

MUSICMAKING AND THE CITY. MAKING SENSE OF THE MONTREAL SCENE

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»Montreal appeals to me because it's isolated already. I like lower-expectation complex, so it's kind of like Canada reduced even more. So if you can hang on to an aesthetic sensibility against the odds it makes you even stronger. That's a really backwards and noble way to think about it, but it appeals to me on a really ›primal‹ level.«
(Patti, derivative records)

I want to use this comment, made by one of my respondents in Montreal some years ago (cited originally in Stahl 2003), as a way of introducing the following discussion about independent musicmaking in Montreal and the notion of being »urban«. It remains one of my favourite statements about the nature of independent musicmaking in the city, mainly because it reveals a peculiar vision of Montreal, providing us with an image of urban musicmaking which accentuates the importance of what Rob Shields (1991) has called »place-images« to the imaginative life of the city. As a place-image, it plays into, and with, stereotypes about both Montreal and Canada. It also indicates a thoughtfulness about how place functions both materially and imaginatively. Representations like this, it might be said, are formed through the accretion of various signifiers to a specific view of the city, and in turn can be mobilized in particular ways to suit particular purposes. They exemplify what Rolf Lindner (2006) has recently called »mythographies«, the semiotic patina borne out of the combination of various stories and narratives which lend a city its unique cultural textures. The city-sign for Patti struck me as a telling one because it offered a kind of ironic civic boosterism that suggested both robustness and an anemia which were framed as virtues specific to Montreal. Conversations with other musicmakers made it clear that this view of Montreal is a shared one, one that courses through

many of the discussions surrounding musicmaking in the city. As a number of interviews unfolded, what became apparent was that for many musicmakers Montreal's strength was its weakness, a particular trope that has a deep-seated social and semiotic value for many involved in the city's music scenes.

Along similar lines, it was revealed through more interviews with musicmakers that Montreal figured into musicmaking as a kind of bohemian enclave, one in which musical activity could flourish (Stahl 2001). Patti's comment is a typical reading of Montreal among musicmakers, evoking an implicit political economy of the scene by linking the ambience of the city's vibrant alternative cultural life to its diminished economic state, a place-image of the city as a haven for artists which has been a durable trope for more than 150 years. In a city of limited ambitions, an expressive practice like musicmaking sees its practitioners adopting a certain kind of rhetoric, whereby the city's cultural spaces acquire a particular shape. For Patti and others, the vigor of the scene is inversely proportional to the city's financial state, a perception that raises the spectre of the bourgeois/bohemian, a binary which finds its antecedents in Paris' Montmartre, Weimar/Berlin, and New York's Greenwich Village (Graña/Graña 1990; Siegel 1996). In an echo of an artistic sensibility produced and reproduced across time and space, the entrenched sense of anomie, where a desire to be musically active is heavily determined by the lack of industrial and/or institutional means to achieve that goal, has also become a common trope associated with musicmaking in Montreal. This is an image of place which remains a compelling dimension of cultural life in the city, one which both binds people together as well as accentuates cultural, economic and linguistic divides.

I want to use the following discussion of Montreal as a preliminary attempt to outline certain aspects of musicmaking in the city, which will take as its central problematic the adequacy of two descriptive categories, scenes and bohémias, terms that have recently been used to outline certain sociomusical experiences (Bennett/Kahn-Harris 2004; Straw 2001). With this in mind, I want to consider both as concepts which better capture material, symbolic, expressive, spatial, social, and imaginative practices as they unfold and overlap in relation to urban musicmaking and its urban contexts. In order to lend each of them more definition, the following discussion will take up some of the issues relating to analyzing musicmaking in the city, detailing how we might begin to formulate a set of research questions, as well how we might devise a set of frameworks for analysis. However, before moving to a discussion of the value of scenes and bohémias as descriptive categories, I want first to set the scene, providing a brief overview of just

some of the historical, economic, demographics and linguistic factors which render Montreal a distinctive cultural space. There is a history to the formulation of Montreal as a subcultural utopia, one which is connected to the specific articulation of social, economic and linguistic factors in the city. A cursory overview of Montreal and its social makeup can help contextualize how these factors inflect musicmaking in the city.

Montreal's historical and social context

Montreal is a primarily francophone city, with anglophones making up about 13-15 percent of the population (Statistics Canada, <http://www40.statcan.ca:80/l01/cst01>). For the better part of twenty-five years, a portion of the city's anglophone population has seen itself as the victim of a concerted effort on the part of Quebec nationalists to further marginalize them through the introduction of franco-centric language laws and cultural policies. This has led to the creation of what is often called the »anxious anglo«, a figure which circulates with some frequency in local (and national) media. Among younger anglos, in contrast, there is also the »new anglo«, part of a local generation raised as bilingual, which in concert with a number of recent émigrés who have made a concerted effort to learn French, have adopted a language politics that reflects a stronger willingness to embrace francophone culture. This fraught demographic of young adults has significant bearing on the nature of cultural production in the city. The ready-access to cultural industries and institutions enjoyed by other English Canadians outside Quebec is much more circumscribed in Montreal, where there is a perception among anglophone cultural producers that the province's granting agencies as well as its industrial and institutional infrastructures are biased towards francophone artists. So, while francophones appear to enjoy a wealth of cultural subsidies, a selection of Montreal anglos see themselves as cut off from government support for their creative work, forced to seek other means of subsidizing their cultural activities. It is worth noting, however, that this picture is skewed and perhaps somewhat overstated in its conspiratorial tone, as anglophones still remain part of a global network which is overwhelmingly English. However, there remains the social fact that in Montreal you have a national majority living as a provincial minority, one which has access to anglo-dominated global systems of distribution, yet sees persists in viewing itself as marginalized in terms of local cultural production. Even at the level of independent music production, where many of these issues are of less concern, it creates a

number of conflicts and compromises which are played out in various ways, all of which contribute to a particular image of Montreal as a subcultural retreat from the mainstream.

This image of Montreal as cultural haven is deeply embedded in the *long durée* of Montreal's cultural conflicts which are themselves often linked to the battles over language in the province. Many anglos have tied Montreal's economic situation to the province's nationalist politics. It is taken for granted that with the rise to power during the 1970s of the separatist party, the Parti Québécois, came the exodus of numerous businesses to other Canadian and American cities, however that is not entirely accurate. Over the course of the twentieth century, Montreal's status as a national economic and social centre had slowly eroded, an extended period during which it would lose the majority of its financial institutions and insurance companies to cities such as Toronto, Vancouver and later Calgary. Yet, contrary to many anglo accounts of the decline of Montreal, this had little to do with the rise of the sovereignty movement or the province's »Quiet Revolution« (a period stretching from the 1950s through to the 1960s, when the province was seeking to put in place a range of institutional, industrial and intellectual changes which were geared towards shoring up provincial, mainly franco-phone, interests). In fact, the disappearance of financial institutions, as well as the ancillary services they require, began as early as the nineteenth century (Germain/Rose 2000; Code 1996). The de-metropolization of Montreal, its reduction to a regional centre after being such a vibrant national one, was a process which took the better part of the twentieth century. Its decline registered among anglophones most acutely, however, when the Parti Québécois came to power in 1976, perceived by many of them to be the historical moment when Montreal's role in national affairs, financial and otherwise, had diminished irreparably.

There were also notable demographic shifts occurring in Montreal from the 1980s through to the 1990s. The »baby boom« which had affected most of North America was also felt in Montreal. Changes in the provincial education system courtesy of the »quiet revolution« had provided good education and the promise of jobs for a number of older members of this privileged generation. By the late seventies, many of the younger members of this generation were suffering the consequences of a provincial economic downturn. Throughout the late seventies and well into the eighties, education remained strong, but job prospects diminished. Between 1971 and 1983, the unemployment rate for 15-19 year-olds had increased from 11 percent to 27 percent (Linteau/Durocher/Robert/Ricard 1991: 323). Linteau notes that »many considered the youth of the 1980s a lost generation« (ibid.).

Regardless of its disputed origins, Montreal's economy has been severely depressed for the better part of twenty years, but that too is often framed as one of its virtues. For instance, in 1996, Montreal had the highest rate of unemployment of 23 North American cities at 11.9 percent (Bureau of Labour Statistics, Statistics Canada, 1997). As a counterpoint, in 1997 *Utne Reader* magazine (No. 75, September) claimed that Montreal's Plateau area was one of the »hippest spots« in North America. It goes without saying that these two things are not mutually exclusive.

Within this fraught image of the city, of economic decline and creative fecundity, there are aspects to life in the city which many local and non-local musicmakers alike have singled out as part of Montreal's continuing appeal: a stagnant real estate market and rent control has meant cheap apartments throughout the city, especially on the cherished Plateau, which has the highest density of self-identified cultural producers in Montreal; Montreal's industrial districts in the Old Port and further north in Mile End were gutted as the city inched slowly towards a post-industrial economy, freeing up warehouses and lofts that many artists used for living, recording, and performance spaces; the city's four universities offer the lowest fees in North America which has meant that a number of foreign and out-of-province students are drawn to the city, a fact which gives the city its youthful, energetic ambience; the cost of living is reasonable even for those living on welfare or unemployment insurance which means that those who wish to pursue an artistic lifestyle rarely have to worry so much about eking out a marginal existence with undue amounts of suffering (in fact, the difficulty of pursuing a creative life in another, more expensive city has driven a number of artists to Montreal); Montreal is close to bigger, cultural vibrant and diverse cities such as Boston or New York, each with their own distinct independent music scenes (anglophone independent labels, musicians and distributors have established affective and industrial ties to these cities, as a way of compensating for Montreal's weak support structures); lastly, the city is steeped in cultural mythology. As to this last point, at one time known as Canada's »Sin City,« Montreal has been a beacon for jazz musicians, poets, painters, playwrights, filmmakers and novelists for most of the twentieth century (Straw 1992). They have returned the favour by lending the city its bohemian aura, in both their lives and in their works, defining its structure of feeling, its mythographies, through song, poetry, novels, theatre, adding to the repository of images and collective representations which also form the imaginative infrastructure underpinning the city's creative milieus.

These select details about the city highlight a salient fact of cultural life in Montreal: that those that do stay in Montreal are often overeducated and underemployed by choice, a demographic fact which helps to reinforce the image of Montreal as a kind of middle-class escapist utopia. The geographic, economic and political situations in Montreal have lent the city a kind of decrepit charm and created an attractive climate for artists and music-makers who wish to live an artful life. In this context, for those music-makers who want to make punk, independent, or avant-garde music, Montreal remains a privileged destination. It is far enough away from an established centre of the anglophone recording industry such as Toronto, which has an extensive and stable network of promoters, clubs, record labels, radio stations, media and audiences. In contrast, anglophone musicmaking in Montreal finds itself nourished by the city's lack of a similar density of institutional and industrial activity (as well as the proximity to the major record labels which often have satellite offices headquartered in Toronto). What may be missing in terms of a large and reasonably well-integrated industrial infrastructure, for instance, is more than compensated for by a rich imaginative infrastructure that encourages an affective relationship to the city and which further entrenches musicmakers in Montreal (at the same time that it also encourages them to orient themselves to cities such as Boston or New York as counterpoints to Toronto). This is not to say that musicmaking in Montreal is not marked by varying degrees of ambivalence and a wavering sense of commitment. The forces shaping musicmaking in Montreal generate a discursive envelope within which is contained a certain sociomusical experience of the city, one fraught with a variety of tensions, many of which are centered on the complex intersection of economics, politics, language, etc. In an effort to get at the complexity of this experience of Montreal, my research highlights a number of related issues, primarily as a way of explaining how musicmaking unfolds within a matrix of spatial strategies, social relations and representational practices. I am using the terms »scenes« and »bohémias« as ways of describing how this matrix is articulated socially, spatially, and symbolically. As social media, both scene and bohemia are significant for the ways in which they stimulate, insulate, circumscribe and structure musical activity, at the same time that they reinforce, reinvigorate, or facilitate the negotiation of, certain social divisions and cultural distinctions in the city.

Bohemia and scene are terms that come closest to describing certain aspects of musicmaking in Montreal and, I would argue, more adequately encompass the complex nature of the city's cultural life and its musicmaking spaces. I have called these phenomena social media because they are as

much about social relations as they are about spatial practices, representations or frames of reference. Bohemia is understood as a specific urban sociocultural phenomenon notable for its role in defining a certain semiotic shape of the city, for the way in which it lends a kind of palpable yet ineffable texture to Montreal. While it is not entirely separate from bohemia, scene is situated as a kind of cultural space and set of practices which depends upon various industries and institutions. To put this schematically: bohemia refers to the imaginative infrastructure of musicmaking; scene to its material infrastructure. The links found between scenes, bohemia and the city are clearly bound up in one another in ways that influence their respective social, symbolic and material forms.

Musicmaking and finding the right questions

What follows is an introduction to some of the analytical tools, conceptual frameworks and research methods which allowed me to trace out the complicated morphology of cultural life in Montreal. Anglo independent music in Montreal was the chosen case study and is used as a way to work through a set of conceptual frameworks and research methods which can more adequately describe the cultural spaces associated with musicmaking. The nature of independent musicmaking in the city is such that it can tell us a great deal about the connections between a specific mode of cultural production and the complex make-up of urban social space. Independent musicmaking's singular forms of cultural expression, its »firm« infrastructure and »soft« social organization are overwhelmingly »urban«, in that they encompass the city's atomizing potential and the collaborative quest for a sense of belonging. Musicmaking requires people, material and symbolic resources, as well as what Bourdieu (1992) has called the »spaces of possibility«, all of which any city supplies in distinct ratios. These various amenities are readily identified, selected and organized according to the specific needs of musicmakers, who have keenly adapted to the idiosyncrasies and capricious demands of city life according to a range of experiences and knowledges which are themselves shaped by the structure of the scene. In a related sense, musicmaking acts also as a kind of pedagogical tool, encouraging and instructing people as to how to act »urban«, in that it frames how a city can be understood and experienced, a person's urban imaginary determined by as well as determining the sociomusical experience, the habitus in other words, allowed in a particular place.

This is not to say that the nature of musicmaking in the suburbs, or elsewhere, is not without its own unique qualities; rather, the city, as a trope and topos, prods one to ask more compelling questions about the way in which sociality, musicmaking, the city, and notion of »the urban« are mutually constituted. The city presents us with a range of »problems« for which we seek negotiated resolutions and compromises: individuality versus solidarity, private versus public, remaining anonymous versus asserting one's self, quietism versus performance. Musicmaking can both heighten and help solve many of these problems. The irrepressible need to assert and realize desires through collaborative activity and cultural expression are aspects of musicmaking which speak to its ameliorative power, with all of the above tensions suspended in a state of what Alan Blum (2003) has called »public intimacy«. I would argue that this example of what Maffesoli (1996) calls »puissance«, or social power, is facilitated by adopting and adapting to certain sociospatial forms such as a scene or bohemia. Following from this, it can be asked: What are some of the specific »problems« associated with urban musicmaking that these sociospatial forms raise in terms of doing social research? What sort of questions does musicmaking pose in terms of examining its more informal aspects? Its more institutionalized ones? Its local and translocal spatial and social relations?

In trying to consider the scope of these sorts of questions, I have been reminded of Robert Merton's work on sociological research, and in particular, his insistence that social research be guided by appropriately formulated questions. Merton introduced a fundamental dilemma that has lingered for four decades when he proposed that finding the right question to ask in sociology is often more difficult than answering it (Merton 1959: ix). He suggested also that a sociological inquiry must be motivated more than just asking simply »Why?«. This question, Merton suggests, can be put to just about anything and thus any social phenomenon can be seen as overly-significant and »socially awesome«. If we can ask »Why?« of every social event, doing sociological research is no longer a question of scale, but rather a question of containment, of setting up parameters so as to determine which studies might be more valuable, and hence more valid or legitimate, than others. In Merton's estimation, there are more rigorous and economical ways to go about framing sociological examinations. He suggests that sociological inquiry be considered in relation to three principal components: originating questions, the rationale of the questions, and specifying questions. In what follows, I want to take these components up in relation to musicmaking and the notion of scene and bohemia, in order to give each term more conceptual definition.

As to the first component, Merton asserts that originating questions are designed to identify sociological facts, explore the adequacy of sociological concepts, pose questions about empirical generalizations, etc. However, before beginning to formulate an originating question, it should be made clear that the nature of musicmaking in the city provides scholars with a range of research possibilities, a fact revealed in the works of, among others, Richard Peterson in Nashville (Bennett/Peterson 2003), Andy Bennett in the UK (2000), Barry Shank in Austin, Texas (1994), and Sara Cohen in Liverpool (1991; 2007). Each of these studies has contributed to the field of popular music studies in invigorating ways, whether it be through deep ethnographic research or by way of engaging with the usefulness of certain categories for describing musical practice and identity production. This project is inspired in large part by much of their work. However, what remains striking about these studies is the peculiar absence of discussions about the role played by the city in shaping the sociomusical experience, where the city registers simply as a kind of backdrop against which musicmaking is set. I want to offer here a kind of corrective or addendum to what I think are notable absences. To follow from Merton, the circumstances surrounding musicmaking in the city are such that they prompt a number of questions: Why does musicmaking take the shapes it does and how best to document them? How might scene and/or bohemia best be used as descriptors for informal social organization associated with musicmaking in the city? What is it about musicmaking that it bears so strongly upon the semiotic and sociological shape of the city? Why does it matter and to whom? What makes it a defining index of »cityness« (as Massey, Allen and Pile [1999] might suggest)? What, more precisely, is the relationship between the material and symbolic dimensions of musicmaking and the city? How is the urban imaginary influenced and underscored by musicmaking? How is the city imagined by musicmakers? A number of these questions are elided or obscured in many studies of musicmaking. The city as an idea and experience remains important, however, as an active force which leaves an indelible impression upon sociomusical experience. For many musicmakers, the image of the city, of city-as-scene, the city as figure and ground are used as demonstrative gestures of differentiation, rhetorical and spatialized strategies of distinction, and modes of engaging with place which are found throughout individual discussions and experiences of Montreal. How and what aspects of Montreal are talked about as primary indicators of musicmakers' affective relationship to the city?

For Merton, the rationale of the question is »the statement of the reasons why it is worth asking« (Merton 1959: xix) and this remains the

primary justification for research. There can be two principal rationales: first, that the research will have consequences for the sociological field in terms of theoretical innovation; second, that it will result in a kind of practical knowledge which can alter the experiences of those studied. The role the question plays in terms of adding to systematic knowledge, suggesting that the research results will move understanding and thus the field forward, is perhaps the most salient aspect for my purposes (although I would suggest that a great deal of other work on musicmaking is important to the development of various cultural policies). What might the questions posed above contribute to the field of popular music studies? I would contend that they would begin to open up the study of urban musicmaking by conceiving of it in a number of related ways:

- 1) as a collaborative activity,
- 2) as a form of individual and shared cultural expression,
- 3) as a practice of collective representation,
- 4) as bound up in cultural spaces which are reciprocally, symbiotically, tied to the city,
- 5) as a set of social practices, experiences and collective representations which shape the experience of the city,
- 6) as contingent upon social media which inflect how one comes to know, perceive, and conceive of the city.

In part, this last suggestion follows from Henri Lefebvre (1991) and his discussion of the three critical dimensions of space: spatial practices, representations of space and the spaces of representation. The links between these three aspects of urban musicmaking have only been partially dealt with in recent discussions of scenes (Ruth Finnegan's [1989] work on Milton Keynes, for instance, most fully describes these links). To be fair, it is the first of Lefebvre's definition of space, spatial practices, that has been most fully realized in recent accounts of musicmaking. The latter aspects, representations of space and spatial representations, are rarely discussed, except perhaps in the context of place promotion. However, they are just as significant and just as revealing in terms of the culture of city life that to neglect them, to not consider the value of collective representation say, abstracts the sociomusical experience from its context. This project takes this occlusion as its rationale for formulating questions about cultural expression, collective representation, social relations and spatial practices among Montreal musicmakers.

Following from the rationale of the question, the final component Merton describes is that of the specifying questions, which brings us back full

circle. What the originary question lacked in specificity is compensated for here by posing questions that provide more sociological detail. It helps to focus the originary question by considering more facets of the research object. The specifying questions help to distil the originary question in such a way that the object of study can be brought into sharper focus. The principle questions dealt with here accentuate the symbolic function of Montreal in relation to musicmaking. What are the unique qualities found in, or more pointedly, ascribed to musicmaking in Montreal? How is the image of Montreal as a bohemia articulated in different ways by different groups of musicmakers? How do these articulations break down along language lines? In what ways does a cultural phenomenon such as musicmaking reveal the complexity of social relations in Montreal? How does the iconic status of Montreal as cultural hub, a bohemia, register in accounts that attempt to differentiate it from other cities? What is the social function of this distinctive image, as binding agent, as divisive force? In what ways are these distinctions differently valued by anglophones and francophones? In attracting a range of creative types from elsewhere, what aspects of Montreal life are emphasized or downplayed and for what purpose?

Frameworks for analysis

All three aspects of Merton's model of inquiry can help situate the study of musicmaking in Montreal as one which provokes questions about the social and spatial relation of musicmaking to the city. Taking a lead from him, this project has as one its primary motivations a consideration of what research methods might be best combined in order to provide a thicker description of musicmaking in Montreal. It proposes three principle frameworks which lay out critical analytical distinctions: the experiential, the materialist and discursive frameworks. Each one is employed as a way of differentiating between the sociospatial properties of musicmaking in the city.

- 1) The experiential framework can be used to consider how the city as both site and object of knowledge is determined by, as well as determines, the horizons of possibility circumscribing sociomusical experience. More specifically, this framework was used to enumerate the spatial and temporal dimensions of musical life in Montreal as they become embedded in particular places and embodied in particular movements through the city. The results reveal patterns of individuation and belonging that form the means through which musicmakers identify and become attuned to

the city's specific rhythms, providing a kind of affective, mattering map of Montreal.

- 2) The materialist framework tells us more about the political economy of the scene, revealing the broader social and institutional structures determining the specific experience of the city. It was used to examine how the aforementioned rhythms of the city are organized and ordered, both spatially and temporally, through various networks, circuits and nodes, thereby linking routes to routines and provoking analyses which can elaborate upon the social mechanics of the scene in relation to the numerous forces which bear down upon it.
- 3) The discursive framework enables a consideration of how the image of the city affects musical and social practice and how the semiotic contours of Montreal musicmaking are produced and reproduced. It can be used to explore the more symbolic relation of scene and bohemia to Montreal, how they both signify a city's »cityness« to locals and non-locals. It locates the imaginative structure of bohemia and scene within a larger history of representation of Montreal, and takes account of the social value and deep resonance of certain narratives and myths associated with musicmaking and cities, singling out their influence on musical practice and urban social relations.

Each framework lent itself to specific research methods: the experiential relied upon qualitative techniques such as mapping, diaries, surveys and interviews as a way of documenting the individual experience of the scene; the materialist framework was based upon detailed consideration of the socio-economic dimensions of the city generally and the micro-economy of the scene specifically; and the discursive framework required analysis of qualitative data, as well as a consideration of the various media discourses and collective representations which support and lend texture to musicmaking in Montreal, as well as shape the experiential horizons of musicmakers. These conceptual frameworks were complemented by different methods for analysis: qualitative methods such as mapping analysis, diary entries, and interviews, political economy and discourse analysis, and thus we can take up, briefly, the usefulness of the methods attached to each framework. Mapping can provide a more schematic view of the city, graphically representing the major sites and locations associated with musicmaking. It is one grounded, however, in a certain kind of experience of place and as such is oriented towards tracing out the individual routes and routines that musicmakers use to navigate through the city. Alongside these mapping exercises, a broader approach to the materiality of city life was

considered, principally as a method which pulls the discussion away from the tendency to fetishize the personal, a bias of ethnographic work which can sometimes obscure consideration of other forces that work to shape musicmaking. A political economy of Montreal established musicmaking as a cultural practice which has historical specificities, shaped as it is by material forces such as the city's economic state and language politics. Finally, discourse analysis revealed how collective representations of places were narrativized, mythologized and actualized in sociomusical experience. The role the image of the city plays in musicmaking, more specifically, how a particular place-image functions to orient musical activity, was a primary focus here. Bringing the results together provided a better picture of the ways in which social action, imagination, and material processes work in concert and conflict as motivating factors in the social construction of the spaces associated with musicmaking in Montreal. Analysing the Montreal music scene according to these frameworks generated a more complex portrayal of the sociomusical experience of the city, one which captured in fuller terms the experiences and imaginings of the city's cultural spaces. As an interpretative schema, this particular model also illuminated the cultural specificity of Montreal and outlined in greater detail the sociospatial dimensions of musicmaking in the city.

All of these methods can be utilized to answer of the following questions: What does the nature of a musicmaking tell us about the relationship of certain modes of cultural production to an urban space like Montreal? What kinds of spaces are produced through musicmaking? What sort of social functions do they serve? What images of the city are privileged in musicmaking and how do those images fold back into musical practice? How does an image of the city function to orient musical activity? What does it mean when the functionality of a city is read according to the demands of an aesthetic experience of place? The value of these questions resides in their ability to frame a discussion of urban musicmaking according to its material, symbolic, and existential dimensions in a city which is steeped in history, layers of meaning and fraught with various conflicts, dilemmas and antagonisms, but also the material and imaginative resources necessary to ameliorate much of their threat.

At the same time, these frameworks can also reveal in telling ways the relation of scene and bohemia to Montreal. Montreal, as described by many musicmakers, is a city that supplies specific aesthetic resources, lifestyle options and a suitably grey economic climate that is more than amenable to the demands of the cultural production associated with independent musicmaking. For a number of musicmakers in Montreal, their relationship to the

city is founded on an aesthetic experience of place and musicmaking that frames their affective attachment to the city, as well as one another. In this sense, musicmaking in Montreal is about the relationship of aesthetic politics to the creation of an ideal urban experience and the cultivation of a chosen lifestyle. Montreal is cast by local anglophone musicmakers and represented to outsiders as a city more willing to accommodate modest musical aspirations, where careerist impulses are curtailed, and where threats of artistic compromise are rendered moot. In terms of the political economy of the scene, for many independent musicmakers the success of the scene is inversely proportional to Montreal's economic state. Instability and isolation are valorized, ironized in many cases. They are charged with a positive valence, imparting to the city its continuing allure, instituting as well a range of expectations on the part of local and non-local musicmakers in terms of what Montreal offers in the way of creative potential. That said, in order to negotiate the space of the musicmaking properly requires having the wherewithal to utilize the amenities at hand, both material and symbolic, in an effort to realize the desire for living an artful life in the city. It also means having the frame of mind, the kind of urban sensibility or »habitus«, which interprets the city as a space of creative possibility, keenly attuned to its potentialities, able to identify and mobilize these necessary resources strategically.

Final Thoughts

We can return briefly to a Merton-esque question, which can edge us closer to a conclusion. »What is a city?«, Lewis Mumford asked rhetorically in 1937. He replied: »One may describe the city, in its social aspect, as a special framework directed toward the creation of differentiated opportunities for a common life and a significant collective drama« (Mumford 2000: 29). The drama of city life, its promise of solitude but also solidarity: these are the twinned facets which amplify our experience of the city, bringing to the fore its existential enigmas and furnish the stage upon which they unfold. Musicmaking sets a stage for diverse kinds of performativity and encourages different levels of engagement with the city. Of the city's performative dimension, Mumford claims that »the city fosters art and is art; the city creates the theatre and *is* the theatre« (ibid.). It is in the act of musicmaking that existential dramas unfold, where individual desires and collective demands mesh into needs for social space in the form of a distinct scene, a

hardening in some ways of a bohemian »structure« of feeling. Mumford also suggests that »it is in the city, the city as theatre, that man's more purposive activities are focused, and work out, through conflicting and cooperative personalities, events, groups, into more significant culminations« (ibid.). Musicmaking extends itself spatially and affectively through social media like scenes and bohémias, providing sites where the desire for belonging as well as wilful alterity are articulated in contradictory and complementary fashion. In the case of musicmaking in Montreal, this tension has led to social, spatial and symbolic consequences that have in turn nourished the sociomusical experience in singular kinds of ways. Montreal musicmaking exemplifies the manner in which a city can serve as a vehicle for the shaping of individual and group identity and collective representation, but perhaps more importantly, it demonstrates the ways in which these social and symbolic practices author one another in a manner that renders the search for causal determinations somewhat misplaced.

By way of concluding, let me qualify the utility of this framework model. There is nothing to suggest that it is restricted solely to independent musicmaking. It can be applied equally to the study of Montreal's hip-hop scene, electroclash, hardcore, idm, d'n'b, salsa, *musique actuelle*, klezmer or any musical genre found in the city. It can be extended to consider as well non-musical »scenes«: open-mic poetry, stamp-collecting, pottery-making, chess playing, quilting or even flashmobbing. Each in their own way can be analyzed according to the experiential, materialist and discursive frameworks, and they each reveal something about the distinctive and special relationship to place and a community of others found in the city. However, musicmaking can offer us a distinctive set of practices through which a number of city-related issues reveal themselves.

Let me consider this last point in terms of a counter-example I just mentioned: chess-playing. I raise this because over the last few years, chess-playing has become an increasingly visible phenomenon in Montreal, producing something that we might call a scene. Now chess-playing may in fact be read as symptomatic of the city's *laissez-faire* contentment, contributing in its way to the vision of Montreal as a city which tolerates the persistence of bohemian demands for living life at a leisurely pace. And although the presence of chess-playing may be an index of the city's easy-going attitude, it is also about a kind of retreat. It is less an engagement with the city and more a muted refusal, as chess-playing turns itself away from the city and looks inward. Even as a kind of scene, it strikes me as a conservative gesture that reacts to the anonymity and solitude of the city by reinforcing it through expression-less

withdrawal. Its solution to city living is interiorized in a manner that disavows actively engaging with the city. Musicmaking, by contrast, poses another kind of solution to the problem of the city and its paradoxes. Its response is much more self-conscious and pro-active, founded as it upon an ethics of commitment, to both place and others, revelling in the pleasures afforded by the city's paradoxes with an unmistakable exuberance. It feeds off of and into the drama of the city life. Its exuberance buttresses the theatricality of the city as Mumford suggests. Musicmaking, in this sense, can tell us a more compelling story about the organization of social and cultural life in a city, than say stamp collecting or chess-playing. As I have described it, musicmaking is a crucial binding agent, a set of practices, ideas, images, institutions and industries where identity production, both individual and civic, and solidarity exist as its just a few of its trajectories. In the case of identity production, these can take the more existential form of community and/or the more symbolic shape of collective representation. As to representation, making music in Montreal is about engaging with the past, a real and imagined history and tradition, which is tied to the economic and social rhythms of the city. Musicmaking here comes appended with its own narratives and is freighted with its own mythologies which are readily absorbed and animated by the history of bohemia in Montreal. One hardly hears talk of the great chess-clubs of the past or the lingering social power of Montreal's chess-playing traditions. No one comes to Montreal for its legendary chess scene.

Unlike chess, musicmaking is about movement through the city, about travelling from house to rehearsal space, from club to bar, from café to recording studio. It revolves around reading the functionality of the city from an aesthetic perspective, pinpointing, integrating, and co-ordinating networks and music-related sites, people and resources, so that they best serve creative demands. The result is a perception of the city-as-scene. Musicmaking, in this sense, becomes about the maintenance of a certain lifestyle which takes advantage of the city's symbolic and material resources and returns the favour by contributing to the »cumulative textures« of the city which in turn resonate with locals and non-locals alike (Suttles 1984). It is about maintaining and contributing to the notion of Montreal as a bohemia by reaffirming the mythologies, Lindner's (2006) »mythographies«, and underwriting the narratives which have given the city its unique cultural resonance.

My overarching concern regarding musicmaking in Montreal centres on an exploration of the singularity of a specific cultural phenomenon in

the city, noting its multiple articulations in an urban context fraught with conflicts both large and small. Through the words and actions of its participants, the many ways it is represented and experienced reveals in telling ways how a city signifies its »cityness« in complex and varied forms. I have chosen musicmaking as one cultural practice which raises interesting questions regarding forms of sociality in the city, as musicmaking is made up of both material and symbolic dimensions which are overwhelmingly social, each of which has spatial consequences. Musicmaking serves as a vehicle through which the meaningfulness of the city can be enunciated in various ways. It can also be one way in which affective attachments to place can be read as spatial extensions of sentiments and desires, both individual and collective. Circulation, movement, networks, social organization, politics, performance, identity and language are central aspects of musicmaking in Montreal and animate its cultural spaces and make possible and plausible, to borrow from Lindner (ibid.) again, the scene's enduring appeal.

The larger study of musicmaking of which this piece is part took the image of the city as one of its organizing principles. I wanted to work through the similar views many of my respondents held of Montreal. They had variously described it as a »city with a palpable difference«, as »Paris between the Wars«, »like Casablanca«, »like Brussels« or »like Canada reduced«, complete with its very own version of the nation's »lower-expectation complex«. I wanted to consider this aggregation of signs and signifiers in relation to musical activity, so I chose the current scene as a phenomenon which raised a number of issues. At the same time, I was interested in working through some of the theoretical and methodological quandaries that the study of informal social organizations in Montreal raises in terms of research as well as social and cultural categorization. I chose two particular terms, »scene« and »bohemia«, as descriptive categories which might better account for the sociomusical experience found in Montreal. Scene and bohemia offer better ways of conceptualizing musicmaking for a number of reasons. Broadly speaking, I read the scene as a social medium structured by industries and institutions and bohemia as a kind of structure of feeling, an atmosphere, generating what Maffesoli (1996) calls a »communal ambience«. Bohemia, as a durable urban tradition, implies an art of living, as Bourdieu (1992) claims, which led me to think more broadly about the semiotic and sociological significance of musicmaking in Montreal as forming one part of the cumulative textures which make up the city's imaginary. Musicmaking in Montreal is made up of a dense cluster of communicative and

social networks, formal and informal economies that create reticular circuits of reciprocity, febrile webs of interconnectedness, which rely upon and reinforce the material and imaginative infrastructures of the city. But it is also about the relationships between francophones and anglophones and as such is animated by a variety of tensions which influence all levels of cultural production in the city. It is about »conflictual harmony« as Maffesoli (1996) might say, or »intimate alterity« as Marc Augé (1995) would suggest. It leads to a productive *frisson* which generates a range of responses, problematics and possible solutions. Above all, it provides a rich field of study in which the ideas and methods here can offer some suggestive frameworks for deeper inquiry.

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Abstract

This article is concerned principally with the study of scenes and bohémias in contemporary Montreal. It explores a number of ways in which these terms might be given more rigour and offers a set of frameworks which can be applied for the analysis of urban musicmaking. Discussing the experiential, material and discursive aspects of musicmaking, the author offers a provisional model of how to consider scenes in relation to the cities in which they unfold.