

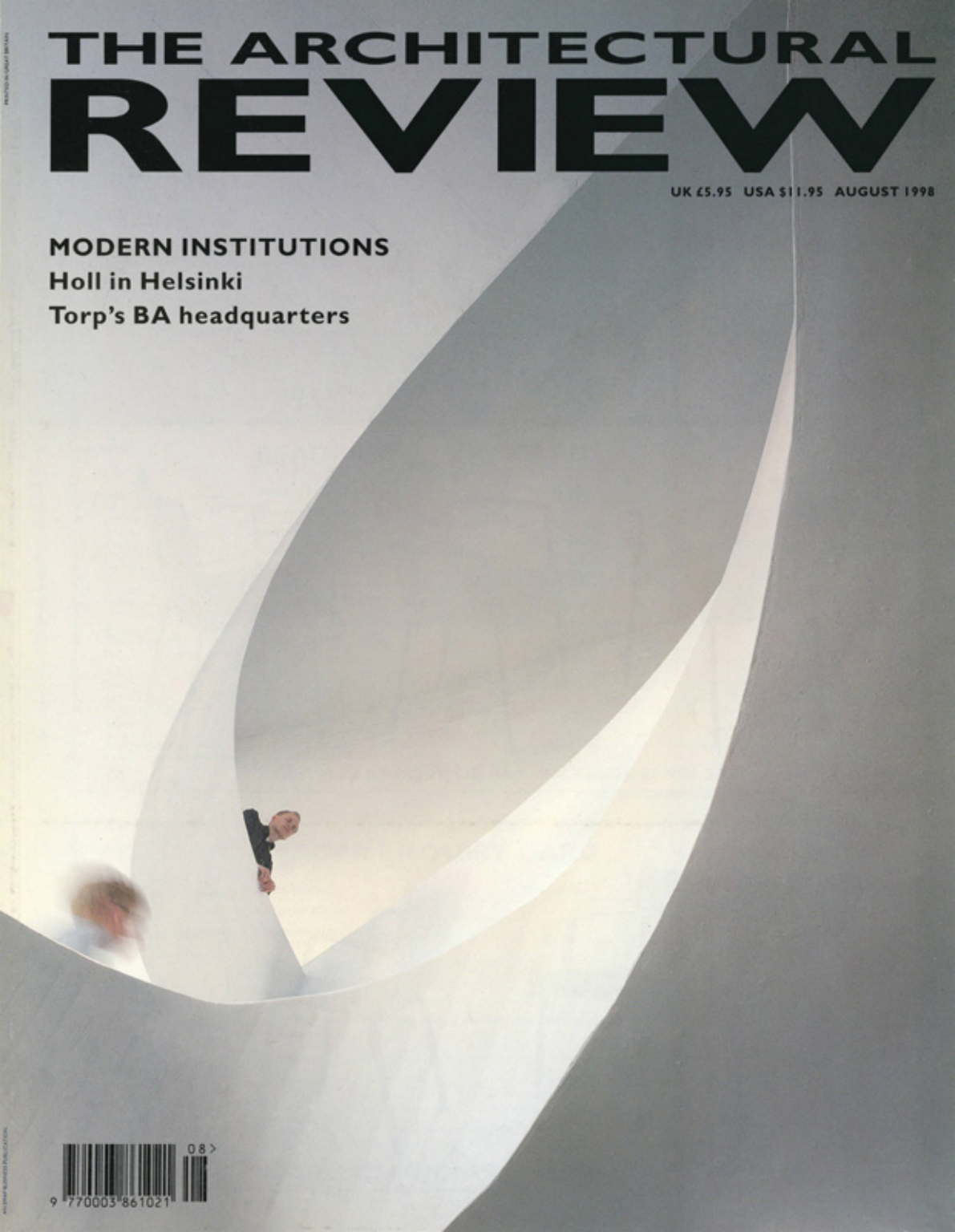
THE ARCHITECTURAL  
**REVIEW**

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# MOVING IMAGE

Combining activity, artifacts and an exploration of the qualities of light, this film centre in the heart of Montreal projects the cinematic image into the life of the city.

The recently completed Cinéma-thèque Québécoise – consisting of a series of public exhibition galleries, two cinemas, an archive, film school and a café – is a new cultural focus which has been developed in the heart of the city of Montreal. The project has been realized in large part by adapting a former school on Boulevard de Maisonneuve Est and re-using an adjacent two-storey brick building that was formerly vacant.

The school has been replanned to house a range of public spaces at street level with the administrative offices of the cinémathèque on the floor

above. Externally its ornate brick and stone facade has been retained but the interior spaces radically reorganized to accommodate foyers, a shop and the newly fitted out space for a 175 seat cinema. A range of classrooms, offices, studios and exhibition areas for the film school have been skillfully fitted within the renovated brick shell of the other building.

The character of the cinémathèque is, however, most emphatically established by a new building constructed within the slot of space between these two existing structures. The addition of a connecting link across the back of the site

houses a café, a small new cinema and exhibition gallery. This connection also frames an outdoor dining terrace which is directly accessible from both café and street and creates a site for a new light box.

As the word light refers to conditions of weight and illumination, so the design of this particular box explores both of those qualities within the context of the moving image. In describing the differences between a photograph and the moving image, Susan Sontag has noted how 'movies and television programs light up walls, flicker and go out' and it is these aspects of movement

and changing light qualities which have also clearly informed the design of the new light box and the overall organization of the cinémathèque.

The light box, connected to the main street by a delicate steel bridge across a constructed cut, is the main entrance to the building. This entrance is signed by a gridded glass screen which projects out over the doors of the entry lobby and also extends beyond the box as a conspicuous layer drawn across the restored brick and stone facade of the old school building. A piece of this glazed skin is translucent and forms a screen which is used to project moving images that can







- 1  
The new cinémathèque appears as a  
lightweight, perforated box on  
Boulevard de Maisonneuve Est.  
2, 3  
The pivotal entrance lobby, with its  
cantilevered balcony for informal  
screenings.  
4  
The secondary, suspended lobby  
screen.

# FILM CENTRE, MONTREAL, CANADA

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location plan





5  
The cinémathèque café ...

6  
... which overlooks an intimate, urban courtyard.

7  
Entrance lobby, with the exhibition area beyond (right). A monochromatic palette of grey, black and white is combined with hard-edged detailing.

#### Architect

Saucier + Perrotte, Montreal

#### Project team

André Perrotte, Gilles Saucier,  
Martin Bouchard, Yves Bouchard,  
Robert D'Errico, Andrew Danbar,  
Jean-François Lagacé, Lyse Lachance,  
Pierre Colpron, Oscar Juarros,  
Frédéric Thonon

#### Structural engineer

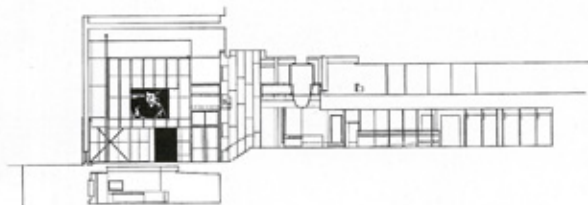
Le Groupe Teknika

#### Mechanical/electrical engineer

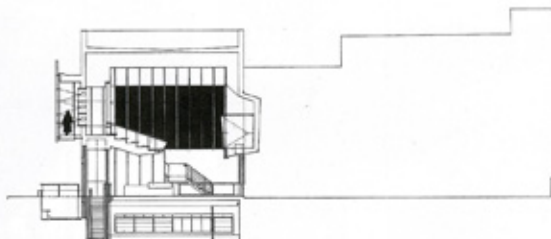
Le Groupe Teknika / Dupras Ledoux

#### Photographs

Jean-François Lenoir, Éric Piché,  
Marc-Antoine Daudelin



longitudinal section

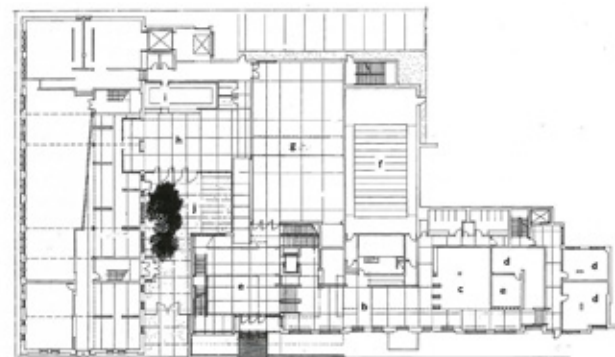


cross section

- a entrance hall
- b exhibition space
- c shop
- d administration offices
- e director
- f cinema
- g media room
- h café
- i kitchen
- j courtyard
- k balcony
- l passageway
- m studios
- n permanent collection
- o video suite
- p meeting room
- q archives



first floor plan



ground floor plan (scale approx 1:400)



# FILM CENTRE, MONTREAL, CANADA

ARCHITECT

SAUCIER + PEROTTE

be viewed from the street.

The idea of large-scale outdoor screens for the moving image, rooted in the drive-in cinema and energetically promoted by Archigram, has subsequently appeared in the work of architects as diverse as Venturi and Rogers. In the recent past however it is a potent idea that rarely survived translation from drawing to building. By comparison to the wide screen proposed for the Centre Pompidou for example, this Montreal screen is modest – yet real. It is extraordinarily successful. A significant part of that success is that the design has been developed not merely as an elevational device but also in section. By considering the movement of people through the building as an integral part of the

scheme and consequently planning a ramped passerelle through the public spaces of the cinémathèque between projector and screen, the silhouetted images of people moving within the building also appear periodically on the screen.

The light box develops the section in other ways so as to characterize a very particular view of the moving image. In sharp contrast to the widely assumed notion of the cinema as sealed black box, this light entrance hall also acts as a cinema. A second screen, suspended opposite the entrance, confronts the visitor on entering and a raked canopy over the entrance lobby is also a balcony designed to seat around 50 people. This space is available

to visitors as they wait or wander through the galleries of the cinémathèque and, with views over the entrance hall and to the second screen, also blurs the distinction between observer and observed in ways which the traditionally dark and enclosed cinema rarely achieves.

Throughout the building the detailing is meticulous and inspired. A series of glass and steel layers filter light, a fragment of the concrete frame of the existing school is suddenly exposed and the palette of materials within these internal spaces is monochromatic. The tones of black and grey together with the lustre and grain of surfaces exemplify Sontag's sense of film. The circuitous threading of public routes through the building and the

design of the lighting focus attention on people and the movement of groups across the spaces in a theatrical manner which contrasts with the meaner public spaces sometimes associated with cinema-going.

While photographs can be collected, the cinematic image recalls the passing glimpse. The design of this building successfully creates and frames a series of those glimpses which combine both activity and artifacts, old buildings and new light box, actor and audience, street and room – fleeting images which are tantalizingly projected, through architecture, into the life and spaces of the city.

BRIAN CARTER

\*Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 1978, Penguin Books, p.3.