Queer Spaces of Montreal: Sites of Utopian Sociality

and Terrains of Critical Engagement

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ABSTRACT

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Billy Hébert

From November 2009 to August 2010, I was actively involved as an organizer of and as a participant at Montreal queer events. In this thesis, I argue that the queer spaces (places-as-events) I studied can be seen as sites for alternative, deliberate, and accountable utopian forms of sociality, and as terrains of emergence for a critical analysis of the way things are and of how they could be. The analysis I present stems from multi-sited ethnography based on participant-observation at three queer festivals (two organized in Montreal, one in Toronto) and during the 2010 G20 protests. Throughout my ethnographic chapters, I provide a description of what I and other activists mean when we use the term 'queer', I discuss the 'raison d'être' of queer spaces, I identify the place-making practices of activists and organizers, and I provide a temporal framework with which to analyze what happens in and what emerges out of queer spaces. Ultimately, my contribution is to show that queer activists are deeply invested in a queer theoretical and political project, as such reconciling the study of queer spaces and the queer study of space.

Acknowledgements

From its conception to its redaction, this thesis stems from my personal commitment to and intellectual fascination with an activist scene I am, at the time of writing these words, deeply committed to. I wrote this manuscript in the hopes of giving legitimacy within academia to the queer organizers, participants, and other local activists who work tirelessly throughout the years to create the temporary spaces I present in my thesis. It is important for me to thank the many organizers and activists from Montreal and Toronto who have welcomed me and this project with open arms, and to acknowledge that without their intelligence, their eloquence, their generosity, and their sensibility, I could have neither filled these pages nor become the activist I am today.

I also want to thank the three members of my committee for accepting to contribute to this thesis with their comments, their critiques, and most importantly with their guidance. To my supervisor Christine Jourdan, I say thank you for sticking with me even though what started as a study of queer linguistics quickly turned into something more akin to geography. You pushed me many times to think back to my original intent and to consider the semantic force of the word queer, and this became a very formative framework with which I reflected on my object of study. To Sally Cole, I say thank you for pushing me to write at a time when I thought I would never be ready. Your words of encouragement have helped me realize that I might just have what it takes to aspire to be an ethnographic writer. And to Chantal Collard, thank you for accepting to be the third member of my committee. You might not remember, but after reading the first ethnographic report I wrote as a graduate student, you told me that once I would trust myself more as a researcher, I would do just fine – these words came at the right moment. Thanks also to Noelle, Jess, Maike, and Kevin for being such bright and stimulating students and colleagues with whom to go through this degree.

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CHAPTER 1 Introduction

> Queerness is not here yet. Queerness is an ideality. […] We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated more of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel *a then and there*. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing. […] Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world. (José Esteban Muñoz, 2009, p.1)

> L'amour et la rébellion. S'unir pour combattre en force. (Bobby)
> *Love and rebellion. United to fight in force.*

Over the past few years I became involved, first as a participant and then as an organizer, in the planning of Radical Queer Semaine, a Montreal-based 10 days long festival. Montreal is a budding North American city for queer activism, for example with events like Radical Queer Semaine, another similar annual festival called PerversCité, and numerous and diverse local activist collectives. Through my involvement in the local "scene", I decided to dedicate my Masters thesis to the study of local queer activists' material and symbolic experiences of space, of their place-making practices, and more largely of the politics informing the creation of, and emerging out of the creation of queer spaces.

However, during the dreaded process of drafting my literature review, which in my case for multiple reasons happened once I was already knee-deep in the field, I came

across a disheartening discovery. The study of "queer spaces", at least according to numerous critical queer geographers and queer theorists, is actually *very unqueer*. At the heart of this critique is that historically, the study of queer spaces has been concerned with gay and lesbian spaces as they are opposed and resistant to dominant heterosexual space. This approach fails to go beyond the identity politics based on binary assumptions of opposition that queer theory seeks to fluidly escape from. An example of such a stance is Nathalie Oswin's perspective. For Oswin (2008), studies of queer spaces had the beneficial effect of literally, and figuratively, putting queers on the map, but the future of queer geography lies in critical approaches to "queer cultural politics as contested sites in which racializations, genderings and classed processes take place" (p.100). Therefore, queer spaces should be studied only to untangle the problematic relations of power that happen in them. Otherwise, according to Oswin again, the queerer alternative would be to adopt "a queer approach to such issues as transnational labour flows, diaspora, immigration, […and] globalization" (p.100) where "we [therefore] dismiss the presumption that queer theory offers only a focus on 'queer' lives and an abstract critique of the heterosexualization of space" (p.100). In other words, all that can truly be queer is an approach used primarily by theorists and by academics[1].

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[1] As an example of such a queer approach, the critique proposed in Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai's "Monster, terrorist, fag" (2002) is for Oswin « that the racialized figure of the 'Muslim terrorist' is simultaneously sexualized such that 'queerness as sexual deviancy is tied to the monstrous figure of the terrorist as a way to otherize and quarantine subjects classified as "terrorists" » (2008, p.97). For Oswin (2008), in Puar and Rai's follow up article entitled "The remaking of a minority model" (2004), this examination leads to envision possibilities of resistance where the singularities categorizing difference must be recognized and addressed. In Oswin words, in this work Puar and Rai's main contribution is to show that "careful attention to the specific racialized, sexualized constructions through which the 'war on terror' functions is required in place of declarations of unity

While researching sources for my literature review, I however also came across a

view of and approach to queer geography that was radically different– that of Gavin

Brown (2007), who as an ethnographer decided to follow the people he did fieldwork

with in their use of the words they employ to talk about themselves. Brown studied what

he calls "queer autonomous spaces", in the form of the anti-capitalist radical queer spaces

created by the "Queeruption" international activist network. The spaces Brown studied

are very similar to those created during events like Radical Queer Semaine.

> [Q]ueer autonomous spaces are not limited simply to being play spaces that
> offer a certain degree of safety for sexual dissidents and gender outlaws.
> Freed from the sexual and gender constraints of the quotidian world,
> participants in these queer autonomous spaces often find themselves
> questioning the social relations that normally restrict the free expression of
> their sexuality […]These events and spaces unleash a plethora of engaged,
> creative, and communal activities that are seldom seen in contemporary
> society, and, as such, when tied to an explicitly anticapitalist politics, and to
> celebrations of queer exuberance, they can be deeply empowering. (Brown,
> 2007, p.2696-2697)

For Brown, more than the discourses and political actions emerging out of queer spaces,

it is these processes of place-making and of community-building that are important.

In this thesis I want to suggest a point of reconciliation between Oswin and

Brown's respective takes on queer studies, and to bridge the gap between those who see

"queer" as an academic critical theoretical project and those activists, community

members, and researchers who seek to make a "queer approach" to social issues one with

applied and practical dimensions. In the process I wish to make the study of queer spaces

a valuable queer anthropological project, and to envision queer activists, whether they are

familiar with queer theory or not, at the center of a queer critical and political project.

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based on presumptions that 'they are just like us'." (p.97). As I argue in this thesis, such
reflection and this attention is already found in, and constitutive of, queer spaces.

Unlike Oswin, therefore, I argue that we can and *should* study queer spaces and that we should do so for more than critique. As I will demonstrate, this process of critique is already deeply involved in the creation of these spaces. Also, while I agree with Brown that the community-building processes witnessed in queer spaces should be at the center of the analysis of such spaces, I see the "end products", the strategies for social change imagined and implemented in queer spaces, to be of importance as well.

In this thesis, I thus argue that queer spaces can at once be seen as spaces for alternative, deliberate and accountable new forms of being together and of being in the world as Brown argues, which in thesis I name *utopian sociality*, and also as sites of emergence for a critical analysis of the way things are and for an exploration of the way things should be, within and beyond queer spaces, that I here frame as a *critical engagement*. In other words, in this thesis I argue that an ethnographic study of queer spaces of Montreal can reveal that local activists are deeply involved in a queer theoretical *and* practical project.

The remainder of this introductory section first describes the field sites I have selected for this thesis project. I discuss why I decided to do multi-sited fieldwork, and then I justify my choice of four events as field sites. Following a presentation of these four events, I discuss the methods of data gathering I employed and the ethical concerns associated with this project. The introductory chapter is then followed by the literature review of this thesis (Chapter 2). I first offer a brief overview of some of the main texts that explore the concepts of space and of place, in anthropology and in other fields. I then present some key texts on queer spaces – I start with studies of gay and lesbian spaces that have marked the literature and include references to Montreal-based studies, and then

move on to discuss the works of some authors who claim to study queer spaces. I then present queer critiques of such studies, and the recommendations of specific authors who advocate for a "queer approach" to the study of space rather than a study of queer spaces before I conclude with a brief presentation of some queer canonical texts.

Chapter 3, the first ethnographic chapter of this thesis, addresses what queer *means* for local activists and for participants at local queer events. I show that the term queer is adopted as more than a simple replacement for the LGBT acronym. The term queer also lends itself to a critical perspective and to a set of politics that go beyond concerns over sexuality and gender only, and which encompass a multi-scaled, intersectional analysis. As a more general chapter on what local organizers, activists and participants at queer events see as idiosyncratic definitions of queer, Chapter 3 serves to conceptualize queer as an identity, as a theory, but also as an ideology and politics. It also serves to justify why the study of queer spaces is relevant, and how this study can reveal the theoretical and practical applicability of "queer".

Chapter 4 discusses the "raison d'être" of queer spaces", by exploring the reasons why queer activists invest the time and energy required around the year to create the temporary queer spaces I selected and the events I attended. I first show that queer spaces serve as alternatives to urban gay enclaves like the Montreal gay village mainly because such commerce-centered spaces fail to respond to queer organisers and participants' reliance on queer politics and practices. I then show that many queer organizers come to the queer scene as "survivors" or violence and marginalization, and they create spaces where they can celebrate their "difference" and where gender deviance is cherished, not shunned. Queer spaces also allow for the creation of socio-affective and militant

networks where one's contribution, whether through socializing or by becoming an active organizer, is vital and valued. They also allow for the elaboration of reflections and strategies for social change that care about more than the lives of queer people only.

In Chapter 5, I present the practices of place-making that queer organizers employ in order to make the spaces they create ideologically sound, as per the definition offered in Chapter 3, and for them to fulfill the needs of those they are for, as identified in Chapter 4. I first provide a list of Montreal spaces that local queer organizers think of as queer, and I identify some key characteristics warranting this classification. I then show how various spaces can be physically and materially "queered", before elaborating on the implicit and explicit strategies put in place in queer spaces for them to be as welcoming, accessible, and safe as possible. Finally, in Chapter 6, I present what actually happens during queer events by providing a temporal framework in which to situate the creation of queer spaces. First, I show that many roots and histories, in the form of identity-based politics, ideologies, and movements and groups, are attributed as a "past" to current activism, as such framing the politics and strategies I presented in the previous chapters within a coherent, if often times individually defined narrative of a queer theoretical and political project. I then give a typology of the types of activities organized in queer spaces, to show what their "present" is. I conclude Chapter 6 by showing some of the tensions that exist over what a "future" queer utopia should be, and thus over what the purpose of activism, as located in queer spaces, should be. These four ethnographic chapters should allow me to demonstrate that queer spaces indeed represent utopian forms of sociality, and the adoption of a critical engagement to think and to act "queerly", therefore showing

that queer activists and organizers themselves indeed do bridge the gap between Oswin and Brown's respective take on the study of queer space and/or the queer study of space.

Multi-sited ethnography and events as field sites:

This thesis stems from my gradual involvement as an active participant in the local queer activist scene of Montreal. As a queer- and trans-identified person, I had been drawn to some of the events organized locally over the last few years – parties, workshops, art shows, and other gatherings – because there, beyond the possibility of meeting potential sexual and romantic partners and for reasons I will explore further in Chapter 5, I felt a rare sense of security and the acceptance I longed for. Moreover, at these events I had the opportunity to exchange with other queer people who see social justice as a goal of political organizing and who have similar visions of utopian futures. I further developed a repertoire of practices and the language to complement the (queer) theory I had started to read as an undergraduate student in Concordia's Minor in Interdisciplinary Studies in Sexuality program. Through my participation and eventually through my contribution in organizing these gatherings, in particular as I will discuss later through my involvement as a member of Radical Queer Semaine's organizing collective, I found myself reflecting on the practices I observed at the spaces where specific queer events were held, and on the politics informing local queer activism. Most importantly, I rapidly became aware that the question of "space" and that practices of place-making were central to local queer organizing.

In this thesis I present the research project I have designed since the summer of 2009, when I decided to do participant-observation at various queer events taking place in Montreal and thus, to do "anthropology at home". Marilyn Strathern's "The limits of

auto-anthropology" (1987) of course warns of some of the pitfalls of this approach, in particular by stressing that the ethnographer is never fully a part of the group or subculture studied in his/her role as a social scientists, which differs from other group or community members who do not (necessarily) whish to document or analyze their actions. As this thesis shows, however, fellow queer organizers and activists are actually deeply involved, as I was, in self-reflexivity – this constant auto-critique is in fact intensely embedded in the conceptualization of "queer", and in the creation of queer spaces this thesis addresses. As such, and as I will show in more detail in the conclusion of this thesis, my own conceptualization of queer space has been, in a way, co-constructed with the activists I met through fieldwork, both from their own observation and reflection on the topic of queer spaces, and from my intense analysis of these spaces as an activist and as a researcher.

This is, as I will discuss further in my concluding chapter, akin to Tom Boellstorff's discussion of "emic theory" (2011) as a possible queer methodology to be used by social scientists and in particular ethnographers. In his chapter entitled "Queer techne: Two theses on methodology and queer studies" (2011), Tom Boellstorff frames "the relationship between theory and data as a *methodological* problem" (p.216, original emphasis), and proposes two different theses exploring what a queer method could be. As an anthropologist, Boellstorff is interested in how one's approach to ethnography, both methodologically and theoretically, relates to the data one gathers. He proposes the term "data-theory-method triangle" (p.216) to highlight the inextricable relationship of these three aspects of research, and writes that this concept reflects that

> What counts as 'data' depends upon the methods used to gather it and the theories used to explicate it; what counts as 'theory' depends on the data used to substantiate it and the methods used to support it; what counts as 'method' depends on the data it is to obtain and the theories it is to inform. (p.216)

This triad leads Boellstorff to propose as one of his two theses that "a queer methods might work through emic theory" (p.216). Noting Kenneth Pike's (1967) development of the term 'emic', meaning insider point of view, and of its counterpart 'etic', outsider point of view, Boellstorff sees emic theory to lend itself well to participant observation (although not exclusively to this method. Boellstorff frames "emic theory" as such:

> Th[e] notion of emic theory has longstanding analogues in the social sciences -for instance, in the notion of a 'grounded theory' that is based upon 'the discovery of theory from data' (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p.1). Unlike the idea of 'grounded theory', however, which in its classic formulation assumed that 'an effective strategy is, at first, literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study' (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p.37), I mean the notion of emic theory to frame theory as emerging from both 'within' and 'without'. (p.218)

My research project is also inspired, at least partly, by George Marcus' (1995) influential discussion of multi-sited ethnography, where research is

> designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicitly, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography (p.105).

Multi-sited ethnography as such focuses on connections and links, rather than on selecting a specific place or community to focus fieldwork on, and as I will show my involvement with the events, and my presence at the queer spaces I selected, depended on many of such connections, either through my own involvement in the queer scene or through the people I met.

Marcus also writes:

> Multi-sited ethnographies define their objects of study through several different modes or techniques. These techniques might be understood as practices of construction through (preplanned or opportunistic) movement and of tracing within different settings of a complex cultural phenomenon given an initial, baseline conceptual identity that turns out to be contingent and malleable as one traces it. (p.106)

I suggest that my object of study, queer space, was consciously defined and constructed by following both the "thing" itself (queer space), as Marcus proposed was a strategy to do multi-sited ethnography, as well as the "people" (queer activists), as a few key activists navigated the multiple spaces and attended many of the events I selected. In using the author's definition of these two strategies I selected my field sites – these sites were events that I chose because specific activists of Montreal I knew organized them, and because I knew that local participants in the scene considered them to be queer.

The primary justification to study events for this project is simply one of focus. The "everyday practices" of queer activists are not what I am trying to investigate; rather, I am interested in the "extra-ordinary" practices that queer activists engage in with acquaintances and with strangers who they share a "space" of activism with. In other words, I am not interested, at least not solely or specifically, in the "intimate" interactions of queer activists, but rather in what happens in specific temporary spaces of activism[2]. I see these spaces to represent the temporary creation of what could resemble a queer utopia, and as the terrain for the elaboration of tactics, strategies, and plans to imagine

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[2] This is not to suggest that the "personal" is no longer political, to reference Carol Hanisch's 1969 seminal essay "The Personal is Political". Chapter 4 will indeed show that activists have many personal investments in their activism and in the creation of queer spaces, and for many living in "queer households", as discussed in Chapter 5, might take their activism and political commitments to the "everyday".

making this utopia a future reality, as I conceptualize throughout the thesis and as I explore in the final ethnographic chapter of this thesis.

There is however a long history of the role of socio-affective and sexual networks in sexual minority communities, and I address some of these connections' importance and impact briefly in Chapter 4. The queer activist scene of Montreal is also composed of a heterogeneous population – because my project does not aim to provide a clear picture of the individuals who make up this community, nor to elaborate on the respective identities of its "members", nor to describe what such a membership entails in terms of involvement[3], I reasoned that focusing on events organized in Montreal and considered to be "queer" would be an effective way to understand what local queer activists *do* rather than who they are, and from this perhaps what their activism *is*. From my previous exposure and involvement participating in and organizing local events, I came to understand that the sense of belonging characteristic of what many call the queer "community" is one that is (in)formed both through its members' personal networks, which as mentioned above is not the focus of this research project, and through participation at events organized in the city.

A further theoretical justification of my decision to focus on events as "field sites" was largely informed by my exposure to linguistic anthropology as an undergraduate student, and to my initial desire to investigate the linguistic practices of local queer activists. Such exposure and original intent led me to reason that in order to understand how in spite of their diverse sites of identification, one can look into queer activists as willful and politicized agents, as opposed to as a regrouping of non-heterosexual folks

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[3] Although this is something I do discuss in Chapter 4.

only. The work of Eckert (1992) and Wenger (1998) on communities of practice was

particularly influential to my early thoughts on this project. Briefly, their works propose

that social actors, in particular as "speakers", can be viewed as possessing the agency to

shape their identities and to negotiate with pre-existing social structures in social

interactions. A community of practice is as such a collection of people who group around

a project, and this concept allows to study how individuals' identities and sense of

belonging are constituted in part in their relations to one another. This view rejects the

conceptualization of identities as being rigidly and statically constituted, and is therefore

one that corroborates much of the queer critiques on identity politics that will be

identified in the following chapter. In communities of practice, shared identity is created

through interactions, particularly at the linguistic and communicative levels, between

participants who act together towards common goals. The "queer linguistic practices"

that were my original object of study and that eventually became part of a larger set of

practices (which I identify in Chapter 5) are representative of a queer "political identity",

as I elaborate on in Chapter 3.

    A final justification of my desire to focus on events as field sites is that by

focusing on the practices of queer activists, I allowed myself to step away from the use of

the problematic and contested concept of "community". As Vered Amit (2002) argues,

the "trouble with community", as with numerous other anthropological tropes, is that

> In the conceptual slippage between category, community and network, the
> challenges of maintaining simple social connections can be minimized. The
> result can be not only a distortion of how people actually experience and
> engage with mobility and social fragmentation; in treating the construction of
> transnational communities as an inevitable element of contemporary forms of
> movement, we can also end up inadvertently supporting a neoliberal tendency
> to treat human beings as if they can and should be infinitely portable,
> unencumbered economic agents. (p.25)

While "community" is a term that is used at length by many of the organizers and participants I met in the field, I argue that I am not trying to define what the queer community is, or who its members are, but rather to identify what "spatial practices" are employed by organizers and participants at local queer events, and what politics and ideologies inform their creation as well as emerge from them.

I chose four "sites" at which I conducted participant-observation to gather data for my research project. First, I was involved as a member of the organizing collective for Radical Queer Semaine, which touts itself as more than an event for the Ls, the Gs, the Bs and the Ts of the often criticized acronym LGBT. The organizing collective of Radical Queer Semaine rather presents the festival's goals to allow a diversity of sexual deviants from homo-identified folks, to asexuals, to sex workers and their allies, to "occupy a common space […] free from heterosexism, sexual repression and other dynamics of oppression", as per the event's website. The festival is further described as a "week of events surrounding gender and sexuality and featuring workshops, performances, debates, parties, film screenings, art exhibits, direct actions, and collective kitchens". Radical Queer Semaine was in part chosen because it represents a conscious attempt at occupying a space for a period of ten full days – indeed, the first edition of the festival was organized at an artist space in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, the 2010-2011 editions at the offices of a local non-profit theatre company, and the 2012 at a local dungeon space close to the gay village. I chose Radical Queer Semaine also because its organizing collective, and the participants at the events, are a mixed linguistic crowd. I selected PerversCité as my second field site; this event is a non-mainstream, inclusive

and "radical" alternative to what is often criticized as the apolitical and corporate nature of the local gay pride celebrations. Unlike Radical Queer Semaine, this festival was held at numerous venues and was the result of the efforts of various smaller collectives and groups. PerversCité has been more significantly attended and organized by people whose first or main language is English. This event was selected to observe the practices associated with a less centralized form of organizing, and to observe the organization of an English-centric event of Montreal.

I was introduced to a two-day event held in Toronto, TRIGGER festival, by two of its organizing collective's members, who are both Toronto-based activists and performers I met during Radical Queer Semaine. Informed of my research project, these two individuals invited me to attend their event, a "queer survivor" themed arts and activism festival. I selected this event as a third field site for comparative purposes, in the hopes of identifying similarities and differences in the organizing styles and the activist spaces created in Montreal and those created in Toronto. The final site I selected interestingly was also in Toronto, although in this case I accompanied a Montreal-based group, PolitiQ: Queers Solidaires, as they prepared for and traveled to the 2010 G20 protests. My reason to join an activist group as they made their way to a potentially dangerous and uncertain terrain was that I wanted to investigate whether the practices observed at events held at selected venues would also be observed in a context where a defined physical space of queer activism" did not exist a priori but was being created. Together, I believed that these four field sites, in addition to interviews with participants and organizers, could inform an investigation aiming at identifying the relationship between the queer spaces created in Montreal, and queer activism and politics.

Methods and ethical concerns:

It should be noted that while my first field notes are dated from February 2010, my "immersion" and socialization in the local "queer activist scene" began much earlier. From November 2009, I was involved as a member of the organizing collective for Radical Queer Semaine. My experience at this field site is thus different from my subsequent experiences at other events, as my observation and insight were marked by my involvement as an organizer, as an activist, as a participant, and ultimately as a researcher. I must also acknowledge that my commitments in the local scene have involved, before, during, and after fieldwork, the organization of events beyond the ones mentioned in this thesis, and as such many of my observations and my analysis reflect my own personal commitment to "many things queer".

It could be said that during my active participation as an organizer an organizer of Radical Queer Semaine, my ethnographic method was closer to what Gavin Brown (2007) described as his own approach in his study of autonomous queer spaces of activism, one of "observant participation [...] that engages with the materiality of the practices that constitute these activist networks and spaces" (p.2686). Brown was himself involved as an activist with the collective he followed for numerous years, and the author views his research as stemming from his personal involvement with the studied network. Moreover, much like I intended for my own project, Brown envisioned his research to inform the future undertaking of the group he collaborated with. In the case of this thesis project, and again reflecting on what Marcus (1995) sees as following both "people" and "things", not only was my presence at TRIGGER festival the result of an encounter with two of its organizers during Radical Queer Semaine, but these same people offered me a couch to sleep on during their event and introduced me to some folks who were

organizing for the G20. In turn, these people allowed me to get in touch with other Toronto-based queer activists who generously offered me and the members of PolitiQ to have places to stay in Toronto during the protest, which may have helped us avoid getting arrested, as we would have otherwise slept in the dormitories that were raided by police the early Sunday morning of the G20 weekend. I am well aware that my active participation during all of the events I did fieldwork at definitely coloured my interpretations of what I observed, and that my actions impacted the experiences of other participants.

The principal method of investigation and of data gathering for this research project consisted of fieldwork-based participant observation. Jotted notes were written throughout the observation period and transformed into field notes at a later time. A series of (semi) structured interviews with individuals recruited through the participant observation "phase" was the final element of data gathering. Video and/or audio recordings were done at some key events during Radical Queer Semaine – the events were selected on the basis that they either directly addressed some of my main research concerns, or because I anticipated such events (like a "Queer 101"workshop, for example) to have the potential to reveal interesting discursive elements constitutive of local queer activism. In addition, it should be noted that for practical reasons, audio-recordings replaced written jottings during the G20 protests.

I decided to include an interview I had done in the context of the graduate research methods course I took in my second semester, long before I had started thinking about interviewing people in the context of fieldwork and before I did fieldwork during Radical Queer Semaine. I included this interview as it was done with an organizer I later

reselected for an in-depth interview, and because many of her reflections had led me to consider more seriously the concept of "queer space", which in turn helped shape my focus in fieldnotes. The interview phase, which was spread over a period of about a year, consisted of seven semi-structured interviews, all done in two sessions of a total time ranging from one hour and a half to three hours, with participants recruited because of their varying levels of involvement and experience in the local activist scene. All of my participants revealed a high level of reflexivity on their experiences at queer spaces and on their involvement in queer activism itself. While I was not searching for "experts" on the creation of local queer spaces, I was often greatly impressed by my interviewees' insight – the "quality" of their reflections has in fact significantly helped define the central argument of this thesis. Questionnaires were prepared to guide myself through the interviews and allowed for a degree of flexibility and for the possibility to stray away from the questions provided. The interviews were recorded using a digital audio-recorder, were partially transcribed for relevant material and were all indexed in full. The fieldnotes constructed from the jotted notes I accumulated were also indexed and, together with the indexed interviews, they made up the bulk of the data on which this thesis project rests.

The ethical concerns related to this research project outlined above were first and foremost that I did fieldwork in a social milieu with which I was already familiar, and hence that I was, at least for the fieldwork taking place in Montreal and with Montreal-based groups, studying individuals that were already part of my social circle. As such I had to be especially careful not to cross boundaries of confidentiality and to establish clear moments when I was or was not in the researcher's role, as well as to acknowledge

that my prior personal interactions with the individuals I met through fieldwork are inextricable from my analysis. Principally, I consider this to be an advantage and to have more closely replicated the lengthier period of time that anthropologists are encouraged to spend in the field. The line between researcher and activist were sometimes blurred, however, including at moments when I volunteered as an active listener during Radical Queer Semaine and TRIGGER. While I believe I have respected the confidentiality with which organizers and attendees entrusted me as an active listener, my interactions with participants while I was acting in this role, during what were often intense emotional moments, also helped me understand the larger purpose and impact of the implementation of such volunteer positions.

However, I also experienced some difficulties in the months following fieldwork, as I continued to be involved in various ways with many of the people I had organized with, and as I continued to be involved as an activist in Montreal. In particular, an "explosive" interpersonal conflict erupted between two important members of the local scene, a situation that had repercussions on the work and personal lives of many other activists who were not directly involved in the conflict, to the point were many of my interviewees mentioned it to me during our interview sessions. To cope with this situation and to avoid "contaminating" the material I had amassed through fieldwork with this situation, my own strategy was to distance myself from the individuals concerned and to retract from my activist commitments for a couple of months while I started to write this thesis. This was done because I started to realize that my perception of local activism was starting to be tainted by the conflict and its repercussion on the way the organizing practices of local organizers were changing. Like my interviewees, however, I remain

aware of the lasting impact this event and other conflicts have had and will continue to have on my perspective on the local queer activist scene.

In addition to this desire to focus on the timeframe during which I was "officially" in the field, my priority was to protect the identity and confidentiality of individuals who organized and attended the events where I did fieldwork, in particular if and when personal anecdotes or (hi)stories were shared. I requested signed consent forms only from key organizers of the events where I did fieldwork. The participants who have been identified by names in this thesis were given pseudonyms, and written records allowing to link pseudonyms to individuals have been kept confidential. Written consent was also solicited from individuals appearing and identifiable in any audio and video recordings. Each participants interviewed were also asked to sign a consent form.

CHAPTER 2 Literature Review - Of Space(s) and of Place(s)

Social scientists interested in the study of space and of place are increasingly confronted with their limitlessness and, to a certain extent, with their indefinable quality. The 'world' is in a constant state of interconnectedness, where boundaries once thought to characterize the global order have long been blurred. For anthropologists in particular, globalization and transnationalism have problematized the isomorphism of culture, place and space, as Gupta and Ferguson (1992) have argued. The "local" is shaped by social, economic, cultural and demographic processes no longer bound to nations and to their territories, but instead taking place "in a global space", and identities are decreasingly territorialized (Kearney, 1995, p.548). As Casey argues (1993), space ought to be studied in the phenomenological experience of subjects who invest in place-making. As such, as Harvey proposes (1993), beyond materiality, imagination and "representation" must be primary factors to consider when thinking of space.

In their influential text *Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference*, Gupta and Ferguson (1992) point to the importance of investigating the processes through which place and space are made meaningful. Concomitantly, Casey (1993), as an author in the tradition of continental philosophy, has written at length about the properties of space and of places and about their relationship. Proposing that places have primacy over space (as understood in Western scientific terms) because knowledge of space can only be locally obtained through experience *in* places, Casey envisions one of the primary characteristics of 'places' to be that they "gather". Places hold physical things "in or out" and configure them, and as such they give meaning to these things. Yet, beyond this material and symbolic relation of places to physical things, another function,

or characteristic of places is that they can also gather histories and memories; places can thus hold, gather and arrange immaterial things like thoughts. As I discuss further in the introduction to Chapter 6, Casey moreover conceptualizes places as 'happening' rather than as 'being', and uses the term places-as-events to emphasize that places take on the qualities of their occupants – space and time come together in places-as-events. In the context of this thesis, Casey's description of places is more akin to what the local activists I talk about here call "queer spaces", and in the spirit of relying on the language of my interviewees rather than to impose academic language on their experiences, I will continue writing of "queer spaces", keeping in mind that what I am discussing is perhaps more accurately temporary queer "places" in Casey's terms. Moreover, Casey's discussion of places-as-events – or in the context of this thesis queer spaces-as-events – emphasizes, as I wish to show, the importance of what happens in and through space, and the validity of 'events' to study spatiality and temporality.

The concept of place, however, is hotly debated in anthropology. "Place", described by Appadurai as "the culturally defined location to which ethnographies refer [...] which often come to be identified with the groups that inhabit them" (1988, p.16) was already a debated concept in 1988 when the author published an edited volume on place and voice in anthropological theory. Beyond the concerns, already mentioned above, that Gupta and Ferguson (1992) raised when warning anthropologists against naively equating cultures and places, the latter is a concept that still remains valid for many anthropologists, as well as for the subjects of their studies. In "Locating culture" (2003), the introduction to the edited volume "The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture", Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zùniga present numerous

theoretical models to think of place and space. Of relevance to this thesis is their

presentation of Low's work (2000) on social production versus social construction of

space to discuss similar, if named differently processes of identifying what people call

places and space. As Low and Lawrence-Zùniga write (2003):

> Setha Low distinguishes between the physical and symbolic aspects of urban
> space by defining *social production* as the processes responsible for the
> material creation of space as they combine social, economic, ideological, and
> technological factors, while the *social construction* of space defines
> experiences of spaces through which "people's social exchanges, memories,
> images and daily use of the material setting" (2000, p.128) transform it and
> give it meaning (Low and Lawrence-Zùniga, 2003, p.20).

As another example, citing the work of Margaret Rodman (1992), Low and Lawrence-

Zùniga (2003) present the concept of "multilocality" as one that eschews traditional

anthropological definitions of places as bound and identifiable through ethnography. For

these authors, Rodman's model (1992) allows to instead understand "the network of

connection among places that link micro and macro levels, as well as the reflexive

qualities of identity formation and the construction of place as people increasingly move

around the globe" (Low and Lawrence-Zùniga, 2003, p.15).

Weiner (2002) argues that there are today two competing anthropological

approaches to place and placedness, the first attempting to detail the "many dimensions

of intimacy, knowledge, familiarity, history, and interpersonality mediated by attachment

to particular places" (p.21). For Weiner, such an approach gives centrality to the in-

placeness of human beings and the importance of place and of the memories and

significance attached to them. The second approach identified by Weiner is one that

instead is "more impressed with the transience, the nomadism, the rootlessness, the

migratory, the diasporic, the out-of-placedness that is becoming more and more

characteristic of populations, communities and individuals around the world" (p.22). This approach would advocate against a focus on places, and rather would suggest for anthropologists to focus on "anthropologically significant events and situations". This distinction of course echoes the gap I identified in my introduction, which exists between those who advocate for a study of queer spaces, and those who want a queer study of space. I would argue that the spaces I selected as "field sites" were socially constructed by participants and organizers as places of memory and significance, and yet that that my object of study is that of temporary, transient "places" that are, as I discussed in the previous chapter, out-of-the-ordinary events – as such, I may be offering a reconciliation between the two approaches identified by Weiner.

In "The politics of space, time and substance: State formation, nationalism, and ethnicity", Alonso (1994) tackles a consideration of the power relations, as experienced in space and as carving meaning onto space, that link together state formation, nationalism and ethnicity. The concepts of the 'state' and of 'civil society' are as such produced by hegemonic symbolic strategies that homogenize space as the single territory of a nation – the space of the nation is shared by citizens who are through such symbolic strategies unequally entitled to leadership and dominance because of their ethnicity, gender and sexuality, amongst other social variables. Alonso thus portrays the state as having coercive control over its population through its organization and partitioning of space, and the subordination of certain 'groups' is justified through such processes of social construction of space.

Harvey (1993) also investigates the social construction of space, yet his model is not limited to the workings of power *within* nations – instead, the author accounts for the

increasingly global quest for capital's accumulation. For Harvey space is thus socially constructed through capitalism's trajectory of geographical expansion, which has redefined traditional conceptions of space such as that of the state's territory. For Harvey there has been and continues to be a collapse of spatial barriers and a reconfiguration of the spatial division of labor, which the author sees as involved in the production of 'otherness'. Alonso (1994) and Harvey (1993) thus both look into the production of 'difference' through space and into the unequal power relations enabled by this production, even if the authors do so at a different scale. Massey (1993), expanding on Harvey's work yet avoids referring to a specific scale, and proposes instead the concept of "power-geometry" to show how individuals and groups are differentially 'situated' in and across the flows and movements characteristic of a global order defined by an unequal distribution of wealth and of political power.

The spatial models of Alonso (1994), Harvey (1993), and Massey (1993), as effective as they are in pointing out the differences created through the production of space, nevertheless fall short in adequately fleshing out the symbolic processes involved in the creation of 'otherness' and in the creation of power hierarchies through space. The work of Provencher (2007) on Paris-based gay men and their perceptions of what constitutes "the gay city" illustrates that even within marginalized populations, racial and class divides can account for his participants' diverging opinions on what such an urban space may consist of and on their access to such spaces. Similarly, Chamberland's (1993) historical account of significant places for lesbian subcultures of Montreal demonstrates that collective memory, and the importance and symbolic meaning of specific spaces are dependent on factors such as class, ethnicity and occupation. What such studies point to

is that class, gender, and race can mediate the experience of space, and the meaning associated with this experience.

For Henri Lefebvre (1991), the "science of space" he proposes in his lengthy and dense *The Production of Space* helps explain the hegemonic control of the capitalist system over space, but also includes an analysis of the ideologies concealing this control. Lefebvre proposes a spatial triad (representations of space; representational space; spatial practice) to think of social space and to account for the genesis of all/most types of social spaces. In this triad, representations of space refers to the dominant space in society in the form of the signs and symbols of experts, such as maps, plans, and models of urban planners and bureaucrats. Representational space refers to the space of inhabitants and users of social space as they experience the material world symbolically, in other words as they conceive of it in discourses, ideals, and visions. Finally, spatial practice refers to the everyday practices of the users of space – it is space experienced and lived through daily routine and urban reality. What Lefebvre calls 'abstract space' refers to the homogenous space making up the representations of space promoted by and serving the interests of the elite– it is instrumental in facilitating the flow of capital and implies a tacit social agreement of non-violence, in spite of being the site of difference, struggles and exclusions.

Interestingly, for Lefebvre (1991) spatial practices should be of particular interest when thinking of social space, in particular because they cannot solely be determined by dominant representations of space. As abstract space is fragmented just as it is homogenized, diversity can exist and space can be appropriated or re-appropriated through its creative use by social actors. Projects that run counter to the dominant

strategy can result in what Lefebvre calls 'counter-space' – the original 'raison d'être' of such spaces as either been outlived or as been put to radically different uses by social actors. Harvey (1993), who himself referred to Lefebvre in his model, also points to the importance of social practices when thinking of the relationship between place and identity.

In this vein, in spite of the collapse of some of the spatial boundaries brought forth by modern capitalist relations, the importance of 'place' in the everyday life of subjects who embrace, or even cling to (an) identity/ies can serve as a basis for mobilization. Kearney (1995) argues, for example, that disadvantaged and excluded groups can use discourses that exist 'globally' to frame their struggles and political demands, as is the case for transnational activist networks. Similarly, what Warner (2002) calls "counterpublics", the audience of a public discourse, differs from 'the public' in that it is situated in a conflictual relation with dominant discourses and in that it does not strive to be representative of the majority. The strangers that are addressed by counterpublic discourses are marked by their active participation in the production of such discourses, not solely because they are passive recipient of their content. Discourse and practice are also at the heart of the salient desire for communities to create places of belonging according to Harvey (1993) – but for the author, "the power of money" and the commodification of identities are inescapable aspects of the global capitalist order. The author thus concludes that even if, as Lefebvre would have argued, counter-spaces (or what one could call places of resistance) would radically change the "raison d'être" of abstract spaces, "[e]very one who moves to establish difference in the contemporary

world has to do so through social practices that necessarily engage with the mediating power of money" (p.20).

From gay and lesbian spaces to queer spaces:

In "Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada" Tom Warner (2002) presents what he sees as three main phases of historical development of gay, lesbian, and more largely queer politics in Canada. First, the period prior to 1975 is portrayed as one of intense repression and oppression – Warner argues that in particular in the aftermath of World War II, gays and lesbians have developed a political consciousness that further flourished after the Stonewall Riots and which culminated in a liberation-based politics and in the decriminalization of certain types of same-sex acts. Warner presents the second phase, from 1975 to 1984, as one where a conservative backlash responded to the advancements previously made through a return to "family values", and an agenda of police repression against immoral sexualities, which included same-sex relations as well as sex work and pornography, for example. This section of the book also describes the impact of the AIDS crisis on gay and lesbian politics, as well as the power issues emerging out of the dominance of gay men's issues in public discourse over gay rights and gay activism. During this period, also, urban gay cultures developed and visible gay and lesbian enclaves developed in many parts of Canada. The third part of Warner's book explores the rift between equality-based assimilationist politics and the liberation agenda that emerged once amendments were made to the Charter of Rights and Freedom to include protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation as possible grounds of discrimination. Warner's final section moreover discusses "queer

spaces" as contemporary urban gay enclaves, and situates queer politics to be centered on gay rights, gay pride, and gay (commercial) cultures.

The study of such sexual minority spaces, although once neglected, have proliferated greatly since the 1990s, and it could be said that the geography of lesbian and gay spaces has since been established as an important, if recently contested and critiqued scholarship. The contribution of such a body of work has included the studies of authors who have paid attention to lesbian and gay landmarks, like Duberman's "Stonewall" (1993) and Esther Newton's "Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty years in America's first gay and lesbian town" (1993), as well as works like those of Bell et al. (1994), which applied queer theoretical concepts like Butler's performativity to discuss the heterosexualization of space, and the presence and reading of different gay and lesbian identities in public space. The study of gay and lesbian people's spaces, and the study of gay and lesbian subjects in space, have contributed, as I mention in Chapter 1, to putting gay and lesbian people on the map (see the volume "Mapping Desire: Geographies of sexuality" edited by Bell et al. (1995), Adler and Brenner (1992), and Wolfe (1992) for examples of such contributions).

In an example of a study of Montreal-based gay space, Remiggi (2000) offers an historical overview of the geographical unification of the "gay village" of Montreal, and of the perceptions and meanings associated through time with this space. Even if Remiggi acknowledges the differential access of men and women to this space, referencing various stages of the history he traces, the author nevertheless argues that this space allows sexual minorities to escape repressive social codes or discourses. This is the case for him even as he reports criticisms associated with the "gay village", for example that it

is a commodified commercial ghetto. The rhetoric of gay spaces as "resistant" and "emancipatory" is one that is deconstructed by critical queer geographers, as I show in the following section, in particular because it creates a binary of dominant/resistant spaces, and because it fails to identify some of the dynamics of power and exclusion that happens in supposedly resistant spaces.

Authors like Podmore (2006), who have investigated how lesbians in Montreal have experienced urban space and inscribed meaning onto particular places in significantly different ways than gay men, counter accounts proposing that gay men and women have a unified experience of urban space. Her article traces the emergence and disappearance of what she considers to be a thriving culture of lesbian public visibility pre- and post-1980s. Linking discourse, practice, and a shared sense of identity and culture, Podmore's article shows how the link between "feminism, lesbian culture, territory and urban space" (p.612) was largely responsible for the "golden age" of lesbian visibility in the 1980s, while the emergence of "queer politics", and their adoption by many lesbians, might have had a large role in the decline of the visibility of lesbian spaces in the 1990s.

The edited collection "Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance" (Ingram, Bouthiller and Retter, 1997) showcases a wide range of sexual minority spaces, including ones with a gay or lesbian "identity" and others named 'queer'. As shown in the chapter entitled "Lost in space: Queer theory and community activism at the Fin-de-millénaire", this volume also provides frameworks for

> […] studying and understanding the perceptions, ideas, and priorities that characterize each community and its relationship to its environment [as] necessary prerequisites to building "effective affinities," which in turn can lead to new alliances between lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transsexuals, and

other groups of "sexual minorities" perceived by some to threaten the heteronormative[4] status quo (Ingram, Bouthiller, and Retter, 1997, p.4).

This collection therefore aims not only to showcase examples of place-making practices by "queer people", although it does as in Yolanda Retter's text "Lesbian spaces in Los Angeles, 1970-90"), but also to provide strategies (albeit vague ones) and warnings for the creation of inclusive militant spaces, as in the editors' chapter entitled "Strategies for (Re)constructing queer communities".

The spaces presented in Remiggi (2000) and perhaps to a lesser extent in Podmore's (2006) works could be argued to be 'homonormative' spaces, where there is a classed, gender and raced (amongst other factors) hierarchisation of proper/acceptable/authentic ways of being a homosexual subject. As I discuss in the following two chapters, the politics linked to the mainstream gay and lesbian movements, and commercial urban gay enclaves like Montreal's gay village, are often distanced from the queer politics and spaces I discuss in this thesis. Gavin Brown's discussion (2007) of what he calls 'autonomous modes of queer living' contrast such gay spaces and more closely resembles the spaces I study. Brown argues that the *Queeruption* network he studies attempts to experiment with autonomous queer living – what is meant here by autonomy is that the group/community attempts to act freely and through self-rule, while also allowing individual choice-making and freedom. For the author, this desire for autonomous organizing, greatly influenced by anti-capitalist and anti-assimilationist ideals, allows to think of an alternative vision of society's current state, and to

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[4] Briefly, "heteronormativity" can be described as the naturalization and normalization of heterosexual pairings and of the man/woman binary, and also usually involves the acknowledgment that these processes intersect with other normative systems, like those of class and race, for example.

collectively reflect on the ways to achieve it. Yet, Brown argues that the most transformative elements of such gatherings might be in the small scale attempts at autonomous living and community building themselves, rather than the larger scale political goals and strategies imagined. Although I also wish to show that the place-making practices of queer activists and organizers I discuss in this thesis are of importance and, as I argue, represent utopian forms of sociality, I want to make the point that the goals and strategies imagined in queer spaces, in addition to the practice of place-making I identify, represent a commitment to a critical queer theoretical and practical political project than can and does have impacts beyond these spaces.

Queering the study of space:

As I mentioned in the first few pages of Chapter 1, this thesis however also aims to reconcile Brown's (2007) desire to study queer spaces with the work of critical queer geographers, and more largely with recent queer theory scholarship, which tends to step away from concerns with the realities of subjects 'identified' as queer and instead aims to study (queer and non-queer) realities through a queer approach. Kate Browne (2006), in her article entitled "Challenging queer geographies", indeed advocates that queer geographical projects must aim to think in radically different ways of bodies, spaces, and geographies, and as such the action of 'naming' subjects, actions, or activism as 'queer' must be done carefully or avoided altogether. Regardless, Browne argues that academic texts that encapsulate the fluidity and non-normativity advocated by queer theory must also seek to influence political action, and thus to encourage dialogue and action outside of singular disciplines; yet, Browne offers no practical strategies, only critical questions.

In "Critical geographies and the uses of sexuality: Deconstructing queer space", Natalie Oswin (2008), whose perspective I seek to reconcile with Gavin Brown's as mentioned in Chapter 1, offers an overview and critique of texts written within and beyond the scope of geography, and which investigate the notion of "queer space". Oswin briefly reviews texts she considers to be framed within a 'liberal framework', where heterosexual dominance of space and queer (or LGBT) spaces of resistance are opposed, before she focuses on the works of authors attempting to complicate this binary. Oswin thus presents works that envision queer spaces as spaces either occupied by self-identified queers, or those that defy power and normativity. Yet, many scholars have addressed the omission of race in such accounts, with some for example picturing race, sexuality, and other socio-economic factors as mutually constitutive. For Oswin, because such approaches still rely on a politics of identity, queer scholars should not attempt to identify inherently (radical) queer subjects or spaces, and should instead investigate the "constellations of power" (p.90) implicated in the making of sexualized, racialized, gendered and classed subjects. My position in this thesis is that there actually *is* virtue in studying queer spaces, because as I will show the constellations of power Oswin sees to be at the center of a queer theoretical project are also centered in queer politics and in the creation of queer spaces.

Browne (2006) and Oswin (2008)'s perspectives and hopes for the future of, respectively, queer politics and queer scholarship, are of course situated within the larger discursive space created by queer theory – in order to situate their work, and to frame my upcoming discussion in Chapter 3 of what I and other organizers of and participants at queer events mean when we say 'queer', I here provide a brief presentation of a few key

contributors to queer theory. First, it must be said that the association of 'queer' and of 'theory' was not originally made by a scholar that is seen as a canonical figure in this body of work – rather, as Annamarie Jagose (1996) proposes in "Queer Theory: An Introduction", Theresa de Lauretis "first advocated the term in 1991 […] and charged it with the responsibility of countering masculinist bias latent in that naturalized and seemingly gender-sensitive phrase 'lesbian and gay'." (p.116). This reference however refers to de Lauretis' text "Queer theory: Lesbian and gay sexuality", although authors like David Halperin (2003) have shown that the term was first coined in the title for a 1990 conference de Lauretis (and others) organized at the University of California Santa Cruz.

In spite of this 'story of origin', many intellectual 'foreparents' can be associated with queer theory. Foucault's three volumes of the "History of Sexuality" (1978, 1985, 1986) are notable examples, as his work attempted to understand the social construction of sexuality and of sexual identity by linking power with knowledge on sexuality, and elaborating on control/surveillance through normalization (as he had already done in other works, like "Discipline and Punish" (1975)). Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" (1993) also discussed the social construction of sexuality, but more precisely identifies some of the fundamental binaries and hierarchies created to marginalize non-normative sexualities. In "Epistemology of the Closet" (1990), Eve Sedgwick focuses on one of such binaries, that of hetero-homo, to make sense of modern definitions of, and limitations to human sexuality. Focusing on gender more than sexuality, Judith Butler (1990) proposed her concept of 'performativity' in "Gender Trouble" and expands it in "Bodies that Matter" (1993) –

briefly, performativity sheds light on gender as an act, and as the repetition of acts in the unattainable pursuit of gendered ideals defined and implied through discursive norms.

After the proliferation of queer theoretical works in the 1990s, the 2000s have seen the traditional concerns of queer theory over gender and sexuality expand to include similar and intersecting analysis of race and class, in part to address the middle class whiteness of this body of work and perhaps, to reconcile queer theory with existing works by scholars of color and by "non-Westerners". Jasbir Puar's "Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times" (2007) is a recent example of how queer theory can be dually critiqued *and* applied to uncover oppressive and normative processes in (queer) social movements and in (queer) academia, in particular when it is joined with other critical perspectives like post-colonial theory and critical race theory. As I show in this thesis, the queer activists and organizers I met through fieldwork dedicate time and energy to the creation of queer spaces and to the elaboration of queer politics, both of which call into question the same constellations of power Oswin (2008) sees works in the vein of Puar's to address.

CHAPTER 3 Defining "Queer"

> As English loves to do it's a catch all [term]. Acronyms don't build common understanding, [they] actually exclude it. So [...] it's a re-appropriation of a derogatory term - that should be remembered, thereby remembering the history of oppression. And so queer is about a response to oppression that was based on sexuality and sexual identity. LGBTTQ is just a sexual identity. Queer is the response – social, moral, artistic, economic, political – to that repression, and to that history. So it's a different category of label [...]. Queer is like LGBTTQ [...] plus solidarity.[...] LGBTTQ as a lobby group pretty much stops at gay marriage, you know? Queer sees beyond it, and responds to its own oppression. And it is more understanding, to me, of intersecting oppressions as well. [...] Racial, and social class *mixité* [are] together with sexual identity and diversity. These are seen as inextricably part of the collective response to oppression [queer activism] is undertaking. So hence queer politics reaching to bell hooks and not necessarily just to gay authors and gay artists. (Jason)

The meaning of the term queer is a hot topic in the Montreal queer scene. Half-jokingly, Jason proposed that Francophones in particular cannot get enough of picking apart the word. This is perhaps because its roots and its trajectory, in particular as a reappropriated insult as Mathieu noted, are not as self-evident for those for whom English is not their first language. In spite of this probable linguistic difference in activists' involvement in "dissecting" queer, the various interpretations of the term and its ramification for political imaginings remain key to local organizing. In a powerful example of how invested local organizers and other queer activists of various linguistic backgrounds are in dialogue over the meaning of the term, a panel and discussion group entitled "Queer à/to Queer" was organized during Radical Queer Semaine. The aim of this workshop was to "explore the ways in which [the Montreal Queer] multi-lingual activist community is coming together (and sometimes being held apart) by the language of queer radicalism as it exists in English, French and other languages", as the Facebook

invitation explained. The workshop's organizers wanted to address how language and language-based barriers affect queer organizing in Montreal. The panel also tackled what I perceived to be the very anthropological concern of seeing how such issues "affect the often separate queer radical discourses taking place within both [the] local Montreal community and [the] larger [Queer] global network". While I present in more depth in Chapter 5 some of the language barriers addressed during this workshop, the discussion this workshop featured over what queer comes to mean to different people in the local scene is, I believe, very evocative of this chapter's aim; to provide a framework with which to think of queer, to help highlight what I and other Montreal-based activists and organizers mean when we talk about queer spaces.

The "Queer à/to Queer" panel was held on the first Monday of Radical Queer Semaine. Emily, as one of its organizers, had strongly "advertised" and circulated the event's invitation through Facebook, one of the central means of promoting the festival's scheduled events. Besides for the busiest weekend workshops, the "Queer à/to Queer" panel was one of the best-attended events of the week – over fifty people showed up to participate, and a large number of people present engaged in the open discussion that followed the half hour panel presentation. The diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, experiences, and sites of identification of the panelists invited to the "Queer à/to Queer" workshop and of the people who attended the event were for me a clear example of the diversity found in the queer activist scene of Montreal. Beyond representing this diversity, this panel was, I believe, illustrative of some of the larger challenges facing the organizers of the festival, one of which this thesis seeks to address. If Radical Queer Semaine and other queer events meet their intended goal and welcome not only

Anglophone and Francophone queers, but also people with multiple and varied sites of self-identification, how do they respond to the needs and interests of each and all? How can such needs and interests be linked together under the umbrella of "radical queer activism", and how can they be accounted for within queer spaces that are created temporarily?

Emily had invited me to be a panelist at the "Queer à/to Queer" workshop because she knew that, as someone who was not only bilingual but also, at the time, "non-binary identified"[5], I often found myself in linguistic situations that were at times hard to navigate. As the first speaker on the panel, I alternated between French and English to talk about the role of what I had learned through my studies in the Anglophone academic world in helping me make sense out of the way I felt about myself as a non-binary trans-identified person. I also argued that my education however limited the ways in which I could render myself intelligible to others because it was in English and unfortunately, that it often did not translate very well in my conversations with my Francophone friends, many of whom are not university-educated. The word queer does not have the same historical connotation in French as it does in English: its use in French is more often reminiscent for French speakers of queer theory, at least for those familiar with it, while for others, the term is only a synonym for LGBT. My contribution to the panel was to question the dominance of Anglo-Saxon forms of knowledge and histories in forming current queer cultural capital.

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[5] This means that at the time I did not perceive myself to be male nor female. I also requested people to use gender-neutral language (in English) when referring to me.

Noah, the second panelist of the Queer à/to Queer workshop, shared some of my concerns. As a young genderqueer-identified and Jewish-identified student, they[6] spoke in English of the divide they felt between the "language of queer" they learned through their education at Concordia University, and their native language, Hebrew. In spite of Hebrew gradually having become more open to include terms to describe queer identities and realities, either through the borrowing of English terms or the production of new terms, Noah often felt as though their sense of self and their identity could only be articulated with difficulty to friends and family in Israel. "Queer lingo" and many identity and ideology terms Noah could easily employ in their everyday life amongst Montreal-based queer folks did not allow them to exchange as easily with people unfamiliar with such language. This was true even in some cases for people with a desire to understand Noah's gender identity, sexuality, and sense of politics. Noah pointed out during their presentation that these linguistic barriers however did not hinder many of the alliances they can create with people who, in spite of not sharing queer language, have similar personal experiences and political visions.

Another of my fellow panelists, a Mexican immigrant named Jose, recalled that when he was a university student in Mexico queer theory had failed to help him make sense of his experiences being a "skid punk" with same-sex desires. While queer theory interested him, he mentioned that it did not "speak" to him. He said "It was actually in some Spanish authors that I saw myself reflected", exemplifying that his participation in

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[6] As I will discuss further in Chapter 5, "they" is often used as a singular gender-neutral pronoun to refer to a person with a non-binary identity, or for whom this pronoun is preferred regardless of gender identification, or to refer to someone whose identity is unknown to the speaker. Other gender-neutral pronouns, like "zie" for example, can also be used although "they" is the most popular I have heard in both Montreal and Toronto.

the "Queer à/to Queer" workshop, and more largely in the local activist scene, was not dependent on acquiring "queer knowledge" through "queer books and authors". Recalling his move to Montreal, Jose mentioned that he went through a period of crisis; "everything went down the crap hole" he exclaimed during his presentation. Without a network of people who could relate to the writings that had helped him develop politics that reflected his personal history and aspirations, Jose attempted for a few years to blend into the culture of the gay village. Yet, he never felt fully accepted or at home, perceiving his background as a punk and as an anarchist to clash with the commodification of gay identities and sexualities he witnessed there. Jose eventually found a safe haven in the local queer activist "community", recognizing in its values and politics those of the "Arrabal" of Mexico, the slums where he could find other "freaks" who did not care to blend in. What attracted Jose to the local queer scene was thus " queer politics", which he had partly acquired through skid-punk networks back in Mexico and from reading Spanish authors who, while not linked to the queer "canon" as Foucault and Butler are, nevertheless helped him develop the language of queer activism as it is found in Montreal.

François, a French immigrant who was the final panelist of the "Queer à/to Queer" workshop, argued that it is important to differentiate between queer *cultures and identities*, queer *theory*, and queer *movements*. The importance of the term queer for him is in how it helps identify inclusive radical political movements that include, for example, questions of sex work and feminism, regardless of the label or name associated to such movements. These are for François "present around the world, under different names and different practices" - for him, they aim to deconstruct and fight systems of oppression. In François's experience, the local queer activist scene reflected his values and politics, as

well as his experiences with the "Trans Pédés Gouines"[7] movement in France. Even though François admitted that he had not read many central texts in queer theory, and while he attempted to argue that his activism is not really influenced by such texts - he "does not care" he said - the movements he identifies as "queer" nevertheless seemingly attempt to address and understand the same issues of oppression that are addressed and deconstructed in queer theory, as I have come to conclude myself in this work. While many issues associated with the term queer and with the "language" of queer were highlighted during the panel, as I show in this chapter, it is clear that a certain ideological cohesion brings a diversity of local activist to create temporary queer spaces of activism in Montreal.

Defining the "queer" in queer spaces:

Before speaking of the queer spaces that are at the heart of this thesis project and of much of the efforts of local queer activism, I must identify some of the meanings I and the queer organizers and participants I met during fieldwork associate with the term 'queer'. To qualify spaces as "queer spaces" means more than to suggest that "queer people" hang out there; but even such an understanding, which was given by some interviewees as a partial definition of queer spaces, requires that these "queer people" be defined. As I will show in this chapter, queer is a term that, for many, has as a main characteristic that it attempts to defy categorization. Yet, beyond the use of queer as a

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[7] An English translation of "Trans Pédés Gouines" could be "Tranny Faggot Dyke". While this movement closely resembles what is found in Montreal under the label "queer", as François suggested, it seems as though the former more closely clings to "identity politics". As will be shown shortly, queer often attempts to circumvent precise identity categories, or at least attempts to become one that is synonymous with fluidity and inclusiveness.

qualifier, as when one thinks of queer *people* and queer *spaces*, my interviewees also often used the term as a noun. Some spoke of queer as if it was an entity of sorts, as in the sentence above where "queer […] attempts to defy categorization". In French, the term queer is even often preceded by the article *le*, as in "*le queer*".

Queer is therefore more than a word that qualifies – it is, as J. L. Austin's work on speech act in "How to do things with words" (1975) suggests, and as I exemplify later in this chapter, a word that *acts*. In this book, Austin proposes that certain utterances serve another purpose than to describe – they instead perform a certain type of action. One of the best-known examples of such performative utterances[8] is "I name this ship *Queen Elizabeth*" (Austin, 1975, p.5; original emphasis), in which the words pronounced do not describe that one is giving a name to a ship, but rather the words do the action of giving the ship a name. Austin further describes performative utterances by providing the three following categories of effects they, and any other kind of utterance to few exceptions he later proposes in the book, can have: locutionary acts, which in their meaning itself act by ordering (for example, by saying "step back" one tells another to step back); illocutionary acts, which through their utterance inform on the context in which they are uttered (for example by saying "step back" one tells another of imminent danger); and perlocutionary acts, which have an effect on the listener (for example by saying "step back", one elicits an emotional reaction, of fear possibly, in the recipient of the utterance). As I show later

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[8] It should be noted, as Susan Stryker does in her chapter entitled "(De)Subjugated knowledges: An introduction to transgender studies" (2006) from the collection "The Transgender Studies Reader" she edited with Stephen Whittle, that the influential model of gender performativity proposed by Butler in her (queer) canonical "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity" (1990) "is derived from speech act theory and owes an intellectual debt to the philosophical/linguistic work of J. L. Austin". (Stryker, 2006, p.10).

in this chapter, Austin's emphasis on the power of words and utterances to "do" is one that lends itself well to the definition(s) of queer I present here, if so more figuratively than literally.

As I discuss in the first pages of this chapter, queer is usually taken in the context of this thesis to mean three things: queer as an identity that is similar to, or that goes beyond, those included in the LGBT acronym; queer as a qualifier for a post-structural, post-modern, interdisciplinary and increasingly multi-scale theoretical current, queer theory; and the political queer, which in this case can be both a noun, as in the ideological queer, or a qualifier, as in queer politics and movements. I do not pretend to have the capacity nor the space in this chapter to provide a full taxonomy of the different meanings that can possibly be associated with the term queer– rather, I focus on what the individuals I have interviewed have thematically focused on during our sessions, as well as on what I came to see as salient uses of the term during the events I attended and participated in during field research.

As I briefly tackled in Chapter 1, my close collaboration with, and involvement in, Radical Queer Semaine's organizing collective is assuredly "coloring" the interpretations I here provide of what the term queer means to queer activists of Montreal. It is also more importantly here showcased in a frame for my upcoming discussion and analysis of queer spaces. As I am still, on the day of writing this chapter, involved in organizing Radical Queer Semaine, I have come to understand since I "officially" did fieldwork in 2009 and 2010 that many other "forms" of radical queer spaces exist. Some, like the Schwarzer Kanal squat[9] located in "a patch of woods in eastern Berlin" on which multiple

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[9] http://www.schwarzerkanal.squat.net/Project.html

abandoned train wagons have been turned into housing units and community spaces, are permanent "queer settlements" that are as close as can be to self-sufficiency. Described as a "a queer community project [that] is a networking, coming-together point for queers-and-friends and part of a wider network of autonomous spaces", the Schwarzer Kanal squat was a home for almost an entire year for one of the organizers of the first edition of Radical Queer Semaine.

Other queer spaces, like those of "public dissent" created by networks like Bash Back, are less (if at all) representative of a defined and organized group's collective consensus. Indeed, the Bash Back network, comprised of multiple "chapters" in different cities, considers itself to be anarchist "non-hierarchical group[s] of autonomous individuals [united] under the guise of a common purpose" [10]. As a contrast, before and during my time with PolitiQ at the G20 protests, I witnessed and took part in lengthy discussions and deliberation processes to reach consensus over the types of actions the group would take part in and the strategies it could put in place to allow for a certain diversity of tactics while ensuring the relative "safety" of the group. It is as such obvious that I write not of all queer spaces, but of what I observed and experienced during fieldwork.

In the following pages, I first show how, in spite of often being conflated, queer means more than the acronym LGBT. Not only does queer in this sense seek to more fluidly represent how people can relate to their gender and their sexuality, it also distances itself from some of the politics and demands of the mainstream gay and lesbian movement. I argue that queer attempts to adopt an intersectional analysis of the ways in

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[10] http://news.infoshop.org/article.php?story=20090604211215180

which oppressions works, thereby going beyond single-issues politics that focus solely on gender and sexual dimensions. Finally, I argue that while queer organizers and activist sometimes associate the term queer with queer theory only, this body of work is often not accessible to many activists who nonetheless find a sense of belonging in queer activism.

Fluidity - More than just a catch all term:

> It's not just about the fact that it's an umbrella term for a bunch of non-heterosexual people doing non-heterosexual things for non-heterosexual reasons. It's really not about that. (Jason)

In spite of its use in some contexts as a replacement for the acronym LGBT[11], the term queer is, in the context of this thesis and in the minds of queer activists I interviewed, more than a simple umbrella term. If it is often seen as a "coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications" (Jagose, 1996, p.1), and at times in itself taken as a site of gendered and sexual identification for some of the individuals I met, in the context of this work the word queer is not taken as a catch-all term for non-heterosexual and cisgender[12] people. Mathieu however acknowledged that the term is often used as an identity that represents individuals who self-identify as queer. However, the people he knows who

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[11] LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*) is often lengthened with more letters to represent a wider range of sexual orientations and identification or of gender identities. For example, LGBTQIA refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, and asexual, while LGBTTIQQ2SA refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning, 2[two]-spirited and allies. As Jason pointed out in the introductory quote of this chapter and as many others have argued, acronyms tend to highlight difference rather than to encourage solidarity.

[12] Cis (or cissexual or cisgender) is a term used in some contexts to refer to people who are not trans-identified. While the prefix "trans" means "on the other side", "cis" means "on the same side" (ASTT(e)Q, 2011).

adopt this label in this way choose queer because it assumes a kind of fluidity and a rejection of fixed labels that other identity categories cannot seem to eschew, like gay and lesbian which assume one is solely attracted to and/or romantically and sexually involved with people of the same gender. Mathieu however saw an irony in this supposed escape of labels:

> People really identify with the term in a "I am different, I don't identity with categories", but in fact it does become a categorical identity, that of "queer".[13]

This naming and labeling paradox is however one that even queer theorists cannot escape, as I discuss in the conclusion chapter of this thesis. It should be noted that many of the individuals I met at the queer events I attended would have either endorsed the label queer talk of their sexuality and/or of their gender identity, or would also claim another or many other labels from and outside of the LGBT acronym, for example as people that I have met, cis and trans, prefer to identify as fags or fairies rather than as gay.

Regardless of whether queer is endorsed as an identity or as a qualifier, there was a general consensus amongst my interviewees that queer is inherently political. As such for Dan, queer is an identity category that is endorsed by those who acknowledge that sexuality is a field of human life where norms are strongly enforced.

> I guess I am starting to think that for me, queer is, you know, meaning a whole lot more than to have sex with the opposite gender. You know, it's sexual deviance, anything that falls under something society doesn't really see as positive sexuality. Or even, something that's very sexual in a way that's not appreciated, or sanctioned, or valued.

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[13] Translation mine, as for every other quote by Mathieu.

From this approach, queer can be an identity term that seeks to question systems of

oppression, in particular as related to sexuality, more than a replacement for isolated

identities within the LGBT umbrella.

An alternative to the LG(BT) movement:

However, as Céline mentioned, queer is also at times appropriated as a catch-all

term by commercial venues of the gay village, many of which claim to cater to the needs

of sexual minorities.

> Sometimes I find it confusing. Sometimes we see it in businesses, the word
> queer. And we ask ourselves, "what sense does it have here?". Maybe they
> don't have the same definition I do! (*laughs*) Sometimes I tell myself that it
> will inevitably be recuperated [in that way]. But […] for me queer situates
> itself outside of the dominant culture, of mass culture, of consumer society.
> It's something that is outside of all of that, so I find it bizarre when it ends up
> on the shelves.[14]

The space of the gay village and many of the criticisms that queer activists have in its

regards are discussed at more length in the following chapter – for now, suffice to say

that many, if not most people I have interviewed and have met in the queer scene

distanced themselves at varying degrees from what many called the mainstream LG(BT)

[15] movement. Mathieu said that he often considers himself to be "à cheval"[16] between on

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[14] Translation mine, as for every other quote by Céline.

[15] In spite of their use of the acronym LGBT, local organizations and service providers
rarely offer services that are inclusive of bisexual- and trans-identified people, hence why
I deliberately chose to use LG(BT) when speaking of these groups. As will be identified
explained shortly, these exclusions by service provides and organizations, and those that
exist in commercial spaces of the village, are some of the reasons why activists decide to
get involved in queer activism rather than within the mainstream LG(BT) movement.
And, as I show in Chapter 4, queer organizers implement various strategies to make the
spaces created during festivals and other events more inclusive of a diversity of people,

the one hand his paid and voluntary commitments with local LG(BT) service providers

and community organizations, and on the other his engagement in the local queer activist

scene. Mathieu described how he often feels like he is considered to be a "bureaucrat" by

other queer activists, while "mainstream LGBT groups" sometimes perceive him to be a

"radical", making him a rare "hybrid creature" in the queer scene. In this dual position,

and because of his desire to render queer intelligible to his colleagues and employers in

the "mainstream" gay and lesbian world, Mathieu often attempts to define queer as

follows when asked to do so by such people:

> Queer is a rejection of binaries like the identities man/woman, but also of
> [fixed] sexual identities and orientations. It refuses labels that are not self-
> defined and self-endorsed. It prefers that people self-identify […]. But it goes
> way beyond that, to include political representation.

For Mathieu and many others, queer denounces "heteronormativity". It is also

however distanced from "mainstream" lesbian and gay organizing and activism, as such

initiatives are often considered to be "homonormative", meaning that they privilege

certain ways of being a "homosexual subject", creating hierarchies with classed,

gendered, and raced referents. As Jason mentioned in the quote introducing this chapter,

mainstream LG(BT) politics tend to ask for equality in the form of tolerance from, and

inclusion in, already existing institutions, best represented in the quest for marriage

equality, for legal protection against discrimination, and for the criminalization of

sexuality- or gender-based hate crimes. These types of demands are often rejected, if not

outright opposed by queer activists, and while this disagreement over mainstream

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and to make these spaces as comfortable and safe as possible for the largest number of
people possible.

[16] To be straddling

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LG(BT) demands is fascinating, I can only briefly allude to it throughout this thesis, as a

proper analysis of the arguments used against these politics are too complex to be

addressed further[17].

What attracts some people who, like Mathieu, have previously or are concurrently

involved in mainstream LG(BT) organizing to learn more about "queer" is that, as he

proposed,

> It gives a space where people can get involved […] in part in rejection of a
> more traditional LGBT movement. Where people can feel free to be involved
> in a positive way in regards to their sexuality, instead of doing it in a kind of a
> negative way, like in the LGBT *milieu*, [which is] always [reacting] against
> prejudice and stereotypes. […] For those reasons, [queer] finds a sense of
> freedom that is both cool and interesting, and queer also allows for a zone of
> reflection that distances itself from the traditional fight against homophobia.
> [It's for] people who don't really correspond to the typical [LG(BT)] family.

Jason considered the term 'queer' to "define itself as neither mainstream gay nor

mainstream straight and to exist as this kind of opposition to both". Céline seemed to

agree, but also added a reflexive dimension to this opposition:

> The term is […] about people who feel at least a little bit outside of the norms
> represented in the LGBT community. And, in fact, who […] question *la
> normalité* [normativity].

Thierry agreed that queer distances itself from LG(BT) organizing, but for him there is

sometimes a tendency for certain activists to engage in a "queerer than thou" moralistic

attitude towards this milieu. As he explained:

> For me, it's very important to be in interaction [with the mainstream LGBT
> movement], and for me [this movement] is not my enemy, not at all! It's my
> friend with whom I don't always agree on certain issues.[18]

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[17] For examples of queer critiques of mainstream LG(BT) politics, see the online
publications of the collective Against Equality (http://www.againstequality.org/).

[18] Translation mine, as for every other quote by Thierry.

Emily also agreed that what she called the "gay community" is not in itself her enemy.

Rather it is the normativity that is enforced in some "gay contexts" that queer activists

oppose:

> There's very few ways in which I'd say queers would openly oppose the gay
> community […]. What is my enemy is the notion [...] that even though I have
> sex with people of the same sex I have to be a really normal person. And that,
> because I don't have sex with people of the opposite sex that means that I
> have to be exactly the opposite [of heterosexuals] and only exactly the
> opposite of that.

As the examples above show, the definition of queer here outlined questions the

inclusivity of the mainstream LG(BT) movement's demands, as they respond to the needs

of individuals who are deemed "normal" lesbian and gay citizens, rather than to address

the realities of a large range of marginalized people. These mainstream demands tend to

rely on single-issues politics, where the interaction of multiple forms of oppression is

ignored, and as such where often only the rights of the most privileged make it onto the

"agenda". As I show in Chapter 6, queer enables critical reflection on the way things are,

and on the ways that oppression functions beyond normative systems of gender and

sexuality only. Beyond critique, it also seeks to envision new forms of sociality and new

political horizons.

Beyond the politics of gender and sexuality:

For Emily, queer further distances itself from the ideals promoted by the

mainstream LG(BT) movement with its endorsement and celebration of "difference".

> There's that great Daryl Vocat image that everyone knows, which is "not gay
> as in happy, but queer as in fuck you", which I think really says a lot. Queer
> is a much more proactive word [...] *it's an identity that works*. It's definitely
> political, and it's definitely an in-your-face word. It makes people

uncomfortable. It's a very confrontational word and I think that this speaks to the fact that queer for me definitely [...] is saying: being sexual deviants is a political thing. The whole Mattachine thing of "we're just like you" is something that queer is in opposition to. It's like, "no, we're different than you" (*laughs*). And that's okay as well. We don't have to be just like you to be okay.

Emily's claim that 'queer' is a term, as an identity (but I argue also as a noun that also encompasses a reference to a theory and to a politics) that *works* of course links to Austin's work (1975) on speech acts – words that *do*. Perhaps from Emily's definition we could see queer as an utterance that Austin called a "perlocutionary act", a speech act that has a psychological effect on its recipient, in this case the effects including for Emily to shock, and to warn that one celebrates deviance as a political statement. Céline also suggested that for queer activists sexuality – being considered a sexual deviant in particular – is political:

I think that in queer, sexuality is political. With queer, there is a political goal, it isn't people who meet without an objective but rather people who have political aims [...]. I think that this is something that is particularly queer.

For "things to change" is what many identify as a main purpose of queer organizing. Queer is therefore inherently political, although as I will show in Chapter 6, social change can take different forms for different activists.

The political activism that local queer organizers and participants engage in is not limited to causes related to sexuality and gender; it extends to other causes, in particular those where other sources of oppression intersect. Creating spaces to discuss sexual and gender oppression is, for Dan, "kind of like, a home base too", adding that while queer activists get "involved in other issues", this home base is often the "place where they can start from". For Jason, the desire to go beyond sexuality and gender and to "venture"

outwards of one's community and of its direct concerns is, in fact, a key aspect of queer

politics and one that sets it apart, as he proposed:

> You have some communities [...] that are entirely moral in nature and then
> you have some communities that are entirely aesthetic in nature, like artist-
> run centers that don't care about anyone but themselves. And so the queer
> community is a very strange bird, in that [...] it touts itself as actually caring
> about more things than most other communities.

Queer is therefore interested in intersecting oppressions, and in reflecting on more

than only issues related to gender and sexuality. Queer is in this sense a critique of

normative systems of gender, sex, and sexuality, but also of other sites of oppression. The

appeal of a "queer focus lens" is in Jason's mind

> [F]or those who are willing to see connections between the reason for their
> oppression, for their sex and gender oppression, and other people's
> oppressions. So queer seeks primarily to legitimate a community that has
> been oppressed based on gender and sexuality, legitimate their struggles and
> stories, and then to move beyond that to refocus [and ask] "What else?"

In light of this, and as Jason also mentioned in the introductory quote, queer is not only

this critique but also the *response* to these oppressions. Bobby similarly expressed his

view that queer seeks for more than the sole inclusion of sexual minorities in social

affairs:

> We try to be ourselves, we know that we are different, and we try to be
> accepted but it's really hard. Sometimes it can seem as though some people
> feel so marginalized that they only want to be around other marginalized
> people. But it's really about fighting for everyone's inclusion, *pour tous et
> chacuns*. In an ideal world, we would live in a free and fair world for
> everyone.[19]

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[19] Translation mine, as for every other quote by Bobby.

This is perhaps a utopian vision of a "queer future" – but it relies, as Dan proposed, on the acknowledgement that striving for inclusions in already existing institutions is a lost cause because "things aren't working the way they are", again pointing to the rift between mainstream LG(BT) politics of assimilation and queer politics. While Thierry also claimed that what "we ought to do is to change the paradigm", Emily proposed that the spectrum of queer demands for social change is quite large.

> I feel like the places that gay comes into conflict with queer is definitely around politics and money and... I view queerness as being very connected to an activist set of values. And by activist I mean this set of lefty spectrum that goes all the way from very mild liberal, kind of like folks who vote for the NDP, to pretty intense anarchist folks. And what I mean by is not the sense of folks who think anarchists are just shit disturbers or black blockers or people who just want to destroy things, but I mean people who are actively working towards this thing, there being no state, in an organized fashion, but no state.

As I show in the final ethnographic chapter of this thesis, this variety in perspectives over how "radical" one's ideology is and one's political practice ought to be can lead to a lack of cohesion amongst the Montreal queer scene, in particular over what a queer utopian future would look like. Imagined ultimate goals behind all the organizing efforts of local queer activists may differ for a variety of reasons, and some of the first factors that can influence this are not only the personal trajectories of activists, but also the influences, roots, and histories that individuals link to the word queer. In Chapter 6, I present this link between an imagined past and a hoped for future. For now, in the following section, I look at queer theory, an undeniable influence to local queer activism. Yet, as I show, local queer organizers and participants often contest this body of work's legitimacy in claiming the word "queer".

Queer theory – Relevance and exclusions:

Thierry, Mathieu, and Céline, three out of the four Francophones I interviewed, were quick to echo some of the concerns I had along with other panelists and audience participants during the "Queer à/to Queer" workshop. As I mentioned before, the term queer does not have the same resonance in French that it does in English, both because of its history as a reappropriated insult, and for its association to a theory that emerged mainly out of American academia and that is still not widely translated nor disseminated outside of Anglo-Saxon academic circles. While other interviewees said they had read a few texts known to belong to the queer canon, Butler and Foucault often being cited for example, Thierry shared that he had never read a full queer theory book, finding many very dense and hard to comprehend. Rather, his knowledge of queer theory came from shorter articles he had read as well as from conversations he had with Christophe, a PhD candidate who was writing a dissertation that made use of such literature. For Thierry, queer theory is often "intellectually marvelous, but politically uninteresting", because it rests on critique, not on the formulation of strategies for change. Yet, echoing other participants quoted above, he noted later during our interview that the political appeal of queer theory is in its ability to unite different minorities and to act as a "political lever" for a common fight.

The concerns raised by Thierry, that queer theory is often too dense and that it frequently lacks the applicability for concrete political action, was mirrored by my observations at a workshop entitled "Queer 101". Organized during Radical Queer Semaine as a two-hour overview of the major queer theorists and theories, it was facilitated by Martin, a person holding a Masters degree in the social sciences and by Dominic, a Masters candidate in sexuality studies. The lecture-style presentation was

followed by an open discussion over the relevance of such material for local initiatives

attempting to address oppression related to sexuality and gender. As some people noted

after the discussion, the title of the workshop was in ways misleading – some attendees

expected an overview of queer as both an identity and as a political movement, in

addition to the presentation given about queer theory.

While more educated members of the audience, like Christophe, were able to

follow and participate in the discussion, numerous others appeared to be lost and

confused. Some participants in fact later told me that they could not follow the

presentation, in spite of their desire to learn more about what they perceived to be

knowledge that could potentially help them develop their analyses and politics. This was

the case for Étienne, who had never read queer theory and who at the time did not hold a

high school degree. In spite of its claims of addressing gender-, race-, and class-based

oppressions, queer theory seems in this case to fail to be accessible to those who, for a

variety of reasons, have not had access to a higher education, or those for whom theory is

not a center of interest. For example, when I asked about her familiarity with queer

theory, Céline said:

> I am not really a theory kind of girl... So, no, I wouldn't say that I am familiar
> with queer theory, I mean, I have read a bit... When I went to the conference,
> you know, last year when Marie-Hélène Boursier [a French activist and
> academic] came to visit, she completely lost me (*laughs*). I felt like I didn't
> understand a thing! (*laughs*) So I would say that no, I am not familiar [...]
> Sometimes when I went to some conferences, personally it wasn't very
> accessible.

Even Bobby, who has been a key member in the local queer scene for many years,

revealed that while he thought queer theory could be for "anyone", he said:

> Basically, I am not much of a reader. I have read Butler to a certain extent...
> There are certain things I wasn't able to understand, or that I had to read
> again, but I really liked it anyway, I learned.

Bobby however proposed that much of his knowledge of queer theory came from zines (Do-It-Yourself small magazine-type publications) created or lent by other members of the community, through discussions with other folks, and from attendance at various events, debates, and talks organized locally. While at times, as during the "Queer 101" workshop, queer theory may estrange certain participants and keep them from learning about issues that can inform their analysis of local and global issues, many local activists are committed to sharing knowledge with others, including academic knowledge. Even towards the end of the "Queer 101" workshop, when Jason eventually voiced that he was having trouble following the theoretical discussion, Christophe volunteered to vulgarize, and thus to render more accessible, some of the material presented. Such an example seems to suggest that many local activists are conscious of the exclusions that can be created when academic language becomes the dominant local mode of expression, and that they attempt to address such power imbalances.

This dedication to accessibility (in many forms) is in fact one of the key features of queer spaces I present in the following chapters. Also, as I discuss further in Chapter 6, queer spaces allow for the convivial and critical exchange of knowledge in many forms and from many sources, and lead many local activists to reach the same critical and political positioning that can be found in many queer theory books. From the typology of queer as an identity, a theory, and a politics that I have presented in this chapter, I have therefore set the stage for my upcoming presentation of queer spaces as where alternative forms of being with one another and critical political perspectives can emerge.

CHAPTER 4 The 'Raison d'Être' of Queer Spaces

> I think the first thing for me seems to be to create a space where people can go and not feel like aliens as opposed to... feeling alienated in a non-queer world. Maybe that's, for me, the most important purpose at this moment. And also, a space that provides support, and where you can find people that provide support. Clearly, [*laughs*] it's also a place where people can meet sexual partners and I guess explore parts of themselves that they don't feel safe exploring elsewhere. Obviously it's a space for people to feel safe. And maybe an important part of it is it seems to be... I mean, I'm sure it's not universal, but there seems to be a respect for the fact that everybody in this community has some pretty extreme vulnerable points. Things that make them feel really bad, or unsafe, or maybe that don't make sense, or that are unexpected... That's accepted. I think there's also shared values, and it's also about building projects, or events, or spaces that respect these values, or support these values. So it's also [...] an environment where people can build stuff together. If it wasn't, I think it would get old quick, if it was just a social space. (Dan)

In the previous chapter I have offered a framework for the term "queer" as an identity, a theory, and as an ideology and politics. I have shown how queer is in these three forms centered on addressing normative systems of power, on providing a framework for critical reflexivity, and on organizing around anti-oppression. The present chapter makes use of this framework and seeks to provide an analysis of the "raison d'être" of queer spaces. While the chapter that follows will show the kinds of practices of place-making that characterize queer spaces, in this chapter I elaborate on the reasons for the creation of these spaces in order to provide answers to the following questions: In addition to some of the ideological gaps between the values promoted in mainstream LG(BT) organizing and queer politics, why do urban gay enclaves like the Montreal gay village and major LG(BT) public demonstrations like the gay pride celebrations fall short of fulfilling the needs, realities, and goals of queer activists? Why do queer organizers

invest so much time and energy to voluntarily organize queer festivals and to create other temporary queer spaces like those of public protests and demonstrations?

In this chapter I first show that the imagined and actual inhabitants of queer spaces are often those who are not or would not be welcome in other sexual minority spaces like gay villages, those who would not have (financial) access to those (commercial) spaces, and those who disagree with the commercialization of queer identities happening in such spaces. I then show that many queer activists come to queer spaces as "survivors" of various kinds of violence and oppression, and/or as outsiders in other social and activist scenes. Queer spaces celebrate those seen as "freaks" and deviants and provide a terrain for some to explore and live gender fluidity and "genderfuck". Yet, beyond this sense of defiance and of play, queer spaces also allow to reflect on, discuss, and create alliances over experiences of oppression that are not necessarily directly experienced by all. In this chapter, I therefore propose that with these purposes in mind, queer spaces allow for new, utopian models of sociality to emerge. Finally, I demonstrate that while not all local activists and participants at queer events act as organizers, the queer spaces collectively created give room for many to contribute with their talents, interests, and expertise, thereby showing that a study of queer spaces reveals that queer activists are deeply involved in a queer theoretical and political project.

The problem(s) with the village:

When asked if they consider the gay village to be a queer space, my interviewees responded almost unanimously that in their mind it is not, at least not inherently. Céline simply answered that the gay village "has not been appropriated by queer [activists]" unless a specific queer event is organized in one of its venues. In this sense, it can be

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assumed that Céline was suggesting that for the village to be queer, "queer people", as those involved in some form of queer activism, have to attend. As an even organizer himself, Bobby mentioned that a few queer parties have been organized in the village over the years and, as is characteristic of most queer events, the majority were benefits for various community groups, organizations, and projects, whether queer or not. For Bobby, these nights often failed to attract a sufficient crowd for them to be established as regular nights, because few people from the scene care to go in the village. "Gloreebox", a yearly event organized these past two years during Radical Queer Semaine, is a notable exception, perhaps because as a fundraiser for the festival and for another chosen cause[20], it manages to interest people who are already mobilized for the rest of the festival.

For Jason and all of my other interviewees, the central issue with the village is that it is a space that now principally serves as a commercial entertainment centre rather than as a space for community development. He said that while there are a lot of

> LGBT people there to look at, it's a commercial space. It's a commercially defined space. Sure, it happens to have this odd urban geographic quality [its history and that of other downtown bars who were shut down before the Olympics]. At the moment, there are so many places in the village that are run for profit and that are run by non-queer people for profit that it functions as obviously, a central space for queers, but a lot of people don't really identify with that area.

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[20] Over the two years it has been run, Gloreebox's revenues were made mainly from donations given at the door and from a quota on alcohol sales given by the manager of Drugstore, a mixed-crowd multi-stories bar complex. The organizer of the event, a writer who works at a local bookstore, was able to obtain the top floor of the bar for free. Last year, half of the money raised was given to VIHsion, a volunteer-run film festival on HIV and AIDS, and this year's half was given to an Algerian organization "who distribute Queer books to Algerians living under censorship", as per the Facebook event's description.

Céline also pointed to the commercial nature of the village, mentioning that there is not really any sense of "collaboration or communication between people" in that neighborhood. Mathieu, who in his work with a local LGBT community organization leads discussion and support groups for youth, recalled that they were kicked out of a restaurant from the village and asked not to come back because during their weekly meeting at the space they were not spending enough money on food and beverages.

This is one of the key factors that has convinced Mathieu of the importance of creating a permanent youth center in the village, a project he has been working on for many years, because young queer and questioning people come to this neighborhood hoping to find a sense of community, yet are often confronted with a "hypersexualized milieu" based in bar-culture many of which are not ready for. Thierry even suggested that beyond the few community groups that cater to the needs of younger people, most LGBT organizations are not welcoming spaces for young people because they often represent the interests of those who sit on their administrative boards, "40 year old white gay men and a few women". For Thierry, the queer scene offers more liberty for younger people's desire to express their sexuality and gender.

For Bobby, more than an issue with the exclusion of younger people in the village is that this space does not "give room for the *bouillonnement*[21] of ideas". As per the critique that mainstream LG(BT) organizing responds to the needs of the most privileged that I identified in the previous chapter, Jason argues that "the village exists primarily for the commercial and sexual behaviors of gay men", an observation that was echoed by Bobby. The village is for many a space that lacks diversity in many forms, and most of

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[21]*Boiling/bubbling* of ideas.

my interviewees said that it was not very welcoming for women and for trans people, in addition to being a white-centric space where ethnic diversity is often exoticized. Jason moreover emphasized that there is not a lot of cultural diversity in terms of business management, saying "most everywhere is owned by white Quebecers".

Many local queer activists are critical of the practices and of the politics of business owners of the village. The Chambre de commerce gaie du Québec, for example, is often criticized for protecting the interests of the private sector with no regards for LGBT communities or for other marginalized populations. As a striking example, the Alliance des résidants et commerçants de Ville-Marie, a group representing many business owners and residents of the downtown area, including the gay Village, issued a petition at the end of 2011 asking for increased security measures in the form of more police presence in the village[22], due to what they perceived as an increased climate of violence that could hurt the economy of the gay village and more generally gay tourism in the city. Its creators portrayed this petition as a response to incidences of violence, like physical assaults, theft, and intimidation that targeted business owners and clients of the gay village. One of the spokespersons for this initiative, fetish storeowner Ghislain Rousseau, however made it clear that the petition targeted very specific undesirable "inhabitants" of the public space of the village, like homeless people, sex workers, drug users, and drug dealers, whom he even called "cockroaches"[23] during an interview. Moreover, in spite of the fall 2011 ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada allowing for safe injection sites to be opened around the country, another similar group called the

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[22] http://www.fugues.com/main.cfm?l=fr&p=100_article&article_ID=18612

[23] http://blogs.montrealgazette.com/2011/12/19/violence-in-montreals-gay-village-has-locals-up-in-arms-over-safety-and-future-of-gay-tourism/

Coalition des associations de résidents de Ville-Marie issued a letter at the end of 2011[24]

to openly oppose such a space to open in the downtown area, although many community

organizations and shelters who offer services to street people and injection drug users are

located in the downtown core[25]. Many queer activists are very critical of what they call

the "(in)justice" system, and tend to support community-based initiatives while opposing

reliance on police intervention as a viable solution to problems of violence and other

social issues that can happen within and outside of LGBT and queer communities.

      Although my interview with Emily happened months before the above events, she

observed that there is a general understanding amongst queer activists that the village

exists for the interests and needs of a specific few:

> The village is a space that has, in a lot of ways, sold out. It has a businessmen association and they want to clean up their space and keep it clean. Queers are interested in cruising in public space, and whether they are living off or have lived off sex work, that comes in opposition with a lot of […] gainfully employed, really kind of normal gay people who want their neighborhoods to be clean, and safe. […] I think that the village *can* be a queer space, but I think that there's a lot of ways in which the village is not welcoming to queers, because it's not welcoming to like, the full breadth and reality of queer lifestyles.

I interpret Emily's comments on "queer lifestyles" to refer not only to the realities of

people who self-identify as queer, but also of those who, as I discussed in the previous

chapter, are seen as sexual and gender deviants and who might also defy other systems of

norms. As I show in the following chapter, queer spaces attempt to keep in mind the

realities and issues faced by those "deviants", both because organizers attempt to make

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[24] http://www.arqsm.ca/Portals/3/Communiqué%20de%20presse%20Coalition%202011-12-16.pdf

[25] http://www.2bmag.com/2012/01/an-injection-of-reality-safe-injection-sites-make-sense-6879

such spaces as safe and accessible as possible, but also because they encourage the political representation of a large range of individuals and groups.

Even though I further explore this representation in Chapter 6, a relevant example of the gap perceived by many activists between the politics of safety asserted in the gay village that I outlined above, and those promoted in queer spaces, is the opening panel of the 2012 edition of Radical Queer Semaine, entitled "Queer In/Justice: Opening panel on criminalizations affecting queer people". This event was an attempt to strategize around the federal government's Omnibus Crime Bill C-10, and featured presentations from members of the Association Québécoise pour la promotion de la santé des personnes utilisatrices de drogues (AQPSUD), from the Coalition des organismes communautaires Québécois de lutte contre le SIDA (COCQ-sida), from Action Santé Travesties et Transsexuelles du Québec (ASTT(e)Q) and from Arc-en-Ciel d'Afrique, a community organization for the health and well-being of LGBT people from the African and Caribbean diaspora. This panel, like many events organized during Radical Queer Semaine, PerversCité, and TRIGGER, served the function of creating a space of exchange to encourage alliances between different marginalized groups, but also to share experiences and knowledge about different realities.

For Bobby, this dedication to offer "*éducation populaire*"[26] is one of the key differences between the village and queer spaces:

> I think that queer [activists] are not very attracted by the village in and of itself, I think that's a fact. If you ask a lot of queer people, at least in my community, [they will say] the village is cool, yes, but it's not a space where you will go to get back to your roots, or to educate yourself.

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[26] Popular education

Many local activists indeed think that public gatherings and demonstrations like those of

the Gay Pride celebrations have lost this connection to the roots and history of LGBT

movements, and tend to have become a succession of public and private parties with little

room for community reflection and engagement. This is one of the central reasons for the

organization of PerversCité, held at the same time as DiversCité, the mainstream pride

festivities. While many venues are used for the queer festival, when I did fieldwork a full

weekend of workshops was offered at a community space just off Sainte-Catherine Street

in the village, giving an opportunity for some to attend both events but also, I believe, to

reclaim the village as a space that has political potential. For the pride parade,

PerversCité organizers encouraged attendees to "crash" the march and to protest against

Israeli Apartheid. Although some local activists preferred to march with a local trans

support organization, many (also, or solely) gathered under the banner of Queers Against

Israeli Apartheid (QAIA). I will discuss examples like QIAI further in Chapter 6, but for

now it serves to show that queer activists are not only interested in creating queer spaces

like those found at the venues where workshops and other events are held, but also to

"queer" public space through protest, for example. This was also partly why PolitiQ

decided to go to the G20 summit in 2010 in Toronto – the mass weekend of

demonstration was a major anti-capitalist protest, and PolitiQ wanted not only to be part

of what they saw as a large anti-oppression-centered gathering, but also to make queer

issues and realities visible within that larger public space of protest (both figuratively in

terms of the group's demands, and literally through the strategy of "pink blocking").

In this section of this chapter on the raisons d'être of queer spaces, I have

attempted to show why urban gay enclaves like the Montreal gay village fail to address

the needs of queer activists, and why the politics that such a commerce-focused neighborhood promotes clash with queer politics. In the following section, I discuss how many queer activists come to queer spaces as "survivors" of various kinds of violence and abuse – but unlike the mainstream LB(BT) movement's reliance on a discourse of rights and of inclusion and tolerance to counter such violence, queer activists desire to create spaces where such experiences can be shared and worked through, and where alternative, community-centered responses can be imagined. In order to view survivorship not as victimhood, but as resilience, I briefly make use of Gerald Robert Vizenor's concept of "survivance"[27], introduced in 1994 his work "Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance".

Survivance:

"Survival" is a term that came back frequently during interviews, and one that permeated my experiences with queer activists and organizers. While it is often assumed that Montreal and other North American cities are safe havens for "sexual minorities", experiences of violence, abuse, and harassment, whether identified to be directly or solely related to sexuality and/or gender, are often discussed within queer spaces. TRIGGER Festival indeed saw its mandate to center on the idea of the "queer survivor", as their Facebook page for the 2010 edition made explicit:

> A militantly unapologetic group of performers, facilitators, speakers, musicians and activists will transform, evoke and stimulate with outrageous interactive performances reclaiming the notion of the queer survivor through art as activism and activism as art.
> TRIGGER identifies the queer survivor in relation to individual experiences of: refugee queers, sexually assaulted queers, disordered queers, diagnosed

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[27] A special thanks to Sally Cole, who pointed out Vizenor's "survivance" as a possible concept to use when thinking of "queer survival".

queers, queers of colour, poor queers, fat queers, struggling queers, disabled queers, abused queers, working queers, anti-capitalist queers, homeless queers, trans identified queers, gender non-conforming queers, questioning queers and unstable queers. TRIGGER celebrates the strength of each queer within our community and their ability to survive.
TRIGGER brings together performers, artists, activists and facilitators to address and confront shared experiences of violence, oppression and marginalization.

During TRIGGER's opening night, performers shared their stories of survival through performance pieces, spoken word, dance, and song – some of the artistic pieces for example addressing experiences of sexual violence, other the realities of being considered a "fat" person of color living in an environment where thin, white bodies are privileged. This festival aimed to create a space for survivors to discuss and process such experiences of violence, oppression and marginalization, in an attempt to empower attendees by creating opportunities to grieve, but also to share and develop strategies to increase both safety and wellbeing in queer communities.

Some of the Montreal-based activists I interviewed revealed that experiences of violence and marginalization were what led them to search for and to create queer spaces. For Bobby, who grew up in a remote rural area of Quebec, moving to Montreal at the age of eighteen was in part the result of a desire to leave "a very close-minded environment, [...] a small town environment where gays and people of color are made invisible" and where he faced violence and intimidation. He says he experienced "sexual repression" there, as he could not envision expressing his desires for "a sexuality with someone of the same sex". Even upon moving to Montreal, it took a long time before he met individuals he was interested in, because in the gay community he felt "marginalized". However, he said that in meeting people who were actively involved in local activism he found a place

for himself and an opportunity to contribute his creative skills in the organization of

Queer É Action, the festival that preceded the organization of Radical Queer Semaine.

> That's why when I started to discover this queer world, there was just this
> sense of relief because I saw that there were many other [...] marginalized
> people. All of society's monsters. Realities that we don't dare speak of
> because... they don't fit the mold, the reality that the majority of people live.

Similarly, Jason explained that even though his hometown was not known as a

homophobic city, he moved to Montreal because he was "fairly severely verbally bashed"

in the small Canadian city he grew up in, also recalling two near-fatal gay bashings

around the time he left.

> In my second year [of university] I was harassed on campus by a complete
> stranger in the most operatically weird way... Someone burst out of a
> university residence wielding a broom, this guy, yelling every single
> homophobic epithet in the book and threatening to sodomize me with the
> broomstick.

   Upon moving to Montreal, he "spent a couple of years [...] being the token fag in

other scenes [and] in other groups" before becoming involved in the queer community.

At thirty years old, after ten years in the city, he said that he decided to remain an active

participant in the local activist scene in part because of his earlier experiences of violence.

> The main motivation for sure, for remaining as active in the queer community,
> is definitely linked to surviving homophobic violence. It's definitely linked to
> the creation of a community in which there can be concerted responses to
> homophobic violence.

This is not to suggest a dichotomy between homophobic "straight" space and safe queer

space, but rather to show that in queer spaces activists respond to this violence through

support and preventative measures, as well as through strategizing for social change.

Jason also added that the social connection created with others and the support given is

another important voucher of engagement. What leads people to get involved is the search for "[a] social connectedness, and finding other marginalized people. Because you have to be weird and you have to have been the survivor of some kind of oppression and exclusion in order to be giving your spare time to these kinds of things".

If the experiences of queer activists I outline here are admittedly widely different from those of the Native American cultures described in "Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance" (1994), Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance can be useful in thinking of queer activists' focus on survival as a term to describe the experiences they have as marginalized people in some aspects of their lives. Being a "survivor" might rely too much on victimhood, in Vizenor's view – as a contrast, "survivance" is not only a response to adversity, it is "resistance" and "a standpoint, a worldview, and a presence" that allows to go beyond narratives of "dominance and victimry" (Vizenor and Lee, 1999, p.93). I believe that queer activists' view of systems of oppression is concordant with Vizenor's concept of survivance, as they both attempt to eschew the binary of dominance/victimry and also because they situate the experience of violence and the response to this experience in a direct relationship. As Jason eloquently expressed in the quote that introduced the previous chapter, queer acknowledges and conceptualizes systems of oppression, but it is also the " social, moral, artistic, economic, [and] political" response to this experience.

Freaks who own it:

If the examples of experiences of homophobic violence and of other forms of violence I have outlined above are part of the personal narratives of many of my interviewees, others seem to have struggled "at their own hands" and to have reached out

to queer activism at a later age. Dan for example was in a long term, and long distance heterosexual relationship with a man, and struggled to address an emerging attraction to women for a long time before the relationship ended when he was thirty-one. He recalled that very shortly after the break up, he decided to go to a queer event: "ten days later, I was at Radical Queer Semaine", he said, having read about the event through a "queerish event guide". While a challenging and, at times, overwhelming space to be in, the festival allowed Dan to reflect on his gender identity.

> So that was the other mind-blowing thing for me at RQS, where they showed that video, and there was that Vietnamese person who said "I had a sex change to male" [and who later embraced a non-binary identity], and I realized that [...] maybe I feel I have a lot in common with that.

For Dan, queer settings – in particular gatherings focused on socializing – have often been a source of anxiety. Yet, queer events and spaces seem to help process some of the pain associated with questioning his sexuality and gender identity, as the following exchange shows:

> -Clearly there is this queer community and I'm trying to find parts of it that I'm comfortable in and I realize that, a lot of these queer gatherings are not super comfortable. Most of them are not super comfortable for me, they're still stressful, but they have a level of comfort and they're becoming more comfortable. And I actually realized, a month or two ago, that I actually needed to spend more time in queer environments because that was probably the only way I was going to start feeling positive about being queer. And it's true, it has made me more comfortable with the whole idea. Maybe the queer community is becoming more important for me because I'm starting to feel comfortable in it, and because since I'm starting to feel comfortable in it I can start to feel part of it and it makes me feel better about myself as a queer person. And I guess [...] I didn't really realize until September, actually it's really disturbing for me, it was hard to see it as a positive thing...
> - To be queer?
> - Yeah, especially being sexually attracted to women was such a headache.

Beyond the discomfort some people may feel with their desires and with the way they embody gender, Emily saw queer activism and people's involvement organizing queer events and creating queer spaces as a way to find a place in the local scene for many who, like Dan, find social interactions uneasy.

> The work that people are doing... for a lot of people their work is the way that they relate to others [...]. Most of us, a lot of people who end up in alternative scenes, ended up here because they are outsiders. They were outsiders, maybe they feel like they were outsiders as children, or teens, or young adults. Maybe it was because of their politics, or the way they looked, or the way they felt or acted [...]. But they were weirdoes. And weirdoes get together. And you put a bunch of weirdoes together, and weird shit happens [*laughs*]. And you put together a group of ten outsiders, and I will bet you five bucks that nine out of those ten outsiders... it's like a *trauma-rama fest*. They are socially dysfunctional people who had a rough time.

As the next chapter shows, the practices of place-making and in particular the attempt to create queer "safe(r) spaces", often stem from the acknowledgement that the inhabitants of queers spaces may have indeed faced a lot of trauma and might feel vulnerable in various social situations. For Emily, being outsiders, or feeling marginalized because of various personal or social characteristics, in particular related to sexuality and gender, thus serves for many as an impetus for community involvement and for the development of "queer politics". As she proposed:

> People's politics develop in different ways and people have different perspectives that they are coming from. And I think that people's politics respond to [...] the oppressions that they face. You know, I experience this... form of sadness, or this form of oppression or these challenges in my life that direct me. I go as far as... how I am. [...] Queer politics speak directly to me because it was about figuring out my own sexuality and my own [...] ways in which I interact with other human beings and who I'm attracted to as friends and as lovers and as a community. [...] Different people come to it in different ways.

For Bobby, the Montreal queer scene attempts to be inclusive of those "who have experienced repression because of their sexuality, and those who are fighting for them", like trans people, "pédés" (fags), "gouines" (dykes) and "séropos" (HIV positive people) – for him, this common experience of repression leads people to "wan[t] to get together and to create something". For Céline, what are created are *spaces* that "respond to the needs of those who don't feel safe in most places. Queer spaces can also respond to the needs of other minority groups (or to an overlapping sense of belonging to multiple groups), like "people who are against a consumerist society, who are critical of the political climate in which we are [...], people with leftist political opinions, anarchists, *les marginaux* and those who are marginalized" – all people and/or groups that Bobby called with affection the *bibites*[28] of society. For Céline, these people can often be lonely and need to create bonds with others, and queer spaces and events are an answer to such needs.

Gender play – Gender fucking, fucking gender:

In addition to the common experience of being outsiders outlined above, Dan added that many forms of "deviance" are celebrated in the queer scene, unlike in other community and activist groups "who really just wan[t] to be normal". Dan for example recalled the pride parade during PerversCité in which two queer contingents participated. The first marched in support of a local community organization of trans people who are sometimes considered to have normative views on gender, and the other was the Queers

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[28] Bibite is used in French in its literal meaning to refer to insects, but in this context can be translated as "monsters".

Against Israeli Apartheid group I mentioned earlier. Dan made the following distinction

between these two groups:

> For me it was very striking when I went to the pride parade. We started with
> [this organization] who really just wanted to be normal. I really sympathize
> with their desire to be normal and to really be taken for the gender of their
> choice [...]. And then I went to the Queers Against Apartheid and they're a
> bunch of freaks. They're like, "we're freaks and we love it, and it's sexy".
> And they're not gender neutral, they're playing with gender in a fierce way.
> There is something really fierce about it, which really appeals to me [...]. The
> fierce part is the part that makes it sexy to me. [...] Queer is really as opposed
> to normal, as opposed to blending in. I guess, a refusal to blend in. That's a
> really strong thing, to refuse to blend in. And maybe that's part of the name
> "queer".

This idea of fierceness in "gender play", of purposefully blurring gender lines and of

experimenting with gender, is an important aspect of local queer organizing[29]. For

example during Radical Queer Semaine, a group of about ten participants (including

myself) dressed in drag and skated at the Atrium, an indoor skating rink in an event they

called "Drag and Skating". The event was not only an occasion to subvert gender norms

in public (the Atrium is known as a "family-friendly space"), but also a gesture of support

for Johnny Weir, the American figure skater that sports commentators and other

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[29] Of course, queer spaces are often a refuge for people who are perceived and read as
gender deviants by "the general public" even though this is not how they think of
themselves – I want to emphasize that I do not mean to suggest that any person who
challenges heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions of gender and sexuality is
inherently "playing with gender". Gender identity and presentation can be a far from
frivolous matter for many people, in particular for some trans people, who are often seen
as the spoke-people of a "gender revolution", regardless of how they feel about their
gender identity. During the workshop called "Find your Normativity" that I co-facilitated
during Radical Queer Semaine, this was something me and other trans people present had
to explain to a cis person who, although I believe had good intentions, suggested that
trans people were revolutionary gender-benders. Some trans people might consider
themselves as such, but others might feel that while they do not identify with the gender
they were assigned at birth, their current gender identity is aligned with the gender binary
and thus, no more or no less revolutionary than a cis person's.

competitors had bashed in the media for what they saw as his effeminacy[30]. The group of

"drag and skaters" distributed flyers that explained to other people at the arena the reason

for the public demonstration and that invited them to also show their support for Weir.

Gender play falls into a description of queer not only as a critical reflection of the

man-woman, masculine-feminine, hetero-homo binaries, but also as an embodiment of

the arbitrariness of gender and sexual norms:

> For me, queer is a form of identity deconstruction. For me, it was a lot of
> reflection on, am I gay because I am attracted to men, am I only gay? Am I
> bisexual? It bothered me to have to classify myself in that way [...]. After
> having pushed my reflections on sexuality in that way [...], for me it is
> imperative to play with gender, to push reflections in so-called "normal"
> society... To bring about acceptance. For some people it can be shocking!
> (Bobby)

> Queer is actually a big enough term so that I can actually take that label and
> not have to say, oh, I can't deal with this part. And I guess an important part
> of it is not just about sexual orientation but it's really about gender flexibility
> and just like, all over the place gender. (Dan)

These reflections and experiments on the possible fluidity of gender and sexuality

however go beyond play, and potentially have tangible implications within the queer

scene, as Emily argued:

> There's definitely lots of folks who I know who identify as queer but who
> don't identify as homos. (...) The great thing about queer, [...] it's a much
> broader umbrella. I [...] know people who were homos for a really long time
> and that was something that was, like, the center of their world, and who
> because of [social and/or medical gender] transition aren't really homos
> anymore in a lot of sense but because of the way the queer community works,
> they're still part of the queer community. [...] I mean, like, *I* have a boyfriend.
> Now at the age of 30 I'm dating Evelyn, but I'm more in this idea of being

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http://montreal.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20100222/mtl_rds_complaint100222/20
100222/?hub=MontrealHome

queer, it gives me the freedom of being somebody who can say that I have a boyfriend within the queer community. And being like "and her name is Evelyn" as this qualifier and no one even blinks. There's no knowledge about whether I'm talking about a cisgender or a trans man, or someone who is genderqueer, or even someone who identifies as a cisgender woman who just prefers to be someone's boyfriend [...]. But no one even blinks. I think queer within our community is this really great word that has allowed people to be like... they don't need to sit there and explain forever. I think that people are getting more able to just like... take that word for it and let you do whatever you want. There seems to be a lot more leeway to move within it and not necessarily to really have to... have confines.

It therefore seems like it is understood that gender and sexuality are not always what they seem in queer spaces. Such spaces can as such accommodate many people whose identities and gender presentations would either be erased or condemned in other settings, and some of the strategies put in place to encourage this are outlined in the next chapter.

Céline likewise proposed that other people's sexual orientation and gender identification is not always known, or necessary to be known, in queer spaces. For her, queer spaces "are for LGBT people [...] but we do say that they are still open to heterosexual people or any other kind of orientation"; she also added that heterosexual-identified people do not always feel very welcome in more mainstream LG(BT) movements, but that queer spaces would, at least in principle, welcome them. Céline's hypothesis seems to have been right in the case of Radical Queer Semaine; indeed, during the 2011 edition of the festival, I witnessed the coming out of self-identified "hetero-queers" during that year's "Find your normativity" workshop. These people, who saw themselves as cisgender and as heterosexual, were attracted to queer spaces for the general welcoming and accepting "ambiance" that characterized them, but also because they adhered to queer politics. Bobby also mentioned during our interview that in his

experiences, "straight people" often find it incredible to be in a queer space – but this experience usually is that of people who adhere to queer politics:

> In general, it's people who are *conscientisés* [politicized] about our causes. Even straight people [...], people who are open minded. [...]. I have had comments before, of "oh, but I'm not gay, I won't go to your event". Well fuck! It's an event of queer *politics*, we're *fighting* for [things], we want to do radical actions because, fuck... we've had enough!

While many people's involvement as activists and participants in the queer scene seem to stem from their own experiences of oppression and survival/survivance and of their desires for sexual and gender "freedom", others therefore decide to become active because they adhere to the politics. Since not everyone who decides to get involved as an activist does so out of such negative experiences, a general understanding amongst interviewees was that queer spaces can be shared by people directly concerned by specific issues *and* by their allies, those who stand and organize in solidarity. While Jason originally proposed during our interview that people do not chose their categories of belonging, he later refined his position when discussing why some people decide to get involved in more radical forms of organizing to belong. Referring to a middle-aged gay man who, in Jason's terms, used to be a key figure in local activism but is no longer politically active, he said:

> I think "belonging", I was thinking [before] more in terms of the context of label, what kind of tribe you belong to. In terms of active belonging, sure, there is a difference. I think that there is *appartenance*, and then there is *appartenance engagée*, and I think that those are different for sure. So I think in the grand scheme of things sociologically this middle age consultant is a queer person but not in the *engagée* sense. So [...] there's an active component of belonging, but there's a limit to how much power you have over what you were deemed to belong to. For a lot of people this guy no longer belongs to the queer community because he sold out and moved on and doesn't do gay shit anymore. [...] There are the two different meanings of the word belonging, you know.

Interestingly, Jason pushed his analysis further, discussing how being an active part of an activist scene also serves as validation of one's belonging. Political involvement, what he calls *appartenance engagée*, also serves to reinforce belonging, *appartenance*.

> They [queer communities/scenes] exist to help each other in times of need but they also merely exist to validate [one's] belonging in that community. And they could just do that. There's nothing forcing Qteam [*a local activist group*] to give the money from their benefit to the Immigrant Worker Centre... And nothing forcing people to show up at this or that really lame party. Because, "it wasn't even that fun", but going to it and *doing* it gets you validation. And so it's a curious behavior of the queer community, that a lot of the things that happen to get you validation in that community actually can have an impact outside of it. That makes it very different from a lot of communitarian [...] projects, which only exist to help themselves.

As Chapter 6 addresses in more detail, queer activists hence do more than solely attempt to create spaces for community-building and for networking; they also value the process of creating these spaces and see them as springboards for political reflection and action that incorporates an understanding of intersectionality and of the importance of solidarity work. Participation and contribution is key to one's feelings of belonging, but as I show in the last section of this chapter *appartenance engagée* can take multiple forms. As this thesis attempts to show more globally, participants' and organizers' involvement usually serves a dual purpose, to build alternative socio-affective models of support and care as I show in the following section, and to strategize around political issues that are relevant to a queer ideology, as I briefly tackle in the final section of this chapter and which I expand on in the final ethnographic chapter of this thesis.

Lovers, friends, and allies:

For many participants in the local scene, the community-building aspect of queer

activism can address, in addition to the violence and exclusion addressed in previous

sections, the rejection of and estrangement from family. For Dan, the queer scene can

help bridge gaps that are not fulfilled by biological families, leading many to speak of

their queer networks as their "chosen families", a term quite common in the queer scene.

> Maybe they [one's biological family] can't really understand what it's like [to
> be queer], and how it colors all of your social interactions. [...] Maybe the
> family also has all of these nurturing and taking care of each other aspects,
> and physical affection, that I now see you can find in non-biological families,
> and also outside of the sexual realm.

The "sexual realm" is, however, an important aspect of why queers and those interested

in queer politics come together. Jason proposed it complements other needs fulfilled in

queer spaces, as in other community spaces.

> Like all communities it is based on the need for safety, the need for a
> common language, and the need for... sex, as a generalization. Pleasure.
> Connection. The queer community takes on the characteristics, markers, and
> means that are peculiar to it, as a self-defined community of sexual others.
> But all communities have the same basic purpose... Protection, language, and
> pleasure.

Mathieu also saw the connections and networks created between individuals to be a

key aspect of local organizing. When asked about what the local activist scene

represented for him, he answered, laughing: "Well, first, it's about people", and added:

> All kinds of networks, I would say socio-sexual networks to a certain extent.
> People who sleep together, people who organize together, people who share
> spaces, who run into one another. Who have all kinds of expertise... it can be
> a community of support and of help without people all knowing each other.
> [...] But it's really about having a space for people to meet, that's the goal too,
> for people to meet. So there's a lot of *rencontres* happening [...] and that's
> what's making the community go forward, because people talk to each other,
> see other, fuck each other.

For Emily, too, queer spaces serve the purpose of "getting laid", but the connections

created between people take on a form that contrast with "traditional" models of sexuality.

> [You] create spaces where you're like, okay, gay people come here, you can
> be in this room and there will be all gay people there. So amongst these
> people, you will find someone to have sex with. [...] I sought out a gay
> community because I wanted to have sex with other women [*laughs*]. That
> was my primary motivation, it was to meet people who met my sexual desire.
> It really turns the way that you organize your world upside down because the
> rest of the world really is structured around heterosexual desire. It's the basis
> of how families are built, and the family is the basis of how the structure of
> the world works.

Dan also identified this alternative configuration of human relations, and of the nexus of

social units, as a key aspect of queer organizing.

> The sex is binding the community because there's a lot of open casual sex
> going on, [and of] polyamory. Sometimes I think that, that's really essential
> to the community, people don't just pair up and go off on their own. It's a
> really important part of the sharing and networking, building a support
> network, helping each other out. I'm really suspicious of this nuclear family
> thing where everybody just goes off on their own to raise their kids and
> disconnect from each other.

Not all relationships created and developed in queer spaces are romantic or sexual

in nature, however, and the following chapter will emphasize some of the implicit

strategies that are implemented at queer events, for example to encourage newcomers to

feel welcome at queer spaces. It will also show the tactics put in place by organizers to

promote a climate of safety and of inclusivity and to encourage networking and the

development of supportive environments. Thierry pointed out that the creation of queer

spaces, with the alternative models of sociality I am portraying in this thesis, can often be

a liberating, if overwhelming experience for individuals who attended festivals like

Radical Queer Semaine for the first time. He referred to the "post-RQS depression" many

individuals, in particular younger and less experienced activists and participants, feel

once a temporary queer space like that which is created for ten days during Radical Queer

Semaine is dismantled.

> It's *bouleversant* [deeply moving] sometimes because... to see a world in front of you, to experience a world that you may have sometimes dreamed of or imagined, but that doesn't exist anywhere and that cannot exist beyond the moment it is experienced… Because after we return to the world as minorities. It's very overwhelming for a lot of people, to be in large numbers, with the seduction and erotic games that we can imagine in such a space. It's a unique experience, to create that world we imagine and to make it evolve.

This is something that I can relate to, as I myself felt sadness and, in some ways,

hopelessness after doing fieldwork during Radical Queer Semaine, which represented my

first extended experience organizing a queer event and being an active participant in a

queer space. This period of depression can of course be partly attributed to exhaustion

from a busy schedule around the time of the festival that included fieldwork, organizing,

but also working two part time jobs while taking a graduate course load. Yet I believe

that, as Thierry suggested, the "return to reality" that followed Radical Queer Semaine

was quite brutal in many ways. During the festival I spent between six and over fourteen

hours daily at the main venue were the festival was held or in the presence of other

activists when events were taking place elsewhere. This time was spent doing a variety of

things, from for example attending insightful and sometimes challenging workshops, to

watching queer short films, to giving a hand to the food committee by cutting up some

vegetables for a vegan stew that I later shared with strangers and new acquaintances, to

volunteering as an active listener, and to dancing all night long at some of the parties

organized during the week including the closing celebrations, the Monster Ball, where

my partner kissed me for the first time. My time at the festival represented my first

extended experience spending the majority of my time over a period of ten days amongst other like-minded people, where, as Emily proposed in a quote I reported above, I did not have to "sit there and explain forever" my politics, my gender, or my sexuality. In this sense, Radical Queer Semaine, and in similar ways the other events that I selected as field sites for this project, were temporary utopian spaces I could only have dreamed of, to echo Thierry.

Contributing:

The creation of safety nets, and of a pool of supportive others, is what leads many activists to get involved in queer activism. The utopic, alternative socio-affective models that characterize queer spaces, when compared to "how the structure of the world works" as Emily proposed, also involve for Jason the significance given to the different types of contributions from organizers and participants. Such involvement can take the form of moral support, but can also translate into concerted community responses to the systemic oppression lived by individuals and groups alike. Jason referred to the case of Elias Dean[31] as an example of how queer activists will, through fundraising and other means of mobilization like public demonstrations, help an individual in their community who is themselves attempting to "do something for the greater good". Elias is a local trans man who decided to launch a legal challenge against the Quebec Registrar of Civil Status and its requirements over legal name and gender marker change for trans-identified people[32]. A large part of the profits that were made during the fundraising nights and parties of

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[31] http://eliasdeanchallenge.wordpress.com/

[32] For more details on the requirements of the Quebec Registrar of Civil Status over legal gender and names change, see the online version of the guide "Taking Charge" (ASTT(e)Q, 2011) at http://santetranshealth.org/jemengage/en/guide-contents/

Radical Queer Semaine's 2011 edition were donated to Elias to help him cover his legal

fees. For Jason, the queer scene exists for

> Mutual benefits, in terms of... yeah, in terms of helping each other out. It is a really big one I mean, what we're seeing now with our friend Elias who needs to take the fucking État Civil to court over their requirements for gender and name change. That's an example of what a community should do for their own members... People respond, when people who are positive or neutral within their communities ask for help. Like with most communities, whether they are religious of cultural, or identity-based, or professional communities, even, there usually is some kind of mutual aid society. So you get together because there is power in numbers and because.... I mean in one way or another the problems of the world are because someone's side is being silenced, somehow confined, controlled, hurt. And those things never change in the world, there's always somebody getting fucked over. So most communities exist to [...] respond when a member of their own are suffering one of those things.

For Bobby, community responses of this kind stem out of the creation of queer spaces.

He said that the queer scene "brings together an enormous [...] amount of people, it's

impressive to see [...] that people really want a queer space in Montreal. A community

that supports itself and that really wants to help itself so that things change". Further

showing that many types of contributions exist, Bobby said:

> People who [get] things done [...] whether it's raising money, or making dialogue, or making friends, or getting people to do things that you think are beneficial, whether it's performing or raising money, or getting out in public... [They] are often not perceived as being that important in the mainstream world. But that does affect how you are perceived in th[e queer] community.

Bobby's sense of belonging, of *appartenance*, "even if it's not written anywhere, if it's

not *officialisé*", depends on his involvement - even if at times, his role is as a participant

rather than as an organizer, as is demonstrated in the following exchange.

> -I consider I contribute to the construction of projects. So I contribute time, I contribute *main d'oeuvre* [labor-power], I look for and find ideas. I deejay, I

find people to put up art. I put together exhibits. I consider I do my part, and that I have the desire to contribute.
-So being involved and committed is very important?
-Very important. But there were moments when I was busier, in my life, so I did not give as much time.
-Did that change your sense of belonging?
-No, like, sometimes, there are conflicts [...] and I take some space, but I can come back and get involved again anytime.

Jason however considered that engagement in the local scene was a necessary condition for belonging, which led some people to say that "because you're not picking up the microphone or making the zine you are not valued", to which he responds "Well you're not doing anything valuable for your community, so why should you be valued? All communities have active and passive participants."

This view that a sense of belonging is constructed, even deserved, by being an active participant, what Jason coined *appartenance engagée,* was mentioned by many of my interviewees. Involvement is, however, on a voluntary basis, and many of the people I saw during fieldwork solely participated by attending events. Yet, I would argue that through attending queer events, and by being in a queer space, one contributes to its creation. In that vein, Thierry said that queer events indeed represent opportunities for people to contribute their skills in a variety of ways, and to focus their activism on what they enjoy doing. People's involvement benefits the community as much as it benefits the individual, in his view, and this also applies to people who come to socialize only:

> That's another thing I love about Radical Queer Semaine, to create a space where we can allow people to fulfill themselves in what they enjoy doing. So it can be arts, it can be politics, it can be socializing [...] In any case, [...] in the end it can transform them, through meeting others, and at the same time, it's a collective transformation. It's a collective benefit, all of these people meeting [... and] it gives a lot of dynamism to the community. For individuals and for the group.

As mentioned before, for some individuals for whom social settings are sources of

anxiety, contributing one's skills can be a way to ease tensions, as was the case for Dan.

> So I'm not comfortable in social settings, but if I'm more in the context of building something or creating something, then I'm less stressed or I'm more comfortable because we're focusing on the goal and the project versus who we are socially. And so I've worked on a lot of team projects [...], they make me feel good about myself and more comfortable with people and I build connections with people that way.

The types of projects taken on and the (queer) goals they tackle will be explored in

Chapter 6, but for now it is important to mention that they are political in nature.

For Thierry, the creation of queer spaces and of the alternative, utopian forms of

sociality I introduce in this chapter ought to translate into political action. He as

such acknowledged that there is a dual role to queer spaces, and that "of course, we

have to create spaces where we can be free, and free to be ourselves, but also where

we are not naïve about everyday problems". In this chapter, I have highlighted the

ways in which queer spaces are seen by queer activists as alternatives to the gay

village, and how they allow individuals to not only work through experiences of

violence and of ostracization, but to celebrate difference and deviance. I have also

started to define the alternative models of sociality I see as emerging through the

creation of queer spaces, and the actual strategies that such an emergence requires

are at the heart of the following chapter. Finally, I have also briefly tackled how

queer spaces are political spaces, and the final ethnographic chapter of this thesis

will elaborate on the critical approaches to social issues that I witnessed in queer

space, and on the stratagems for their resolution that are imagined and applied by

queer activists.

CHAPTER 5 Identifying and Creating Queer Spaces

In the first ethnographic chapter of this thesis, I defined the word queer as an identity, a theory, and a political ideology focused on anti-normativity, critical reflexivity, and anti-oppression. In the following chapter, I applied this queer framework to analyze the raison d'être of queer spaces. In the present chapter, I discuss queer spaces more specifically, focusing on the spaces the queer activists I interviewed consider to be queer, and on the strategies and practices they deploy to "queer" space. This discussion should show a practical dimension to the ideological queer that is imagined by queer activists of Montreal, and should reveal how queer as anti-oppression translates into a reflexive process through which queer organizers create queer spaces. In this chapter I therefore hope to show what I mean when I argue that queer spaces represent utopian forms of sociality, by focusing on the implicit and explicit practices put in place in queer spaces.

First, I offer an overview of the spaces that the activists I interviewed identify as queer, highlighting the features that grant them this classification and highlighting that the "political charge" of a space, and the militant commitments of those organizing events in them, are two key feature of such spaces in my interviewees' minds. I also discuss some of the difficulties that queer organizers face when attempting to find spaces that will welcome their events, and show the struggles that come with the creation of temporary queer spaces of activism. I then address the strategies of place-making that queer the spaces where specific events are held, first introducing some of the strategies employed to physically and material "queer" space. I then discuss the importance of the concept of "safe(r)" space, before highlighting some of the strategies implemented to

increase safety, taking the example of "guidelines of communication". Finally, I discuss

the concept of "accessibility" (financial, physical, and linguistic), and show how the

implicit and explicit tactics of place-making that characterize queer spaces show an

applied and practical dimension to the political ideological queer I have identified in

Chapter 3, and a tangible "emplacement" of the "raison d'être" I identified in Chapter 4.

Queer spaces of Montreal – From queer households to (queer) venues:

> Often, they are improvised spaces. I take for example Cabaret Faux-Pas,
> which is a cabaret of shows, theatre, and performance that happens in an
> apartment. So sometimes, there is a space in particular. Otherwise of more
> obvious spots there is the Playhouse, with the Faggity Ass Fridays *soirée*.
> And then, queer events are not always like a *soirée*, often they are the spaces
> that we mobilize, so not so much in a venue or even a neighbourhood. In
> general, [we] move from place to place. There can be events that always
> happen at the same place, [but] it's not sedentary, *c'est pas vraiment comme
> dans la glace* (it's not really set in stone). (Bobby)

The first type of queer spaces my interviewees mentioned when I asked them about

which spaces they consider to be queer in the city of Montreal were queer households, and the

second were venues that were either owned by queer- or LGBT-identified people, or where at

least such people would/could work and hang out. Such answers showed me that these spaces

where spaces with a queer "identity" that is not necessarily inherently political; most of my

interviewees differentiated between spaces of socializing, where queer (and non-queer) people

can feel comfortable and welcome, and spaces of activism, where there is usually a political

agenda (in the form of a night of performances, a fundraising dance-party, or a an evening of

workshops, for example). However, many of the venues identified as queer because of the

"socio-demographic characteristics" of their inhabitants, their owners, their staff, or their

patrons, have the potential to be "queered" further and to be rendered political, in particular

when the practices of place-making I identify in the following sections of this chapter are implemented. As I come to show, and as the object of this thesis is, I am interested in utopian forms of sociality that rest not only on the identification of the people who share a space, but on their dedication to the creation of safe(r), accessible, and welcoming space, as well as on their common political goals.

Emily was one of the my interviewees to mention that for her, the most important queer spaces in the city were what she called "queer households", described as either individual houses or apartments inhabited by queer people, in particular by queer activists. Emily proposed that such living arrangements, where the people cohabitating have intense emotional connections and can be but are not necessarily romantically attached, are often the basis for some individuals' activism, as roommates frequently collaborate on projects together. For example, such a household was a large Plateau five-bedroom flat, known by many as the House of Faux-Pas. The House's roommates were co-organizing Cabaret Faux-Pas at their apartment, a monthly "queer cabaret" night of performances. Bobby and other interviewees mentioned the House, in particular during its night of cabaret, as one of the key queer spaces of Montreal. Again, the House is perhaps here identified as queer because of its inhabitants, but what makes it "particularly queer" on the nights of the Cabaret is the (political) performance art that is presented there, as well as some of the key practices of place-making I explore in the following section, like the presence of posters explaining the Cabaret's take on what a safe(r) space means.

In addition to these queer households, interviewees generally agreed that a few specific businesses can be considered queer spaces, like Depanneur Pick-Up, located in

Little Italy, and the bike shop/hair salon Bike Curious (pronounced *bi-curious*), located in

the Village. However, the "queerness" of these spaces is relative, as Emily proposed:

> There's businesses [...] that I know are owned by queers, and tend to employ
> queers, but there's no way that they are exclusively a queer space or that they
> even are intentionally marked as so. But Cagibi [a coffee shop/restaurant in
> the Mile End] is owned by queers, and not most but a lot of the people that
> work there are queer. And therefore a lot of the people in the queer
> community show their art there, or have events there.

Emily here shows that these venues can be further queered, or "intentionally marked" as

queer, when art is exhibited, when specific activities are taking place, or when queer

events are organized at such venues. Although most of Radical Queer Semaine's events

are organized at one main space that is rented for the length of the festival, during

PerversCité (queer) venues including or similar to those listed above are chosen and/or

rented to host events, as Cagibi was for the launch of the "Queers Made This" archival

zine.

Along with the House of Faux-Pas, Café Touski was one of the two main spaces

where the organizing collective of Radical Queer Semaine met in preparation for its 2010

edition. As per the examples of venues mentioned above, this coop-restaurant situated in

Centre-Sud is a space interviewees and other organizers, like Céline, consider to be queer

because as she said "there are a lot of people who work there who are queer, so it could

be called queer even if it is not *necessarily* a queer space". I would argue that these two

spaces were chosen not only because they were convenient meeting spots, but also

because of their symbolic capital in the queer scene and because the usual "raison d'être"

(a queer household in the case of the House of Faux-Pas, and a cooperatively owned and

run neighbourhood café in the case of Touski), made them easy and politically appropriate to "queer". In another example of the importance of a space's political charge, TRIGGER Festival was held at the Raging Spoon, a restaurant/café described on its website as a "a 'Social Purpose Enterprise' […] highly focused on community interaction"[33] on its website, that was at the time of fieldwork owned by an engaged activist who has since, regrettably, passed away. According to one of the organizers this connection allowed them to use the premises for free for the two days of the festival, and the owner had even offered a staffed kitchen to donate food during the event

An exception to this basic standard of queer ownership or staff for the potential of commercial venues to be queered is the Playhouse, a bar and lottery-video machine venue in Mile End that has hosted numerous monthly queer dance parties and occasional fundraisers over the past few years. Jason attempted to explain the peculiarity of this venue, which is not queered-owned:

> There should [...] be some kind of a speakeasy for queer people but there isn't right now, and so the Playhouse is naturally a flagship queer space at the moment. Which embodies an interesting history of being a mob-run strip bar becomes sitting-duck tax write-off bar for people to play lottery video. The fact that they do one or two successful nights a month is just kind of a joke to them. [...] It is a strange bird in that now, it has a sort of very '60s feel of "oh, everyone knows that this is still vaguely mob-run but the staff are friendly, so who cares", you know? It's been a very easily queered space.

Venues like the Playhouse, which in spite of not being queer-owned or -staffed nevertheless treat queer customers with respect, are considered by many local organizers to be an anomaly in Montreal, and as I show in the next section, accessible (financially and physically, for example) and welcoming spaces are scarce for local queer organizers. As a party/fundraiser

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[33] http://www.ragingspoon.ca/

organizer, Emily noted that one of the "biggest ground of conflict" that queer organizers and participants face when renting or borrowing spaces is the homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of violence that bar owners and staff can exhibit, and which threatens the safety and wellbeing of participants.

Temporary queer spaces:

As the previous section suggests, the activists I interviewed, when asked to give examples of local queer spaces, tended to refer to particular events rather than to actual physical spaces, as such supporting that what matters in the study of queer spaces is what happens in their creation, both ideologically and tangibly, more than the physical spaces in and of themselves. Some interviewees, like Emily, emphasized that queer spaces are "really fleeting", and consist in the organization of an event that will bring people together, "like a QTeam party or Radical Queer Semaine", amongst the examples she provided. Also agreeing that "there aren't really any permanent dedicated spaces" at the time of our interview, Mathieu called "temporary queer zones" the "physical spaces that are transformed" during queer events, and I would argue that almost any space can be "queered" in this way. As will be discussed in the following sections, the creation of these "fleeting" temporary zones is not only the result of a gathering of like-minded, or similarly-identified people, even if such characteristics were identified by most to matter – they are also the result of the conscious efforts of organizers and participants alike to make events welcoming, accessible, and safe(r) for those for whom and by whom they are created, even in the case of more spontaneous, or at least less predictable environments, like a public demonstration of the magnitude of the G20 protests for example.

Financial constraints can limit opportunities for organizers to create temporary queer spaces that respond to the needs of large range of identities and realities. For example, while

venues like the Playhouse allow for the "door money" (cover charges) to be entirely collected by organizers, other venues impose a rental price and also often claim a percentage of cover charges. As will be discussed below, queer organizers are often faced with the dilemma of managing the costs of renting adequate spaces, while avoiding expensive and mandatory cover charges, in particular for fundraisers and benefits. The organizing collective of Radical Queer Semaine in fact yearly sees as one of its main challenges in the months leading to the festival to find an affordable and welcoming space for the ten days of the event. For the 2010 edition, when I did fieldwork, the collective selected the office spaces of Mise au Jeu, a local not-for-profit participative theatre company located in Chinatown, first and foremost because it was a highly functional space for the event. The Mise au Jeu staff had also offered us an excellent price for the ten days we needed a venue for, and the organization's mission statement, as provided on their website, emphasized community development and empowerment, echoing the goals of Radical Queer Semaine and more largely the politics behind the creation of queer spaces. The festival was held at the same space for the 2011 edition and, had Mise au Jeu not had to move to a new office space in the last year, the 2012 edition would most likely have been held there again that year.

The only space in Montreal that was, at the time of interviews, seen as a non-commercial permanent queer space was the Ste-Emilie Skillshare, where a few events took place during PerversCité. Ste-Emilie's is described as follow on its website:

> The Ste-Emilie Skillshare is a community art space devoted to empowerment, self-determination and collective liberation. It is a space run by and for people who are trans, two-spirit, queer, Indigenous and/or people of colour* and friends. As a collective of activists and artists, we work within an anti-oppression framework toward social and economic transformation. We share

skills and resources to create art in the spirit of self-representation and revolution.[34]

From this description it is obvious that Ste-Emilie's was the only permanent queer space identified as queer not only for the people it claims to cater to but also for the politics endorsed by the collective running it, but its capacity (both in terms of size and because Radical Queer Semaine requires a space that can be taken over for a period of ten days) could not allow for it to hold events like Radical Queer Semaine.

The search for spaces where queer events can be held is so time consuming that some local activists have been organizing fundraisers to try and open another not-for-profit, queer-run permanent community-centered queer space. One of these people is Emily who, when we were hanging out one early evening in between workshops during the 2010 edition of Radical Queer Semaine, explained that she was dreaming of a space where not only parties and fundraisers could be held, but where local community groups with scarce resources could also have access to office and storage space. L'Equeerie, as the planned space came to be called over the following year, would not only allow for annual festivals like Radical Queer Semaine to be held, but also for the creation of a permanent hang out and organizing spot for local activists. Emphasizing the importance of having a space not only to socialize "in our own terms", but also to do activism, Emily said:

> We're constantly having all of our events in spaces that don't belong to us. We're a community that has no space. We don't have space, we don't own space, we're constantly depending on other people, other communities to allow us to use their space [...] *We build up these amazing sand castles is what we're doing*.

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[34] http://steemilieskillshare.org/?page_id=579

While the project of a permanent queer space that is multifunctional, like the one Emily and other organizers are hoping to open, is to this day still only in the works, the rest of this chapter describes practices of place-making of queer organizers and participants to queer the spaces they temporarily occupy. As the next section shows, such a queering of space can start with a physical and material transformation of the spaces occupied.

"This is our space":

One of the first and most obvious ways in which a space of any sort can be queered is through its physical and material transformation. Of course, the mere presence of queer people, in particular if their looks fall into the category of "genderfuck" identified in the previous chapter, can serve to signify a queer presence. The example of the "drag and skating" gathering at the Atrium, mentioned in the previous chapter, is of course one obvious case of such a "queering of space", but in my experiences with PolitiQ at the G20 a "queer aesthetic" was used by the group to mark as queer the space of protest we occupied. As Céline said simply, one of the main and most visible characteristics of the pink bloc was, quite simply that it was "Pink… We were pink, we were visible, and when there were other queer groups around we saw them too because they were also pink. Just wearing a pink bandana made a difference!" This difference may have been that being part of the pink bloc sent a message to other protesters that we were a welcoming group, and this was reinforced when Quinn, one of TRIGGER's organizers who came to meet PolitiQ during the G20 protests, asked me if they could borrow a pink armband because they felt like they were unsafe in the larger protest space, being dressed all in black, and as such potentially being more likely to be targeted by police violence. Quinn also requested the armband, as they told me, because they felt that

other protesters might feel safer around them if they had a visible sign of belonging to the pink bloc.

Interestingly, a marker of queerness in the charged and, at times violent space of the G20 demonstrations was one that could in fact protect us from violence, instead of making us a target of it, as is often the case in other contexts. I argue that this was first and foremost because of the tactics of the pink bloc in and of themselves – this "festive" type of protest often takes the form of mobile and "frivolous" street parties, where protesters and organizers "emphasize […] a networking logic, involving coordination among diverse forms of action across diversity and difference", as Jeffrey Juris wrote about his experience with a pink bloc at the Battle of Genoa protests (2005, p.429). Our presence was very noticeable in the larger space of the G20 demonstrations in Toronto as, in addition to wearing pink, we marched with the Montreal Anarchist Marching Band, in part because one of its members was friends with someone from PolitiQ and also because we seemed to be in political agreement with them over what type of presence we wanted to have in the protest. I also believe that their music, combined with our chants and our "radical cheerleading", may have prevented us from getting arrested, as we were attracting the sympathy and encouragements of many other protesters from the larger mass of the demonstration.

An ongoing conversation that followed from the G20, which happened in the form of a follow up workshop during PerversCité, was whether this festive presence diminished the impact of the actual message we were trying to promote, and if what many could qualify as our "pacifist" tactical approach could make us less radical. If no definitive answers can be given to these questions, the workshop nevertheless provided a

critical space to reflect on our achievements and shortcomings post-G20. For example, it allowed for an attendee, who identified as a person of color, to question whether a pink bloc could act as a safe(r) space for people who are more vulnerable to police profiling and violence. The "whiteness of queer spaces" is an ongoing issue within the queer scene of Montreal and that of Toronto, from my experience at TRIGGER, and it is one I will address further in the final ethnographic chapter of this thesis. The post-G20 workshop and the critical discussions coming from it however also exemplify, as I will discuss in more depth towards the end of this chapter, the critical self-reflexivity that characterizes queer spaces and more generally, queer activism.

Both for Radical Queer Semaine and TRIGGER, another tactic that was organizers implemented to mark spaces as queer during these festivals was the use of posters. Emily, for example, designed a series of large bilingual "affiches" with the following messages: "This is our space" (featuring a long list of the people included in the category "our" such as…), "Consent is sexy", "Being polite isn't old fashioned, it's radical", "We make safe(r) space together for ourselves and for each other", and "Give'r!", a poster emphasizing responsible substance use. People who attended the 2010 Radical Queer Semaine positively commented on the posters, and the original large copies that Emily created in 2010 have since been re-used for every subsequent edition of the festival. In the case of TRIGGER, three smaller posters plastered the walls of the Raging Spoon – one that described the mission statement of the festival, another that detailed the festival's commitment to access, and the third that described its policy of "safe(r) space", which I will describe in more detail in the following section.

Beyond marking what could be seen as "neutral" spaces – meaning venues that were known to be either queer-friendly or queer-run, but that were not explicitly exclusively queer (activist) spaces as I discussed them in the previous section– the physical queering of the venues used during Radical Queer Semaine and TRIGGER also involved putting up signs declaring that bathrooms are gender neutral, and that as such "transformed" gendered bathrooms into gender-inclusive ones. This sort of practice again emphasizes that queer spaces seek to respond to and dismantle heteronormativity as an oppressive system that marks space, and as I show in the following sections this commitment to centering the experiences of marginalized/excluded people (and to respond to other systems of oppression) results in the elaboration of other strategies beyond those centering on the physical/material queering of space.

Safe(r) space: Militant commitments and tactics:

> TRIGGER is committed to producing a festival that takes positive, pro-active, preventative steps towards confronting discrimination, assault, oppression and violence in all its forms. We work together, as a committed, active community to create a space that reflects the ideals of a radical queer community – autonomous spaces that are supportive, respectful and free from harassment. As people who try to bring about change in our world, we recognize that our own personal behaviours need to reflect this change. (TRIGGER Safer Space Statement, as read on a poster during the festival).

The safe(r) spaces that queer activists discuss extensively are not so much a matter of defined boundaries between spaces of queer people and the outside, oppressive hetero world. Indeed, as Oswin (2008) describes in her critique of the study of queer spaces, the binary created when one thinks of safe queer spaces versus oppressive non-queer spaces is one that a queer theoretical and ideological viewpoint would attempt to

disrupt. I argue that queer organizers and participants tend to side with Oswin's view of

queer spaces, and that as such what they think of as safe(r) space is a process, rather than

a defined and bound LGBT-centered, geographically identifiable space.

This processual aspect is what differentiates the idea of "safe space" from that of

"safer space", as the latter does not assume that safety can be guaranteed nor achieved for

everyone, and because the concept of safer space does not take for granted the stability of

the safety that organizers can provide. In addition to the definition provided by

TRIGGER, which highlights that the concept of a safer space is one that requires a

commitment on the part of those present, Jason provided the following insight on what is

meant when the terms "safer" and "space" are used together:

> Primarily, it's a space where you know that if discriminatory or violent things
> happen there will either be a person or a group of people that you can go to,
> to diffuse that, or to evict the perpetrator. But conversely safer space is also
> often a space where there is no such authority figure… So safer space is a
> space that happens *either deliberately or magically*.

An example of a "magical" demonstration of queer safer space occurred during Radical

Queer Semaine for the event of the Punk Show, which happened at a local punk coop.

While most of the regular patrons were friendly to the crowd of queer folks who showed

up for the show, a homophobic assault erupted after a person (assumed to have been at

the bar not knowing it was a queer event) called an attendee a "faggot" before starting a

physical altercation. Right away, a group of queer attendees responded by creating a

physical barrier between the aggressor and the queer person. Céline recalled the incident

and described it as follows:

> I think that it [safer space] is about helping each other out, cooperating, in
> particular if something messed up is happening. We can act in those instances.
> I remember something that happened during Radical Queer Semaine at

Katacombes, there was an altercation and I think someone suffered from verbal violence on the dance floor, and people reacted by defending that person and by kicking out the perpetrator. A bit after, I saw that there was a person crying in the bathroom [presumably, the person who was assaulted], and there were many people taking care of them.

While this example shows that the safety of participants is a concern for most attendees at queer events and as such, as argued in the previous chapter, that queer spaces are concerted responses to violence and oppression as experiences by marginalized people, certain strategies are deliberately implemented to increase chances that people will feel welcome and safe in queer spaces. If spontaneous responses to violence can and do happen in queer spaces, and one can assume this response is characteristic of many other types of (non-queer) community spaces, organizers also put in place certain deliberate strategies to contribute to the wellbeing and safety of participants.

Organizers care about the wellbeing of attendees, but as I have discussed in the previous chapter organizers' individual sites of vulnerability influence the kinds of commitments they can have to a queer project. For example, Dan was one of the key people to advocate for volunteers to be present at all time during Radical Queer Semaine to welcome attendees and to allow for newcomers to have a chance to introduce themselves upon their arrival, in the context of its 2011 edition, emphasizing that his own discomfort in certain social situations led him to develop strategies to increase how welcoming the space of the festival could be. In addition to this (then) new volunteer position, which mainly consisted of sitting at the entrance of the venue of Mise au Jeu, of greeting people, and of giving them information about the festivals and the events of the day, other volunteers are often recruited and trained to hold positions of support and care during queer events.

One such position was that of "active listener", volunteers who are asked to make themselves available for participants who might feel triggered/shaken during events, or for those who, for any reason, would need the presence of a supportive individual when they remove themselves from a challenging workshop. Emily, Mathieu and I volunteered to be members of the "Safe(r) Space Committee" for Radical Qeeer Semaine, and together we created an "Active Listener Toolkit" to distribute to volunteers who had signified their interest in giving their time during the festival. The toolkit emphasised that an active listener ought to have an "anti-oppressive orientation"[35] as well as a "harm-reduction approach"[36]. In practical terms, in the context of Radical Queer Semaine, active listeners were encouraged to, amongst other tips, make themselves physically available to participants, to let individuals express themselves without interrupting, and to show signs of interest (verbal and non-verbal), while also avoiding offering advice as their role was not to mediate conflict or to act as a "therapist." Active listeners were asked/trained to use gender-neutral language to refer to individuals, in order to avoid misgendering. The use of the pronoun "they" was given as an example of gender-neutral language in English, and the use of a person's first name was given as an alternative in French (example:

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[35] An anti-oppressive orientation was briefly described in the toolkit to involve the promotion of inclusivity, accessibility, equity and social justice, and to require the constant awareness of one's assumptions linked to the identity/ies that one imposes on people, in particular on marginalized populations. An anti-oppressive orientation also requires an attempt to create environments where people feel safe yet also empowered to express their opinion.

[36] Harm-reduction is a popular term used to define sets of practices of intervention that emphasize the reduction of the risks an individual can take with many types of behaviors, by providing them with the tools necessary to make informed decisions about their behaviors. In the context of sex education, and of "safer sex programs" in particular, risk reduction can for example include the promotion of a variety of methods to minimize the risk of HIV transmission, rather than the promotion of abstinence or "condoms always" policies.

"Voudrais-tu m'en dire plus sur ta réaction lorsque Max (or "cette personne") t'a dit cela?"). Active listeners were also encouraged to ask people about their pronoun preference, a practice that many activists already use in the queer scene. For the 2011 edition of Radical Queer Semaine, Dan also created a series of pins with various pronouns written on them that people could wear to "advertise" their preferred term of address without having to tell people verbally. These pins, which included French and English options like "il/he", "elle/she", "they" and a blank option (the latter presumably for people who prefer other pronouns or for French speakers who don't have an option for neutral pronouns), were very popular and exemplified a simple strategy that can help people to respect others' identities.

In contrast to the small committee that was responsible for developing the toolkit for active listeners at Radical Queer Semaine, the whole TRIGGER collective prepared a meeting for prospective volunteers a few weeks before the beginning of the Toronto festival, so that a communal discussion involving organizers and volunteers would design the "orientation" session for active listeners. As revealed by the notes form the meeting I received by email, the experiences and perspectives shared by TRIGGER's volunteers were similar to the recommendations provided in Radical Queer Semaine's toolkit. Active listeners were also required to wear a "laminate" during Radical Queer Semaine, and a pink armband in the case of TRIGGER, making it easier for participants to locate them in the space. Active listeners may not be regularly solicited during events – I can attest to this from my own experiences doing Active Listening during TRIGGER and Radical Queer Semaine, but also from what other volunteers have told me – but their presence often offers a buffer in times of "crisis". For example, after a highly emotional

performance art piece during Stalle, the yearly performance night during Radical Queer

Semaine, a few attendees left the main room crying or visibly shaken. The active listeners

present ensured that these people were not left alone and that, if they wanted, they had the

opportunity to talk with someone. Emphasizing the importance of active listeners in

queer spaces, Thierry said:

> Safe(r) space, for me, is to create all of the conditions in a space so that we
> feel as little violence as possible or, at least, a degree of violence that is
> acceptable enough so that people can stay in the space and feel confortable
> expressing themselves. People must be informed of this as soon as they get
> into a space [as with the use of posters], but there must also be people who
> embody [safety] in the sense that if violence occurs […], it's important that
> someone is there to listen and to talk. Without active listeners, for me, there's
> no safe(r) space. So there are material conditions [like posters] and human
> conditions [like the presence of active listeners] for it to work.

As the following section shows, various forms of violence, marginalization, and

exclusion are also addressed in their more systemic forms in queer spaces. As the

following two sections of this chapter show, one of the first strategy exemplifying a queer

response to oppression is centered on the elaboration of agreed upon "guidelines of

communication", while the remainder of the chapter shows the centrality of the concept

of accessibility and of means to increase it.

Guidelines of communication: Deliberate practices and agreed upon values:

For Céline, two of the most important and salient features of queer spaces are an anti-

oppressive "way of doing things" and non-hierarchical "ways of communicating." For Dan, the

two concepts are related to one another, and the latter enables the former. Before his

involvement with PolitiQ, Dan was loosely linked to different anarchist groups, but after

uncomfortable situations during meetings preparing for the G20 protests, he decided to come

to a meeting organized by PolitiQ to see if there would be less of a chance that his opinions

and fears would be silenced by more established members. Dan had been confronted with

violent interactions and was worried to rely on a group of people who might, because they

would not allow him to express himself, pressure him into unsafe confrontations with the

police. The PolitiQ meeting he attended, which took place at one member's communal

apartment, enabled him to feel comfortable about the prospect of traveling with the group and

to find himself in a potentially dangerous situation. As he explained:

> It's really, really important to me that I can say when I disagree, when I am
> uncomfortable and to not have people say "what the hell, why aren't you
> comfortable, you're being a coward". Not to be attacked because I am
> uncomfortable. [During the PolitiQ meeting], my discomfort was recognized,
> acknowledged, and respected, and other people were also comfortable talking
> about their discomfort and fears and insecurities and all that... and that's why
> I went with PolitiQ.

During this meeting I was, with the various members present, indeed able to negotiate how we

would, as a group, accommodate our respective desires to engage (or not) in direct action and

"civil disobedience", while also ensuring that no one felt pressured into participating. We also

emphasized that that more "vulnerable" members' safety should not be jeopardized, regardless

of what individuals in the group wanted to do.

Establishing non-hierarchical "guidelines of communication" was also a key

feature of the time I spent with the organizing collective of Radical Queer Semaine.

Attendance at most meetings ranged from around six to twelve people – membership was

however deliberately unofficial, to ensure that the collective remained open to new

collaborations. Our work mailing list included over forty-five people's email addresses;

but around fifteen people were regulars at meetings. We spoke of each other as individual "members", but most often as "the collective" ("le collectif," in French), and anyone with an interest in getting involved was welcomed at the meetings and encouraged to participate in the organization of the event. A few members usually held more speaking time during meetings, but they were usually members who had been involved in the organization of Radical Queer Semaine's first edition the year before, and who often spoke to offer their insight into what had made the first Radical Queer Semaine a success. As such, I did not perceive that their more frequent contributions to discussions silenced other members. In fact, while newer members, including myself, were quieter during meetings, our participation was often encouraged and other collective members regularly requested our input, in particular when important decisions about Radical Queer Semaine were to be made.

As I mentioned in my first ethnographic chapter, queer organizers value and encourage each other's contribution and the contribution of participants, and this was also emblematic of the Radical Queer Semaine collective's ethics for decision-making during meetings. The group recognized individual members' talents, goals, and interests, but for every individual proposition or need, an assessment of the group's benefit or of the relevance of the project for Radical Queer Semaine was made. Collective organizing implied non-hierarchical decision-making, which usually meant that an idea proposed at a meeting had to be accepted by all that were present. Consensus meant unanimity, and many of our discussions during meetings involved dialogue between a person who had proposed an idea, and those who had qualms or suggestions about it. Thierry or Baker were usually responsible for taking down the names of those who wished to add to the

conversation, as it had been decided early on that we would avoid interrupting one another. We would therefore raise our hand to signify an interest in speaking. The speakers list ensured that members took the time to reflect on their intervention, and often diffused tension during more heated conversations, as participants often had to wait before it was their turn to talk. This process of interaction of course meant that what I often thought could have been simple decisions became impassioned discussions on the ethics of the group, and again I believe that this demonstrates the self-reflexive critical commitment of queer organizers.

For Dan, the process of establishing these guidelines of communication is an important part of creating a queer safe(r) space during the festival. As was the case at workshops organized during Radical Queer Semaine and at TRIGGER festival, organizers implemented such practices by announcing that respectful communication between participants is encouraged and by proposing the implementation of a speakers list. That I witnessed such suggestions to always, when proposed, be accepted by participants can of course suggest that many queer participants have either been exposed to similar practices, or that such communication styles are a desired norm for most. For Dan, these practices allow not only to "get things done", as in the case of a meeting, but also to engage in debate.

> I think that's part of safer space, to be willing to be less efficient. Sometimes I think that a safer space requires that you say unpleasant things to each other, but maybe you have to say it in the least violent way possible. [...] I don't think that it's about being politically correct. And I think it's not just about muzzling people. Or maybe safer space is something where you say, when we're all together there are certain things we're not going to say, we're not going to make people feel attacked, it doesn't mean we're not going to address these issues again.

Even if the guidelines of communication may mean that more sensitive topics are not addressed, Dan argued that in certain settings delicate discussions might be more easily approached.

> I think that when you are in smaller groups and you get to know people a bit better, it's easier to test the water than in a larger group. Maybe, I think, that if you are trying to push ideas, it's better done in a smaller group, and with people you know better. [...] And I think the safety of the space is much more important than pushing new ideas unless you really work on your diplomacy skills.

Of course, the line between safe(r) space and silencing the perspective and experiences of people who are already marginalized can be thin, but it is my impression that creating a context of safe(r) space can allow for the discussion of some of the issues of oppression that are (re)created in queer spaces. As an example, I co-facilitated the emotionally challenging "Find your Normativity" workshop with Martin on the last day of Radical Queer Semaine, during which we encouraged participants to confront their own "normativity" and to "work through" some of the internalized violence and oppression that they impose on themselves and others. After witnessing the strategies employed by other facilitators during the festival (and I will admit, through my own dedicated reflections on the concept of safe(r) space), Martin and I decided, for the first part of the workshop, to discuss at length with participants the type of environment that we thought would empower ourselves to feel comfortable to share some of our potentially offensive and oppressive thoughts and behaviors. I was humbled when, at the end of the intense, yet liberating workshop, a participant came to Martin and I to thank us for creating one of the safest workshop environment he had ever been in. Dan also attended the workshop and also mentioned during our interview how powerful the experience had been for him. As this example, but also the rest of this chapter shows, a dedication to the concept of

safety requires not only ideological cohesiveness amongst those in these spaces, but also

the elaboration of specific strategies of place-making. However, beyond safety,

organizers and participants also have in mind the concept of accessibility in its many

forms, and as I show also have strategies to address the needs of the diverse real and

imagined inhabitants of queer spaces.

Accessibility: Financial, physical, and linguistic:

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, queer organizers often face many dilemma when

choosing spaces to hold their events, in particular if they want to ensure the wellbeing and

safety of participants while also aiming to avoid charging expensive and mandatory cover

charges. This is usually because queer spaces ought to be accessible in a variety of ways,

including financially, which also translated in the case of the 2010 and 2011 editions of

Radical Queer Semaine in trying to offer meals as often as possible during the festival. An

example of the difficulty of maintaining financial accessibility occurred during the 2010

edition: Baker wanted to offer warm meals daily during Radical Queer Semaine but was

prevented from doing so when Thierry presented our budget[37]. After our final fundraising party

and once we had received responses from our grant applications, it became clear that we could

not afford to feed participants on a daily basis. The compromise, accepted by all, was to have

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[37] Although Radical Queer Semaine and other queer festivals and projects aim to be self-sufficient and usually adhere to anti-capitalist politics, the temporary queer spaces I study in this thesis cannot succeed in being 'capital-independent'. For example, Radical Queer Semaine's annual budget, with most of its expenses going towards renting a space for the ten days of the festival, depends on various small grants as well as on fundraising parties before Radical Queer Semaine and the money raised from the Pay What You Can $10 cover charge of the Monster Ball and the alcohol sales made during that event. This reliance on the financial contributions of attendees, in particular from their consumption of alcohol, has been an ongoing source of debate within the collective and, I would assume, in the queer activist scene at large.

communal kitchens on Fridays and over the weekends, with the possibility to improvise meals during the week if our food supplies allowed. For the 2011 edition Dan joined the food committee, and his dedication to dumpstering food (retrieving it from dumpsters) made it possible for him and other volunteers to prepare and serve daily meals.

Financial accessibility also related to and influences other forms of accessibility. While the Raging Spoon, the venue where TRIGGER was held, was a wheelchair accessible café, none of the venues rented or used throughout the 2010 and 2011 editions of Radical Queer Semaine and PerverCité (for the most part) were recognized as such. Disability-centered activism was not something I had, through my involvement in local events, been familiarized with in Montreal until my presence at TRIGGER[38]. As Emily proposed, the situation is "difficult" in Montreal, and for her it is not that organizers do not wish for wheelchair accessible events, but that local infrastructures are for the most part not wheelchair-friendly in the city:

> My opinion on accessibility is mainly [that] I think it's super important and I think it needs to be strived for and it needs to be achieved at a certain point. The problem is that it's a serious uphill battle that isn't just about how much effort people put in, but it has to do with what resources are available. [...] And by resources I mean both the money that people have to spend and what places are actually available in this city. And sometimes, actually, more times than not, it just doesn't work out. And I don't think that just because an event isn't wheelchair accessible, it means that it shouldn't happen.

As such, in spite of the will of organizers to provide physically accessible spaces, other accessibility-related dilemmas can arise, as Emily suggested:

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[38] Since the 2011 edition, however, a "space" has been created for the discussion of ableism and for critical disability studies/activism – I believe that this space was created both physically, as the collective has invested time and resources to find (more) accessible venues, and discursively, as local activists have voiced their critiques and organized workshops on these issues during the festival.

> Accessibility to me is also on multiple levels, and the thing I have had to choose from was between financial accessibility, or physical accessibility. Because I know in Vancouver, there were some wheelchair accessible spaces but they were often the newest spaces that were huge and they were built for corporate events and they would be a thousand dollars to rent, or you could get this other space that was older, built in the 60s, [physically] inaccessible but it was four hundred dollars to rent.

In turn, this discrepancy in rent prices affect the required suggested donation, or the firm entry fee requested of participants.

Perhaps because physical accessibility is more easily attainable in Toronto, but also I believe because many queer activists are also vocal disability activists, TRIGGER organizers saw the necessity for the coordination and training of volunteers that offered mobility-related support and assistance during the festival. "Attendant care", as it was called, referred to the position of trained individuals whose roles in the space of the festival was to help people with disability to move around the space, for example to go to the washroom. I was not familiar with such a role until attending TRIGGER, having never witnessed it in Montreal. A few days before the opening night of the festival, I received an email from TRIGGER's volunteer coordinator that included an attendant care manual, similar to Radical Queer Semaine's active listener toolkit that I was to read as I was scheduled to do one attendant care volunteer shift during the festival.

Reinforcing the need for volunteers and attendees to recognize that relationships of help and support are also inherently relationships of power, the document invited volunteers to reflect on how they conceive of their own needs, as well as to be reflexive about the power dynamics involved in care-based exchanges:

> Engaging in attendant care means openly negotiating *your* [original emphasis] needs, and the needs of folks around you. Helping/care has a

history of reinforcing certain people/groups as having power by being the ones who help rather than those who need help. We want to contribute to breaking down this false division by recognizing the contribution of all parties involved in negotiating care. The truth is that everyone has needs, and the more openly we share our needs with each other, the better we will be at dismantling ableism!! [sic] Attendant care should be a mutual negotiation.

In addition, the document addressed "ableism" as a system of oppression privileging non-disabled people, and situated relations based on care within this and other systems of oppression, again showing that queer spaces are both host to and the result of an anti-oppression-centered activism that incorporates multiple, intersecting scales of analysis – a framework that theorists and academics often claim as their own as I argued in the introduction of this thesis.

A final form of accessibility I will briefly address in this chapter is linguistic accessibility. Local queer organizers are faced, at least in Montreal, with a decision to either ignore or to address the linguistics barriers that can exist when they organize events. While, as far as I experienced, PerversCité does not really tackle this issue and is known to be the "more Anglophone" queer festival of Montreal, Radical Queer Semaine's organizing collective is deeply invested in making their events as accessible to French speakers as they are to English speakers. My experiences taking part in the organization of the festival, but also attending its events, have shown me that there is a genuine dedication on the part of organizers to ensure that all folks present at meetings, workshops, parties, and other events, have access to the cultural material presented. While I indeed witnessed many participants code-switch and express themselves in French and English during Radical Queer Semaine (suggesting that many organizers and participants are bilingual) the organizing committee is dedicated to translating all of the material it produces, from its website, to its paper schedule, to the actual content of

workshops presented by people who are not part of the collective. As such, for virtually all events during Radical Queer Semaine, the organizers offered whispered translation from English to French and French to English, depending on the needs of attendees and participants. Almost every event thus becomes accessible to folks who do not speak one of the two languages in which workshops and events were presented. It should also be noted that over the years, a close to equal proportion of French and English events are offered during the festival. Such practices reveal a desire to go beyond tackling the limits of individual languages and instead aim at practically addressing the difficulties that arise out of the existence of two main language communities in Montreal, and the exclusions that can and might result from this linguistic reality. While, as I mentioned before, such tactics were not employed during PerversCité, organizers at TRIGGER made the linguistic accessibility of their event about providing sign language and close captioning when requested, perhaps because few Francophones live in Toronto and also again for the festival's focus on fighting ableism.

I would argue that one of the key reason why PerversCité organizers do not implement strategies like having active listeners present and offering whispered translation, is in part because the festival's organization is far less centralized than Radical Queer Semaine's. Indeed, not only is PerversCité's organizing collective made up of and seen as a grouping of individuals who are part of other groups, rather than as a permanent collective like Radical Queer Semaine's, the event itself happens at various venues in the city, depending on respective workshop facilitators and event organizers' preferences. Overall, as I believe this chapter shows, many of the practices of place-making I have identified, in particular those that aim to queer space by addressing the

safety of participants and the systemic violence that queer and other marginalized people can face, require the dedication, reflexivity, and time commitment of queer organizers and participants. This shows that the utopian sociality I describe in this thesis are the result of an ideological consensus and a shared dedication to queer politics, and of the deliberate implementation of strategies, tactics, and tools. As I have myself witnessed over the past few years, organizing collectives constantly re-evaluates their strategies and commitments to making the spaces they create safer and accessible. As I will show in the final ethnographic chapter of this thesis, this reflexive process stems from a commitment to a queer politics that responds to various forms of oppression. As I also demonstrate, there is often disagreement over the form a queer utopia would take and over the best strategies, both in terms of community-building and of a larger political project, to achieve our goals. This possible divergence over the "future" of queer activism, and the individual and imagined collective pasts of queer activism, and of the spaces of queer activism, is what I show in this final ethnographic chapter.

CHAPTER 6 Queer Temporalities – What Actually Happens in Queer Spaces

In Chapter 3, I presented a typology of queer that then served, respectively in the following two chapters, to highlight the raîson d'être of queer spaces, as well as to identify the place-making practices of queer activists and organizers of Montreal and Toronto. In the present chapter, I take a look at what actually happens in queer spaces besides for the strategies of safer space and of accessibility identified in the previous chapter. I as such elaborate on the discourses that are circulating in, and emerging out of the queer spaces I studied, and on the political issues at the heart of queer organizing – to do so, I turn to the *temporality* of queer spaces. This of course refers back to Casey's (1993) account of the relationship of time and space within places[39] – a key feature of places for the author is that they have gathering power and that they can be seen and must be seen as events. Places, or for the queer spaces here defined, are in Casey's view not in a state of 'being', but rather in one of 'happening', as they take on the characteristics of its occupants through time. The relationship of space – as absolute and infinite and onto which places are en-culturated – to time and to place is defined in Casey's concept of "space-time". Casey uses this concept to emphasize that these two Western absolutes only come together in places-as-event, as they can only be experienced in place and are "coordinated and co-specified in the common matrix provided by place" (p.339).

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[39] As I have discussed in my literature review, what Casey calls "places" are akin to what my interviewees and other fellow activists call "queer spaces" – like Gavin Brown (2007), I chose to use the language that the people I interviewed and met through fieldwork used themselves.

While in this chapter, following Casey, I use the concepts of the past, the present, and the future to discuss queer spaces (places-as-events), I do not mean to suggest a rigid linear narrative to think of how these spaces are created. As I show, the moments at which organizers and participants experience being in queer spaces (that I here define as the present and that I "accessed" through fieldwork) are contingent on an imagining of, and on the material conditions of, the past and the future of these spaces, and also on the significance attached to their experience. To show this temporality, I first identify what the imagined *past* of queer spaces is, by hinting at some of the roots, influences, and histories that queer activists associate with the meaning they attach to the word queer and which influences their politics and practices of place making. Second, I situate the *present* of queer spaces by describing what actually happens in queer spaces in order to identify the social issues that are at the heart of local queer organizing. I achieve this by looking at the types of activities taking place in and organized in queer spaces, and at the discourses circulating and emerging during the queer events I did participant observation at. Finally, I address the utopian *future*(s) that local queer organizers and participants envision, in order to elaborate on the form of social change imagined, articulated, planned, and initiated in queer spaces. This should allow me to introduce briefly some of the tensions that exist locally and across other queer scenes, in particular when it comes to defining what a queer political project is as well as the form it should take. Looking at queer spaces through a temporal lens also helps recognize the perpetual self-reflexive impulse of queer organizing, which once again suggests that queer activists and organizers of Montreal are not only deeply invested in the same critical project that queer theorists are, but also in giving this project a practical dimension.

The "past" – Roots, influences, and histories:

My interviewees provided many idiosyncratic, if often intersecting "biographies" of queer, linking the term to the histories of different movements, groups, and ideological currents. The aim of this section is not to provide an all-encompassing portrayal of the history of queer as an identity, a theory, or as a movement/politics, but rather to emphasize how different activists and organizers come to queer spaces in different ways. This is both in their individual paths and histories as I have hinted at in Chapter 4, and in the intellectual and political traditions they link to their current involvement in the creation of queer spaces and in a queer political project. To think of the queer's past, however, I will refer to the typology of queer I highlighted in Chapter 3, and briefly link LGBT history, different (yet related) theories, and various movements to the work that queer activists do and which I witnessed in queer spaces.

Queer's past is of course one that stems from, intersects with, and diverges from gay and lesbian history/ies, in my interviewees' minds. It seemed clear during interviews, however, that much like queer politics distance themselves from the mainstream LG(BT) movement, and like queer spaces are alternatives to the commercial spaces of urban gay enclaves, the LGBT history that queer activists draw from is one that is more radical, and less if at all concerned with assimilationist politics. To focus on one strand of this "radical" past, I focus on examples given by Jason, who closely associated current queer politics and activism with groups like Act Up, Queer Nation, OutRage!, and the artistic/activist collective Gran Fury. For Jason, these groups were part of a community-centered response to the AIDS crisis, which in is mind cut across class, gender, race, and

sexual orientation and brought awareness of the structural ways in which sexual and other "minorities" are ignored, neglected, and discriminated against by social institutions, including the government. For Jason, and for other activists, the current interest of queer politics into "more than just itself", and the impetus to make queer spaces accessible and safe for a diversity of people affected by dominant systems of oppression, mirrors the alliances created between marginalized populations during the AIDS crisis.

This crisis also triggered what some see as "betrayals" that happened when the community response to the government's inaction became more "bureaucratized", and consequently more responsive to the needs, realities, and leadership of white gay men. Many groups went on to separate once again to cater better to their own needs and realities, while others had already been organizing on the margins all along. I believe that this is also one of the AIDS crisis' legacy for 'present-day' activism – the awareness that within every social movement, even those based on literal survival, power hierarchies can be created and recreated, emphasizing the need for a constant critical self-examination. As I think I have come to show in the previous chapters, this critical outlook one one's own political practice is a key characteristic of the creation of queer spaces, and of the elaboration of a queer politics.

To think of the history of queer as a theoretical positioning, my interviewees referred to many critical perspectives including, as I will elaborate on shortly to exemplify, feminism. As a body of theoretical works (of course it is obvious that not all feminist works align with queer politics) it is "queer's homeland" in Jason's words, in particular "the feminist critique of heteronormativity and of patriarchy as being why we are gender-policed", as he said. Again showing queer's interest in the intersectional,

Mathieu pointed out the notable intellectual contribution of black feminism and of other

critical theories placing multiple forms of oppression at their core. The practices of some

lesbian-separatists are also sometimes reminiscent of the place-making practices of queer

activists, as is illustrated in Sarah Green's presentation of women-only lesbian feminist

spaces in her book Urban Amazon (1997), although such spaces were often historically

for cis women only. Dan and Céline in particular both seemed to think that radical

feminism is often resistant to the inclusion of trans people, and in particular of trans

women. Queer's present is one that is also closely linked with trans studies and

movements, although rifts exist between trans scholars and queer feminist theory[40]. Many

local activists currently work to reconcile some of the divergence, and at times outright

oppositions that exists and have existed between local feminist groups and queer groups.

An example of this attempt to write a new chapter of this complicated history could be

the opening panel and debate of Radical Queer Semaine entitled "Sexuality is Political",

which featured presentations by a representative of PolitiQ, by the president from the

Federation des Femmes du Quebec (FFQ), and by an employee of Stella (a community

group for sex workers).

    As for examples of the histories interviewees linked to queer as politics and as a

movement, I now turn to more local examples of groups and movements that have

influenced current practices and politics in Montreal. In spite of her access to higher

education, Emily was one of many of my interviews to relativize the legacy of theory,

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[40] For an example, see Viviane Namaste's critique of Butler in her chapter entitled
"Tragic misreadings" from her book "Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and
Transgendered People (2000).

queer and otherwise, to the state of local activism, and instead pointed to how she herself

became involved:

> I don't think academia can be given the 100% credit for it, in fact not at all. I think that (...) there's so much amazing work that comes out of academic folks, from thinkers that have written that a lot of folks have read and that have brought a lot of things [to our imaginary], but I think that for me, queer didn't come out of a book so much. But that's just my experience of figuring it out. Queer for me, actually, *I found it on the dance floor*. Which is a little bit cheesy, but it totally was going to Will Monroe's Vaseline [a local underground dance night] that I started to figure things out.

It is perhaps partly because of this association between her experiences at this dance night

and her attachment to the local queer scene that she is now actively involved in the

organization of dance nights. Emily said that she had come to Vaseline, where she first

learned about polyamory and about "kink", through her involvement with some "homos"

she had met through the local punk scene.

> The gay scene before the Ass Pirates were crusty punks and freaks, not all queer. They all hung out together. That was partly the foundation of the queer scene, musicians and punks. The break off with straight or not-so-queer people happened eventually. Things were hazy, a lot more back then, and perhaps now that [the scene is] bigger, much bigger, it ain't so hazy anymore.

Emily's first contact with people who proclaimed themselves as "queer activists" was

during one of the first local Anarchist Bookfairs, which has now been organized yearly

for over a decade, and which hosted what she sees as one of the first queer political

gatherings in the city (and perhaps in this sense, one of its first "queer spaces"), the

"queer caucus".

Groups like the Anti-Capitalist Ass Pirates and the Panthères Roses, two queer

activist groups whose main purpose was to "confront the mainstream GLBT agenda of

assimilation, consumption and conformation" (Hogan, 2005, p.155), emerged onto the

local scene shortly following the Anarchist Bookfair's first caucus (although I do not

mean to suggest that their creation is linked to the Bookfair, as I was not able to verify

this possible link). These groups' 'spatial interests', as shown in this excerpt of the Ass

Pirates' website that Mélanie Hogan (2005) quotes in her article on these groups, that

they "reject ghettoization [as in the gay village] in favor of queer mobility" (p.157).

Mathieu mentioned that the local Panthères Roses were from what he knew very

interested in getting inspiration from the Black Panthers, and more generally from black

liberation movements, as well as from more confrontational gay and lesbian groups from

the 70s such as the Radical Faeries, who centered their politics on the rejection of hetero-

imitation as it came from assimilationist gay and lesbian groups of the time. These

examples seem to suggest that the queer spaces I study in this thesis are in political and

ideological continuation with the work done by these groups. This section clearly

highlights that while there is often a sense of shared "past" and "history" given to the

word queer as an identity, a theory, and a movement, there is also room for individual

interpretations of not only what the term means, but also of how it came to be. Regardless

of individual narratives of this queer past, it appears as though there is enough coherence

for them to translate into the creation of queer spaces of activism and what happens in

them, from socializing to political organizing.

The "present" – From sharing a meal to planning the revolution:

There is an eclectic, yet strangely coherent variety of events, activities, and

improvised goings-on that happen during the events I selected as field sites. In this

section, in order to discuss the "present" of queer spaces, I provide a loose taxonomy of

the purposes and goals of these events, in order to clarify how queer organizers come to

see the organization of such events to belong in queer spaces. I do not here intend to list

every activity I witnessed over the years during queer festivals, nor to offer a complete

typology of the goals and aims of the activities organized during such events. Rather, I

want to identify some of the key purposes of the various types of activities organized

during Radical Queer Semaine and to situate them within the temporality identified in

this chapter. I do this by showing their link to the past/historical imaginings of queer

activists, as well as by identifying their role in building the utopian future(s) they

envision. An important point to note is that I am here giving examples mainly of

workshops and panels, with some exceptions, but for every "category" of events I list, the

goals and aim identified can be, and are also attained through art. Queer spaces, as Jason

and Thierry, amongst others, have emphasized, are the home of a large range of artistic

expressions and mediums, from the paintings, sculptures, photography, and mixed

medium installations grouped at art exhibits, to the performances nights, and to the many

evenings of film and shorts screenings, for example. Art, and arts-based activism, is a

large part of local queer activism, and the space they are given are a defining feature of

local queer spaces. It is perhaps because of my own lack of knowledge of the arts that I

speak so little of them throughout this thesis, but not because I doubt their local

importance and their impact on queer politics.

A first purpose of queer spaces is one that I alluded to throughout this thesis – to

allow people with similar experiences, and/or those interested in solidarity work, to get

together and to socialize. While as many mentioned and as I discussed in Chapter 4, some

people come to queer events to find sexual partners and to party, social and affective

networks extend beyond the sexual realm. Of course, many of the parties organized

during queer festivals, like the dance night that happened on the Saturday night of TRIGGER fest, like Radical Queer Semaine's Monster Ball, and like the karaoke night organized during PerversCité for example, might seem to serve more of a social and entertainment goal than to allow for political organizing. Yet as Emily mentioned in the previous section, these parties can serve as a gateway for further involvement in the scene, and to introduce newcomers who might not be familiar with queer politics to a more festive aspect of the scene. These festivities can even act as springboards for connections that might lead to later collaborations, as I myself have experienced. Other social events that happened outside of bars for example included a queer soccer and wrestling night scheduled during PerversCité, and the queer tango and queer ballet lessons organized during Radical Queer Semaine. More generally, queer spaces also usually provide an opportunity to "hang out" in communal spaces, to share a cup of coffee, a meal, a beer, or simply to chat and relax with friends and new acquaintances.

Some workshops scheduled at the festivals however also have as an aim to encourage the inclusion of newcomers, and the creation of connections between people who might not be likely to introduce each other otherwise, like the Platonic Speed Dating workshop that has been a popular recurring event over the past three years during Radical Queer Semaine. As another interesting example, a non-mixed potluck for queer people of color called "QPOCluck: Oh queer people of color, where art though?" was organized during PerversCité – this event, organized at Ste-Emilie Skillshare, which as I have mentioned in Chapter 5 centers the experiences of people of color and aboriginal people in its mission, served to allow for networks to be created between people sharing similar experiences. Other events, as I will discuss shortly, invite potential allies to come in

solidarity to learn about experiences they might not share, but non-mixed spaces of this sort, like the one that a local activist implemented for intersex people to network before a larger mixed solidarity workshop, allow to recognize that even though diversity is encouraged in queer spaces, the differences in the identities and experiences of various people are also often acknowledged and respected[41].

Other events seem to center more closely on an exploration and celebration of gender fluidity, gender play, or more generally of the plurality of gender identities that can co-exist in queer spaces. As examples, a wig maintenance workshop has been organized a few times over the years both at PerversCité and at Radical Queer Semaine, to help people of all sorts to learn to care about the wigs they wear for various reasons. Other workshops, like "Trans identities and sexual orientation: Similarities and differences" organized for the 2010 edition of Radical Queer Semaine, attempted to recognize the differences, similarities, and sites of intersection between singular realities. Other events, like the "Capture the Fag" public games of the hide and seek kind located at the Eaton Centre during Radical Queer Semaine and in the Little Italy neighborhood during PerversCité, have as a purpose, beyond the enjoyment of the game itself, to *queer* public space, in ways similar to the tactics I have already identified for the Pink Bloc in the previous chapter.

A large portion of the workshops, panels, and activities I participated in during queer events also has a larger "pedagogical" component. Some events literally aim to provide people with tangible skills, like the self-defense workshops organized at different

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[41] This of course closely resembles Puar and Rai's proposition to consider singularities across difference, as they present in "The remaking of a minority model" (2004), a work Oswin (2008) considers to exemplify the queer approach queer geographers should aim for, as I discuss in Chapter 1.

festivals, and the mental health workshop organized during TRIGGER, which aimed to provide tools for people to deal better with their emotions and their mental health, and for people who provide support to their loved ones. Other workshops allow for knowledge, academic and otherwise, to be shared, as per the example I mentioned earlier of the "Queer 101" workshop, as well as other cases like Kink and BDSM 101-type workshops. Such information-based events also included a presentation organized around the situation and realities of Queer Palestinian people that a student from Ottawa facilitated, and a local researcher and university-professor's presentation of research results on a large Québec-based study on homophobia in schools, which both took place during Radical Queer Semaine.

As an other example of a 'learning-based' workshop, a walking tour of the important historical queer sites of Montreal organized during PerversCité emphasized, for example, that the first "gay parade" of Montreal was in fact a 1977 public demonstration against the violent raid of Truxx bar, where over 140 gay people were arrested[42]. The same tour also linked local queer history to that of underground bars and taverns of the Montreal Downtown and Red Light districts, where the day to day and often emotional and romantic lives of many "sexual perverts" of the time were closely intertwined with various members of the underground economy, including sex workers. This tour also aimed to provide information to local activists about the history of queer spaces of the city, but also of the repression and of the responses to this repression that have characterized our collective past. Other events encourage participants to think *critically* about various issues and politics and to build solidarity with people who are not

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[42] http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/rights_freedoms/clips/3231/

(necessarily) part of the LGBT(etc) acronym, like workshops organized by Stella during Radical Queer Semaine, and the Prisoners Correspondence Project's workshops on the criminal justice system and on alliances to be created between queer activists and people in and out of prison walls.

Some events encourage for the application of a queer critical lens to our own behaviors and practices in queer communities. For example, during TRIGGER was organized a consent-based workshop for partners of sex workers; during Radical Queer Semaine was organized an anti-capitalist and cheap dating discussion, and throughout the years both festivals (and I assume, PerversCité as well although I have not witnessed this) have been actively involved in engaging in reflection and dialogue within their organizing collective and with the larger scene over the inclusion/exclusion and accessibility issues that ought to be remedied or at least addressed for their next edition. This was the case over concerns for physical accessibility, over the instability and relativity of safe space, and over the whiteness of the local queer scene, for example – in the case of TRIGGER, this last example was directly addressed through a survey that was sent out through mailing lists to attendees to invite them to comment on how they felt the collective addressed racism and white supremacy during the festival. This constant critical re-evaluation of the oppressions created and re-created in queer spaces that I have hinted at many times before and that I identified as a key feature of queer spaces and more largely of queer organizing, is representative of the inclusive, accessible, and more largely reflexively anti-oppressive orientation of queer politics and found in and through queer spaces.

Finally, another aim of many events organized during Radical Queer Semaine is to plan actions and to develop strategies for social change. Some workshops are for example organized to decide how and on which issues the next public demonstration should be, as per the workshop entitled "Organizing a trans visibility action together" that members of PolitiQ organized during Radical Queer Semaine. This workshop resulted, in the summer following the 2010 edition, in the organization of a large public demonstration that brought together numerous local trans groups, individuals, and allies to protest against the regulations of the Director of Civil Status over name and gender marker change for trans people. During PerversCité, PolitiQ members organized a follow up event to discuss, in the aftermath of this large demonstration, what the next steps of the trans movement could be in Québec. Similarly, a preparatory meeting organized before the G20 at TRIGGER allowed not only for Toronto-based activists to exchange about protesting and direct action strategies, but also to dialogue over the profiling that certain racialized members of the community would face and the strategies possible to address/counter this violence. This workshop notably gave me an opportunity to network with local activists in preparation for my trip to Toronto with PolitiQ, and therefore was a starting point in allowing me to be able to find places for me and other queer Montrealers to stay during the G20 weekend.

These examples of course show that what happens in queer spaces is influenced not only by the movements, politics, and ideologies I have presented in the previous section, but they also aim to plan for the future, which I discuss in the following section. These examples also help to show, as I argue more largely in this thesis, that queer spaces are at once the spaces for utopian, self-reflexive, and auto-critical sociality, and also

terrains for the emergence of a critical analysis of the way things could and should be, within and beyond queer spaces. However, as I address in the final section of this chapter, this double feature of queer spaces I have discussed throughout this thesis is also a source of debate within the local queer scenes, as activists disagree over which aspect should have priority locally.

The "future" – Utopic visions of a queer(ed) world:

In this final section, I highlight one of the main tensions that exist over what local queer activist see as the future of queer activism – in other words, I show that there are sources of disagreement over the utopias that are imagined in, and that should eventually partly result from, the creation of queer spaces and the activism they host in Montreal and other queer locales. There are, of course, more than one issue within the local scene, but as I have discussed before, many are recognized and acknowledged, and some are addressed as part of the creation of queer events. This cannot guarantee that nothing problematic (like exclusions, silencing, and other forms of violence) can ever happen in queer spaces, but the self-monitoring that is an intrinsic part of queer organizing helps to create an atmosphere were there is (at least theoretically) space for issues to be brought forth. The events I attended for this thesis project, and the spaces I created, visited, and inhabited with other local activists, serve to create the discourse of a local queer politics as identified in the previous section. They also serve to enable queer politics to reach outside of radical queer circles, although the extent to which a breakthrough in the larger local political landscape is desired or hoped for remains one of the main sources of debate and of tension within the local scene.

Indeed, there seems to be disagreement over whether there is a necessity to attempt to change the local political landscape by interacting with it, or whether the queerer alternative is to refuse to interact with institutions like the state and to instead call for and envision a radical transformation of our social fabric that starts with alternative experimentations between radical activists, experiments that do not aim to right away reach out to the rest of the population. A key issues that I see to be at the heart of this division, that is I should note not symptomatic of a complete divide in the queer scene but rather of the existence of two overlapping if often divergent strategic "lines" leading to (a) queer future(s), is the elaboration of the most effective strategy for meaningful and inclusive social change.

In order to simplify, and to again allow for my interviewees' and other local activists' own analysis to prevail, I will rest this divide on tensions and differences existing between the two main language communities of Montreal – however, I acknowledge that suggesting such a binary is not only *unqueer* because it does not allow for a plurality and a continuum of positions (as well as for the existence of bilingual and multi-lingual Montrealers), but also that these divergent positions emerge not solely from one aspect of people's identities and experiences but from a multitude of factors constituting their current political visions. My point here is not to 'essentialize' the politics of French and English language communities of Montreal, but rather to point out once again the influence of various factors, including individuals' pasts and paths, and the historical narratives that they associate with queer politics.

Jason was one of my interviewees to most clearly articulate one aspect of this difference between francophone and Anglophone queer organizers of Montreal, first

linking this divide to the relationships of francophone activists to the mainstream LG(BT) world and to academia:

> There doesn't seem to be as big a tension amongst Quebecois people my age, who have the same political beliefs I do and are gay lesbian trans or bi, with the mainstream LGBT world. There isn't, there's nothing weird for my Quebecois queer friends about doing things like sitting on boards of directors and like, you know, doing fully funded PhDs, and all of those things that are steeped in a legitimacy that I think Quebecers still strive for because as a culture they identify as being marginal from the get go. For non-Québécois queers there seems that there's something very sell out about wanting to be on the board of some ineffectual NGO or wanting to go do your PhD just to say you did.

Jason of course here hinted at the tension Mathieu mentioned he feels in his dual roles in more mainstream LG(BT) organizing and in queer circles, but I would add that although Jason identified position within LG(BT) organizations as something that many Anglophone despise, and that Francophones aspire to, this difference also applies to the larger involvement of Francophones in local/regional/provincial politics (as well more largely in their interest in activism that addresses the national government and the politics/policies at every level). Later in our interview, he added that francophone organizers tend to be less "critical" than Anglophones:

> There's a sense amongst bicultural and anglo queers that no gay organization is ever doing enough politically. Either against gentrification, or against misogyny, or against racism. Whereas Quebec queers aren't as critical of those things. I don't know any actively anti-racist Quebecois activist. The struggle is the struggle for Quebec against its Canadian overlords.

However, many (Francophones, but not exclusively) activists question the actual tangible efficacy of a position of refusal to interact, dialogue, or argue with those who currently have power, in particular on the ability of a position based mainly on critique, or centered on (very) small scale and temporary initiatives, to change the material

conditions of existence and of marginalization of a wide range of people. Indeed, what is

left for many behind a refusal to interact with and organized around, for example,

government policies, is a perpetual critique that rarely succeeds to materialize in concrete

actions and that often serves to reinforce an anti-oppressive code of conduct within queer

spaces, without reaching out to the rest of the world. Of course, many local activists in

this position create alliances with other groups and as such step out of sexuality- and

gender-centered political goals and as such get involved with, for example, groups like

No One is Illegal[43]. Yet many other activists (including myself I will admit), remain

skeptical of the impact, both ideological and material, of initiatives like the Queers

Against Israeli Apartheid float during the 2010 gay pride celebrations. Indeed, this

example shows that even such initiative, which seemingly aim to create transnational

alliances with oppressed folks around the globe and to critique states like Israel for their

attempted seduction of queer tourists, might in actually be more effective for local

community-building and in creating networks of support with other queer Canadian

activists, rather than with the actual creation of networks of support and action with

Palestinian people (queer or not)[44], as shown in the description from the PerversCité

program:

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[43] I cannot ignore that many queer people of color (as well as white queer people) are already involved in such initiatives, while they are also not involved in any way in the queer scene I discuss in this thesis. Like many of my fellow organizers, and the organizers of the events I did fieldwork with, whether white or POC-identified, I am well aware that the local queer scene as I present it is overwhelmingly white. A workshop called "What does it mean to be Queer and People of Color: A workshop in three stages" organized during the 2012 edition of Radical Queer Semaine had, in a powerful example of this reality, a presentation entitled "Why is Queer culture so f*@?%!g white?".

[44] The point of such initiatives might however only be to raise awareness, in the context of a large LG(BT) gathering, for the realities of Palestinian people and of the issues

> For the second year in a row, a posse of fabulously dressed Montreal queers will be marching in the pride parade under the banner Queers Come Out Against Israeli Apartheid. This year, we are energized and inspired by our comrades in Toronto who fought and won a battle to assert their right to once again march at Pride with this message.

Perhaps simplifying the reasons for this divergence in the solutions and paths envisioned for social change, Jason offers the following insight about why Francophones and Anglophone tend to have different visions for the future, and links their present endeavors in the achievement of their respective utopia to the separate past and histories of these language communities. In this long, but insightful quote, Jason synthesized many of my other interviewees and fellow activists' thoughts:

> You know… Emily would always joke about the proposal we would get for RQS. They were *so* different. The Québécois queers wanted to have a panel about language, and some wanted to have a panel about "what is queer". The Anglos wanted to do... speed dating! There's a big difference there in what you see as the purpose of organizing. So strangely, there's the French intellectual tradition, [where] the purpose of organizing is an intellectual and political pursuit. Talking with people in a room, talking with like-minded people in a room, is not actually interesting [for Francophones] unless you have something to debate about. Whereas North American anglo culture has less of an interest in debate. Disagreeing is actually not that interesting to us. Whereas in the French tradition it's essential. It's dialectic. While a lot of the English tradition tends to assume that we already agree on a lot of things. […]And this is also a very big difference in terms of the history of isolationist organizing in Anglo American history, by which I mean you're a bunch of like-minded, in this case like-oriented people, you're getting together and your sole purpose is just to be safe together. The buck can actually stop there and you don't give a shit, like 70s feminism.[...] There is a trend to isolationism with the Anglo queers which is very different from the Français de France tradition and the Québécois tradition for which the point is to lead to change in the general well. Changing the mass mentalities. […] In the French tradition, in the Québécois tradition, you're doing what you're doing because eventually you want all seven million people to really believe and feel the same thing. [...] In English queer culture there's always this sense that you can abandon that ideal. You could always give up on being able to

associated with Israel's pink tourism, although I am skeptical of the *éducation populaire*, to use Bobby's words, that is actually done in such contexts.

change what the mainstream thinks and you're still a valid political agent. And that is not seen the same way in French culture. You're perceived as either giving up or ineffectual or intellectually inferior, if you stop being concerned with the general well.

Of course, once again, the tension between the imagined utopia that queer political activism and organizing should lead to is here simplified, but it is interestingly also representative of the dual "nature" of queer spaces I identify in this thesis, and of the rifts between queer theorists like Oswin and queer ethnographers like Brown that I set out to reconcile. While it would be fascinating to further explore this divide and other tensions and issues that I witnessed in queer spaces, such a discussion is beyond the purposes of this thesis. For now, suffice to say that this key tension is in itself largely constitutive of queer spaces, and of the meaning of queer I have identified previously, of the raison d'être of queer spaces I proposed, and of the place-making practices I have framed as constitutive of the creation of these spaces.

CHAPTER 7 Conclusion

In these final pages, I refer back to Tom Boellstorff's "data-theory-method triangle" (2011, p.216) to show that my thesis' contribution to queer studies is to reconcile a queer theory and methods with the study of objects and subjects defined as queer. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Boellstorff's triangle emphasizes that one's methodological and theoretical approach to ethnography relates to the data one gathers, highlighting the inextricable relationship of these three aspects of research. This triad leads Boellstorff to propose that "a queer methods might work through emic theory" (p.216), which involves treating the data one gathers as "theorizations of social worlds, not just as documentation of those social worlds" (2011, p.220).

Emic theory, and more particularly the "data-theory-method triangle" Boellstorff identifies is one that helps to show there is an irony to queer's supposed escape of naming and of labels, as even queer theorists cannot dodge it. What they advocate against, as exemplified by Oswin (2008)'s work, is the naming and labeling of people, or activism, or spaces as queer – yet the approach, or theory, or method that is the queerer alternative is itself named as queer. The major contribution of my thesis is therefore to show that, although I take a methodology and a theoretical approach that leads me to select an object of study and data that is closer to the queer spaces identified and studied by Brown, the activist I encountered, and the spaces they created, themselves reveal and reflect on the violence and oppression that takes place within these spaces, which Oswin sees as one potential lead for a truly queer approach to the study of space. My project therefore re-legitimizes queer activists at the center of a self-reflexive queer critical project, as the

practices of place-making they employ give a practical dimension to this project. The se practices and the intent behind them is what I term utopian sociality.

Moreover, in my thesis I show that the even queerer approach to the study of queer space, whereby we step away from an analysis of the lives of queer people and instead aim to think queerly of issues beyond those affecting queer communities, is also one addressed in queer spaces – indeed, the queer spaces I study in my thesis represent temporary utopic experiments at living better with one another, and at creating forms of sociality where multiple and intersecting forms of oppression beyond sexuality and gender are addressed. These spaces can be seen as experimental attempts at an imagined larger political project, or in the minds of some activist they are the foundations for the elaboration of strategies for social change that can, must, and will result in a radical transformation of the local and global political landscape, which is what I refer throughout my thesis as a queer critical engagement.

From multi-sited fieldwork done at three queer festivals and at one large public demonstration, from interviews with local organizers, and through analyzing the meaning of the term queer, the raison d'être of queer spaces, the place-making practices of local activists, and the temporality of queer spaces, I have shown that the peculiarity of queer spaces is that they are the product of not only a desire to create alternative forms of being with one another, *utopian sociality*, or to use a queer analysis for the way things are and the way things should be, *a critical engagement*, but that these two aspects of queer spaces are mutually constitutive and can be seen as two sides of the same coin. They represent "queer" as theoretical, and "queer" as practical.

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