“Good Vibes”: The Role of Alternative Nightlife in Montreal

by

Katarina Gligorijevic

An MRP submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master’s in Human Geography

Department of Geography and Planning
University of Toronto

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2016

Abstract

My research examines the role of alternative nightlife in the creative city through a case study of underground loft and warehouse parties in the city of Montreal. Despite the growing recognition of creativity as an important facet of urban development, the future of local night-time activities remains uncertain – at times valued for their distinctiveness, they are often disadvantaged or destroyed by processes of culture-led gentrification. Drawing on a set of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with promoters, musicians and volunteers, the study addresses three main questions. First, it evaluates the role and significance of these events by considering how they are framed in relation to mainstream events/venues, and how the use of non-traditional spaces contributes to the production of a different music experience. Second, the paper seeks to identify place-specific opportunities and constraints encountered by independent promoters. Finally, it examines the relevance of the underground music scene to Montreal’s cultural development policies and city-marketing efforts. How can the creative city foster (rather than impede) the development of local, innovation-driven and sustainable forms of nightlife?

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1 Introduction

1.1. The death of urban nightlife?

On September 6, 2016, after a six-hour hearing with local authorities, London's legendary nightclub Fabric – widely considered one of the best in the world – had its license revoked following two tragic drug-related deaths. The news came after a three-week-long suspension, during which the global dance community rallied under the banner #savefabric: at the time of this writing, an online petition on change.org had garnered more than 150,000 signatures. London Mayor Sadiq Khan and local MP Emily Thornberry also voiced their support of the venue, and urged all involved to find a sensible solution that would protect the future of the club while ensuring the safety of its visitors. Following the ruling, Khan's statement reiterated his disappointment, emphasizing that "London's iconic clubs are an essential part of our cultural landscape… This decline must stop if London is to retain its status as a 24-hour city with a world-class nightlife" (Khan, 2016).

The closure of Fabric casts light on the growing tension between the regulation and promotion of the night-time economy. This is not a unique case, but rather the crowning jewel of an alarming trend: in the past ten years, London has lost nearly half of its nightclubs and 35% of its grassroots music venues (Connely, 2015; Greater London Authority, 2015). Journalists continue to proclaim the 'death' of urban nightlife – not only in London, but also New York and other western cultural hubs (Pollock, 2015; Wei, 2015; Proud, 2015). In other words, this is a global trend. In 2009, the situation in Paris came to a head when a group of artists, promoters and venue operators penned an open letter exposing a number of regulatory issues, under the (suitably somber) title "Quand la nuit meurt en silence" (When the night silently dies). In New York, the complicated relationship between gentrification and nightlife has led some (Wei, 2015) to question whether nightlife venues – frequently displaced by rising rents and residential intensification – actually contribute to their own gentrification.

The management of nightlife is a current issue in urban policy and regulatory circles. On the one hand, cultural vibrancy is seen as increasingly important for attracting talent, tourists and investment; on the other, conflicts between residents and revelers are steadily worsening in increasingly residential city centers. Since nightlife scenes are locally-specific, conflicts tend to

vary in type and intensity, and approaches to nightlife management are shaped by a complex combination of historical, social and cultural factors. This might be why, for instance, the innovative and socially progressive city of Amsterdam paved the way by appointing a Night Mayor to address potential conflicts between residents and revelers, with Paris, Toulouse and Zurich following suit (O'Sullivan, 2016). London is also in the process of appointing its own 'Night Czar'.

For the most part, however, discussions around the future of nightlife are focused on and take place within the confines of western Europe and the UK. With the exception of New York, North American cities are largely absent from the nightlife narrative – perhaps with good reason: early closing hours and restrictive drinking laws have muted the party experience in many regions of the New World. At the same time, however, a number of cities still host vibrant underground dance music scenes – for those willing to look for them. With its European flair and Quebecois exceptionalism, Montreal has gained a global reputation as a city of music and as a nightlife destination. Since the early 2000s, the city has made a name for itself in the global electronic music community, and today hosts one of the most vibrant techno[1] scenes in North America.

1.2. Research questions

This paper examines the role of the 'underground'[2] techno music scene in Montreal through a case study of parties that take place in unconventional spaces such as lofts and warehouses. In particular, it focuses on the following research areas:

1. How are alternative music events framed in relation to mainstream events and venues?
    a. How does the use of non-traditional spaces contribute to the production of a different music experience?
    b. To what degree do these events employ notions of 'community'?
2. How do these events fit into broader policy agendas and governance frameworks in the city of Montreal?
    a. How does the policy/regulatory context create opportunities and constraints?

[1] Techno is a form of electronic music that emerged in Detroit in the late 1980s. It is repetitive, instrumental, and characterized by a strong backbeat of hi-hats, snares and claps.

[2] While deeply contested in Montreal's techno music scene (see section 4.4), the term 'underground' can be useful in describing certain forms of alternative nightlife.

b. To what extent are alternative events incorporated into broader city-branding/image-building?

The paper is structured as follows: in the second section, I review the literature on the night-time economy and creative cities, paying particular attention to the contradictory trends between the regulation and promotion of nightlife activities. The third section describes the methods used and presents the city of Montreal as a unique case study. In the fourth section, I offer a brief history of the local techno scene, and describe the loft and warehouse parties that comprise the main subject of this paper. The fifth section makes a case for a unique combination of social, cultural and material place-based characteristics that enable the development of the local techno music scene, while the sixth offers a brief overview of regulatory challenges that act to constrain its growth. The conclusion offers recommendations and some final thoughts on the future of Montreal as an electronic music hub.

2 Literature review

2.1. The rise of the night-time economy

> A time of (for) transgression, a time for spending, a time for trying to be something the daytime may not let you be, a time for meeting people you shouldn't, for doing things your parents told you not to, that your children are too young to understand. This is now being promoted as vibrancy (Lovatt & O'Connor, 1995, p. 132).

Despite its historical role as a space for cultural exchange, the official recognition and promotion of urban nightlife is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the western imaginary, the night was a 'liminal zone': a time of 'crime and desire', of transgression, the adversary of the regimented and ordered time-spaces of the day. Because it was free from the rules of the daytime, the night became synonymous with risk and scandal, it represented "the possibility of the permanent festival – the revels of the night" (Lovatt & O'Connor, 1995, p. 130). In short, it was a problem to be regulated and contained. In the post-1968 era, however, demographic and social shifts – increased leisure time, the democratization of higher education and the rise of urban social movements, among others – contributed to the resurgence of urban nightlife (Bianchini, 1995). As the transition from Fordist production to consumerism made the development of entertainment and leisure industries economically viable, the official sentiments surrounding nightlife began to shift.

In the 1970s and 1980s, examples of the use of cultural policy to revitalize urban nightlife could be found in cities across continental Europe. Faced with the relative underdevelopment of British nightlife, Bianchini (1995) was one of the first to make a strong case for the social and economic importance of nightlife and night-time economies. Properly managed, he claimed, the night held enormous potential as a time for experimentation, social flourishing and economic growth, as "a time which is free for one's own personal development… the time of friendship, of love, of conversation… freer than the daytime from social constraints, conventions and persecutions" (1995, p. 124). Bianchini's (1995) ambitious vision proposed overcoming old moral panics and trepidation surrounding the night-time in order to fully realize its potential: to experiment with new planning regimes, traffic flows and urban timetables, to 'double' the economy, to bring the city center back to life.

Bianchini (1995) urged us to reclaim the night by making urban policy "more like the culture itself of the city: more flexible, open-ended, holistic, pluralistic, innovation-orientated and, at the risk of appearing elitist, perhaps more cultured as well" (p. 125). And starting with post-industrial British cities in the 1990s, the aims of cultural policy slowly shifted from the regulation and containment of the nightlife 'problem' to its positive management. It is around this time that the concept of the '24h city' gained traction in policy debates and academic circles: a set of urban development strategies that hoped to leverage the night-time economy to attract people to city centres and, in so doing, transform the post-industrial city (Heath, 1997). British cities started adopting 24h city strategies for a variety of reasons, including public safety, city image-building, inward investment, and economic regeneration (Stickland, as cited in Heath, 1997, p. 197).

For better or for worse, the expansion and deregulation of night-time activities thus became part of new urban regeneration schemes (Hadfield, 2015). This gradual but difficult transition involved the extension of bar closing hours, less restrictive nightlife regulations and the development of vibrant downtown 'entertainment' districts. However, it also produced a wave of unanticipated consequences: issues of violence, health, as well as inequalities in governance and power. The 1990s manifesto of a sustainable, open-minded and innovation-driven 'creative city', one driven by social concerns rather than merely economic potential, did not come into being. Instead, the development of the night-time economy (NTE) became entangled with popular contemporary discourses of 'urban entrepreneurialism', inter-urban competition and, starting in the early 2000s, the ubiquitous 'creative city' narrative. Some (Shaw, 2010; Chatterton & Hollands, 2002) therefore contend that the negative manifestations of the NTE can be blamed on its particular enactment within the existing (neoliberal) policy environment. In the following sections, I discuss the dominant 'creative city' approach to urban development, criticisms of its fundamental premises (in particular, the linear relationship between creativity and economic development), and finally, its effects on the regulation and promotion of nightlife activities.

2.2. The role of the NTE in the creative city

The 'creative city' refers to an urban development approach popularized by Richard Florida in the early 2000s and since adopted by countless municipalities worldwide. In it, Florida attributes a healthy urban economy to the presence of a mobile, highly-skilled 'creative

class': a broad-stroke term that refers to workers in various 'creative' professions as varied as technology, media, art, law and finance. Since members of the creative class are (allegedly) drawn to "more experiences, flexible spaces and fewer rules" (Bayliss, 2007, p. 898), the most successful cities will be those that are able to support a dynamic creative milieu, world-class architecture, art institutions, festivals and most crucially in the context of this paper, *a vibrant nightlife.*

In cities that subscribe to aggressive creative city tactics, the promotion of the NTE is largely tied to economic development aims. In the same way that the 24h city was touted as a means of increasing revenue through the entrepreneurial exploitation of new time-spaces, the NTE is framed as the building block of a vibrant creative milieu and the catalyst for the 'regeneration' of downtown districts. In privileging economic growth over social cohesion, however, these approaches tend to exacerbate social inequalities by catering to wealthier residents and corporate interests. As a result, creative city policies have been widely criticized as an unsustainable form of urban development (Kirchberg & Kagan, 2013; Bayliss, 2007; Peck, 2012).

Since this particular approach to urban creativity is guided by *economic* goals, its arsenal of interventions is narrow and generic: across the board, 'creative cities' are marked by large-scale urban (re)development projects, international events and 'starchitecture'. This one-size-fits-all approach to 'creativity' has also resulted in the increasing standardization of the urban experience across post-industrial cities. Critics argue that the inclusion of creative pursuits in urban policy should therefore not be conflated with the ambitions of the *actually existing* creative city: a place characterized by "a cynical rhetorical play for property-led and amenity-oriented urban development, as well as a spectacle-driven governance of arts and culture and place production and promotion" (Jakob, 2010, p. 193). In other words, the 'creative city' is coming to resemble the bland, consumerist playground that early NTE writers sought to avoid.

Criticisms have also been levied at the ostensibly linear relationship between creativity and prosperity. There is evidence that the most vibrant cultures actually develop in (economically and politically) unstable conditions found in 'cities in transition' (Hall, 2000). This is in line with an extensive body of gentrification research which shows that artists are attracted to declining districts due to a combination of aesthetic sensibilities ('character') and material

factors (low rents and high vacancy rates) (Bain, 2003; Ley, 2003; Mathews, 2010; Zukin 1989). Some of the most 'creative' cities actually developed vibrant music scenes during periods of economic decline and social transformation. This might be because networks of music production are dependent on a particular set of material factors: the availability of vacant spaces, low costs of living, and relaxed regulations (Bader & Scharenberg, 2010; Cummins-Russell & Rantisi, 2012).

For instance, the development of Berlin's famous electronic music scene in the 1990s was initially facilitated by a large stock of abandoned buildings in the former eastern districts, temporary uncertainty regarding ownership rights and a lack of police surveillance (or authority) (Bader & Scharenberg, 2010). Many of the city's most popular clubs and bars grew out of illegally occupied spaces. The sustainability of this dynamic underground scene was further ensured by a low cost of living and relaxed nightlife regulations: factors that continue to make Berlin one of the most popular nightlife destinations in Europe. Montreal was 'colonized' by artists in much the same way, as the economic recession in the 1980s left empty centrally located loft spaces in its wake (Cummins-Russel & Rantisi, 2012).

2.3. Regulatory innovation

In the creative city, the gradual evolution of nightlife from public nuisance to urban amenity produced contradictory trends: the deregulation and expansion of the NTE, on the one hand, and increased regulation and surveillance, on the other. Whereas the governance of nightlife used to be the exclusive domain of traditional regulators, it came to include an increasingly complex network of actors, including licensing magistrates, fire departments, local authorities, police, resident groups and venue operators (Chatterton & Hollands, 2002). Some of the most powerful of these players are also the most conservative: local authorities often act in the interest of capital investors and public-private partnerships, while resident groups are increasingly active in the protection of social control and order. On a smaller scale, venue operators can shape nightlife through drinking levels, door policies, design, and promotions. The views of nightlife participants ('consumers'), however, are routinely overlooked[1]. The

[1] An independent nightlife provider describes an out-of-touch police licensing officer: "He's running a major European city and he doesn't know the difference between techno and salsa" (as cited in Chatterton & Hollands. 2002, p. 107).

power dynamics between these groups vary across time and place, resulting in different approaches to nightlife development.

Since the spatial and temporal expansion of nightlife activities resulted in the proliferation of conflicts between revelers and residents (especially within increasingly residential city centers), the proper management and planning of the NTE became imperative. Authorities now act on the assumption that nightlife-related disorder is not inevitable but can be carefully managed through spatial (physical distance and zoning) and time-based strategies (planning consents and liquor licenses). Common approaches include the designation of 'entertainment districts' (to prevent conflict between land uses), the extension of closing hours (to reduce noise congestion), and stricter forms of space and liquor licensing. Understandably, the most effective way to ensure cooperation is through an *integrated* spatial and time-based NTE management strategy (Tiesdell & Slater, 2006).

The case of the Licensing Act 2003 in the UK illustrates this contradictory trend toward the promotion and stifling of nightlife activity. The Act's stated goal is to promote entertainment activity and encourage cooperation between the different actors – but while it has promoted flexible 'open hours' and 24h operation, it has simultaneously increased regulatory oversight through the extension of noise and nuisance laws, the imposition of new conditions on the designation, disposal and use of space, and the introduction of measures aimed at encouraging responsible practice. Talbot contends that the Act effectively makes "a distinction between commercial responsibility and consumption and a criminal and disorderly subculture" (2006, p. 162), privileging family- and tourism-orientated café society (more organized and mainstream nightlife) over what is seen as 'anti-social behaviour' (more interesting but 'disorderly' spaces).

This intensification of regulatory and legal scrutiny - what Talbot (2011) terms the 'juridification' of nightlife – has produced an uneven outcome on different types of nightlife activity. This is because the NTE is actually not a monolithic entity, but rather composed of different 'camps': at its most basic, urban nightlife can be categorized into mainstream, alternative and residual spaces (Hollands & Chatterton, 2002). The mainstream mode is "based upon a separation between consumers and producers in which control over innovation, design, music, dress and pricing policy is taken out of the locality or the particular venue" (p. 110). In contrast, alternative spaces are characterized by a "blurring of

the division between producers and consumers, through the exchange of music, ideas, business deals and networks of trust and reciprocity" (p. 111). They are owned by independent operators and cater to particular identity-groups based around certain genres of music, clothing, ethnicity, politics or sexual identity. These activities are usually found in residual spaces on the margins of city centers and include illegal loft and warehouse parties.

Chatterton and Hollands (2002) theorize that the production, regulation and consumption of the 'urban playscape' (young people's urban night-time activities) results in a dominant mode of mainstream nightlife: "a largely standardized, sanitized and non-local consumption experience" (p. 102). The mainstream mode has important economic, regulatory and political advantages over less-profitable alternative and residual forms of nightlife, which are increasingly under threat or squeezed out of city centers. Non-commercial projects, particular styles of music and events motivated by alternative objectives are more likely to be seen as sources of social disorder and less likely to garner support from political elites (Talbot, 2011). Mainstream (read: profitable) spaces, in contrast, are thought to be self-policed through design, price and clientele (Chatterton & Hollands, 2002). In the UK, the tightening of control over cultural production at night has resulted in an increase in license revocations, the raiding and closure of well-known London nightclubs and increased difficulty of independent venues to meet (and pay for) new licensing conditions.

Although the modes of production, regulation and consumption are modified by place-specific characteristics, there is evidence that similar trends have led to the loss of alternative spaces in even the most celebrated subcultural strongholds, such as Berlin, Amsterdam and Melbourne (Shaw, 2005). This is certainly not a new process: the displacement of alternative subcultures from city centers was happening as early as the 1990s. Subcultural spaces are often the most threatened by processes of revalorization due to the development of rent gaps and the possibility of 'higher and better uses'. Since cities tend to prioritize the attraction of new investors and consumers, the consequent rise in land prices and rents pushes alternative cultures to the margins of the city. Regulatory mechanisms therefore tend to "[coalesce] with cultural regeneration strategies to ultimately favour chain bars over independent or alternative spaces … in a complex process that intertwines moral norms and cultural habits with commercial development" (Talbot, 2011, p. 82). In many cities, the combination of

creative city policy directives, gentrification processes and increasingly strict regulation has led to the decline of alternative nightlife.

2.4. Situating local forms of creativity

In Florida's creative city narrative, underground and subcultural scenes are valuable because they appeal to the aesthetic sensibilities of the creative class. Local culture serves as a mark of distinction, and is routinely instrumentalized in city-branding and place-marketing efforts. In some cases, the presence of strong subcultures serves as a key asset for the development of creative districts and clusters - in other words, forms of large-scale urban redevelopment. In Berlin, the waterfront regeneration project *Mediaspree* converted the formerly vibrant heart of the city's underground scene into a hotspot of corporate 'creativity'. The city's status as a 'world media city' has developed in part thanks to the 'buzz' surrounding the city's vibrant electronic music scene. In Berlin and Hamburg, there is also evidence that temporary uses of space - grassroots, locally-oriented subcultural activities - are used as locational boosters to attract real estate investment to the city center (Novy & Colomb, 2013).

Critics argue that dominant discourses of urban creativity fail to account for the role of urban subcultures in stimulating innovation processes that cannot be quantified in terms of economic activity. Yet economically marginal actors (such as temporary and semi-legal clubs and bars) play an important role as places of communication for local networks of creativity (Bader & Scharenberg, 2010). The temporary character of these spaces, entry restrictions and, perhaps most importantly, the lack of a strong financial motive, make space for artistic experimentation and innovation (Chatterton & Hollands, 2002; Bader & Scharenberg, 2010). Temporary uses of space work in the same way, as they are usually organized in a bottom-up, grassroots manner by a wide range of actors (Tonkiss, 2013; Colomb, 2012). They provide greater opportunities for local nightlife entrepreneurs such as DJs and musicians, and tend to show their commitment to the local economy by choosing local labour and product suppliers (Hollands & Chatterton, 2002).

Smaller, independent venues also sustain music communities by allowing closer links to be forged between producers and consumers, whereas top-down approaches to nightlife governance usually *privilege* the interests of capital over the needs of participants ('consumers'). The development of Berlin's dynamic club scene in the 1990s is said to have

effectively changed the attitude of participants since "people were no longer just passive consumers, but – as dancers – constitutive elements of raves" (Bader & Scharenberg, 2010, p. 83). In short, subcultural and underground scenes are more than a 'soft' locational factor (or consumption opportunities) for the creative class, but rather play an important role in the support and maintenance of the local creative field. This is what Leslie and Brail (2011) describe as the *productive function* of 'quality of place': namely, amenities that contribute to the retention of creative workers by acting as a source of inspiration and support. The absence of an aggressive profit motive means that local (sub)cultural initiatives are able to take risks – in terms of music and space – and in so doing, produce unconventional, one-of-a-kind experiences for participants.

2.5. The creative city paradox

In many post-industrial cities, processes of gentrification and the expansion of mainstream forms of nightlife threaten to displace crucial components of the creative milieu. This is evident both in the displacement of (sub)cultural spaces from city centers, as well as the lack of (financial or institutional) support for cultural producers (see Jakob, 2010; Ponzini & Rossi, 2010). Paradoxically, there is a growing recognition on the part of policymakers and authorities that local cultures can actually serve as *lucrative markers of difference* in the context of intense inter-urban competition (Shaw, 2005). The place-based character of local alternative scenes is important for creative city policies and place-marketing campaigns. This creates important issues for those involved in the production of local culture, who might feel pressured to negotiate between displacement/institutionalization and 'authenticity'/cooptation (Shaw, 2005).

The development of an inclusive and diverse nightlife means addressing this "tension between conformity and experimentation, mediated by the governance of entertainment and the use of public space" (Talbot, 2011, p. 91). On the one hand, there are concerns that official recognition of alternative spaces might be the "kiss of death… a process that by definition stifles innovation and commodifies difference" (Shaw, 2005, p. 150). Members of subcultures who subscribe to values of minimal government interference, and value individual and collective freedom, might regard prospects of integration into larger schemes of place-making and cultural development as a threat to their autonomy and authenticity. For example, some argue that the legalization of squats in the Netherlands has caused a shift in

their objectives - from social and political mobilization to the provision of cultural services (Uitermark, 2004a,b). This creates a difficult dilemma for local and independent parts of the scene: on the one hand, alternative spaces risk being co-opted because authenticity is a valuable commodity in the creative city; on the other, integration into the mainstream can cause this elusive 'special quality' to evaporate (Shaw, 2005). This is where the interests of local authorities and subcultural actors intersect, as both hope to maintain the place-specific, unique qualities of subcultural spaces.

Artists and cultural producers evidently play an increasingly ambiguous role in the struggle between sustainable and unsustainable (creative) urban development policies. The presence of artists and members of counter-cultural movements often make inner city spaces attractive and set processes of gentrification in motion (Marti-Costa & Pradel, 2012; Zukin & Braslow, 2011). For instance, Berlin's techno clubs were used as "truffle pigs" to attract media conglomerates to the banks of the Spree as evidence of the wealth of subcultural capital in the area (Colomb 2012, p. 141). At best, temporary urban interventions can "impel a rethinking of certain orthodoxies of urban development as usual" (Tonkiss, 2013, p. 313): the time-scales of conventional development models, as well as notions of use and value. At worst, they serve as cheap locational boosters and substitute or compensate for absent or inadequate public service provision. Yet makeshift urban practices which exist "in the cracks between formal planning speculative development and local possibilities" (Tonkiss, 2013, p. 313) may be able to shape the future of urban space by delaying or changing the course of its development.

David Harvey (2001) suggests that the instrumentalization of local culture produces two major contradictions which create "spaces of hope" for alternative forms of urban development. The first is the tendency toward *homogenization,* which erases the monopoly advantage offered by local places, products and activities. The second contradiction comes from the necessity for capital to support a certain level of differentiation in order to maintain local specificities, which can then allow antagonistic cultural developments. In many places, attempts to use creativity as an economic development tool have resulted in the devolution of local creativity. Processes of gentrification, combined with the expansion of corporate power in the inner city, threaten to displace subcultures in favour of 'higher and better uses'.

Tensions between grassroots/local and mainstream/corporate ignite when the top-down development of creative displaces existing artistic communities. Harvey hypothesized that this instrumentalization of arts and culture in service of narrow economic development objectives could "lead a segment of the community concerned with cultural matters to side with a politics opposed to multinational capitalism and in favour of some more compelling alternative based on different kinds of social and ecological relations" (2001, p. 410). Some exploratory research suggests that the appropriation of the creative lifestyle by market forces has indeed caused some members of the 'creative class' to mobilize against the status quo (Kirchberg & Kagan, 2013; Novy & Colomb, 2013).

Evidence from some cities shows that an alternative to this profit-oriented approach to cultural development is possible, that "a new way of planning lies inside the paradoxes: an inclusive and more equitable practice that encourages the evolution of alternative cultures" (Shaw, 2005, p. 167). The sustainable creative city should embrace "participatory, bottom-up, intergenerational approaches where 'trial and error' (i.e. iterative) experiments are fostered [and where] long-term developments and processes are regarded as important, rather than products" (Kagan & Verstraete, 2011; p. 16). This definition of urban creativity privileges process over product, innovation rather than profit, and genuinely participatory (bottom-up) processes instead of top-down master-planned development. State intervention can ensure a degree of mutual benefit if it allows local actors room to move instead of defining the nature of cultural activities. In a city in which culture and creativity are valued for their own sake rather than as a means to an end, policies place the well-being of artists and grassroots creative communities over the narrow aims of developers and corporate players. For instance, Amsterdam's recognition of squats as a cultural asset has given rise to the 'breeding place' policy, which guarantees the availability of cheap space for artistic and subcultural activities (Uitermark, 2004a).

For cities that have built their reputation on tolerance and alternative activities, the adoption of Floridian ideas requires a 'delicate balancing act' – in terms of authenticity/ standardization, consumption/production, local/global. Ultimately, the loss of interesting and innovative activities is undesirable in the realm of existing (and alternative) conceptions of urban creativity: the inability to protect local subcultures and entrepreneurs can be a dangerous form of shortsightedness. At the same time that local cultures are valorized for

their contributions to the creative city, they are being squeezed out by processes of culture-led gentrification. Yet the development of a vibrant and sustainable nightlife necessitates an innovative and diverse range of cultural activities. The increasingly ambiguous role of alternative night-time activities in the 'creative city' must be examined in order to gain greater insight into the processes that constrain and enable local and non-commercial forms of creativity.

3 Methodology

3.1. Case study: Montreal

> The only reason there is [a nightlife] in Toronto is because there's a half a million Montrealers who have moved there (Montreal Mayor Denis Coderre, as cited in CBC News, 2014).

The aim of the proposed research is to examine the role of alternative nightlife activities in the creative city through a case study of 'underground' electronic music events in Montreal. The city's unique cultural heritage has made it an interesting place to explore place-based dimensions of creativity. Since its prohibition-era stint as the 'sin city on the St. Lawrence', Montreal has developed a less risqué reputation as a European-style outpost of the interesting and avant-garde, hosting a large repertoire of festivals, an innovative circus and a bustling music scene. Its status as a 'creative city' is as evident in the policy realm as it is in the city's place-marketing efforts. The beginnings of this relatively new concern with culture can be traced to the city's first cultural development plan *Montréal: Métropole culturelle* (Ville de Montreal, 2005). The report positions culture as not only part of Montreal's identity, history and social cohesion but also "a key driver of its development, economic vitality and future prosperity" (p. 1). Being in line with the 'creative city' model of urban development, the new approach has been (rightly) criticized for its instrumental view of culture (Katiya, 2011).

The Floridian linking of culture, inter-urban competition and economic growth is somewhat offset by inherited local concerns of social inclusion and the maintenance of Quebecois culture. More significantly, still, the policy places non-traditional artistic and cultural practices at the very heart of the city's identity; indeed, its reputation for innovation and the avant-garde acts is singled out as an important competitive advantage. In order to maintain Montreal's rank as a creative and innovative cultural metropolis, the policy recommends better support of *new art form practices* – whether mainstream, avant-garde or alternative. In its final pages, the policy also manages to address some of the issues faced by members of the alternative scene, such as rent hikes, lack of representation and billposting (p. 53). It also recognizes the problems faced by the city's artists, creators and cultural companies whose living and working spaces are threatened by the redevelopment of older industrial areas. In

order to attract and retain talent, the plan commits to ensuring the availability of creation venues and increase support to creators and artists (p. 55).

Montreal's cultural strengths are also a key component of its place-marketing and city-branding efforts. For example, Tourisme Montréal's popular campaign "#MTLMOMENTS" attempts to capitalize on the city's creative offerings by inviting readers to post photos of their local experiences. The campaign was developed by advertising agency Sid Lee in order to promote Montreal to business and pleasure travelers by showcasing "magical and unique moments" (Sid Lee, n.d.). It draws on the social media presence of locals and tourists by encouraging them to use the hashtag and take photos at key spots around the city that are designated by large photo frames. The campaign is designed to feel "organic, decentralized and authentic" (Sid Lee, n.d.) while being predictably orchestrated around certain 'defining' experiences – the videos released under the banner feature the usual culprits (tourist attractions and landmarks) but are dominated by cultural events and festivals.

The efforts to maintain a balance between large-scale/small-scale, corporate/independent, traditional/avant-garde reflects some of what makes Montreal tick: while the city is well-known for '*les festivals grands'*, it is also the hometown of innovation and the avant-garde. In particular, the vibrancy of the independent music scene is evident in both the number and variety of events – from 'indie' live music shows to underground (and often illegal) electronic music-driven loft parties. However, there has been little movement towards the integration of nightlife and the night-time economy into the city's present and future. More experimental underground initiatives continue to coexist with larger, state-sponsored forms of cultural development – perhaps due to (or in spite of) this oversight.

Despite its importance for the city's international reputation, nightlife is for the most part curiously absent from policy, and the body of literature on the topic remains slim. A study commissioned by the district of Saint-Laurent offers a glimpse of Montreal's night-time activities, addresses conflicts of interest between residents and revelers, and makes recommendations for the management and enhancement of the city's nightlife (Néron-Dejean 2011). The report's message is clear: while Montreal has a lot to offer, it is behind the innovative and ambitious nightlife strategies of other cities. It therefore seems to be at an interesting crossroads: as culture enters the policy and place-making realm, the city remains relatively inexpensive and hosts a variety of interesting cultural activities. Events can be

found on a broad spectrum: corporate/grassroots, legal/illegal, high-culture/low-culture, mainstream/underground. I hope to work with these dualities to examine how popular urban creativity discourses can foster (rather than erase) alternative, grassroots, innovation-driven music experiences.

3.2. Methods

I addressed the research questions by conducting seven in-depth semi-structured interviews with promoters, artists and volunteers involved in the staging of electronic music event series in Montreal. The choice of data collection technique was informed by the desire to collect rich data comprising a diversity of meaning, opinion and experiences (Dunn, 2005, p. 102). Interviews are well-suited for this case study because they allow networks of relationships and ideas to be presented and qualified, along with detailed examples and rich narratives (Hoggart, Lees & Davies, 2002, p. 204). In particular, semi-structured interviews are ideal for the transmission of 'stories' that are not interrupted or influenced by the presence of other people (Shurmer-Smith, 2002, p. 155). Dunn describes interviews as an excellent method of gaining access to information about events (2005, p. 102). In the context of this case study, I was able to learn how different actors both experience and perceive alternative music events. I also gained some insight into the motivations of those involved in the staging of these events.

Because in-depth interviewing allows the researcher to discover what is most relevant to the informant, interviews are often used to fill a gap in knowledge that other methods (such as census data, surveys and mere observation) are unable to bridge. In the case of underground scenes, the lack of quantitative or official data makes other forms of analysis impossible. Similarly, it is difficult to quantify or map a constantly shifting landscape of temporary venues and events (Bader & Scharenberg, 2010). Studies of underground music scenes also tend to rely on qualitative research methods because they allow the researcher to build rapport with participants and gain a nuanced understanding of their experiences and motivations. Studies of raves and warehouse parties are especially well-suited to the use of ethnography, participant-observation and in-depth interviews due to the prevalence of illegal activities. For instance, Malbon's (1999) ethnography of ecstasy-fueled clubbing experiences draws on rich interview data, as does Spring's (2004) history of a Midwestern techno scene and Anderson's (2009) account of the change and decline of raves in Philadelphia.

For the purposes of this study, I used a semi-structured interview design consisting of a mix of carefully worded questions and topic areas. The questions followed a pyramid structure, starting with easy-to-answer descriptive prompts and leading up to more general and abstract themes. The guides differed based on the participant's role, but addressed the following topics: the event, its distinguishing features, its role in the local music scene, as well as opportunities and challenges specific to nightlife in Montreal. In the first sections, themes included the atmosphere, use of non-traditional spaces and relations between participants. The latter parts of the interview pertained to the steps and actors involved in the organization of each event (e.g. finding a space, obtaining licenses and permits, selling tickets, promotion, booking acts). This then led to a discussion of more challenging aspects such as relations to authorities, local music networks, language issues, etc. A mix of description, storytelling, opinion and structural questions allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the events (Dunn, 2005, p. 106). I ensured that the interviewing process remained dynamic and adjusted the guide as needed.

Informants were recruited using purposive sampling methods with the help of gatekeepers (personal contacts involved in the techno music scene). This increased the informants' willingness to participate and helped establish rapport. Interviews were conducted in the homes and offices of individual respondents in the months of August 2015 to January 2016. The atmosphere was casual and relatively informal. I transcribed, coded and analyzed interviews using ATLAS.ti.

Interview data was supplemented with an analysis of relevant policy documents, as well as newspaper and blog articles on Montreal's electronic music scene. These sources provided additional information about the history of the scene and its image in the global electronic dance music community. Discourse analysis – or what Gill (2000) refers to as 'skeptical reading' – is useful in teasing out how scenes and locales are *constructed* in popular media representations and official documents. Examples of this can be found in Stahl's (2001) discussion of Montreal as Anglo-bohemia and Paul's (2004) account of the politics of 'global imagineering' as a joint (discursive) venture between the new middle class and global capital. Textual analysis was used to corroborate interview findings.

4 Electronic music culture in Montreal

4.1. Montreal's techno scene

The concept of a 'music scene' is used in academic discourse to "designate the contexts in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans collectively share their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others" (Peterson & Bennett, 2004, p. 1). In this way, scenes allow fans of particular musical genres to create an 'underground' or 'alternative' identity and express a cultural distinctiveness from the 'mainstream'. This study focuses on Montreal's techno scene, and as such, must not be confused for a comprehensive account of alternative nightlife in the city, which is made up of many different scenes that cover a wide range of musical genres and lifestyles.

Techno is a form of electronic music that emerged in Detroit in the 1980s as a successor to Chicago house music. It is repetitive, made in 4/4 time, and relatively fast (120-150 beats per minute) with a strong backbeat of hi-hats, snares and claps. Techno music is performed by a DJ who combines different 'tracks' into a continuous 'set' - the standard duration is one to three hours, but extended sets can last for six to eight hours. The skill of a DJ depends on his technical abilities ('beat-matching' and other signs of good mixing), track selection and the ability to 'read a crowd'.

Techno music is commonly associated with the 'rave scene', a youth cultural phenomenon that appeared in the UK in the 1990s and gained widespread popularity across Europe and North America. Raves are grassroots and illegal all-night parties characterized by electronic music (techno, house, trance, drum and bass, among others), illegal drug use and other 'deviant' behaviour (Anderson & Kavanaugh, 2007). They are commonly understood to be a historical phenomenon, since concerns about youth participation and drug use led to a mass crackdown toward the end of the decade. In the new millennium, large-scale, illegal outdoor parties were replaced by a culture of clubbing and festivals. Aspects of rave culture – its DIY ethos, use of non-conventional spaces, electronic music styles, and recreational drug use – survive in contemporary loft and warehouse parties (Anderson & Kavanaugh, 2007).

When rave culture emerged in the fields and warehouses of the UK, it quickly spread to other parts of the world and gained particular prominence in North America. Remarkably, Toronto

came to host of one of the largest and most vibrant rave scenes on the continent. Montreal's underground electronic music scene paled in comparison: while a warehouse scene existed, parties were smaller and older forms of house music remained dominant. Tiga James Sontag, better known by his DJ alias Tiga, is credited with bringing the new techno sound to Montreal. In fact, he was so influential in the development of Montreal's techno scene that *The Gazette* describes him as "the closest thing the city has to a legitimate living legend" (Leijon, 2016) while *Spin* plainly notes that he "pretty much founded the techno scene there" (Siegel, 2016). Inspired by his childhood experience of Goa's mythological party scene, the Anglophone native established Solstice, which many consider Montreal's 'first genuine rave' (Macdonald, 2016). He also co-founded afterhours club Sona in 1996, promotion company Neon, and the Turbo Recordings label; bought a record store; and hosted a popular radio show on college radio station CKUT.

By the turn of the millennium, Toronto's rave scene was unraveling due to concerns over drug use and the participation of minors. Following two drug-related deaths in the fall of 1999, policymakers turned their attention to the control and management of raves by enacting new and stricter regulations. With the decline of Toronto raves and the geographical isolation of west coast artists acting as push factors, Montreal was on its way to becoming the new destination for Canadian electronic artists (Thompson, 2011a,b). While the Toronto scene was dominated by Detroit and Chicago influences, but Montreal developed a distinct, European sound. Signs of Montreal's ascendancy included the residencies of two top international DJs – Tiga and Richie Hawtin – at Sona. As the city's electronic and dance scene matured, a network of businesses also developed around it: legendary afterhours club Stereo, multidisciplinary hub La Société des Arts Technologiques (SAT) and the city's first DJ equipment store Moog Audio.

In 2000, the founding of the Mutek festival cemented Montreal's reputation in the international electronic music community: from its conception, Mutek's more serious approach to the digital arts made it "an institution... North America's most respectable gathering for electronic music" (Jackson, 2016). Perceiving a gap in Montreal's nightlife, its founders aimed "to try and connect – or make bridges – between the North American artists and what was happening elsewhere in the world" (Jackson, 2016). From the start, Mutek committed to booking an equal number of Canadian and international acts. Its relationship

with Frankfurt-based record label Force Inc. led the latter to relocate its North American office from New York to Montreal, and subsequently help bring the sound of emerging Canadian artists to the European market. The 2001 release of the *Montreal Smoked Meat* compilation cast a light on the thriving Canadian techno scene.

In 2003, Montreal's burgeoning electronic scene gave rise to another unique festival: the daytime party series Piknic Électronik. Every Sunday from May to October, Piknic offers partygoers an alternative way to experience electronic music by attracting thousands of locals and tourists to scenic island-park Jean-Drapeau. Unlike Mutek's more serious approach to the digital arts, Piknic's mission is to produce "immersive, social experiences in a friendly environment" (Piknic Électronik, 2016). In 2007, the Piknic team created Igloofest, a winter outdoor music festival that takes place in the Old Port during Montreal's frigid winter months. By bringing electronic music out of the club into non-traditional settings, these two experiments are credited with effectively changing the "contextual possibilities for enjoying electronic music" in Montreal (Dunlevy, 2014). Since they are more (musically) accessible and light-hearted in feel, Piknic and Igloofest occupy a different niche from Mutek, whose focus remains on the experimental and the unknown (it regularly hosts North American premieres and showcases relatively obscure Canadian artists). Still, all three festivals contributed to the development of the city's vibrant electronic music culture.

4.3. The role of electronic music in Montreal

Starting in the early 2000s, then, Montreal developed a lively reputation as a North American hub for quality electronic music. *Boiler Room* describes it as "a city where hybridity and unpredictability are celebrated, and which punches well above its weight in the production of innovative and interesting musicians" (Muggs, 2015). In my interviews, there was a general consensus that the city ranks among the best places for techno music on the continent, with most respondents ranking it second only to New York. In 2012, *The Telegraph* earnestly named it 'the new Brooklyn', citing the breakthroughs of electronic pop acts such as Grimes, Purity Ring, Trust and Doldrums (Jones, 2012). In interviews, comparisons with New York – the Brooklyn scene, in particular – were common. When asked about Montreal's scene, one DJ remarked,

> I don't think it's on the same level as Europe, but I think it's on a much higher level than anywhere else in North America, with the exception of New York City, of course. But New York City only gets that because it's just so many damn people, it's just a matter of like, you have more moving targets, you know? (interview)

In other words, for a city of *its size* – 1.7 million inhabitants – Montreal's output is considered remarkable. Its vibrant party and festival scene are part of the reason why the Quebecois metropolis is consistently ranked as one of the best nightlife cities in the world (Manson, 2014; Fodor's Travel, 2013). One of Montreal's main strengths is the diversity of its night-time activities – everything from large-scale EDM productions, casual weekly series, to more serious artistic gatherings and world-renowned festivals (Osheaga and POP Montreal, among others).

The electronic music scene contributes to Montreal's reputation as a nightlife destination as well as its international image as a 'festival city'. Festivals helped revive Montreal as an international tourist destination in the 1990s (Germain & Rose, 2000). Since its conception, Igloofest's attendance multiplied 18-fold to reach 74,000 visitors in 2015 (Igloofest, 2016). In 2015, Piknic recorded more than 109,000 attendees; of those, 20% were tourists (Piknic Élektronik, 2016). While techno tourism is a "relatively underground phenomenon" in this part of the world, the *New York Times* singled out Mutek as a popular summertime destination for a growing number of electronic music lovers (Day, 2010). In fact, Tourisme Montréal's list of places to go dancing in the city ignored Top 40 clubs and chic lounges for more underground electronic music and hip-hop. For those looking for more late-night partying, the agency suggests "hyped DJ sets and parties at SAT, Espace Reunion, Eastern Bloc, Hangar 16 and other loft-like spaces around the city that host all-night music and dancing events" (Fadden, 2015).

It is not difficult to see how Montreal's electronic music scene contributes to its international image as a '*metropole culturelle'* (Paul, 2004). Since its cultural development plan emphasizes cutting-edge, multidisciplinary and innovative projects, these experiments in the animation of public space and digital arts might count among its strongest exports. Electronic music institutions have played an integral role in building relationships with other pioneering cities and making Montreal part of larger creative networks: Mutek hosts editions in Mexico City and Tokyo, while Piknic has expanded its operations to Barcelona, Melbourne, Dubai, Lisbon and Santiago. Mutek has also founded the International Cities of Advanced Sound

(ICAS) network with the hopes of advancing sound cultures, music and related arts. Its list of collaborators includes the Red Bull Music Academy, SHAPE (a European project supported by EU's Creative Europe program), Resident Advisor and British festival Bloc (Mutek, 2016). By contributing to Montreal's international image as an innovative cultural metropolis with a vibrant underground scene, the electronic music scene helps attract international students, artists and members of the creative class (Stolarick & Florida, 2006).

4.4. Loft and warehouse parties

This paper is concerned with more intimate events that make up Montreal's vibrant techno scene – a phenomenon known as 'loft parties' to Montrealers. What makes these events most distinctive is their use of non-conventional venues: vacant, 'underutilized' or converted spaces (studios, galleries, live-work spaces) in formerly industrial areas. Following in the tradition of raves, loft parties are all-night events, with hours that extend from 10 pm 'until late' (usually 7 or 8 am). Despite their modest scale (both in terms of size and budget), it is not uncommon to see well-known international acts play alongside local DJs. Loft parties are also affordable (tickets can usually be found in the $10-15 range) and give partygoers more freedom: longer hours, less security, fewer rules. The vast majority are organized as monthly or bimonthly series by different 'crews'. Organizers are deeply embedded in the scene, and many are DJs as well as promoters. The process of organizing a party is long and happens in stages over a period of weeks or months. First, the promoter books a DJ. In the case of popular international acts, this typically happens months ahead of time. Then, she must rent a space, obtain a temporary alcohol permit, rent a sound system, hire staff (coat check, security and bartenders) and throughout the entire process, 'promote' the party and sell tickets (interviews).

The typical Montreal loft party attracts around 100 to 300 attendees, with the notable exception of Bacchanale, an event that makes use of larger warehouse spaces and can bring in as many as a thousand partygoers. The audience is mostly composed of locals in their 20s and 30s, typically an equal share of men and women (interviews). The number of anglophones and francophones depends on the background of the organizing crew: the large Bacchanale parties are predominantly patronized by the French, while English-speaking promoters are more likely to bring in a more mixed crowd. Unlike larger festivals, loft parties do not attract many tourists (except for visiting friends of friends). The parties are usually

advertised via social media and word of mouth, as well as through the event listings page of popular electronic music community Resident Advisor. For promoters, the visual identity of an event series is important, and flyers for individual events are often designed with this global concept or theme in mind. The party 'flyer' has its origins in the rave scene, but physical distribution has been largely replaced by digital dissemination (although flyers might still be found in the windows of respectable record stores).

Unlike Montreal's mainstream nightlife, which is concentrated along several major streets, loft and warehouse parties take place in slightly outlying areas such as the Plateau, Mile End and St. Henri. The main draw of these districts is their post-industrial and predominantly non-residential character, which reduces the likelihood of noise complaints and police interference. In other words, "You don't wanna throw an event, you know, where there's a lot of people, like neighbours, families. You wanna try to find a space where no one will shut it down, which is… it's also sometimes tough here" (interview, DJ). Although they are not located in the city center, these areas are easily accessible by transit. They are also places with higher vacancy rates: a stock of residual or converted industrial spaces that can be easily transformed into temporary venues.

Some of these spaces become popular underground venues over time (e.g. Torn Curtain, Lab Synthèse and La Plante), while others are used sporadically. Since smaller loft venues are not viable options for the larger Bacchanale parties, the team is forced to find larger warehouse spaces. An important part of the Bacchanale experience - and perhaps one of its contributions to the Montreal party scene more generally - is the team's determination to find and use repurposed industrial spaces as venues. Bacchanale has hosted some of the most prominent European techno DJs in non-conventional spaces that were entirely transformed into one-night music venues. Some of these spaces are used for different purposes during the day, such as filming location Studios Saint-Ambroise and art gallery Fonderie Darling. Others were entirely blank slates: Old Port's Hangar 16 and the former Canadian Rubber Co. building count among these.

Loft parties comprise an alternative form of nightlife in Montreal because they are different from mainstream nightlife providers in several important ways. They are organized by cultural producers in a bottom-up manner, and cater to a niche audience of techno-lovers. They do not rely on sponsorships or government funding, and are not profit-oriented but

rather driven by musical appreciation (interviews). Loft parties are generally considered 'underground' but the use of this term is deeply contested. For some members of the scene, this refers to exclusivity and lack of publicity, while others associate it with particular styles of music, attitude and atmosphere. According to one DJ, the term denotes exclusivity, or a lack of exposure:

> I mean, underground can mean, like, a lot of different things, but usually it's just less promotion, not putting it in people's faces so much…Having no address anywhere, kind of keeping it low-key, you know… Your goal is not to have like a ton of people… You're trying to get the right people to the party that you know are gonna enjoy the music (interview).

Others echoed this sentiment but added that it can refer to certain musical styles and party vibes:

> To me, the notion of underground really ties to the music, so yeah, it's music that may be a little deeper, that you have to go a bit further to seek and have to have more of an open mind to accept, you know. It's hard to define, the term underground has been tossed around so much lately, but I think it's a feeling, really. I think it's a feeling that's hard to maybe encapsulate in words, but when you experience it, you definitely know you're experiencing it (interview, DJ).

> I guess… the main thing would be the sound, the music, you know? Unknown, I guess, would be the way to put it. Or when you book someone that is pushing, that is trying to expose something that is not the common denominator of the city or the scene, but then also when people are… not really caring, you know… more free souls, in a way (interview, DJ).

These excerpts reveal some of the conceptual fuzziness around the term 'underground'. Respondents used it to describe different aspects of the party experience, including publicity, music, attitude and atmosphere. In the case of musical styles, moreover, there was no general consensus on what *counts* as underground since even the most successful techno acts might be considered 'underground' in the context of the Canadian music scene (interviews).

4.5. 'Good vibes'

According to respondents, the appeal of loft and warehouse parties is the atmosphere: unlike mainstream clubs, these events are described as friendly, easygoing and relaxed (interviews). A DJ explained the goal of the Raw Feelings events in this way:

> It's all about the atmosphere and how people feel and it's not about certain themes. It's not about certain ideals. It's not about certain values. It's all about creating a sick vibe, a sick infectious atmosphere. Have you ever been to a party where you felt the atmosphere was literally infectious, like you wanted to be there, it felt like a drug… and every moment you were you were just getting higher and higher, you know? (interview)

This was echoed by another respondent who explained that the name of the event series Raw Feelings was supposed to encapsulate the '*raw'* (minimal) sound and the act of bringing people together to experience "goosebump moments of the dancefloor… [of] hearing a track that blows your mind" (interview, DJ). This encapsulates the *vibe,* a basic component of the underground house-dance scene: "an active communal force, a feeling, a rhythm that is created by the mix of dancers, the balance of loud music, the effects of darkness and light, the energy… an active, exhilarating feeling of 'now-ness' that everything is coming together-that a good party is in the making" (Sommer, 2001, p. 73). Promoters strive to ensure that different aspects under their control (crowd, space, music and visuals) come together to produce a friendly, relaxed atmosphere: a 'good vibe'.

Space plays a particularly important role in the production of the desired atmosphere, underscoring the role of material factors in creative pursuits (Rantisi & Leslie, 2010). Techno music is often associated with industrial spaces due to its roots in rave culture and warehouse parties, as well as its aesthetic sensibilities. One respondent explained that industrial spaces were common because they reflected a "utopian vision" of matching the space to the music (interview, DJ). Some spaces are made more desirable by large warehouse windows and panoramic views: for example, a top floor loft that overlooks the train tracks. Seeing the sunrise is a rare occurrence at clubs, but not uncommon at a loft party:

> When we were doing the nights at [loft name redacted], when it was starting to get lighter outside, at 6am, the music would change too … when it's really dark, you're playing music that suits that and then as the morning comes … [we] call it morning fever music (interview, DJ).

Another respondent described the use of non-traditional spaces as a means of redefining the party experience:

> You find these amazing spaces and you bring [a] nice sound system and then all of a sudden it's not like being in a club, where it's restricted in a way… you move the context of partying always in a club to: Oh, I'm in a beautiful loft in the middle of the city and the view is amazing… I'm here listening to this amazing music that I'm

> usually listening [to] in a club… I think people have different perceptions when it's [a] party outside the common party space. I think that gives [it] a bit of magic, you know? (interview, DJ)

For instance, he explained how a party at a church created the unusual sense of "going to mass but to listen to techno" (interview, DJ). Loft and warehouse parties produce a unique urban experience by allowing partygoers to explore non-conventional (and often ignored) spaces:

> What's cool sometimes, if it's in an industrial area in Montreal, takes a little bit of looking around, Google maps, to know where you're going, that's kind of cool… gives the party a special feel. Like going to [loft name redacted], for those first few times, was like, where are we going? What the- where are we? (interview, DJ)

Loft and warehouse parties therefore provide an opportunity to discover parts of the city one would not normally go to. This is an important source of novelty for participants (interviews). The temporary nature of the event also adds to this sense of exclusivity:

> The venue is a special treat to everybody. There are no regulars at Hangar 16, for example. So everyone's kind of united in the newness of whatever's happening… The excitement that comes from the sentiment of like, this was turned into another very powerful experience just for this one night (interview, volunteer).

In contrast with events that take place in established venues, renting a loft and producing an independently funded party gives promoters complete control over the floor plan, sound, visuals and most importantly, the (informal) codes of conduct. Whereas formal establishments are monitored by staff and security, lofts are seen as more relaxed environments where partygoers feel less pressure to conform to a set of formal rules:

> It's more personal I think… and kind of offers people more of an escape than a club where there's security and like $8 beer and, you know, flashing lights everywhere. It's more stripped down and music is more at the front (interview, DJ).

As a result, loft parties are seen as intimate affairs that are more conducive to community-building than regular clubs. As one DJ explained,

> When you hold more intimate parties, it's easier for individuals to get to know each other because through the night you're dancing beside the same person and… it's a bit more down to earth in a way… and this allows people to get to know each other and that also creates some peace in a way, you know, like you can let go and you're not as tense and … always worrying because you lose your friends or whatever (interview).

He described clubs as “dark and closed spaces” where large sound systems prohibit meaningful conversations among partygoers (interview, DJ). The relatively small size of loft parties contributes to a more intimate atmosphere in which attendees are brought together by a shared love of techno music. Because they are less profit-oriented (with more affordable drinks and tickets), attendees are positioned as participants rather than consumers. The producer/consumer boundary is less pronounced because DJs, promoters, their friends and acquaintances make up a large segment of the audience.

Since they tend to be music-oriented rather than profit-driven, loft parties also allow for artistic experimentation. In the words of one DJ, playing at a loft party is different because “I can go as weird as I want” (interview). In other words, there is less pressure to conform to the expectations attached to a formal gig within an established venue. Longer hours also allow DJs to play significantly longer sets than in regular clubs (which are only open from 10pm to 3am). One DJ expressed his frustration with regular club hours,

> People can play five hours, eight hours, this never happens here except at Stereo, Stereo’s the only place, you know? So that’s a big limitation. You cut the flow. Here, everybody plays for an hour and a half. What can you do in an hour and a half? Nothing. You play ten records and that’s it. So you can’t really develop anything, you know? It’s like: okay, hi, bye. So I think that’s a huge limitation towards the artistic expression (interview).

As with any art form, the ‘vibe’ and the environment can act as inspiration and shape the musical direction of any set. Loft parties therefore provide unique opportunities for local DJs to experiment and develop their sound without the pressure associated with performing in a formal venue.

5 The making of an electronic music hub

5.1. Foreign influences

In many ways, Montreal occupies a unique cultural position in North America. It is the only predominantly bilingual metropolitan center in Canada and the United States: an urban island embedded within a francophone province. As the center of convergence between the English and French cultural traditions, Montreal possesses a "unique kind of urbanity, embodying a European flavour but one that has been transplanted to a resolutely North American context where culture seems much more fluid than in the Old World" (Germain & Rose, 2000, p. 5). Bilingualism, creativity and relative affordability make Montreal a popular destination for immigrants, students and artists; as a result, almost a quarter of its population is foreign-born (Statistics Canada, 2011). As one DJ puts it,

> Montreal is a bit more [a] mix of Europe, the North American way, let's say, and yet you have so many different influences, you have so many Latin immigrants, like Columbian, Chilean. You have people from everywhere, so... the fact that it has this European soul and so many influences, I think that gives a richness that many other cities don't have (interview).

Another DJ ascribed his discovery of electronic music to European influences,

> In Israel obviously I got influenced by electronic music since a very young age because … Israel is right near Europe and … it tends to borrow a lot from Europe culturally in certain ways, and so a lot of the music that was popular back in the day in Europe was also quite popular in Israel (interview).

In the context of the electronic music scene, the presence of diverse populations is especially important because dance music has historically found a better following in other parts of the world. In particular, Montreal's connections with Europe and its close proximity to New York allow the transmission of influences from major international electronic music centers. Many promoters and DJs involved with techno and house music events in Montreal are transplants from South America and Europe. Moreover, respondents attributed the increasing popularity of techno music in the city to a sizeable population of French promoters and partygoers, as the following passage shows,

> I honestly think that much of the success of the local scene in recent years … almost single-handedly can be attributed to the presence of a *large* number of French students,

> you know? Because in Paris, and in France in general, underground, *proper* underground electronic dance music has *exploded* in recent years … Some of the best music is coming out of Paris right now. Some of the best parties are taking place in Paris right now. So you know, all these students that have moved here in the last 2-3 years, they were there to witness it, so they brought that with them. They brought that enthusiasm about the music, and the enthusiasm about the partying with them… So that allows people like me to go and play a certain sound at a club and I'll have an audience, whereas a few years ago, maybe that audience would not have existed (interview, DJ).

Montreal's relationship to Paris – and by extension, its thriving nightlife – have played an important role in the recent evolution of its techno scene. In 2009, when nightlife actors exposed the harmful consequences of overregulation in the French metropolis, declaring the death of Parisian nightlife, the situation seemed bleak. In the years since, the city has experienced a remarkable resurgence and become one of the most vibrant techno music hubs in the world. *Resident Advisor* ranked five-year-old afterhours spot Concrete as one of the world's 12 best dance floors: "the club that gave Paris its groove back", a spot that hosts "some of the best parties you'll find anywhere in the world" (Lynch, 2016). The Parisian scene is now as strong as ever thanks to a new generation of excellent DJs and a growing number of raves, clubs and festivals.

The success of the Parisian scene can be felt in Montreal, perhaps most clearly in the popularity of the Bacchanale party series, which was formed in 2012 by four Parisian students in response to a perceived gap in the local nightlife scene. The inspiration for the first event came from a party that one of the founders attended in France and sought to re-create in Montreal through a combination of art, music and interactive experiences. The Bacchanale parties continue to attract a predominantly French audience. One of the founders quipped that all-night parties themselves were a European import since the "Quebecois eat at 6 pm so you cannot expect [them] to go out 'til like 9[am]!" (interview). Montreal's connections to France (and Europe more generally) therefore continue to shape its cultural landscape through the transmission of both musical influences and youth cultures.

5.2. Tolerance and open-mindedness

As a diverse and open-minded milieu with a rich cultural heritage, more generally, Montreal is a setting in which underground and avant-garde art forms can find an audience. Germain and Rose posit that the city "is renowned for the civility of day-to-day social interactions – in spite of the highly segmented nature of its ethnic mosaic and the tendency of French- and

English-speaking Montrealers to move in parallel social universes" (2000, p. 5). When asked about positive aspects of Montreal in comparison to other cities, an Ecuadorian DJ commended people as the 'soul' of the city:

> People are friendly, and people are down to earth, and people look for something new and exciting, so I think it's the people that always help the scene improve … People are not really that judgmental, and people in Montreal are open-minded. You can go and talk to random people and they will be friendly. In places like Toronto that won't happen as much, in my personal perception (interview).

One French promoter made this more explicit by comparing Montreal with Paris:

> We are very inspired by Montreal and the difference between Paris and Montreal. And like, for us, [in] Montreal, we are able to be what we want and everybody is able to be who he wants … People don't care what you're doing at home, you know. You can be a lesbian and also have a boyfriend, and I absolutely don't care. It's your business. It's your private life, and … I'm not going to judge you. In Paris, it's different. We are going to judge you even before you speak. I see you and I judge you. If you don't tell me hello, or if you sit down before I go to sit, I'm going to say: 'Oh, oh, oh!', a lot of judgment. In Montreal, it's more: accept people as they are, and they have their private life (interview).

According to Florida (2002), tolerance is especially important in the development of an attractive urban milieu. In fact, it is one of the 'three T's' – tolerance, talent and technology – that comprise the totality of a creative city. This seems to be the case in the electronic music scene – an open-minded mentality makes Montrealers more receptive to new experiences, musical styles, and more experimental ways of doing things, allowing innovative festivals like Mutek and Igloofest to find an audience. A tolerant and easygoing attitude is also apparent in other mainstays of the Montreal lifestyle: the popularity of the 5 à 7 (a local version of the happy hour), crowded parks and *terrases* (patios), and the use of public space for events and festivals. The propensity toward social gatherings, and a strong desire to spend time outdoors might be why Montreal has gained a reputation as a city of festivals. One of the best examples of this laissez-faire attitude is seen at 'Tam-Tams', an unplanned, informal gathering that attracts thousands of people to the eastern slope of Mount Royal Park every summertime Sunday to enjoy drum-circles, DJ sets, live-action role play, impromptu circus acts, and more banal park activities such as Frisbee games and slacklines.

5.3. Montreal' s 'hybrid spirit'

Montreal's most unique artistic and cultural exports can be attributed, at least in part, to this intermingling of different cultural traditions within a supportive (but insular) environment. This is as evident in the city's electronic music output as it is in the more well-known exports in other fields. Montreal is able to produce innovative hybrids by allowing the intermingling of different cultures and styles in a rather insular environment. For instance, Cirque du Soleil emerged as a unique twist on the French circus (Leslie & Rantisi, 2011), while the Anglophone indie music scene gained traction in part thanks to the constraints faced by an isolated group of musicians within a francophone milieu (Bedford, 2015). In a study commissioned by Culture Montreal, Stolarick and Florida (2006) give credence to this claim, showing that geographic and cultural linkages make it the 'perfect laboratory' for experimentation and innovation.

Electronic dance music culture is polycentric, since most styles emerge as regional or local ('Detroit' techno, 'Chicago' house) while larger urban centers like New York and London serve as sites for the transformation and reworking of these (non-indigenous) styles (Straw, 1991, p. 381). Starting in the early 2000s, Montreal became part of this network of talent incubators for electronic artists: a large number of students and creative workers provided an audience, while its proximity to other east coast production hubs (and Europe) allowed cross-fertilization to take place. In an interview with an online blog, Tiga described Montreal as distinct from cities with more established electronic music traditions,

> It's nice place to build as a base for creativity, because it's neutral. It doesn't colour you too much… If you're from New York, London or Berlin, it's a thing. I think if you're from Montreal it's easier to be yourself and not be as quickly labelled (Tiga, as cited in Leijon, 2016).

In the electronic music community, this intermingling of cultural influences gives rise to what *Boiler Room* calls Montreal's 'hybrid spirit', and Muggs (2015) goes on to explain that

> Montreal is, in a lot of ways, a model for how a 21st century city can build a clear personality of its own from a pile-up of history and modern influences… it is at the forefront of French-Canadian identity, culturally half a step removed from the rest of the country, and with more than a hint of rebel spirit about it.

This is evident in its diverse musical output: blends of hip-hop, rap, Latin and electronic styles, as well as bilingual (and even trilingual) acts. Montreal might be heavily influenced

by its European history, but it lends creative products ‘a mutation of its own’ (Thompson, 2011).

5.4. A post-industrial haven

In addition to social and cultural dimensions, a host of material factors – the availability of industrial-style loft spaces, affordable rents and a light regulatory environment – support the development of Montreal’s techno scene. This abundance of industrial spaces is an especially important factor in the viability of DIY loft and warehouse parties - whether vacant and underutilized spaces, or newer conversions such as artistic studios, live/work spaces, rehearsal spaces and, in rare cases, more established event venues. While respondents admitted finding a space was one of the most difficult steps of the process, the constantly changing landscape of makeshift party venues suggests that the selection remains abundant. The stock of functionally appropriate and aesthetically pleasing temporary venues has as much to do with the sluggishness of the local economy, as it does with a history of manufacturing and heritage conservation.

Montreal’s rich industrial landscape is a remnant of a golden period in which it acted as the center of Canadian manufacturing. When deindustrialization rendered its factories and warehouses vacant, the city managed to preserve much of its industrial heritage. Its belated urban renewal attempts proved unsuccessful, leading authorities to rehabilitate older housing rather than razing it to the ground. The conservation of industry was encouraged in some downtown districts since the late 1970s, and in the former garment manufacturing district of Mile End, the conversion of industrial buildings into condominiums was forbidden from 1975 to 1993 (Germain & Rose, 2000). Successful municipal preservation efforts therefore helped ward off gentrification and helped maintain a distinct post-industrial aesthetic in many downtown districts. Heritage concerns became entangled with the city’s recreational, cultural and tourism goals, and now remain embedded in urban planning policies, with the Master Plan denoting parts of the waterfront, Mile End, and the Lachine Canal as industrial heritage zones. It is these same areas that now host the majority of loft and warehouse parties in Montreal.

The appeal of industrial spaces as temporary venues is their flexibility: an open floor plan can be easily reconfigured for new uses, making lofts attractive for a variety of creative

pursuits (Markus, 1994). While the popularity of industrial spaces as artist workspaces has been well-documented (Zukin & Braslow, 2011), less attention has been paid to the contemporary use of these spaces as temporary venues within alternative music scenes. But the production of parties in disused or underutilized spaces is not a new phenomenon, nor is the association of electronic music and industrial buildings: raves made use of empty warehouses in the UK, while Berlin's famous techno scene was made possible by a stock of abandoned communist-era spaces in its eastern districts. Starting in the mid-1980s, Montreal's stock of vacant, centrally-located loft spaces at low rents attracted artists from across Canada (Cummins-Russell & Rantisi, 2012, p. 87). At the time, the absence of music venues means shows were performed in lofts, often illegally, with little legal repercussion – drawing parallels to 1990s Berlin. The city also supported local cultural producers by modifying its zoning bylaws to facilitate the use of lofts as live/work spaces (Lessard, 1997).

The functional values of lofts for creative practices have been documented elsewhere: high ceilings, ample natural light, and a flexible floor plan makes industrial spaces well-suited for many forms of artistic production (Zukin, 1989; Podmore, 1998; Rantisi & Leslie, 2010). According to respondents, it is this same flexibility that makes lofts attractive as party spaces: unlike most conventional venues, promoters have control over every aspect of the experience, including the positioning of the DJ booth, bar, and seating, as well as the sound system, decoration, and visuals. Lofts and warehouses are also typically located in post-industrial areas, where noise is less likely to be an issue. The appropriateness of a space as a temporary venue depends on a variety of factors including cost, size, accessibility by public transit, proximity to neighbours, sound, ventilation and aesthetics.

Industrial spaces do not merely provide *physical* room for these artistic endeavours, but they also act as important aesthetic stimuli. In the case of designers in Mile End, Rantisi and Leslie (2010) show how the aesthetics of the area permeate local graphic design through graffiti-like text and monochrome colour schemes. In much the same way, respondents described an aesthetic connection between techno music and industrial spaces

> I mean, obviously, there's this utopian vision of matching the venue with the music, so they're kind of on the same vibe… especially techno, for example, you could see how it takes well to being played in more… industrial, you know, concrete spaces... I guess it's … just the vision that this music will fit in a particular space, so let's try to find that space (interview, DJ).

This sentiment was echoed by another respondent:

> The visual experience when you're in, sort of an industrial space, a lot of the music is very sort of industrial in nature… It's not music that is made with, you know, nice-sounding things like guitars and pianos that would seem out of place in like a factory setting. It has a lot of … heavy percussive noises and unusual, often metallic sounds that just sort of seem at home in an environment that is a large industrial space… I think… the people who create this kind of music create it *for* this kind of environment specifically. So Bacchanale by having events in these places are able to... present it at its best (interview, volunteer).

This is the 'utopian vision' of matching the music with the space. Another DJ made the music-space connection more explicit, noting that "the location can definitely play a factor on the music, 'cause [when] you're in this like… dark, weird, kind of almost dirty building, you can play… more sinister music" (interview).

Some respondents also discussed the appeal of the post-industrial urban environment in which individual lofts and warehouses are embedded. Rantisi and Leslie (2010) touch on this in their descriptions of Mile End, noting that "the industrial heritage that sprinkles the district, coupled with derelict, rough, and incomplete spaces associated with deindustrialization, bring into strong relief the district's 'alternative' status in a post-industrial urban economy" (p. 2836). The experience of a (peripheral) district at night-time contributes to the overall music experience, and creates a sense of comradery with other partygoers,

> It's hard not to mix the venue and the atmosphere, they are *in* with the atmosphere, with what's happening … around the venue. A lot of the venues that Bacchanale hosts their events at are… out of the downtown core, and as a result, you know, when you get there, when you leave… the vast majority of people you see are other people who are there for the venue, who are just having a smoke or also arriving (interview, volunteer).

It is evident from these examples that material factors – flexible loft spaces and a gritty post-industrial landscape – play a functional and symbolic role in the production of DIY loft and warehouse parties.

These informal spaces are also lightly regulated and affordable: two factors that make them accessible for less-profitable (and admittedly, sometimes illegal) underground activities. Accounts of interactions with police portrayed a rather permissive regulatory environment (interviews). Respondents often made a distinction between individual police officers and 'the system'. Police visits did not necessarily entail intervention: in the absence of illegal

activities, parties were permitted to continue; and in the case of noise complaints, promoters first received warnings. Tam-tams might be the best example of Montreal's 'live and let live' mentality: police officers routinely patrol the premises, but decidedly turn a blind eye to conspicuous marijuana use and alcohol consumption. In online discussions, there is a general consensus that marijuana prohibition is rarely enforced in the city. There is a sense in which Montreal is seen as unique in this respect compared to other cities in Canada.[1]

[1] In a discussion around marijuana consumption in Montreal, one poster memorably exclaimed "I'm from Vancouver and I'm still shocked with delight at how much fun this city lets you have!" (GinandJinger, 2014).

6 Challenges

Partygoers might derive many advantages from Montreal's relatively relaxed urban milieu, but members of the nightlife scene still regard the regulations governing nightlife as overly restrictive. While local authorities recognize some of the cultural and economic contributions of nightlife, they have failed to take a proactive role in adapting outdated regulations to the needs of the elusive 'creative city'. A study commissioned by the Faubourg Saint-Laurent offers a rare glimpse of issues surrounding nightlife in the city and stresses the very real need to negotiate conflicts of interest between revelers and residents (Néron-Dejean, 2011). The report addressed a wide range of problems in the downtown district, including closing hours, noise, safety, transportation and vandalism. In my study, members of the underground scene were most concerned with laws that directly affected the feasibility and quality of the events: alcohol licensing, closing hours and noise. In general, promoters and DJs regarded local authorities as largely indifferent toward DIY parties.

6.1. Closing hours

According to provincial liquor laws, licensed establishments in the city of Montreal are permitted to serve alcohol until 3 a.m. To put this in perspective, Toronto and Vancouver are governed by a more conservative 2 a.m. closing hour. In New York – widely seen as Montreal's biggest nightlife rival on the East Coast and the quintessential '24h' city – partygoers are permitted to drink until 4 a.m., while bars and clubs remain open indefinitely.[1] As discussed earlier, regulations governing temporal urban rhythms shape the quality (and quantity) of local nightlife: longer hours are generally a sign of a more permissive regulatory environment. Although a 3 a.m. closing hour is considered liberal in the North American context, it remains an 'important problem' for Montreal nightlife (Néron-Dejean, 2011). The law regulating closing hours in Quebec dates to 1979 and many see it as maladapted to the needs of contemporary urban lifestyles (Néron-Dejean, 2011; interviews). Some local politicians and business owners have also expressed concerns that a fixed closing hour exacerbates problems of noise and public disturbance, since patrons stream out of bars and clubs at the same time, with no time to sober up or leave in a 'staggered' manner.

[1] In the United States, only New York sets a later closing hour than Montreal, while Miami, New Orleans and Las Vegas allow 24h alcohol sale.

Although alcohol sales are forbidden past 3 a.m., lofts and warehouse parties offer partygoers an alternative to the rigid hours of mainstream establishments. While most licensed establishments close at 3 a.m., DIY parties generally continue until the early hours of the morning. Electronic music has historically been associated with all-night raves – this is reflected in the European party scene, where clubs often remain open until the morning or even 24h over the weekend. The cities that dominate the techno music scene and serve as a reference point – Berlin, London, Amsterdam and Ibiza – are known for their long parties and extended sets. Some clubs have even been known to host weekend-long events. With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that local DJs view the hours of Montreal nightlife (22h-3h) as a limit on their musical freedom (interviews). Since late-night partygoers have few options in Montreal, a near-monopoly on afterhours partying can be seen as a competitive advantage; but it might also be inferred that this also infringes on the financial feasibility of the events by reducing profit margins from alcohol sales.

More generally, fixed closing hours also shape norms surrounding nightlife and the way 'afterhours' parties are perceived. Nightlife activities that continue after 3 a.m. are more likely to be seen as transgressive, subject to increased police surveillance and become an easy target for noise complaints. While all events must conform to fire and safety regulations, members of the Bacchanale team reported experiencing additional difficulties due to the scale of their events (interviews). The police perceived their events as 'raves' because of their similarities with large-scale illegal parties that took place in the 1990s, and led to a set of strict regulations, including the 'rave' protocol, which requires large-scale afterhours events to comply with more stringent fire and safety regulations, provide on-site medical help and hire a number of security personnel.

One of the most common issues encountered by promoters, however, is the noise complaint – as one promoter put it, "everything comes with the noise complaint" (interview). Because they skirt outside 'acceptable' nightlife hours, afterhours parties are more likely to be shut down due to noise. In a dense city like Montreal, unfortunately, finding an accessible location while avoiding residential areas is difficult. While afterhours clubs Stereo and Circus are located on the busy Ste-Catherine strip, they receive numerous noise complaints over the weekend due to their late opening hours (2-10h) (Néron-Dejean, 2011). Noise has become a source of contention in the city, especially in the Plateau, a dense and popular

district with a growing number of clubs. The 2015 clash between live music venue Le Divan Orange and their upstairs neighbours brought media attention to conflicts between residents and nightlife venues (Kelly, 2015). In the Ville-Marie district, signs have been placed along major streets reminding revelers to be conscious of sleeping residents. This initiative, entitled "La Nuit la Bruit", is coordinated by the Ville-Marie district and Montreal police. Outdoor music events such as Piknic are governed by stricter regulations and must end before midnight. On the international stage, the repercussions of such stringent closing times are obvious, and even homegrown hero Tiga notes that his London club residency would be difficult to manage in a city with a 3 a.m. last call (Leijon, 2016).

6.2. Alcohol licensing

In order to serve or sell alcohol outside a licensed establishment, promoters must apply for a temporary liquor license, administered by the Régie des alcools, des courses et des jeux. There are two types of Reunion permits: the permit to sell alcohol and the permit to serve alcohol (for 'BYOB' parties). While the Reunion Permit is widely used for all types of events, its conditions are surprisingly narrow. The permit may only be issued for social, cultural, educational or family events. The applicant may not make profit from the event; if profit is made, it must be used for a non-profit organization. Promoters must submit the application 15 days before the event, pay the tariff ($87 to sell or $44 to serve), provide authorization from the owner of the event premises, and from a registered non-profit organization. Additionally, holders of the BYOB permit are not permitted to charge an entry fee. While promoters described the process as relatively simple, it is not uncommon to experience issues. There are various reasons for applications to be denied and for permits to be revoked – these are sometimes not entirely clear.[1]

It is clear, however, that the conditions of the Reunion Permit are oddly incongruent with its use. Ostensibly, the permit is not concerned with nightlife activities (except insofar as they can be regarded as 'social' and 'cultural' events), nor does it make space for profitable ventures. While it purports to deal with *charitable* event planning and alcohol consumption, Reunion permits are routinely granted to party promoters under the auspices of non-profit work. Some promoters obtain authorization from a non-profit organization through their

[1] One of Bacchanale's early applications was reportedly denied because the beneficiary non-for-profit organization was financing a project outside of Quebec.

personal networks, others establish their own not-for-profit entities to streamline the process. Respondents told stories of even more creative alternatives: promoters claiming large-scale parties as ‘private events’ by producing a complete attendance list and proving no cash was being exchanged on the premises, and alcohol sales facilitated through ‘raffles’ with alcohol prizes (interview). Considering the popularity of loft parties and pop-up spaces in Montreal, the failure to acknowledge profitable nightlife and entertainment events is rather striking.

7 Conclusion

7.1. Situating loft and warehouse parties

This paper sought to show that loft and warehouse parties play a valuable role in Montreal's electronic music culture and act as an alternative to mainstream forms of nightlife. The best parties are characterized by 'good vibes': a friendly and communal atmosphere in an intimate setting. The use of non-conventional spaces is important because it gives promoters freedom over different aspects of the party experience, and allows them to produce the desired atmosphere. For partygoers, loft and warehouse parties provide an alternative to the anonymity of dark, loud and expensive clubs in the city. For DJs, they are an informal opportunity to practice and experiment without the constraints of more formal 'gigs'. In many ways, these parties can be understood as the contemporary equivalent of 90s raves: both are characterized by imaginative reuse of underutilized urban spaces, a communal atmosphere and grassroots organizing.

In Montreal, the intermingling of cultural, social and material factors enable the development of a vibrant independent techno scene. The popularity of techno music in Montreal – a relatively niche genre on this continent – is associated with the presence of diverse populations and the transmission of cultural influences from Europe and Latin America. This is evident in the hybridity of Montreal's musical output as well the innovative parties and festivals that make up its open-minded nightlife culture. More alternative night-time activities such as DIY loft and warehouse parties depend on a stock of affordable industrial-style spaces in non-residential areas and a flexible regulatory environment. Montreal's underground scene is relatively healthy, but its sustainability is contingent on planning and policy developments. First, the prevalence of mixed use zoning continues to create conflict between partygoers and residents. Second, regulations governing closing hours and alcohol sale are outdated and impose constraints on promoters and partygoers alike. Finally, the exclusion of nightlife from urban policymaking means that Montreal has effectively failed to take advantage of a unique and interesting cultural phenomenon (Ville de Montréal, 2005; Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal, 2015; BOP Consulting, 2015).

7.2. Recommendations

How can Montreal ensure the sustainability of its diverse, innovative and creative nightlife activities? Other cities have adopted a variety of planning and policy tools to address nightlife-related conflicts and promote local music scenes. A number of self-proclaimed 'music cities' have appointed music officers and adopted comprehensive music strategies, while Amsterdam's 'night mayor' role is gaining popularity in Europe and other parts of the world. In Paris (a point of reference for many Montrealers), the nightlife crisis produced a nightlife councilor, as well as a unique nightlife advisory group composed of local authorities, venue operators, NGOs and experts. More concretely, these cities have implemented a number of planning strategies to reduce conflicts between residents and revelers. These include the development of 'entertainment' or 24h zones (in Lisbon, Barcelona and Amsterdam), streamlined licensing procedures (in Chicago and Vancouver), and sound mitigation measures (in Barcelona and Melbourne).

In Montreal, the extension of alcohol and bar closing hours has been considered as a means of regenerating local nightlife and boosting tourism (Néron-Dejean, 2011; Tourisme Montreal, 2013). In 2014, mayor Denis Coderre proposed an ambitious pilot project that would allow some bars on Crescent and St. Denis streets to remain open until 6 a.m. and serve alcohol until 5:30 a.m. (Peritz, 2014). The initiative was led by the downtown merchants' association and Montreal police, who hoped that the project would allow them to assess whether longer closing hours might reduce the rate of noise and disturbance (Magder, 2014). Critics argued that other issues needed to be addressed before the implementation of longer bar hours, including resident-business relations, public safety, public transit, policing and need for mediation instead of force. The president of the Quebec Nightlife Association memorably quipped that "a 6 a.m. closing is hardly a catch-all solution to what ails Montreal's nightlife industry" (White, 2014).

The pilot project signaled a step in the right direction and caused a ripple of excitement in the nightlife industry – but was ultimately rejected by the Quebec Liquor Board. In its scathing response, the Board criticized the plan for its lack of research and planning, preoccupation with economic benefits and a lack of consideration for public health. According to the ruling, later bar hours are not necessarily a bad idea, but require public debate and a "serious, thought-out and well-documented" plan (Régie des alcools, des courses et des jeux, 2014).

Straw (2014) posits that the pilot project was rejected precisely because the city failed to gather input from transit authorities and the general public: “Missing from the application and from the Régie’s response was any broader, philosophical sense of what, as Montrealers, we might want our night to be”. In a sense, the rushed proposal and its even more rapid demise served an important function in Montreal’s nightlife story: it reminded us that discussion, cooperation and debate – bottom-up approaches to planning – are essential for sustainable forms of urban development.

In keeping with this collaborative approach, some local nightlife experts (Néron-Dejean, 2011; Straw, 2014) have proposed a nightlife summit modelled after the 2010 États Généraux des nuits de Paris, a gathering which encouraged discussion and cooperation between disparate actors to ensure the longevity of Parisian nightlife. In her analysis of the Ville-Marie district, Néron-Dejean (2011) also suggested the development of a platform that would bring together a network of actors and encourage institutional, economic and educational exchange. Straw (2014) noted that the city can prevent and mediate conflict between residents and revelers by adopting a Charter of Nightlife: a document which recognizes the contribution of night-time culture and commerce, while listing both rights and responsibilities of those who work and play at night. This was proposed by the Association des Sociétés de dévéloppement de Montréal in 2012. More generally, it is important to develop a night-time strategy because Montreal’s image – as a permissive and night-time destination – hinges on its ability to keep up with the innovative and ambitious nightlife developments in other cities: a world of 72h parties, night mayors and airport festival grounds.

7.3. Montreal’ s future as electronic music center

Starting in the early 2000s, promoters, DJs and producers – locals as well as transplants from other parts of the country – helped put Montreal on the map as a budding electronic music hub with a reinvigorated party scene. Today, proponents of this scene are trying to draw attention to the importance of seizing this momentum and preserving the city’s lead amid growing competition from abroad. Montreal might be the destination for Canadian electronic artists, but ultimately, the city is losing many successful DJs and producers to Berlin and other European cities (Thompson, 2011a,b; Maisonneuve, 2014). Even other Canadian metropolises have started implementing proactive measures to support local music and

streamline regulatory processes. In 2016, the Toronto council unanimously adopted a Music Strategy, an ambitious long-term plan which seeks to support and develop the city's music sector. This led to the appointment of a Music Sector Development Officer and public consultations around issues such as noise and licensing. In Vancouver, the alternative arts and music scene was being stifled by restrictive liquor laws and residential creep, making it hard to find venues to host events (Posadzki, 2014). In response, the city created a new, streamlined Arts Event License, which facilitates the production of events in unconventional spaces[1].

Montreal has provided fertile ground for the development of a vibrant techno scene, and the seeds sown by past generations have given rise to a diverse landscape of loft and warehouse parties, interesting venues and innovative artists. But if the city is to retain its place amongst the heavyweights in the global electronic music culture, it must find a way to support the fledgling underground scenes which form the backbone of its evolving creative milieu. This might mean reviewing current licensing regulations, organizing inclusive public consultations and making sure that the contributions of local promoters and DJs are recognized, and their voices heard. Policymakers should also take steps to preserve the material advantages – low rents, vibrant parks and public spaces – that have fostered the growth of alternative scenes in Montreal.

During Fabric's ill-fated council meeting, co-founder and director Cameron Leslie presented a passionate defense of the club, but also issued an important warning for cities like London that might find themselves at this crossroads:

> We could be bold, like Amsterdam and Berlin, which regard nightlife not as a social disorder issue but a tourist attraction or we could be like New York, where neoliberal policies have all but destroyed what was once the most musically innovative and vital club scene in the world (as cited in Coultate, 2016).

On the same day, Berlin's legendary club Berghain – a much wilder, darker version of Fabric – was fighting its own battle in court. But in this case, the German authorities ruled in its favour. Berghain was deemed *culturally significant* and now holds the same tax status as the city's museums and concert halls. In Berlin, techno is not a source of disorder, but a form of high culture.

[1] See http://vancouver.ca/doing-business/arts-event-licence.aspx.

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