Research Aims:
A new lifestyle trend of “loft living” has proven to be a popular way to reuse many former industrial buildings, but what attention has been paid to the social and spatial frictions that could potentially arise in the surrounding community? I think it is important to produce knowledge about the underlying forces that shape these post-industrial landscapes so as to better inform developers and municipalities undergoing similar transformations. In my research, I will be relying on a variety of theoretical methods in order to pursue 3 main lines of enquiry:

1) First, I will document and analyze the spatial relationships of the built environment, between the old industrial buildings and the new residential lofts they have become.
2) Second, I will document and analyze the role of commercial advertisements and marketing influence on the new “loft living” lifestyle.
3) Thirdly, I will document and analyze the local perceptions of both new incoming residents and long-time inhabitants of Saint-Henri to gather more specific insights into the physical and social changes taking place.

Key results to date:
• The city is more than a “passive by-product of human behavior” but it also acts to shape people’s lifestyles as well (Hodder, 1986: 13). This means that although real estate demands may lead to the creation of industrial lofts, lofts may also play an influential role on people’s willingness to embrace the new residential trend.

• Marketing language evokes images of “neighbourhood recycling, upgrading, renaissance”. What is really happening is that landscapes of production are being turned into landscapes of consumption (Smith, 1996: 32). In Saint-Henri, the history of industry is a marketing tool being used to sell residential lofts.

• Zukin argues that the aesthetic appreciation for lofts is usually by those people “… who do not know the steam and sweat of a factory…” (Zukin, 1982: 59). Generally, the people who have lived a long time in Saint-Henri or had worked in the former industrial spaces, are not the ones who are buying the lofts let alone being able to afford them. Below are two quotes illustrating the contrasting views towards “loft living”:

  “I love it [industrial loft conversions]...as long as it has modern amenities. If you get the right developer to put the right type of money into it, I think it’s a great tribute to the building rather than letting it rot away. You need to have a developer that has an appreciation for it’s original state and preserve the building’s characteristics...exposed concrete ceilings, exposed piping...the vents, tall windows, these were the selling points of this place” (Anonymous, 2008)

  “The lofts don’t fit in with the local culture. These buildings could have been used for day cares or more housing for older people. People here know what we need...we don’t need high ceilings or concrete walls. It’s the Lachine Canal, I mean...come on!!! They have their big windows but I don’t understand why people want a condo when they have nothing! Nothing that really matters unlike green spaces for a family.” (Anonymous, 2008)