watched a ribbon-cutting ceremony before surging up escalators and through doors to explore Eaton's and 160 other new stores.<sup>335</sup> The public was amply primed with information. Press materials naturally emphasized the complex's striking modern design. They echoed older themes like downtown revitalization, casting the Centre as the crown jewel in Eaton's nation-wide "comprehensive urban re-development program," alongside the Pacific Centre and

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<sup>333</sup> "At last it's go," *Eaton News*, May 1974.

<sup>334</sup> "Ancient Yonge renews...", *Toronto Star*, Nov. 29, 1973; "Rectory moved 47 feet for \$140,000," *Toronto Star*, Mar. 4, 1974. The populist *Sun* took another, more nostalgic tack in "The Strip won't be quite the same," *Toronto Sun*, Sunday, Jan. 27, 1974.

<sup>335</sup> "New Eaton's opens with trumpets, pipes," *Toronto Star*, Feb. 10, 1977.

London's Wellington Square. More novel, however, was the way this corporate publicity deftly rebranded the mall as a collaboratively-designed, human-centred place. Press releases explained that

Toronto Eaton Centre combines the ideals of government, religious institutions and the people of Toronto in an age when the democratic process is extending right down to the drawing boards.<sup>336</sup>

Features like the glassed-in galleria and pedestrian rights of way that had essentially been forced on the developer were embraced as reflections of its core principles as “a people place, a recreation facility” for Torontonians. In one stroke, the Centre's long history of citizen engagement became a positive part of its image, rather than the frustrating obstacle it had so often seemed to the project's corporate planners.

This bold leap into modern retailing was also an occasion for nostalgia. Both the company's majestic College Street store and its original Queen location would soon shut their doors for good, the former sold to a consortium of developers, and the latter to Cadillac Fairview for the southward expansion of the shopping mall. In late 1976 journalists followed a 3,000 lb bronze statue of company founder Timothy Eaton as it was shunted laboriously up Yonge Street to the rotunda of the new store, to fix its paternal gaze on a new generation of shoppers and employees. Soon after, the company launched a three-week closing sale, resurrecting the “Eaton Special,” a pre-subway shuttle bus service between the company's two downtown stores, at the original price of 5¢ a ride.<sup>337</sup> Many Torontonians responded to these evocations of a bygone era. City official and essayist George Heron was prompted to “mourn the loss of an old friend,” the Queen Street store where as a child he escaped from the “drabness of the Depression years” by riding escalators, staring at window displays, and enjoying ten-cent egg nog milkshakes. A few long-time employees—“Old Eatonians”—spoke fondly about working for a company that treated them like family, or about the prewar shopping district perpetually bustling with life.<sup>338</sup> On closing day, Timothy Eaton's grandsons shook hands and kissed babies as

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<sup>336</sup> “A company dream takes shape, n.d. 1977,” AO, Eaton's Fonds, B253779, F229-162-0-385. See also “Your personal preview of Eaton's...,” *Toronto Star*, Jan. 14, 1977.

<sup>337</sup> “1 ½ ton Eaton statue trundles up street,” *Toronto Star*, Dec. 30, 1976. “Special programs commemorate closing...Jan. 1977,” AO, Eaton's Fonds, B253779, F229-162-0-385.

<sup>338</sup> “I mourn loss of an old friend,” *Toronto Star*, Feb. 4, 1977, “New store evokes happy memories in Old Eatonians,” *Toronto Star*, Feb. 10, 1977.

thousands of Torontonians left their stores for the last time, hands full of discounted products and mementos like mannequins and merchandising signs.<sup>339</sup>

As much it celebrated the past, Eaton's had its eye on the future—and the bottom line. The opening of its new flagship was part of a larger process of streamlining and modernization that had a significant impact on the way it did business in Toronto. After almost a century of operation, Eaton's announced the end of its mail-order service in early 1976. The consequences included not just the end of the iconic Eaton's catalogue, but the loss of 2,000 jobs in the Toronto suburbs, where mail-order operations were based. To that number were added around 350 local employees fired during and just after consolidation of the two downtown stores and decentralization of merchandising across the country.<sup>340</sup> The move to more modern premises in the Eaton Centre was also accompanied by an aggressive marketing philosophy more in tune with the retail world of the 1970s. Advertising and purchasing patterns moved away from the company tradition of demur, no-frills selling based on competitive pricing, and towards a focus on "lifestyles"—young, hip, and urban—as a way to market higher-priced, more stylish goods. Central to this strategy were longer evening hours and new floor areas or "worlds" directly geared to younger shoppers, including the "T-Shirt Shop" and the "Attitude Shop"; one advertisement for the latter featured female models shaking up the establishment by invading the solemnity of a traditional men's club.<sup>341</sup> Hopes were high that cutting the company's workforce and embracing a fashion-oriented profile would make the Dundas and Yonge store into a selling machine, "the model for all department stores to be built in the next 20 years."<sup>342</sup>

### **Death of a main drag?**

Everything about the Centre was bigger and more profitable than Yonge's existing uses. Just eight months after the opening of his new flagship, John Craig Eaton boasted during a speech to the Canadian Club that it was a "gamble that paid off." A 38% rise in downtown

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<sup>339</sup> "Last day at Eaton's: Buying fever, sadness," *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 6, 1977.

<sup>340</sup> "Eaton's scraps its catalogue," *Toronto Star*, Jan. 14, 1976, "Season's greetings: You've got the boot!," *Toronto Sun*, Dec. 12, 1976, "Eaton Centre: Six months later," *Toronto Sun*, Aug. 21, 1977.

<sup>341</sup> "Eaton's erupts with a bold new style," *Financial Post*, Dec. 25, 1976.

<sup>342</sup> "TEC Merchandising Philosophy, Dec. 1965," AO, Eaton's Fonds, B382479, "Eaton's banking on high productivity from new centre," *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 14, 1977.



*Image 3.10: The Eaton Centre's main entrance at Dundas and Yonge, March 1977. A dramatically different streetscape. Ron Bull/Toronto Star. Toronto Public Library Baldwin Collection, tspa\_0109963f.*

sales seemed to vindicate his family's commitment to keeping their business downtown.<sup>343</sup> By 1980, approximately one million people visited the Centre's bright, expansive halls each week, including growing numbers of visitors that made it a tourist attraction in its own right. The complex employed 15,000 people and grossed more than \$150 million yearly, excluding Eaton's. Of that amount, a substantial percentage went into Cadillac Fairview's coffers in sales premiums, making it "the most successful mall in Canada" and the "crown jewel" for what was now the largest publicly traded development corporation in North America.<sup>344</sup>

What, observers asked, was the impact of this success on Yonge? During construction, the project's advocates had described it as a "magnet" that would draw more shoppers downtown, and "force out the dreary body rub shops and smutty movie houses

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<sup>343</sup> John Craig Eaton, "The Gamble That Paid Off," Oct. 24, 1977. Available online at: [www.canadianclub.org/Events/EventDetails.aspx?id=2135](http://www.canadianclub.org/Events/EventDetails.aspx?id=2135).

<sup>344</sup> "The Dream is Fulfilled," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 7, 1979, "Life in the city: Giant shopping, eating centre," *Toronto Star*, Sep. 27, 1980; "Developer's assets \$2 billion," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 10, 1979; "Eaton Centre wants to entertain you," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 9, 1981.

that have infested the street.”<sup>345</sup> Others, however, had warned that the mall threatened to “kill” Yonge by stealing away the foot traffic on which it depended.<sup>346</sup> Certainly the Centre was transforming shopping in downtown Toronto. The Galleria, expanded to 301 stores, had more than doubled the number of retail outlets on the Yonge Street strip, substantially increasing local competition and changing the profile of the sector.<sup>347</sup> While the profile of the street remained a mixture of chains and independent businesses, the Centre was dominated by the latter; few Yonge Street businesses proved able to make the jump to the higher-rent space. The *Financial Post* remarked that Cadillac Fairview’s tenant list, full of national and international brands, was “not so very different from [that] of a large regional shopping centre.” Local business associations like the Downtown Council were weakened as Centre shops formed their own representative group with a different agenda. To their varied if generic shopping opportunities were added two successful pubs open until 1 am, and the world’s first “Cineplex” of 18 cinemas, providing clean, modern alternatives to Yonge Street’s famous watering holes and independent theatres.<sup>348</sup>

Some thought this would spell the definitive end for this already ailing downtown strip. That spring, in a speech to the Downtown Council, Alderman Allan Sparrow bluntly argued that “the Eaton Centre has contributed to the destruction of Yonge Street,” pulling people off the street and making profits at the expense of small operators. A week later, *Globe and Mail* writer Stephen Godfrey stated the case in more detail, questioning whether the Eaton family’s vision of a revitalizing project had not backfired.

[a]s the second section of the Eaton Centre worms its way relentlessly towards Queen Street, to be completed by the fall, it’s increasingly clear that this retail giant is not the saviour Yonge Street and the downtown core was waiting for. It may, in fact, be the critical blow in stilling the very life that [the Eatons were] so determined to preserve.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> “Yonge St. looks to its future,” *Toronto Star*, Feb. 7, 1977.

<sup>346</sup> “Jaffary claims Eaton Centre will kill mall,” *Toronto Star*, Nov. 5, 1973.

<sup>347</sup> Statistics for 1966 show 158 retail stores and 138 service establishments on lower Yonge. Richard Baine, A. Lynn McMurray, *Toronto: An Urban Study* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1973), 47.

<sup>348</sup> “Will new centre concentrate Toronto shopping?” *Financial Post*, Dec. 25, 1976; “Eaton Centre complex will house 18 theatres,” *Globe and Mail*, Oct. 19, 1978.

<sup>349</sup> “Destruction of Yonge St. blamed on Eaton Centre,” *Toronto Star*, Mar. 1, 1979. “Death of a main drag,” *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 10, 1979.



By presenting a dull face to Yonge and luring pedestrians into its carefully-designed facsimile of a commercial street, the Centre promised death, not life to Yonge Street. These comments prompted a heated back and forth with defenders of the Centre. There seemed to be little common ground. Fredrik Eaton pointed out that foot traffic in and out of Dundas subway station had more than doubled from 32,000 to 75,000 daily since the new Eaton's store—directly connected by underground tunnel—had opened. But to critics like Godfrey that same statistic was proof that the Centre was “draining the street life” by forcing it underground. Similar critiques had been levelled at the city's extensive underground PATH system, also seen as over-commercialized, sanitized, and a poor alternative to the vibrant public space of the sidewalk and the pedestrian mall.

### **A controlled environment**

Some thought those criticizing the Centre's attractiveness to shoppers were missing the point. Downtown Council head David Walsh spoke for established Yonge Street merchants, arguing that Yonge's real problem remained a lack of amenities for pedestrians: “the present condition of Yonge Street is not due to the Eaton Centre, but to the lack of positive action for streetscape improvements by our government.”<sup>350</sup> That perspective was further developed by urbanist Jane Jacobs, who saw opportunity, rather than danger, in the Centre's immense popularity.

When it happens that streets depending on pedestrians serve them so meanly and grudgingly as Yonge does now, when we become heedless of the importance of bedrock civility in public streets and their public life...then a jolt like the one administered to Yonge by the popularity of Eaton Centre is useful. Perhaps more than useful—necessary...[T]he Centre's success is in Yonge's favor, and as a failure it would only further depress Yonge.<sup>351</sup>

Was the galleria, as Jacobs argued, a lesson for Toronto in designing public spaces people actually wanted to use? It was certainly a pleasant place to be. A 1978 survey of 600 Yonge Street shoppers suggested a strong preference for factors like convenience, a “pleasurable environment,” and a controlled climate, even among those who stated that

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<sup>350</sup> “Eaton Centre firmly defended,” *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 17, 1979; “Eaton Centre yeas and nays,” “Centre not to blame,” *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 31, 1979; “Walsh to Crombie, Mar. 3, 1977,” CTA, P043119-26.

<sup>351</sup> “Eaton Centre firmly defended,” *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 17, 1979.

they also liked on-street retail.<sup>352</sup> The Eaton Centre provided all of those things, as well as many of the attractions—plants, benches, fountains, entertainment—that were hallmarks of the early pedestrian malls. Canada’s most popular shopping centre earned that status by replacing Yonge’s outdoor eclecticism with a modern, climate-controlled alternative. But was it a *public* place, or something else altogether?

Since its postwar beginnings, the North American shopping mall has always been plagued by what Eric Tucker has called “an unresolved tension between its public and private dimensions.”<sup>353</sup> Across the continent, shopping centres acted as *de facto* social and community spaces, particularly in new suburbs which lacked the established shopping streets or public squares of older city centres. Yet as much as people gathered in malls, and as much as pioneers like Victor Gruen may have intended them as modern successors to the agora, it was impossible to escape the fact that they were privately constructed and managed with the overall goal of maximizing profit per square foot of retail space.<sup>354</sup> Most of the time the dual functions of civic and commercial space co-existed, and in fact were mutually-reinforcing. But where there was conflict between these two roles mall owners were in almost all cases able to assert their legal right to regulate who used their premises, and what they did while there.

In the case of the Eaton Centre, the waters were further muddied by the complicated public-private negotiation that had preceded construction. Public access to the Centre was one of the key concepts written into the 1972 development agreements, which provided for “at least 40,000 square feet of private open space accessible to the public,” as well as 24-hour pedestrian rights-of-way to the subway and between Trinity Square and Yonge Street.<sup>355</sup> The latter passage, because it ran directly through the Galleria’s main atrium, effectively guaranteed pedestrian access to the entire length of the mall at all hours.

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<sup>352</sup> Revitalization Survey Team, *Attitude Survey* (Toronto: 1978), 28.

<sup>353</sup> Eric Tucker, “The Malling of Property Law?: The Toronto Eaton Centre Cases, 1984-1987, and the Right to Exclude,” in Tucker, James Muir, and Bruce Ziff, eds., *Property on Trial: Canadian Cases in Context* (Toronto: Irwin Law, 2012), 307.

<sup>354</sup> On malls as civic space see Lizabeth Cohen, “From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America,” *American Historical Review* 101:4 (Oct. 1996): 1050-81.

<sup>355</sup> City of Toronto, *Appendix “A” to the Minutes of Proceedings for the Year 1972* (Toronto: 1973), 4242-415; “Agreement between Church of the Holy Trinity, Fairview Corporation and Eaton’s, Nov. 14, 1972,” AO, Eaton’s Fonds, F299-501-135.

While there was initially some concern on Fairview's part about this—particularly when Holy Trinity's negotiators pushed for an air curtain, rather than conventional doors, at either end of the passage—the idea that people would roam the Centre on their way to and from the subway and the square gradually became an accepted part of the complex's function.<sup>356</sup> In this context, it was natural that many Torontonians thought of the Eaton Centre as public. A 1980 newspaper column that identified the mall as an important downtown meeting place was typical:

Torontonians wanting to meet a friend downtown used to say, "I'll meet you on the steps of City Hall." Now, more often than not, they say, "I'll meet you at the fountain in the Eaton Centre."<sup>357</sup>

That impression was only encouraged by a marketing strategy that positioned the development as Toronto's centre, a place that never closed and contained under its roof all of the exciting and varied activities associated with downtown life.<sup>358</sup>

At the same time, the mall was a controlled, securitized environment managed for commercial, not civic, purposes. Cadillac Fairview employed a security staff of 40 that was headed by a former staff sergeant in the Toronto police and included other veterans of the Canadian military and law enforcement. In keeping with the latest trends in mall security, a 32-camera electronic surveillance system allowed staff to watch shoppers throughout the complex.<sup>359</sup> For Eaton Centre management and security, more important than any principle of public access was protecting the mall "as a place for people to enjoy" as shoppers, diners, or strollers. That meant identifying and excluding undesirable people and uses that harmed the mall as a pleasurable environment for consumption. The Centre's manager would later testify to feeling besieged by

general youth hanging out in the centre with nothing better to do...drunks and derelicts who try to use the centre as a place of residence...people trying to deal drugs...different groups who espouse a particular philosophy

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<sup>356</sup> "Becker to congregation, Aug. 6, 1974," CTA, Downtown Action Fonds, 62-3-12, Zeidler, *Building Cities Life: An Autobiography in Architecture, Volume I*, 176.

<sup>357</sup> "Meet me for lunch by the fountain," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 6, 1980.

<sup>358</sup> For example, from 1977 the Centre's jingle was "Life in the city starts at the Centre."

<sup>359</sup> "Life in the city: Giant shopping, eating centre," *Toronto Star*, Sep. 27, 1980.

or a particular political point who would try to use the centre as their forum.<sup>360</sup>

In other words, many of the problems already identified by critics of Yonge's 1960s and 1970s decline. Mall security were extremely active in following and excluding these populations. By 1980 more than 30,000 people were ejected from the Eaton Centre premises each year, many of them youth, many of them black, and most without the involvement of the police.<sup>361</sup> Through this practice, rights of access and freedom of expression were curtailed much more strongly than they were outside at street level. Those whose appearance or behaviour made them casualties of this policy were seldom able to appeal; a handful of court challenges—including one by Toronto Councillor Jack Layton, issued a ticket while leafletting—resulted in individual victories but did little to change the policy or the legal basis for exclusion.<sup>362</sup> Nor, if responses to the early 1970s pedestrian mall were any indication, would many shoppers have wanted a change: the Centre's security regime underwrote the civility that Jane Jacobs attributed to the mall, and which so many Torontonians clearly enjoyed.

## Conclusion

Amid the anxiety and optimism of the postwar era, a broad consensus emerged in Toronto in favour of modernizing and rebuilding downtown. While advocates of redevelopment differed in approach, most shared a common conviction that both the public interest and private profit could be served by replacing the aging cityscape with modern structures and more profitable uses. Planners, politicians, business elites, and prominent public personalities sought to mobilize government and private resources to create a long-lasting urban transformation. But as the preceding account suggests, there was nothing simple or straightforward about putting this rebuilding ethic into practice. It was not enough to imagine the city of tomorrow in all its comfort, convenience, and prosperity; that future had to be built. Faith in progress would be tested by economic realities, intense public scrutiny,

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<sup>360</sup> "Tougher security keeps undesirables from Eaton Centre," *Toronto Star*, Apr. 15, 1977; Ontario Court of Appeal, File 843/86, Transcript, *R. v Layton* at 24, quoted in Tucker, "The Malling of Property Law?," 314.

<sup>361</sup> "Wall-to-wall kids scare shoppers," *Toronto Sun*, Mar. 30, 1980. The rate stayed at a similar level into the mid-1980s. "Gillespie to Layton, Jun. 14, 1985," CTA, 509830-1, "Task force to study use of trespass law," *Globe and Mail*, July 16, 1986.

<sup>362</sup> Tucker, "The Malling of Property Law?" discusses this at length.

and the sheer complexity of the existing urban landscape. Rather than a great urban unifier, redevelopment would become a contested, politically fractious process that put the differing interests of citizens, business, and the civic administration into sharp relief.

For more than two decades, Yonge Street and the T. Eaton Co. were central to this process. With the development of a modern planning system and a vigorous pro-growth politics in Toronto, municipal proponents of redevelopment saw the Eaton properties as a unique opportunity to rebuild at scale. In one stroke, the city could eliminate obsolete buildings, reinvigorate the Yonge Street shopping core, and create a fitting counterpart to the modern government complex taking shape next door. The civic administration and Canada's largest retailer were cast as partners in making a "new heart for old Toronto" on Yonge, a complex of towers, arcades, and squares around which an entirely new downtown could take shape.<sup>363</sup> Eaton's became invested in this vision, or a version of it, enlisting some of North America's most renowned downtown planners and revitalization experts to devise a complex that reconciled civic goals with its own internal business objectives.

It was almost inevitable that the 1966 Eaton Centre could not live up to the rhetoric that accompanied its planning and public presentation. The project's failure underlined how ill-equipped Eaton's—good corporate citizen or not—was to plan and finance redevelopment on such a scale; it also demonstrated the potential influence of well-organized citizen groups on what had up to that point been a closed, non-consultative development process. By the early 1970s the idea of redevelopment as good corporate citizenship was almost dead in Toronto. The second Eaton Centre took shape in a context of corporate consolidation within the development industry, and the emergence of a new politics of development rooted in participatory democracy and protection of urban diversity. Citizens, urban experts and politicians contested not just its treatment of historic structures—the central focus of criticism of the first Centre—but every facet of its design. More broadly, they offered a critique of the corporate power and rapaciousness they saw embodied in this megastructure. Development giant Cadillac Fairview, much more adroit than Eaton's at public relations and negotiations, was able to effectively stave off these criticisms by significantly altering its design, while still building a commercial development

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<sup>363</sup> "The Eaton Centre: A new heart for old Toronto," *Toronto Star*, Mar. 2, 1966.

that replaced sidewalk with mall, small businesses with chain outlets, and would prove immensely profitable for its investors and shareholders. Yonge would never be the same.

## **Conclusion: Making and Remaking Yonge Street**

Through its explorations of people planning and public space; entertainment and moral regulation; and redevelopment and corporate ambition, this thesis relates the story of three decades of change on Toronto's Yonge Street commercial strip. It provides a detailed historical account of a period when Yonge was at the heart of efforts to reinvent downtown to meet the challenges of the modern city. Depending on the observer, those challenges included not just rapid decentralization, but changing demographics, the reorientation of consumer tastes and habits, and the spread of new ideas about the city. A range of downtown actors—including department stores, independent businesses, municipal politicians, and citizen activists—invested time, money, and political capital in Yonge's transformation. Conflict and negotiation between their improvement agendas played a crucial role in the street's making and remaking.

Looking over this process, certain patterns emerge. One main theme of this thesis is the important role played by the local state in working out Yonge's future. In the postwar decades, a new municipal regime took shape in Toronto, one that sought to move well beyond its established role of service provision—keeping the water flowing and the streets clean—to embrace interventionist, long-range planning. This was most obvious at the level of the new Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, tasked with planning and connecting the expanding suburbs, but the City of Toronto also took on new roles and responsibilities. A permanent planning department was established, whose focus was very much on downtown; tens of millions of dollars were invested in building a modern City Hall and civic square. Beginning with the idea of redevelopment areas and continuing on to private-public partnerships—including most notably the Eaton Centre—municipal experts and elected officials sought to carve out an unprecedented place for local government in shaping the urban future. Early on, many of these efforts were devoted to encouraging downtown investment, in an effort to keep up with the dynamic suburbs and secure tax revenues to pay for an expanding repertoire of services.

Even as the prevailing tone of politics changed in the 1960s and 1970s, the basic assumption that this kind of state action was necessary never changed. By the early 1970s,

in the context of a development boom and a surge in citizen activism, the City's focus was on limiting growth, or at least shaping it in politically acceptable ways. Meanwhile, planners and downtown politicians began to explore ways of protecting elements of the city—including distinctive, older shopping areas like Yonge Street—from becoming casualties of modernization. This was the context in which the Yonge Street pedestrian mall and a number of other attempts at preservation—some successful, some not—were proposed. At the heart of all of these interventions was a belief that, while private capital would be the engine of growth, local government had a crucial role to play in shaping and guiding the resulting urban change.

The power of the state was influential in more mundane ways. This study also explores how the day-to-day procedural activities of the municipal government—police patrols, inspections, enforcement of zoning regulations—played a role in shaping the street. Pedestrianization, for example, met a great deal of public support, but also obstruction from elements of the municipal bureaucracy that saw it as disruptive of a careful balance of established uses. In the end, the Yonge pedestrian mall was undone as much by the City's lack of administrative capacity or internal consensus as by citizen opposition to its boisterous or unsafe atmosphere. On the strip, police regulated how the street was used, and by whom, each day. High-profile operations, including morality squad raids and drug arrests captured the headlines but the daily negotiations of informal policing were equally important. In the mid-1970s, even as city officials blustered about the undesirability of the sex industry on Yonge, patrol officers were reaching their own pragmatic agreements with the operators and employees of body rub parlours. This complicity, of course, had clear limits, breaking down overnight when public scrutiny of police and the strip was highest.

Another theme is people power. In an era of robust civil society engagement, I find that debates over Yonge Street played a mobilizing role analogous to fights over expressways and tower construction, with the crucial difference that downtown it was not homes or communities that were at stake, so much as a vision of what the city could or should be. Young community activists, suburban churchgoers, working-class Portuguese Canadians—a range of Torontonians—made their first forays into local politics with letters to the editor, demonstrations, and deputations on the future of Yonge Street. Many others spoke out on these issues as part of a larger process of political mobilization that began with



other contested urban issues. As a result, citizen perspectives—wherever they were on the political spectrum—had a significant impact on Yonge Street. By no means did citizens always lead in downtown transformation; but at the same time they were rarely followers, and never bystanders. They were, in the final analysis, a vocal minority with an influence well beyond their numbers.

People power could be reactive and obstructionist—citizens saying “No!”—but it could also be creative. The Yonge Street pedestrian mall, as much as it originated in the international circulation of planning ideas, was propelled into reality by the engagement of a diverse coalition of citizen groups, including small Yonge Street merchants, hip youth, and anti-pollution activists. Meanwhile, successive groups of citizens forced their way into negotiations between the City and Eaton’s for the sale of Old City Hall, halting the Eaton Centre project and changing its design and impact. Equally, ideas of urban citizenship and democracy permeated discussions of Yonge Street, often serving to justify, shape, or frustrate the various futures people envisioned for it. The image of Yonge, Main Street Toronto, as an essentially democratic space, “a street for all the people,” was employed on both sides of the debate over Sin Strip, and polls and surveys became key tools as Eaton’s and other actors attempted to mobilize or capture public opinion to support their plans for transformation.

The story of Eaton’s brief career as a land developer cuts to the heart of the influence of capital on the development of Yonge Street and downtown Toronto. Looking over three decades of change on Yonge, it is difficult to overstate the importance of business and investment decisions to determining the street’s postwar fate. As much as it was conceived of as a public space or thoroughfare, Yonge’s principal function was commercial: a marketplace for goods and services second to none in the city, although by the 1950s it certainly had its challengers. The marketplace brought the crowds, and the crowds created profits. This simple fact motivated the entrepreneurs who shifted the strip’s focus to entertainment in the 1940s, or to commercialized sex in the 1970s; it was this function that Eaton’s, and later Cadillac Fairview, sought to exploit with the construction of a modern shopping complex. Postwar, if the City set the parameters for urban development, and citizens sought to limit its excesses or democratize it, the principal source of dynamism remained private investment and the capitalist urban process.

This becomes clearer when we hone in on a single project. Even before its completion, the Eaton Centre had a far-reaching impact on Yonge. In part this was material. By the 1960s the Centre and other redevelopment proposals had vastly increased real estate speculation on the strip. Properties changed hands frequently and new value was created seemingly from thin air as Eaton's and its competitors snapped up Yonge Street properties. This shift in ownership patterns helped create a pool of commercial buildings that were essentially held in stasis, without renovation or improvement, in anticipation of sale for redevelopment: these proved to be well-suited for short-term use as sex cinemas and body rub parlours. For its construction the Centre required the demolition of block after block of older buildings, further reducing the pool of premises suitable to viable independent businesses.

As the third section of this thesis relates, in a way the Eaton Centre also cornered the market in ideas. Its long and fractious planning process gave the Centre's architects ample time to address critiques, and also to capture what seemed best in the creative downtown politics of the time, and incorporate—or co-opt—it into their design. Once built, the Centre not only duplicated many of the functions of the historic strip's businesses—retail, cinema, dining—but it also appeared to offer a better, more controlled version of the street itself. Like the Yonge Street pedestrian malls of the early 1970s, the Centre's multi-level shopping concourse was free to enter: it included people-friendly benches and fountains, and entertainment ranging from fashion shows and music. Unlike the public malls it was privately managed and secured with a state-of-the-art security system aimed at keeping undesirable users—including the young people who flocked to Yonge in summer—at bay. The Eaton Centre was the perfect embodiment of the commercial success many had hoped the pedestrian malls would bring downtown, but with only a nod to the public objectives and hopes for the urban future that a broad public invested in the experiment.

Finally, the street emerges in this account as an actor in its own right. Downtown Yonge's aging built landscape, its diversity, its essential unruliness inspired the improvement agendas explored here—but they also frustrated them. Change always proved to be more difficult than imagined, less controllable, more chaotic. Interventions were adjusted to circumstances, and actions had unintended consequences. Modernist hopes for aesthetic and functional coherence were long frustrated by the street's small lots and complex

pattern of property ownership; the final shape of the Eaton Centre complex, hugging Holy Trinity Church and Square and wrapping around the hulking mass of Old City Hall, is a testimony to this. Plans to widen the street, or to remove traffic from it entirely, were complicated by the delicate balance of uses that had developed on pavement and sidewalk over a century of crowds and commerce. And visions of a moral “clean sweep” of the sex industry, while powerful in motivating legal action, proved to be more destructive than restorative. In this study of contested urban space, Yonge Street emerges as the changing product of layers of ideas, networks, and different forms of power, and in that respect a microcosm of the inherent complexity and instability of the modern city.<sup>1</sup>

### **The street today**

This thesis introduced Yonge Street to the reader with a short *flâneur*'s tour on foot. A similar trip down its sidewalks today reveals much that is new, but also continuities, as patterns from the past resurface to shape the street's transformation. If in the postwar decades Yonge emerged from the industrial landscape of Toronto's harbour, in the 2010s its beginnings are both more refined and more self-conscious. Its foot at the lakeshore is now marked by a brass plaque declaring it the “longest street in the world,” a legacy of its conflation with provincial Highway 11 and the flurry of imaginative promotion and celebration that accompanied the 180<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1975. Surrounding that marker is a landscape in transition, acre after acre of land now being repurposed for residential and commercial development. Proponents of Pier 27 and other projects slated for this section of the street imagine a “minicity” that is a far cry from the parking lots and industry that made this an unprepossessing start for our tour in the 1950s.<sup>2</sup>

North of these newly inhabited spaces the tour takes our stroller underneath two major metropolitan infrastructure projects dating from the postwar era. First is a walk through the somewhat forbidding spaces under the now-crumbling Gardiner Expressway, completed at great expense in 1964 as one of the key elements in Metro Toronto's urban expressway plan. This east-west commuter corridor is one of the most visible legacies of

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<sup>1</sup> On change and complexity as the defining features of the city see Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Seeing Like a City* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> “The radical re-imagining of Yonge Street,” *Toronto Star*, Sep. 25, 2015.

auto-centric infrastructure planning in the densely-built core. It also, however, testifies to paths not taken: a connection to the southern tip of the unbuilt Spadina Expressway and an eastern extension of the route were left uncompleted, symbolizing by their absence Toronto's 1970s move away from expressway building. Just beyond the Gardiner the city's railyards, since the 1960s substantially adapted to house the GO commuter rail and bus system, offer another point of entry into the city from its fringes. Both expressway and the GO hub speak to the reality of Toronto in the twenty-first century: that of a sprawling, polycentric urban region of six million inhabitants—2.6 million in the city itself—in which the old downtown core remains a major economic hub.

The rebuilding of downtown has, since the 1970s and the Eaton Centre project, has continued apace. Yonge has experienced significant redevelopment over the last forty years, particularly in the zones bookending the main commercial strip. Today, the absorption of the southern stretch of the street into the office and financial services district, begun in the 1950s or earlier, is virtually complete. With a few exceptions—stately nineteenth-century buildings and a few incongruous stretches of low-rise retail—most of Yonge south of Queen Street is now a concrete and glass canyon flanked by some of the most valuable office space in the city. Meanwhile, at the north end of the strip, a residential development boom is remaking the College Street intersection and environs. The College Park residential and commercial complex built in the 1970s around the former Eaton's store is now dwarfed by the 78 storeys of Canada's largest condominium tower. Moving north, block after block of Yonge's low-rise retail landscape is punctuated by construction hoardings or pits for tower footings. The fortunes of development corporations continue to be made on Yonge Street.

The idea that thousands of people would be living—or want to live—within spitting distance of the Yonge Street Strip is itself very much a product of the 1970s. A natural outgrowth of the era of “people planning” was a revisioning of downtown not just as the centre of the metropolitan region and a place of business, but as a community. This image for the core, already evident in the debates that surrounded the city's original “people place”—the Yonge Street mall—became a central tenet of the reform urban planning of the 1970s, and was enshrined in the *Central Area Plan* in 1976. The ongoing return to the central city and planning policies that encouraged residential densification helped to effectively double the population of the downtown core to 200,000 residents between 1976

and 2016. Today, with a total of 1,600 storeys of (mostly luxury) condominium residences proposed for the Yonge corridor north from the Strip to Bloor Street, some believe this policy has been too successful: Toronto's chief planner recently stated that it is time to "hit the pause button" on redevelopment, and downtown politicians recently floated the idea of a construction moratorium very similar to that proposed for apartments and office towers by the newly elected reform administration in 1973.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1970s the former Eaton lands have been entirely rebuilt. The centralization of control achieved through the long and costly land assembly process not only paved the way for the complex's Galleria and department store building, but primed the rest of the superblock for transformation according to market demand. Over several decades the west side of the superblock has been filled in with a million square foot office complex (1983), a luxury hotel (1991), and a combined commercial and educational building connected to Ryerson University (2006). Many of these uses echo those set out in Viking and the 1966 Eaton Centre, although they lack the aesthetic coherence so central to those schemes. Meanwhile, Trinity Square was completed in the early 1980s, and continues to provide a popular island of green space in the heart of downtown, surrounding still-vital Holy Trinity Church. In stark contrast, the other "people-friendly" features activists fought to have included in Eberhard Zeidler's original design—benches and trees on Yonge, direct entry into retail stores from the street—are gone. Doors to the street have been converted into window displays, and false façades down the length of the mall have cut the sidewalk width nearly in half, with the intent of channelling as much street traffic as possible into the profitable Galleria. Today's Centre presents Yonge Street with a blank wall, reminiscent less of the "mall connected to the street grid" imagined by Zeidler and the project's citizen critics than of the archetypal suburban shopping centre.<sup>4</sup>

The Eaton Centre's commercialized public-private space remains a runaway commercial success for tenants and developer Cadillac Fairview. However, little today connects it to the corporation that made its construction possible, and was for decades its most significant tenant. In 1997, after years of speculation about its declining profitability

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<sup>3</sup> "Toronto reaches for 'pause button' on Yonge Street redevelopment," *Metro News*, Oct. 19, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Zeidler, *Buildings Cities Life*, 184-86.

and competitiveness, Canada's greatest retailer filed for bankruptcy. The positive corporate image that Eaton's had worked so hard to preserve could not stave off failure in the face of broadening competition and the constant drain of overexpansion. Stores across Canada were sold off, including the Toronto Eaton Centre flagship, permanently closed by its new owner in 2002. There was considerable pathos as the massive seated statue of Timothy Eaton, which had cast stern glances at downtown shoppers since 1919, was removed from the mall lobby to its new home in the Royal Ontario Museum. After years as a Sears department store, in 2016 the former Eaton's premises were taken over by upscale American retailer Nordstrom. Simpson's has similarly been replaced, its elegant main store now occupied by department stores—Hudson's Bay Company and Sak's Fifth Avenue—that have weathered difficult economic times by moving away from one-stop shopping to focus their attention on luxury fashion and accessories. The department store giants, responsible for the demise of many a smaller competitor from the late 1800s onwards, have in their turn been edged out of the market by low-cost, big box retailers and aggressively-marketed specialty stores.

In fact, today's stroller would be hard-pressed to find many familiar landmarks on Yonge's present-day commercial strip. Music hotspot Friar's Tavern has become a Hard Rock Café music-themed restaurant; Sam the Record Man's store replaced by a Ryerson University student centre; Clark's Shoes a Burger King. Of the watering holes and music venues of the 1960s and 1970s, Zanzibar is the last holdout, still eking out an existence with strip shows and as a Hollywood movie set. As predicted forty years ago by the embattled Downtown Council, in the long run many of Yonge's independent retailers and service providers have disappeared or moved further north up the strip, replaced by chain outlets better able to capitalize on the street's crowds and pay its sky-high retail rents. Many—most—are American-owned, reflecting a Canadian retail sector more than ever dominated by brands whose reach and economies of scale are truly global. Those national chains that have survived have done so by adopting the same aggressive marketing strategies and economies of scale as their foreign competitors.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In 2010, 53% of Canada's top retailers were foreign-owned and operated, with the vast majority being American. Industry Canada, *Canada's Changing Retail Market, 2010* (Ottawa: Industry Canada, 2013).

Structurally, certain elements of the strip remain intact. Many of the century-old buildings that housed Yonge's small shops and services for decades still remain. Their persistence which speaks to the cost and difficult of land assembly on this stretch of Yonge, downzonings following the Eaton Centre development, and a wave of heritage designations since the 1980s. Today forty Yonge Street buildings between King and College are listed as City heritage properties, making them more difficult to tear down. This has not, however, prevented their gutting and re-adaptation through what one architect has referred to as "urban taxidermy," offering an historic streetscape diorama that masks stripped modern spaces within.<sup>6</sup> A Starbucks' café has taken over the premises of the Oddfellows fraternal society (1891); a 1940s bank building is now home to a mass-market fashion outlet. Meanwhile, buildings with less storied histories have been covered over with metal and glass façades and corporate branding. One side effect of this process has been that whole buildings have in many places been taken over by a single tenant, dramatically reducing the density of uses—offices, apartments, secondary businesses—that our visitor to the strip observed decades ago.

Consolidation of a modern corporate shopping area is most advanced around the intersection of Yonge and Dundas Street, now the busiest commercial crossroads in the city and the most visibly changed section of the strip. The north entrance to the Eaton Centre dominates the corner and is the main reason for the shift of shopping and pedestrian activity north from Queen and Yonge. Diagonally opposite but very much in alignment with the Centre's modernist aesthetic, the north-east corner block was entirely rebuilt in the 2000s as an L-shaped theatre, commercial, and restaurant complex called, successively, Metropolis, Toronto Life Square, and 10 Dundas Street East. Like the Centre whose style it mimics, this private redevelopment project was facilitated by extensive municipal action, in this case the expropriation of key land parcels by the City.<sup>7</sup> And like the Eaton Centre it has been blasted by urbanists and architects for its uninventive industrial exterior—"horrorchitecture," according to one—and yet remains immensely popular with downtown crowds.<sup>8</sup> 10 Dundas forms the central platform for an accumulation of gaudy billboards,

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Allsop, "Are we killing Yonge Street?" *Now Magazine*, July 6, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> The story is related in Beth Moore Milroy, *Thinking Planning and Urbanism* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> "We don't deserve this horrorchitecture," *Toronto Star*, Jan. 14, 2008.



*Image 4.1: Yonge-Dundas Square at night, 2010. The Eaton Centre is on the far left, and 10 Dundas Street East on the right. Little is visible of the Strip of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, although the bright lights and crowds remain. Pedro Szekely/Wikimedia Commons.*

gigantic television screens, and corporate logos that now covers three of the intersection's four corners, advertising Yonge's shopping and entertainment possibilities even more comprehensively—and inescapably—than the neon signage of a previous era. If in the 1970s comparisons to Times Square were used to identify Yonge with criminality and sleaze, today, more often than not, they refer to this miniature version of New York City's sanitized—but still crassly commercial—"electric pandemonium."<sup>9</sup>

On Yonge Street, the local has given way to the global. Those critics of the street's rebuilding who in the 1960s and 1970s saw it as a victory for the corporate city were in a way correct. The trend on the street, as described here, has been towards the centralization of control over the urban landscape, and the replacement of diversity with more profitable—but homogeneous—consumer opportunities. Yonge today provides *more* than ever before—more retailers, more entertainment, more sales—but few of its offerings are

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<sup>9</sup> "Iconic Yonge-Dundas square a major city asset," *Toronto Star*, Feb. 4, 2008.



substantially different from those available in Chicago's Loop, London's Oxford Street, or a suburban mall in Bangkok. In this respect the street's story echoes those of other successful Main Street shopping areas across North America and the world.

This change has not, however, dampened enthusiasm for downtown Yonge as a shopping area. The many observers who from the late 1960s argued that redevelopment would curb the street's human vitality, or even "kill" it—they imagined windswept, empty streets—have been proved wrong. Despite its new clothes, Yonge today is as much a vital marketplace and an exciting (or frustrating) pedestrian street as ever. The renovated Yonge and Dundas intersection is now Toronto's busiest, with 120,000 crossings per day, three-quarters of which are made by pedestrians.<sup>10</sup> People continue to come to Yonge's modernized shopping core at all hours of the day, and in that sense it remains one of the most successful elements of Toronto's public realm.

Still, it is a public realm whose boundaries have shifted. Another large-scale change visible on Yonge is that from the public to the private, also understood as the enclosure and commercialization of urban space. This study touches at several points on the history of the different regulatory regimes used to manage Yonge Street as a public space in the postwar decades. It explores how ideas of the street and its economic, social, or civic functions collided with the reality of competing uses, expectations, and public moralities on the Yonge Street pedestrian mall, and how the Eaton Centre's privately managed, publicly accessible galleria was built to avoid those same conflicts. The lessons of that era have not been lost on today's planners. The final major addition to Yonge's streetscape since the 1970s is Dundas Square, an acre-sized plaza at south-east corner of Yonge and Dundas. Completed in 2002 as part of the same downtown regeneration initiative that produced 10 Dundas East, it offers seating, washrooms, fountains, and wireless internet. The square is a natural meeting place, and in warm weather it hosts daily and nightly events ranging from protest marches to concerts to fairs.

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<sup>10</sup> City of Toronto, *Signalized Traffic Pedestrian Volumes, 1999-2012*. Raw data available online at: [http://www1.toronto.ca/City\\_Of\\_Toronto/Information\\_&\\_Technology/Open\\_Data/Data\\_Sets/Assets/Files/signalizedTrafficPedestrianVolumes.xls](http://www1.toronto.ca/City_Of_Toronto/Information_&_Technology/Open_Data/Data_Sets/Assets/Files/signalizedTrafficPedestrianVolumes.xls)

However, Dundas Square is not, strictly-speaking, public space. It is a public-private partnership managed by an arms-length board made up of city officials, citizens, and representatives of downtown institutions, a governance structure very similar to the committees that ran the 1970s pedestrian mall. Permissible and non-permissible uses—the latter category includes smoking, and unlicensed vending, and artistic performance without a permit—are set out clearly in a dedicated municipal law.<sup>11</sup> Private security and surveillance technologies, paid for through event fees, enforce those rules and in doing so create a much more circumscribed environment than the classic city street. The contrast with the other three corners of the intersection, often crowded with buskers, evangelists, and leafleteers, is noticeable. In her account of the square’s creation, sociologist Evelyn Ruppert describes it as a place that exemplifies the “secure, consumer, and aesthetic city” imagined by today’s planning professionals; local activists have protested it as part of the creeping privatization of public space.<sup>12</sup> If this study is any guide, Dundas Square is also the product of an earlier era that established an obvious public desire for people space downtown, and offered new models for creating and managing it.

Other themes from the past are inscribed within Yonge’s ongoing transformation. One is danger. Downtown Yonge today remains a site where Toronto negotiates its fears about urban insecurity, where crimes that go unremarked in other parts of the city become the focus of emotive media coverage and public soul-searching. In 1977 the murder of shoeshine boy Emanuel Jaques riveted attention on the Strip, provoking political mobilization, a renewed citizen-led morality campaign, and repressive action by City authorities against sex shops and, soon after, Toronto’s gay community. Today it is gun violence that captures public attention and maintains Yonge’s reputation as a danger zone. In 2005 a 15-year old girl named Jane Creba was shot and killed at the height of the street’s busy Boxing Day sales, victim of crossfire that erupted after an argument between two groups of young men. Her tragic and pointless death triggered public anger and anxious calls for a police response, resulting in one of the largest murder investigations in the city’s

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<sup>11</sup> City of Toronto, *Toronto Municipal Code 636: Public Squares*, revised June 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Evelyn Ruppert, *The Moral Economy of Cities: Shaping Good Citizens* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Christopher Smith, “‘Whose streets?’: Urban social movements and the politicization of public space,” *Public: Art, Culture, Ideas* 29 (2004): 156-67.

history, involving dozens of officers, undercover surveillance, and more than 250,000 wiretap intercepts.<sup>13</sup>

Once again, a tragic murder that promised to unify the city also revealed deep divisions. In 2005, as in 1977, a single crime with a young victim was seized upon as an example of a larger social problem—in this case, gang violence—and used to justify a massive police response. The rhetoric was much the same, too. The detective in charge of the Creba investigation proclaimed just a few days after her death that Toronto had “finally lost its innocence,” echoing almost word for word similar pronouncements made in the Emanuel Jaques case.<sup>14</sup> The explicit homophobia of the 1970s was replaced with a more subtle racism, in which attacks on gang members—Creba was white, her accused killers black—were broadened to criticism of the city’s large Jamaican-Canadian community. Of course, black Torontonians were already intensely aware of the costs of gun violence. Creba’s murder came at the end of a year—media called it the “Year of the Gun”—that saw a record 359 shootings and 52 gun-related homicides in Toronto. The victims of this staggering number of gun crimes were overwhelmingly African-Canadian men, and most were shot well away from downtown crowds in the city’s low-income inner suburbs.<sup>15</sup> None had triggered a similar outpouring of public grief or anywhere near the same commitment of police resources.

Another persistent theme is nostalgia. In the 1960s and 1970s many Torontonians expressed attachment to an earlier version of the street, in many cases harkening back to an idealized downtown (and a city) characterized by public propriety, social cohesion, and safety. They contrasted this image with unwelcome changes occurring at the time, including the development of youth culture, the mushrooming of sex shops, and Yonge’s general orientation towards popular entertainment. Today, somewhat ironically, the version of the street they decried—the glitzy, loud, neon-lit Strip—is widely nostalgized, the subject of documentaries, poems, and journalistic musings about the city that once was.<sup>16</sup> Photos of

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<sup>13</sup> A critical account of the crime and its aftermath is Anita Arvast, *What Killed Jane Creba: Rap, Race, and the Invention of a Gang War* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> “Police cast keen eye on videotapes,” *Toronto Star*, Dec. 28, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> 40 of 52 shot and killed in 2005 were African-Canadian men. Wendy Chan, Dorothy Chunn, *Racialization, Crime, and Criminal Justice in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 59-60.

<sup>16</sup> See for example David Brady Productions’ three-part documentary series *Yonge Street Rock & Roll Stories* (2011).

downtown Yonge in the postwar decades outnumber those of any other street on the popular *Vintage Toronto* facebook group, where a community of nearly 100,000 reflects on change and personal attachments to the city's past. Among the many who decry the takeover of Yonge and Dundas by big brands and billboards, the 1960s and 1970s are held up as a period when the street was more exciting, freer, when it was "cool."<sup>17</sup> Even the street's "marvellously sleazy" sex shops are occasionally singled out for fond remembrance, as in one recent memoir of Yonge's punk music scene, although in most narratives they continue to be portrayed as one of the principal causes of Yonge's decline.<sup>18</sup>

The power of public attachments to Yonge's the past was made plain when, after more than forty years operating on the Yonge Street Strip, music store Sam the Record Man closed its doors in 2007. Ryerson University's proposed redevelopment of the site was very nearly derailed by public outcry over the loss of this iconic business, which so many people in Toronto—and indeed, southern Ontario—remember as their point of entry into the world of pop music and record culture. A citizen campaign quickly emerged calling for the university and the municipal government to preserve Sam's trademark sign, a two-storey pair of spinning records illuminated in red neon. Within a few days more than ten thousand people had showed support for online "Save the Sign" petitions, in many cases accompanied by personal memories of the store. The result has been plans, nearing completion in 2016, to mount the neon sign on a City-owned building where it would face Dundas Square.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, as the sandblasted and otherwise restored Old City Hall nears the end of decades as a provincial courthouse, a new public discussion is beginning about its adaptive re-use. Citizen voices unmistakably favour keeping the building whole and in the public realm, and proposals very similar to those advanced by the Friends of Old City Hall in the 1960s—museum and community centre, among others—have begun making the rounds.<sup>20</sup>

The debates over planning, development, and public space that defined the period studied here have not been resolved; instead they resurface periodically, often with new

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<sup>17</sup> "That time when Yonge and Dundas was cool," *blogTO*, Jan. 23, 2016.

[http://www.blogto.com/city/2016/01/that\\_time\\_when\\_yonge\\_and\\_dundas\\_was\\_cool/](http://www.blogto.com/city/2016/01/that_time_when_yonge_and_dundas_was_cool/)

<sup>18</sup> Liz Worth, *Treat Me Like Dirt: An Oral History of Punk in Toronto and Beyond, 1977-1981* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2009), 195.

<sup>19</sup> "12,000 pinpricks of light online to save Sam's iconic sign," *Toronto Star*, June 1, 2007; "Sam the Record Man's iconic sign to spin again," *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 11, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Keenan, "Don't bring a mall into the municipal temple," *Toronto Star*, Sep. 30, 2015.

participants and updated stakes. Just as they did in 1955 or 1975, in the twenty-first century people continue to view Yonge Street through the dual lens of problem and possibility. As I write, the old refrain that “[d]owntown Yonge isn’t what it used to be,” has re-entered common use, this time in reference not to diminished sales or sleazy entertainment, but to the loss of diversity and vitality created by breakneck speed of redevelopment.<sup>21</sup> City officials and property owners are clashing over the 2016 designation of Yonge from College to Bloor Street as a Heritage Conservation District, a measure designed both to recognize its long history and to limit the terms on which private redevelopment can reshape its future.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, the Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Association—successor to the 1970s Downtown Council—has released a report calling for Toronto to “build a great Yonge Street” through investment in pedestrian improvements and downtown cultural programming.<sup>23</sup> Yonge today remains a street in motion, a dynamic commercial corridor and public space whose story is intertwined with that of the larger city. It continues to fulfil its role as a connector, not just of people and livelihoods, but of past, present, and imagined futures.

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Allsop, “Are we killing Yonge Street?” *Now Magazine* July 6, 2016.

<sup>22</sup> City of Toronto/DIALOG, *Historic Yonge Street: Heritage Conservation District Plan* (Toronto, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> DYBIA, *YongeLove* (Toronto: DYBIA, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> Note that wherever possible, archival documents are cited in this thesis with the formula "Title, Date," Archive, File and Box Number for clarity. Eg. "Letter to LLBO, Dec. 7 1971," City of Toronto Archives (CTA) P037427-5. Series listed here represent the main series accessed in larger archival fonds.

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