

DIY Spaces in the Montreal Independent Anglophone Music Scene From 1995-2025

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the spaces and spatial practices that inform the independent Anglophone music scene in Montreal, Quebec. This scene incorporates elements of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) culture, which resists mainstream influences and dominant modes of production. Through a participant-centred ethnography incorporating 16 participants and archival research, this study documents tactics that have allowed the scene to persist despite changing urban pressures. DIY spaces, that is, those places that have gone unregulated and have allowed for unique, boundaryless cultural production, are the central focus. Looking at space and place as configurations of cultural practice with fluid boundaries, I consider the longevity of this music scene at the crossroads of the old and new, its history and its future, and its networks and structures. The theoretical framework draws on Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, Michel de Certeau's tactics and strategies, and Doreen Massey's understanding of spatial temporality, illuminating how scenes are dynamic processes, shaped by ongoing negotiations of space and authority. Case studies of past and present DIY spaces illustrate the scene's adaptability and reliance on ephemeral, often hidden, spaces for music production and consumption. I conclude that a scene is a story and practice of space: through action it becomes inscribed into the environment, and through refigurative action it is maintained, forming a path legible to those who share in its rhythms, histories, and spatial practices.

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Introduction

In 2014, I moved to Montreal from Ottawa to start an undergraduate degree in Sociology at Concordia University. Because of my disinterest in the Frosh Week initiation activities associated with the Faculty of Arts and Science, I decided to hang around the residence buildings instead, meeting many students from the Faculty of Fine Arts (a faculty that had no organized Frosh Week activities). Following them along to events and parties across the city, I soon found myself enmeshed in a world of underground music I had never known existed. My new friends, informed by their older friends and siblings, took me to concerts in industrial buildings and unassuming lofts. Every outing felt like an adventure, one that could only have been revealed to me by virtue of my presence in that place at that time.

Montreal has a rich history as a cultural centre for musical practices, reaching beyond the bounds of Canadian notoriety. The urban environment's material conditions have allowed for the development of independent scenes, its participants relying on cheap rents and access to resources and grants. Within this creative ecosystem, the Mile End neighbourhood has been primarily associated with the city's Anglophone independent music scene and was notably awarded the title of "Music Creation Capital of Canada" by the Society of Composers, Authors, and Music Publishers of Canada in 2016 (SOCAN 2016).

François Mouillot describes Montreal as an "insular, isolated and atrophied milieu for independent music" which is "culturally isolated" from not only the rest of the province of Quebec but also remains "peripheral" to the Anglophone music industry in other Canadian cities (2021, 133-134). From the late 1970s to mid-1990s, "pursuing creative or experimental music in Montreal meant being totally secluded from any other network of similar music-making existing

in other countries, in other Canadian provinces, and from other music scenes within Montreal” (Ibid.) Therefore, some paths to a professional music career were not available to those working in the industry (Ibid., 134-135). However, many independent musicians in Montreal have been able to “pursue creative paths without the financial pressures of ‘making it’” (Ibid., 139). These conditions have led local musicians to structure music production according to alternative business models that are dedicated to supporting local musical communities (Ibid., 135; Stahl 2007, 142). As such, the “place-based attributes of Montreal are highly influential in shaping networks within the music industry” (Cummins-Russell and Rantisi 2012, 81). These conditions have shaped some of the core aspects and definitive traits of the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) operational principles and experimentalism of music scenes in the city (Mouillot 2021, 135).

This thesis focuses on the independent Anglophone (indie-Anglo) music scene in Montreal. This cluster of musical activity has centred around the Mile End neighbourhood of Montreal since the 1990s. The beginning of the movement of the cultural industry in Montreal to the Mile End was marked by Ubisoft, the large video game development company, buying up industrial spaces in buildings in the area (Desjardins 2021). As the Mile End began undergoing this cultural transformation, artists began moving into loft spaces in the area. As Yves Desjardins describes:

Countless cultural creators had also discovered these vast light-filled spaces, often offered at very low rents by hard-pressed landlords. The landlords looked the other way when some of the artists added residential loft-type space to their studios. A series of collectives sprung up...a new indie music scene, primarily anglophone, already active in the surrounding area, also moved into spaces. Bands created rehearsal spaces, and semi-underground raves went on into the early morning hours in these vast spaces of former factories. (Ibid.)

A blossoming independent music scene emerged in the Mile End area through the use of DIY spaces and small venues.

Today, the indie-Anglo scene continues to thrive. It encompasses alternative or “indie” genres with more low-fidelity (lo-fi) production and experimentation often present in the music. Notable genres featured in the scene include indie rock, indie pop, dream pop, alternative rock, experimental rock, and country. Artists that have emerged from this scene and found international success include Arcade Fire, Godspeed You! Black Emperor (GY!BE), Mac DeMarco, Grimes, TOPS, Homeshake, and Yves Jarvis, among many others. These artists, whose success helps sustain the scene, are currently or were at one point collaborating with independent labels, recording studios, and distributors. The scene has favoured a DIY ethos in the production, distribution, and consumption of music (Sterne and Razlogova 2019, 6-7). At least in theory, artists do not need to rely on the corporate industry and can sustain their practices outside the boundaries of major record labels and distributors.

DIY can be defined as the method of doing anything on your own, especially in terms of creative processes, without the direct aid or influence of professionals. DIY production labels have been major actors in the development of independent music practices in Montreal (Mouillot 2017). A key component of this independent music and the associated scene is its DIY spaces. These spaces are typically unregulated, organized by renters of apartments or lofts, and operate without formal approval from municipal authorities. According to Mouillot, the “economic and industrial landscape [of Montreal] has helped foster and maintain a proportionally large number of small grassroots to mid-size infrastructure—concert venues, recording studios, festivals, record labels and more recently music production software,” —all of which contribute to the maintenance of the scene (2021, 139).

In his 1998 discussion of this music scene in Montreal, Geoff Stahl wrote: “Currently there is little and infrequent discussion of a Montréal independent scene in major or minor media

(including radio and print) outside of the city” (43-44), although at the time, discussion of the scene was beginning to emerge within the city itself. Bands such as GY!BE posted show dates online, and magazines such as *The Hour* discussed the emergence of venues such as Casa del Popolo and DIY spaces such as Hotel2Tango. A significant amount of international journalism emerged focusing on the independent music scene in Montreal’s Mile End neighbourhood in the early 2000s. Notably a 2005 article in *The New York Times* described “English speakers who have banded together up and down St. Laurent Boulevard in the Mile End neighbourhood, filling lofts, community centres, bars and restaurants with sumptuous noise” (Carr 2005). When reporters came looking for signs of the indie-Anglo music scene, they soon found that it was hard to find, as it lacked visible cues (Straw 2018, 21). The fact that the scene did not “offer itself up to be easily understood or decoded,” and that its places of musical consumption were hidden, enhanced the sense that this music was indeed “underground” (Ibid., 22). The music was marked by a “cultivated casualness,” and often consumed in dark rooms, lofts, or bars; these inconspicuous spaces did little to convey the scene to outsiders (Ibid., 21). These underground DIY structures, some with much shorter life spans than others, became part of the lasting indie-Anglo music scene. Many small loft spaces, such as Hotel2Tango, Lab Synthèse, The Torn Curtain, Drones Club, and La Plante, have received journalistic attention (Astorga 2021; Catchlove 2016; MacIntyre 2022). These spaces employed DIY approaches to cultural activity and provided room for experimentation where the boundaries associated with legal venues could be suspended.

This thesis draws on cultural studies and engages with the spatial turn, focusing attention on the importance of space and place in cultural analysis. A key concept is “scene,” which is used here to describe groups whose social lives are shaped by shared practices of cultural

production, building on and revising earlier notions of subculture. I draw on theories of space and place from Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau. Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974) argues that social space is a social product, shaped by hegemonic forces, incorporating Antonio Gramsci's idea that ideological consciousness is produced through structural conditions. De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) distinguishes between strategies of institutional power and tactics, the everyday practices through which marginalized people navigate and resist dominant systems.

An exploration of these spaces reveals their contribution to the formation and maintenance of this scene. Placing this scene and its associated spaces in its historical context illuminates how its practices have been maintained. As small venues and DIY spaces close, others open, and as the scene changes, it can persist in supporting independent music practices. A study of DIY spaces is intriguing because their histories are hard to uncover and archive, especially when participants have employed tactics to remain relatively unseen. In order to respond to this challenge of invisibility, this thesis incorporates interviews with 16 members of the scene. Through these interactions, I gathered information and ephemera to illuminate these less visible spaces. These interviews help to document the scene in its present configuration. They draw out the ways in which DIY spaces have been influential in the formation of the scene and continue to be used by local musicians in ongoing resistance against more formalized music institutions.

Throughout this work, I uncover the specific components of the Montreal indie-Anglo scene in its current form that have been passed down through previous scene members. These include a dedication to shared spaces and practices, a resistance to purely commercial goals, and an insistence on creative autonomy. DIY spaces have been essential to produce and sustain the

scene over the past 30 years. I argue that key to maintaining the indie-Anglo scene in Montreal is an insistence on resisting mainstream and commercialized music practices by challenging and finding alternatives to the intended use of space imposed by authorities such as municipal officials and urban developers. This has led to an understanding of Montreal as a space shaped by everyday experiences of scene members as opposed to the institutional design of city authority. Through their everyday resistances, scene members contribute to a refiguration of authority. Key to this refiguration of authority is a refiguration of spaces of music production and consumption.

Chapter 1: Background, Theoretical Framework, and Methodology

This chapter traces the development, foundations, and manifestations of DIY culture within music scenes. It explores how DIY emerged in response to industrial capitalism and evolved through countercultural movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The chapter then examines the relationship between DIY and adjacent terms like “indie” and “independent,” emphasizing how autonomy and resistance to mainstream systems shape their overlapping meanings. Attention is given to the labour that sustains local music scenes, the broadening of access to DIY methods, and the difference between ideological and political interpretations of DIY practices and their pragmatic adaptations. From there follows a discussion of the importance of physical space in structuring live music culture. The chapter considers how small venues contribute to scene formation, social intimacy, and musical innovation. Finally, it investigates DIY live music spaces as flexible, often fragile infrastructures through which artists claim independence and creativity.

The development of DIY

The widespread shift from subsistence economies to industrial capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fundamentally transformed systems of labour and production. As a conscious alternative to dominant systems of production, the concept of DIY only became thinkable after the transition to systems of labour introduced by the industrial revolution. In this context, ethnomusicology scholar and author of *DIY House Shows and Music Venues in the US: Ethnographic Explorations of Place and Community* (2021) David Verbuč argues that “doing it yourself” began to emerge as a response to the alienation produced by industrial capitalism and the division of labour (2021, 5). As such, DIY represents a response to

the alienation, specialization, and commodification of labour characteristic of industrial capitalist society.

In response to growing dissatisfaction with urban-industrial society, a variety of countercultural movements emerged throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Kevin Wehr notes that dissatisfaction with urban-industrial society gave rise to various counter-movements in the nineteenth century, including back-to-the-land and back-to-nature initiatives, as well as alternative religious and utopian socialist communities (2012). Such movements first appeared in Great Britain and later took root in the United States during the nineteenth century (Verbuč 2021, 5; Wehr 2012, 11-14; Brown 2002). In the American context, the idea of “self-reliance,” as articulated by Ralph Waldo Emerson in the mid-nineteenth century, reflected an early form of DIY thinking (Emerson [1841] 2010; Wehr 2012, xii-2; Verbuč 2021, 5). Over time, a wide range of practices came to be associated with DIY, as individuals and communities sought alternatives to mainstream economic and cultural systems. These included worker’s cooperatives, the early Arts and Crafts movement, and fanzine self-publishing cultures, all of which reflected the growing popularity of DIY throughout the twentieth century (Verbuč 2021, 5). This historical lineage is echoed in the name of one of Canada’s most prominent independent labels, Arts & Crafts, co-founded by members of Broken Social Scene in the early 2000s (Murphy 2009).

The term DIY was first used at the beginning of the twentieth century to describe home improvement, referring to creating, repairing, and modifying things without an expert (Bennett and Guerra 2018, 8). Over the following decades, the meaning of DIY evolved to embrace a range of creative cultural practices. Referencing music scholar David Pearson (2018) in the context of music scenes, David Farrow explains:

American DIY emerged in the 1980s independent rock and punk scene as an “ideology and practice” of cultural production that strived for a sense of social autonomy from oppressive hierarchical structures and aesthetic autonomy from the music industry (Pearson 2018, 47). DIY situates self-sufficiency and autonomy as central aspects of creative life. (2020, 11)

Andy Bennett and Paula Guerra describe DIY *culture* as the following:

Do-it-yourself (DIY) culture describes a form of cultural practice that is often pitched against more mainstream, mass-produced, and commodified forms of cultural production. It often finds itself aligned with an anti-hegemonic ideology focused on aesthetic and lifestyle politics. (2018, 1)

These authors highlight the tension between DIY practices and the corporate music world.

This oppositional stance was prominent in the late 1970s and 1980s American and British punk scenes, where DIY emerged as a central organizing principle. Verbuč argues that while punk initially rejected aspects of 1960s counterculture such as its idealism, musical complexity, and perceived elitism, it ultimately reabsorbed many of its values, including communal living, sustainability, and anti-war or anti-racist politics (2021, 7-8). Although early punk and DIY spaces often reproduced exclusionary practices inherited from mainstream and rock cultures, they also developed inclusive spatial tactics aimed at fostering social intimacy at shows. These practices included onstage dialogue, interactive performances, and the articulation of shared values through informal communication such as cartoons and zines (Verbuč 2021, 64).

This DIY ethos extended to networks of independent labels, distributors, and other players operating outside corporate cultural industries (Martin-Iverson 2017, 1; Gosling 2004; Moore 2007; O’Connor 2008; Spencer 2005; Thompson 2004). Pearson emphasizes that DIY in American punk functioned both as an ideological commitment to autonomy and as a practical mode of cultural production (2018). Many scholars view collaborative, non-profit production as the “authentic core” of punk, which included a strong rejection of “selling out” and assimilation into mainstream systems (Martin-Iverson 2017; Dean 2002). Still, as Stevphen Shukaitis (2010)

and Steve Wright (2000, 128-130) point out, this ideal often conflicted with material realities, as a heavy reliance on unpaid labour and personal sacrifice had the potential to lead to precarity and self-exploitation.

By the 1990s, as punk and punk-influenced bands gained mainstream popularity in the United States, the underground scene (rooted in 1980s DIY values) responded with anxiety. Many participants advocated for a renewed commitment to the underground and distanced themselves from bands who signed with major labels or became too popular, even within independent circuits (Pearson 2018, 37).

Over time, the DIY ethos evolved from a practical response to industrial alienation into a broad cultural and political stance rooted in autonomy, self-sufficiency, and resistance to mainstream systems. Initially grounded in ideological and political movements, its values, such as collaboration, anti-commercialism, and community building, have been adapted across diverse creative and activist contexts. Despite internal contradictions and material limitations, the lasting appeal of DIY lies in its capacity to imagine and enact alternative ways of making, living, and organizing.

Indie/Independent

The terms DIY, indie, and independent music culture are often used to describe similar sets of practices. These terms all emphasize self-sufficiency, creative autonomy, and resistance to mainstream commercial systems. However, their meanings and associations have evolved and distinctions have emerged between them, particularly as indie has shifted from a mode of production to a genre label.

Much of the scholarship on indie and independent music—particularly in the work of Kaya Oakes, David Hesmondhalgh, and David Verbuč—highlights how independent cultures share values and practices with broader DIY scenes. As Hesmondhalgh explains, the early indie movement grew out of “a hard-headed network of post-punk companies” that actively challenged the commercial organization of music production and distribution favoured by major record labels (1999, 35). Oakes traces indie culture back to the 1950s and 60s, identifying early forms of grassroots organizing and artistic independence that prioritized creativity over profit and operated outside the mainstream (2009, 12). While she describes DIY as a central tenet, she argues that indie culture also involves building community, personal empowerment, and self-actualization through creativity (Ibid., 12-13). Indie artists have historically “cultivated” autonomy, credibility, and freedom by building their own networks and controlling their own artistic outputs (Ibid., 14-15).

Verbuč similarly connects DIY and indie music culture, noting that both emerged from oppositional practices associated with anti-corporate scenes (2021, 7). However, “indie” underwent a transformation from being a synonym for DIY in the 1970s and 1980s to becoming a genre and marketing category in the 1990s and 2000s. As Verbuč notes, many contemporary artists and labels still present themselves as “independent” or “DIY” while operating within corporate frameworks of branding, distribution, and promotion (2021, 7-8).

Hesmondhalgh argues that this shift led indie to become associated with a narrower set of aesthetic traits such as “jangly” guitars, an emphasis on clever and/or sensitive lyrics inherited from the singer/songwriter tradition in rock and pop, and minimal focus on rhythm track (1999, 38). As a result, the term became increasingly detached from its earlier political and structural connotations. By the 1990s, indie had become part of the British pop mainstream, even as it

retained a rhetorical connection to independence (Hesmondhalgh 1999, 37). Indie now often refers not to a politics of resistance but to a commodified genre. Yet, as both Oakes (2009) and Verbuč (2021) argue, the values of DIY that informed the indie genre continue to shape how artists define themselves and operate within contemporary independent music scenes.

Rather than focusing on distinctions between DIY, indie, and independent, it is more productive to understand how the insistence on independence operates across these overlapping and reinforcing contexts. As Heller argues, this insistence can be overdetermined, shaped simultaneously by social, political, and economic forces (2017, 67). This multiplicity is echoed in Hesmondhalgh, where the appeal to autonomy and independence in popular music should not be read as either wholly resistant to or wholly complicit in commercial systems. Instead, these ideals often express “a contradictory but deeply felt desire for both authenticity and success, for meaningful expression and wide recognition” (Hesmondhalgh 2013, 85). Independence functions less as a fixed category and more as a flexible cultural resource, one that artists and communities use to navigate the pressures of the market, the demands of artistic integrity, and the politics of self-representation. Understanding this as a connecting thread helps to explain the persistence of DIY, indie, and other independent practices, even as their material conditions and institutional affiliations change. Their convergence reflects a shared valuation of self-determination and creative control that continue to be central aspirations, despite differing interpretations and applications.

DIY Culture

The role of DIY cultural labour in sustaining local music scenes has garnered increasing academic attention, particularly in relation to how these grassroots efforts support broader

networks of creativity and infrastructure. Andy Bennett and Christopher Driver discuss the significance of different forms of DIY cultural labour and economic activity within local music scenes (2014, 102). Referring to Stahl, they highlight that “local music scenes invariably embrace a broad range of activities, including music-making, production, promotion—as well as the necessary infrastructure of physical resources, such as venues, clubs, rehearsal space, recording studios, and record/music shops, needed to sustain such activities” (Ibid.). These DIY approaches may resist corporate cultural hegemony (Lohman 2017, 51).

For Ellis Jones (2020), there are two types of DIY culture. He writes:

One is a broad but ultimately coherent tradition of cultural resistance, often undertaken in the name of greater aesthetic diversity, economic equality and access to participation—and often with inherent or implicit connections to larger ideas of social justice. The other is largely a socio-economic consequence of changes in the music industries, as well as in the ICT (information and communication technologies) industries. (2-3)

While ideologically driven DIY participants reject profit and see their work as political, pragmatic DIY participants aim to make a living and build a sustainable music career (Crossley 2023, 83). Jones argues that in the contemporary moment, DIY has become mainstream. This may appear contradictory as DIY has historically been defined by its opposition to conventional norms and corporate control (2020, 2). However, Jones is not pointing to the collapse of DIY’s ethos but rather the popularization of its methods. As he notes, “the lineage of DIY culture no longer has sole dominion over certain aspects of ‘do-it-yourself’ practice,” and “DIY is increasingly acknowledged as an obvious choice for all sorts of musicians” (Ibid.). In other words, DIY as a mode of music-making has diffused beyond subcultural boundaries into wider fields of practice, including those that do not explicitly position themselves as anticorporate or underground.

While DIY has historically been framed as oppositional or subcultural, it does not necessarily represent an ideal or utopian alternative to the corporate music industry. Rather, like the flexibility of the term “independent,” DIY should be understood as a flexible set of practices that emerge in specific contexts and respond to particular conditions of cultural production. As Jones argues, DIY can help mitigate “the distance that popular music culture has from the lives of most people,” by fostering more direct and grounded relationships between music and everyday life (2020, 6). He emphasizes that DIY presents opportunities for “a particularly close kind of ‘articulation’ (i.e., connection) between music and social life, which can (and sometimes does) have empowering, democratizing effects” (Ibid.). These democratizing effects are often realized through pragmatic, everyday practices that differ in tone, form, and politics from the punk-informed roots of DIY culture. For example, while early DIY was explicitly anti-commercial and aggressive in its aesthetic, many contemporary forms prioritize personal expression, community building, and sustainability, often maintaining more subtle modes of anti-commercial resistance. This shift reflects how DIY has evolved into a broader mode of cultural production.

The Place of Live Music in Public Space

Urban spaces and live music are necessarily connected, with venues, performances, and audience engagement shaping cultural, social, and spatial experience. Fabian Holt and Carsten Wergin (2013) conceptualize musical performance as a dynamic force in shaping urban space and social meaning, providing both sensory and emotional engagement. Performance enables communities lacking stable geographic or social belonging to experience a sense of place through shared sound and presence (Holt and Wergin 2013, 13; Bohlman 1994; Gilroy 1993;

Ramnarine 2004; Stokes 1994; Toynbee and Dueck 2011; Wergin 2010). Urban transformations, such as gentrification or tourism, reshape how music is produced, performed, and valued, often instrumentalizing music in global city competition at the expense of local diversity and autonomy (Holt and Wergin 2013, 13; O'Meara and Tretter 2013).

Physical location remains central to urban music cultures, materially and symbolically. Verbuč argues: "Music therefore has to be examined and understood not only in its wider sociocultural context (for example, history, political economy, culture), but also in the immediate physical context of music making activities" (Verbuč 2021, 37; Forsyth 1985; Stock 2002; Stump 2003; Sakakeeny 2010; Holt 2013). He adds: "Through physical contact and intimate connection with strangers and friends...DIY participants momentarily transcend the boundaries of private 'personal space' and temporarily establish an affective intimate community" (Verbuč 2021, 95; Garcia 2011, 74-112; Muñoz 2013; Farrow 2020, 18). Luis-Manuel Garcia analyzes nightlife and electronic music venues, showing that social connections in crowds arise from shared emotions and experiences rather than fixed identities or causes. He emphasizes the fluid and unstable nature of these bonds, shaped by the dynamics of the venue and the crowd itself (Holt and Wergin 2013, 17; Garcia 2011). The embodied experience of music in physical space remains central in anchoring social meaning and cultural identity.

At the architectural and acoustic level, venue design shapes both performance and audience experiences. Michael Forsyth's *Buildings for Music* (1985) offers a comprehensive historical analysis of the dynamic relationship between musical composition, architectural design, and acoustic experience from the seventeenth century to the present. Forsyth contends that changes in musical styles and tastes have directly influenced the design and function of performance spaces, while architectural innovations and acoustic considerations, in turn, shaped

the evolution of musical practice (1985, 8). The text traces this co-development through early purpose-built music rooms in Britain and Germany, the rise of opera houses in Italy and France, and the expansion of concert halls in response to Romanticism's demands for larger and more resonant spaces. Forsyth challenges deterministic views of acoustics based on mathematical formulas, emphasizing instead the interplay of artistic judgment and scientific inquiry (1985, 324). For example, he references a piece of writing by Debussy in which the composer expressed how certain musical compositions were created specifically to be performed outdoors, where harmonies and effects would reflect the environment. Debussy described creating

music composed especially for the open air, on broad lines, with bold vocal and instrumental effects, which would sport and skim among the treetops in the sunshine and fresh air. Harmonies which would seem out of place in an enclosed concert room would be in their true environment here. (1928, 32)

This illustrates Debussy's attention to the physical context of the space in which the piece is performed.

Forsyth bridges architectural history, musicology, and acoustic science, considering contemporary trends in adjustable and technologically enhanced performance environments. Contemporary research on small venue acoustics similarly demonstrates practical solutions for multifunctional spaces, ensuring sound quality despite spatial constraints (Ramakrishnan and Dumoulin 2016). Together, these perspectives reinforce that music's physicality—its architecture, acoustics, and embodied presence—is inseparable from its social and cultural significance.

Simon Frith (2007) frames live music as a practice deeply rooted in physical space, where the shared presence of performers and audiences creates a unique collective experience and emotional engagement. This immediacy fosters a social experience unattainable through recorded music alone (Frith 2007, 14; Holt and Wergin 2013, 5). The “ideal” listening

experience depends on the interplay between performer, audience, and setting, making the physical space a central component of musical meaning (Frith 2007, 9). Even mediated or secondary performances, such as karaoke, tribute bands, and reality TV competitions, rely on the audience's awareness of the original live context, highlighting the enduring cultural and ideological importance of the live musical environment (Ibid., 11-12). Frith's insights complement Holt and Wergin's (2013) framing of performance as active urban space production while aligning with Forsyth's account of architectural and spatial adaptation.

Venue characteristics, including physical constraints and acoustics, influence participation and musical experience. Urban transformation and gentrification in urban music scenes drive up rents, displace low-income residents and artists, and encourage homogenized, chain-oriented commercial spaces (Holt and Wergin 2013, 9; Lloyd 2006; Zukin 1982; Hammett and Hammett 2007; Atkinson and Bridge 2005). This dynamic is illustrated by the closure of the New York East Village club Tonic:

After more than 9 years as a home for avant-garde, creative, and experimental music, Tonic will reluctantly close its doors on Friday, April 13th, 2007. We simply can no longer afford the rent and all of the other costs associated with doing business on the Lower East Side. The neighborhood around us has been increasingly consumed by 'luxury condominiums,' boutique hotels and glass towers, all making the value of our salvaged space worth more than our business could ever realistically support. (digital_freak 2007, in Holt and Wergin 2013, 10)

Managers and fans lamented the loss of a vital, community-focused venue resisting mainstream commercialization. The loss of flexible spaces undermines scene diversity and vitality.

Small Venues

Music venues, from informal clubs to major concert spaces, operate as both physical and social infrastructures that reflect broader urban processes such as gentrification and cultural

policy. As cities evolve, smaller venues are often displaced or disappear, while mid-sized commercial venues increasingly dominate, reshaping the conditions under which musical communities form and sustain themselves. This displacement is closely tied to gentrification, as rising rents and the influx of luxury development often push out venues that support experimental or underground music scenes, altering the cultural character of neighbourhoods. Beyond their structural role, venues function as affective sites that shape how music is experienced (Holt and Wergin 2013, 16; Tsioulakis 2013). Small venues in particular play a continuous and vital role in urban cultural life, serving as incubators for local music scenes and fostering the development of popular music (Whiting 2023, 5). Regular live performances in these intimate spaces create opportunities for musicians to perform consistently and for participants to network and socialize, contributing to the emergence of internationally recognized movements such as Manchester's Madchester in the 1980s and Seattle's grunge scene in the early 1990s (Whiting 2022, 241).

Robert Kronenburg (2012) notes the influence of small venues in developing many popular music genres. He explains:

The story of vaudeville [in the United States] is primarily one of influence from Europe via Music Hall and variety; however, the story of honky-tonks and juke joints is clearly the reverse, for in the years before and after the First World War, it was in these small, informal, sometimes barely legal venues that the principal strands of global popular music performance would be forged – blues, country, jazz, and rock 'n' roll. (37-38)

Before the amplification of live music, folk and acoustic performances depended on the intimacy of small spaces to enhance their sound and volume (Whiting 2023, 7). These spaces typically had low ceilings and a stage at one end to project sound, features that continue to create an intimate and social atmosphere (Ibid.). Being frequently adapted from previous uses, small venues are deeply influenced by their built environment, often having a makeshift appearance resulting from

an ongoing process of “making do” with the given space (Whitting 7, 2022; Kronenburg 156, 2019).

Small venues provide artists with entry-level spaces to play to interested audiences, allowing innovation to flourish (Miller and Schofield, 2017). In their description of “The Toilet Circuit,” composed of small and independent music venues in England, Miller and Schofield write that “seedy environments are the bedrock of cultural production. Their survival is integral to the establishment of grassroots scenes, for bands to cut their teeth, to learn their craft and to get signed” (2017, 160). Music scene participants gather to enjoy music in small venues, share a drink, tell stories, dance, and socialize. These precarious spaces consistently face challenges like noise restrictions, rising rents, and eviction for new developments. Despite these challenges, these spaces are integral to the networks maintained within local music scenes (Whiting 5, 2023). Sam Whiting explains that “the social interactions that occur in small live music venues are integral to the live music culture of a city, as it is within and between these interactions that local music scenes are articulated, acting as the bedrock upon which a broader live music ecosystem is built” (8, 2023). As independent music scenes rely on networking and personal relationships, these small spaces enhance expressions of intimacy and sociality integral to maintaining these relationships (Crewe and Beaverstock 1998; Whiting 6, 2023).

Ben Gallan’s (2012) description of The Oxford Tavern, a pub in the Australian city of Wollongong, describes the former venue as a focal point of the city’s music scene:

With a small stage, dingy room and poor sound qualities the pub had never been purpose built or retrofitted as a music venue. Nor had it launched a globally famous band, genre or subculture. Instead, it was associated with local meanings of what it meant to play and support local music—a place to drink, socialise, dance, mosh, sing and belong. (35)

Generally, the commercialization of music venues leads to higher ticket and drink prices, which makes these venues less accessible to lower-income audiences and independent or lesser-

established artists (Holt 2013; Burrows 2009, 246; Verbuč 2021, 19). Niche cultural spaces like small live music venues often focus on supporting communities rather than maximizing profits. Operating independently from more extensive franchises, they face more frequent risks than larger corporate venues (Whiting 2023, 6). Despite having certain benefits for artists, small venues often maintain restrictive policies (“pay-to-play” policies, door policies) related to a profit-driven economy that affects music and social places (Verbuč 2021, 19). These examples point to the more significant problem with the material political-economic forces in music scenes, as many public spaces have high admissions, expensive drinks, and age policies, which can potentially repel participants, especially younger ones, from attending these venues (Ibid., 2). For these reasons, many independent musicians today rely on DIY spaces as an alternative to these intimate but regulated spaces.

DIY Spaces

A DIY live music space is any space used for live music performance that was not originally intended for such use. These include locations such as lofts, warehouses, apartments, houses, and highway underpasses. The use of DIY spaces illustrates the creative employment of unconventional strategies and self-sufficiency by artists and organizers to bypass the constraints of regulated spaces and the mainstream music industry (Hawkins 261, 2020). A tendency to skip permits, avoid liquor licenses, and to create noise late into the night often leads to conflict with neighbours, landlords and law enforcement. However, the independent structure and discrete nature of such spaces offer performers, organizers, and attendees opportunities for experimentation, self-expression, collaboration, community building, and performance when no other space is available (Hawkins 261, 2020).

DIY spaces offer many of the same benefits as small music venues. As non-commercialized places of music production and consumption, they are part of the network of places integral to a city's music scene. Verbuč writes that because of the structural and social reasons repelling participants from attending public venues, as well as the ideological orientation toward DIY independence, American DIY communities aim to create DIY music spaces that resonate with their social and cultural goals (2021, 22). He argues that "This kind of double determination of structural and ideological factors...leads toward house shows as being both the 'last resort' (a means to an end) and the 'best option' (an end in itself)" (Ibid.). John Bealle's work emphasizes the importance of space in DIY scenes, particularly processes of place-bonding with favourite venues or scene-associated spaces; the regular turnover of impermanent spaces results in communal grieving when these spaces are lost (2013, 6). These spaces are often fragile and short-lived, as they frequently function illegally and are hard to maintain because the space was not intended for such activity. Michaela Hoare et al. explain that "the autonomous DIY spaces run by amateur musicians aim to celebrate their distinct localities through the performance and recording techniques unique to their area" (2014). The authors also note that live performance preserves local identity (Ibid.). That said, it is important to recognize that arts communities are complicit in the gentrification of low-income neighbourhoods despite the inclusive political commitments of DIY scenes and venues (Farrow 2020, 9).

Nevertheless, the radical or pragmatic use of space has contributed to the growth of countless music scenes. Two early examples point to the pragmatic, unconventional use of spaces as DIY venues. The first is the scene of New York jazz music in the Harlem rent parties of the 1920s. Giora writes that the "Harlem of rent parties and underground economies created music" (1977, 94). In response to rising rents, Black Americans segregated in Harlem began

throwing rent parties to be able to pay rent. A 1938 interview describes the birth of the rent party:

Harlemites soon discovered that meeting these doubled, and sometimes tripled rents was not so easy...Someone evidently got the idea of having a few friends in as paying party guests a few days before the landlord's scheduled monthly visit. It was a happy, timely thought. The guests had a good time and entered wholeheartedly into the spirit of the party. Besides, it cost each individual very little, probably much less than he would have spent in some public amusement place. Besides, it was a cheap way to help a friend in need. It was such a good, easy way out of one's difficulties that others decided to make use of it. Thus was the Harlem rent-party born. (Byrd, 4)

Pianist Willie the Lion Smith recalled: "They would crowd a hundred or more people into a seven room railroad flat, and the walls would bulge" (Giora 1977, 94-95). This creative use of space not only aided the low-income inhabitants of the neighbourhood in paying inflated rents but also offered semi-private places where musicians could perform.

Another early example of DIY venues is that of the New York "loft scene" (Heller 2017). Jazz performances in these spaces began as early as the mid-1950s, with informal gatherings and jam sessions held in the spacious industrial lofts of musicians, artists, or supporters. New York artists initially used various alternative spaces—warehouses, parks, street corners, churches, and community centres—to promote their work. Eventually, they became most associated with abandoned factory spaces, which frequently hosted concerts and became known globally as the "loft scene" (Zukin 1989, 118). These large spaces, often in areas with few neighbours, were ideal for accommodating instruments and large ensembles without causing noise complaints (Heller 2017, 32).

Even before the popularization of the term "DIY" in independent rock music, the pragmatic use of private space for live events was already shaping music scenes. Analyzing DIY spaces reveals how material, economic, and regulatory conditions structure not only the production of music but also its social experience. Live music is always contingent on its

physical, acoustic, economic, and political environments. Space and place are therefore essential to understanding the sociality surrounding musical practice. Venues are not merely performance sites; they are spaces where gentrification, regulation, and economic pressures are enacted and contested. DIY practices, often framed as autonomous or self-directed, are better understood as adaptive responses to these spatial constraints. Both formal and DIY spaces illustrate how access, organization, and the temporality of live music are shaped by the occupation and regulation of space. This spatial perspective provides a framework for examining Montreal's indie-Anglo music scene, where the built environment, economic precarity, and shifting policies directly influence how music is produced, performed, and experienced.

Theoretical Framework

To better grasp the significance of environments of music production and consumption, it is essential to investigate theories related to the social dimensions of spaces. Space is neither neutral nor passive; it plays an active role in everyday practices. Every mode of production creates its own space (Lefebvre 1991, 31), including DIY production. Social production necessarily has material effects (Ibid.). These effects are especially evident in music-related spaces, where social practices and material conditions coalesce to produce distinct cultural formations. In relation to music, the terms “subculture” and “scene” have been central to discussions about sociability and space.

Subcultural studies emerged as a prominent field of inquiry in the 1970s and 1980s, largely shaped by the theoretical and empirical work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Subculture theory explored the experiences of working-class youth, emphasizing how their music-related rituals signalled forms of social identity and

differentiation (Hall and Jefferson 1993 [1976]; Hebdige 1979; Stahl 2022, 9). A shift in academic focus in the late 1980s and early 1990s moved away from the more rigid, class-based frameworks of subcultural studies toward more flexible and spatially oriented concepts like “scene.” The term “scene” has been favoured by authors such as Will Straw and Geoff Stahl to describe distinct social groups who participate in music production and consumption. Scene is a flexible concept that describes the expansive sociabilities that fuel “ongoing cultural innovation and experimentation within and against the rituals of everyday life” (Drysdale 2014, 346). It serves as a revision and critique to the concept of subculture, addressing some of its limitations, such as subculture’s emphasis on spectacularity and class-based resistance to the dominant or parent culture. That being said, both terms point to the significance of local geographic context of spaces where music production and consumption take place. I will first explore the development of theories of subculture and then propose scene as the appropriate concept used to describe local clusters of musical activity (Stahl 2004, 52).

Subculture

In the Second Edition of *The Subcultures Reader* (2005), Ken Gelder defines subcultures as differentiated groups that are non-normative or marginal to the greater social system through their particular interests or practices (1). Although various terms categorizing these marginal groups have had different defining boundaries, such as subcultures, tribes, and scenes (Hesmondhalgh 2005, 22), studies of these collectivities have remained abundant in the fields of popular music and cultural studies (Gelder 2005, 2).

Subcultural studies began with the study of urban social “types” at the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago in the mid-1930s (Ibid., 19). The focus was on

“unassimilated” and “deviant” types that were marginal to society. Writers such as Robert Park (1925) were interested in the city as a highly differentiated and ever-changing place of social, cultural, and moral variations (Park 1925; Gelder 2005, 20). In the field of urban sociology, Albert Cohen was the first to provide a general theory of subcultural identity, focusing on the experience of social class and alternative sets of values produced by circumstances and group belonging (Gelder 2005, 21). Cohen’s *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang* (1955) emphasized the social aspects of anomie, seeing delinquency not as an individual phenomenon but as an aspect of groups of youth doing things together, deriving meaning from their togetherness (Cohen 1955, 178; Gelder 2005, 21).

The CCCS, founded by Richard Hoggart in 1964, broadened the study of subcultures and significantly influenced subcultural studies throughout the 1960s and 70s (Ibid., 81). Their works analyzed contemporary examples of culture combined with an engagement with critical theory. They understood that people produce what they produce not by choice but rather under the circumstances directly imposed on them by the past (Hall and Jefferson 1976, 5; Marx 1951, 225). Their definition of culture and, in turn, subculture is framed within this critical epistemology, focused on class relations. Culture is understood as historically situated, shaped by the material and social conditions from which it emerges. This perspective shaped how the CCCS approached the study of subcultures. Rather than seeing youth cultural practices as autonomous or spontaneous, they interpreted such practices as symbolic responses to lived conditions of class and social dynamics. They moved away from the observational and ethnographic approaches of the Chicago School towards analyses of popular media, culture, and everyday life (Hall and Jefferson 1976). They emphasized conflicts between subcultures, their parent cultures, and the relationships between youth and the new consumer society (Cohen

1972). Notably, the concept of subculture assumes the existence of a cohesive parent culture, which can be problematic since such coherence is often an oversimplification.

Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's collection of essays, *Resistance through Rituals* (1975), shifted focus to resistance. Subcultures resist consenting to hegemony through leisure activity (Hall and Jefferson, 1975; Gelder, 2005, 83). They turned away from urban sociology towards the critical practice of semiotics (Gelder 2005, 83). McRobbie's "Girls and Subcultures: An Exploration" was significant for highlighting the structural social and economic contexts and constraints that girls occupied in relation to subcultural style and commercial culture, at a time when most theorists primarily focused on boys and masculine subcultures (McRobbie 1975; Gelder 2005, 84). Unlike much subcultural theory that emphasized resistance, McRobbie paid greater attention to how girls engaged with consumer culture from below, navigating commercial forces in ways that were neither fully oppositional nor wholly compliant (Gelder 2005, 84). This approach underscored how they creatively negotiated identity through consumption within constrained social and economic conditions (Ibid.).

Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) developed the focus on subculture and style, seeing it as a "refusal" or a "gesture of defiance," notably with the radical reuse of ordinary objects (Hebdige 1979, 84). Hebdige's work incorporated an antipathy towards the dominance of mass culture and communication (Gelder 2005, 85). Hebdige describes style as spectacular because it is visually disruptive, and therefore has signifying power, acting as a mechanism of "semantic disorder" by recontextualizing everyday objects in ways that challenge and subvert mainstream meanings (Hebdige 1979, 90; Gelder 2005, 121). In this way, resistance in subcultural theory was partly about semiotic struggle, as subcultures express their alternative positioning through coordination of style and display. Subcultures represent a "noise" or

“interference in the ordinary sequence” in the representation of phenomena (Ibid.). Following Hebdige’s work, subcultural studies moved further away from the tradition of urban sociology towards art and the humanities.

Several studies on subcultures from this era explored the spatial dynamics of these social groups. As Gelder explains: “Some subcultures can indeed refuse social regulations and seek places...where their own often excessive or ‘de-regulated’ activities can flourish” (2005, 215). Peter Marsh et al. discuss “microsocieties” that are thought to be hard to regulate but have places structured by ritual and meaning-making (Marsh et al. 1978; Ibid.).

By the 1960s, the term “subculture” had become ubiquitous and was no longer applied solely to deviant behaviour, instead taken up across a range of subfields of sociology (Gelder 2005, 23). In 1970, John Irwin posited that the association of subcultures with deviance did not account for the casualness of the subcultures he experienced (Irwin 1970, Gelder 2005, 18). He responded to this with the term “scene,” referring to a social world whose members have a shared perspective (Gelder 2005, 23). He stated that “subculture is becoming a conscious category at the folk level” and that “the widespread use of the metaphor ‘scene’ reflects this trend” (Irwin 1970, 76). Irwin notes that in the metaphor “make the scene,” “scene usually has a definite location and is transitory” (Ibid., 74). Although he did not position it as an academic concept then, his understanding of the folk use of the word “scene” reflects its later association with urban space.

An important aspect of contemporary understandings of “subculture,” and which lends itself to the development of the concept of “scene,” is the idea that “what [subculture] comes down to is nothing less than learning how to refigure authority” (Hebdige 2012, 405). Key to a “refiguring of authority” is the refiguring of space.

In their first conception of subculture, Hall and Jefferson asserted that subcultural activity:

win[s] space for the young: cultural space in the neighbourhood and institutions, real-time for leisure and recreation, actual room on the street or street-corner. They serve to mark out an appropriate 'territory' in the localities. (1975, 35)

In this excerpt, there is a keen sense of the importance of reappropriated space, which remains prominent in discussions of music scenes by more contemporary theorists. In order to carve out new space for themselves, these groups continue to negotiate and subvert urban strategies. A focus on the refiguring of space focuses not on the analysis of people in place but rather on the everyday production of that space (Lefebvre 1991, 37).

In his work on skateboarding in the city, Iain Borden foregrounds the production of space, showing how skateboarders engage the city creatively by finding alternatives to architecture's intended and regulated uses (Borden 2001; Gelder 2005, 216). Borden was influenced by the work of the Situationist International movement and Henri Lefebvre, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this section (Gelder 2005, 217). For Borden, revolution is an act of play and imagination; skateboarding reinvents spaces and repurposes them, subverting the use of these spaces intended by those who created them (e.g., city planners) (Ibid.).

During the 1990s and early 2000s, a significant body of scholarship emerged challenging the continued utility of the concept of subculture. Although the specific limitations of the concept differed among theorists, there was broad consensus that youth identities and social identities had become increasingly reflexive, fluid, and fragmented (Bennett 2011, 493). This transformation was attributed to the growing circulation of cultural commodities, images, and

texts, which enabled more individualized identity constructions and complex notions of selfhood (Ibid.; Muggleton 2000).

The concept of “subculture” is limited in its ability to account for the complex socio-spatial dynamics of popular music. Stahl explains that subcultural theory is rooted in class-based analyses of working-class youth and their use of music as a marker of social distinction and resistance within “temporary counter-hegemonic” spaces (2022, 9). However, this framework tends to romanticize public, masculinized spaces while neglecting more private or feminized sites of musical engagement, such as the bedroom, thus reinforcing gender biases (Ibid.). Moreover, subculture assumes relatively fixed social boundaries and coherent group identities and parent culture, which limits its ability to account for the fluid and multifaceted nature of contemporary musical formations. As a result, it fails to adequately engage with the transient nature of these social groups and of musical space highlighted by Stahl (2022, 8–10).

The limitations of subcultural theory in capturing the spatial dynamics of music culture lie in its use of place as a fixed backdrop rather than a lived experience. In contrast, Bennett (2000) emphasizes that music is deeply embedded in the lived negotiation of space and place, shaping how individuals “author” their surroundings and create “collectively defined meanings” of space (3). The CCCS model, by ignoring these transient and relational dimensions, ultimately reduces music culture to symbolic resistance while overlooking its role in constituting the everyday production of space.

Notably, much of the work on subcultures in the 1970s closely links popular music culture with youth culture (Hesmondhalgh 2005, 22). While it is true that popular music holds particular significance for young people, it is also important to recognize that “popular music should not be conceived as the privileged domain of young people” (Ibid.). Although young

people do form many scenes, the category of youth is not a necessary descriptor for these groups according to the concept of “scene.” What I draw from the works on subculture from the 1960s and 1970s is an understanding that a scene can resist or repurpose dominant cultural activity while maintaining an urban spatiality.

Scene

In response to the limitations of traditional subcultural theory, the concept of “scene” emerged as a more flexible concept for understanding cultural and musical groups. “Scene” abandons some of the more spectacular and resistance-oriented ideas associated with subcultural studies. Will Straw developed “scene” as an academic concept in his landmark work, “Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music” (1991), drawing the term from an earlier paper by Barry Shank (Hesmondhalgh 2005). Soon after, Shank published his book on the rock and roll scene in Austin, Texas, using the concept in quite a different way from Straw (Ibid., 27). For Straw, scene implies an urban spatial context and provides a term that can point to groups that are “insistent and industrious in mapping out their difference” but perhaps in a less visible way than “subculture” implies (Stahl 2004, 53). Straw describes a “unit of city culture” (2004, 413) that emerges “from the excesses of sociability that surround the pursuit of interests” (412). For Straw:

Scene designates particular clusters of social and cultural activity without specifying the nature of the boundaries which circumscribe them. Scenes may be distinguished according to their location...the genre of cultural production which gives them coherence... or the loosely defined social activity around which they take shape... (2004, 412)

Hesmondhalgh describes Shank's "scene" as

a series of temporary identifications, which create "a productive anxiety" (Shank 1994, p. 131), which in turn provides the impetus to participate in a live, face-to-face scene. In Shank's words, "spectators become fans, fans become musicians, musicians are always already fans." (2005, 27)

Hesmondhalgh argues that scene is a confusing term, as it suggests a bounded place but, at the same time, has been used to refer to more complex spatial flows, which he understands as two incompatible ways of using the concept (2005, 23). Nevertheless, the term's flexibility is one of its merits, as it can refer to fixed boundaries and the less rigid, unfixed, processual spatial practices that constitute a scene. Although Shank's scene is compelling, I draw on Straw's conception of scene for the purposes of this thesis.

Stahl implements Straw's understanding of "scene" to discuss the indie-Anglo scene in Montreal, which also informs how my research employs the concept. Stahl explains that scene is a salient descriptive category that describes this particular group with more explanatory power than subculture implies (2004, 52). It includes both the formal and informal arrangements within infrastructures. It takes on the shifting roles that any music-adjacent person may take on within the scene, whether simultaneously or over time. This flexible and relational understanding of "scene" not only captures social dynamics but also provides a lens through which to view the spatial contexts in which they unfold.

Spatial Practices

To engage with the spatial dimensions of "scene," Henri Lefebvre's theorization of space provides a critical framework for understanding how social and cultural practices both are embedded in space and actively produce it. Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space* introduces the idea of "social space" (1991, 2). He states that "(social) space is a (social) product" (1991, 6).

Lefebvre aims to construct a “unitary theory” between three fields of concern: the physical, the mental, and the social (Ibid., 11-12). In doing so, he incorporates Gramsci’s concept of hegemony. Gramsci posits that “the thesis which asserts that men become conscious of fundamental conflicts on the level of ideology is not psychological or moralistic in character but structural and epistemological” (1971, 164). Hall and Jefferson describe hegemony as the “moment when a ruling class is able, not only to coerce a subordinate class to conform to its interests but to exert a ‘hegemony’ or ‘total social authority’ over subordinate classes” (Hall and Jefferson 28, 1976). For Lefebvre, the process of hegemony is intimately linked to the production of space. He argues that “the ruling class seeks to maintain its hegemony by all available means” and that this exercise of hegemony includes the occupancy of space (1991, 10-11). Space is not a “passive locus” of social relations. Rather, it plays an operational and instrumental role in “knowledge and action” in the “existing mode of production” (Ibid.).

Lefebvre offers a “perceived—conceived—lived (in spatial terms: spatial practice, representations of space, representational spaces)” (Ibid., 40) conceptual triad of space. He defines this triad as the following:

1. Spatial practice embraces the “production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion.” (Ibid., 31)
2. Representations of space “are tied to the relations of production and to the ‘order’ which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to ‘frontal’ relations.” (Ibid.)
3. Representational spaces “embody complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art” (Ibid.). He explains that this is the dominated, passively experienced space, which overlays physical space, reimagining the use of its objects. (Ibid., 39)

Lefebvre notes that these three categories contribute in different ways to the production of space according to unique modes of production and varying historical periods (Ibid., 46).

Lefebvre's description of representational spaces compliments Michel de Certeau's concepts of "strategies" and "tactics" in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). For de Certeau, there is a political dimension to everyday practices, as the "dominees" (those who are subject to those in power) make use of the "strong" (those in power) in their ingenious ways of consumption (1984, xvii). Central to this is the distinction between "strategies" and "tactics." De Certeau defines strategies as "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power...can be isolated from an 'environment'" (Ibid., xix). Strategies include what is considered proper and dominant, where political, economic, and scientific rationality reside. Conversely, there are tactics. A tactic is

a calculus which cannot count on a "proper"...the place of the tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. (Ibid.)

These "victories of the weak over the strong" consist of many everyday practices (Ibid.). DIY approaches in music scenes, whether it be a dedication to independent production labels, methods of distribution, or accessible event spaces, can be considered an amalgamation of tactical accomplishments that sustain their presence.

In de Certeau's chapter "Walking in the City," he separates daily, on-the-ground practices from the "theoretical" city, as seen from above. He states that this fiction of a "voyeur-god" must make themselves alien to the ordinary practitioners of "down below" (Ibid., 93). He writes that "escaping the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye, the everyday has a certain strangeness that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible" (Ibid.). Everyday practices are not imagined totalizations. They are a series of stories and tactics that move ordinary practitioners through space. De Certeau distinguishes between the "collective

mode of administration” and the “individual mode of reappropriation” of spatial practices (Ibid., 96).

De Certeau writes that “places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve...” (Ibid., 108). A story is a spatial practice (Ibid., 115). He states that “spatial practices in fact secretly structure the determining conditions of social life” (Ibid., 96). The everyday practice of space is a *tour*; by this, he means a travel story through space. In this way, “space is a practiced *place*” (Ibid., 117). The dominant narrative is like a map, which totalizes and configures a strategic “mythical” conception of place from an all-seeing perspective (Ibid., 125). Such a map seeks to impose a single overarching narrative, overwriting “places haunted by the story-spirit” to fit its depiction (Ibid.). In this way, scene as a spatial practice can be understood as a story of space. The collection of everyday stories in a place processes that space as a “culturally creative act” (Ibid., 123).

Doreen Massey’s work “Places and their Pasts” (1995) stresses the inclusion of historical context in investigations of place. Massey insists that “in trying to understand the identity of places we cannot—or, perhaps, should not—separate space from time, or geography from history” (1995, 187). Massey’s insistence on the temporality of places, Lefebvre’s conceptual triad of space, de Certeau’s distinction between strategies and tactics, as well as the spatiality of stories, all consider space to be processual and never fixed in place or unidimensional. In this way, space is a practiced place, socially produced by clusters of activity with fluid historical and geographical boundaries, or as stated by Massey, as “articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings” (Stahl 1998, 5; Massey 1995, 154). Addressing the manifestation

of a scene through places, spaces, and their histories contributes to an exploration of how spatial practices produce scenes.

Methodology

This work employs a qualitative, ethnographic methodology. I incorporate interviews to explore first-hand accounts of both the geographical and historical aspects of the Montreal indie-Anglo music scene. This choice is influenced by Kerry Drysdale's work "When Scenes Fade: Methodological Lessons from Sydney's Drag King Culture" (2014) in which she employs interviews as a method. She explores "the way in which an ethnographic methodology has the capacity to advance our understanding of scenes' peculiar temporal qualities" (Drysdale 2014, 347). Relying on Straw's concept of scene to carry out her ethnographic exploration, she understands ethnography as generative, explaining that "scenes emerge through everyday processes of interpretation by the participants in the same process as their academic corollaries" (Ibid., 355). For Drysdale, the social moment of describing the scene in an interview helps to generate the scene. In this way, the ethnography as a process also establishes a scene.

My methods are also influenced by Verbuč's ethnographic exploration of DIY house shows and music venues. In studying music scenes, setting the boundary of place, and not genre, allows for an approach that accounts for differences in stylistic preferences. Performing intensive, ethnographic research across the United States, Verbuč employed participant observation, semi-structured interviews, attended over 200 DIY shows, lived in three DIY houses, participated in three DIY tours, and studied written accounts and primary sources authored by DIY participants (Verbuč 2022, 14-15). He explains that by using a "multiplicity of perspectives, and occasional first-person narrative," he endeavoured "to avoid authoritative

discourse and its claims to objectivity” (Ibid., 15). When performing an analysis of a dynamic, living community, this type of care in research, focusing on “particular stories and individuals situated in particular cultural and spatial contexts” is essential to studying a culture non-invasively (Ibid., 17).

As inspired by Verbuč, I use multi-sited ethnography. As Stéphanie Gaudet and Dominique Robert explain, “multi-sited ethnography highlights the fact that a research object is never given, whether by a territory, era, or group, but always the result of a selection of decisions” (2018, 71). When using multi-sited ethnography, researchers follow connections that create and are part of the research object (2018, 72). This reflects the theoretical framework of this project, understanding cultural production as processual, as this method emphasizes connections and relations of research areas. As George E. Marcus explains:

Cultural logics so much sought after in anthropology are always multiply produced, and any ethnographic account of these logics finds that they are at least partly constituted within sites of the so-called system (i.e., modern interlocking institutions of media, markets, states, industries, universities – the worlds of elites, experts, and middle classes). Strategies of quite literally following connections, associations, and putative relationships are thus at the very heart of designing multi-sited ethnographic research. (1995, 97)

This method allowed me to investigate multiple sites and their interconnected relations.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather a range of different experiences from a diverse group of scene members. I prepared a list of guiding questions for the interviews, but also followed participants’ own ideas of what was important to share about this scene. I let the interviews themselves guide the process by following the suggestions from my participants. I developed my questions as the interview process was underway as new topics and venue spaces emerged that were interesting to explore. I used both purposive sampling and snowball sampling, allowing for scene members to participate in directing this research.

Upon reaching out to participants I provided a general idea of what the interview covered. To be eligible for an interview, participants needed to identify as current or former members of the indie-Anglo music scene. In total, I conducted 17 interviews, concluding the process once the data had reached saturation. Participants included: Colin Ratchford (musician performing as Fireball Kid), Ethan Soil (musician in multiple bands, including Fleece and Nora Kelly Band), Felix Viton Ho (event promoter with KickDrum), Jean-Sebastien Audet (musician performing as Yves Jarvis and 2025 Polaris Music Prize winner), Konner Whitney (musician performing as Whitney K), Michael Eidelson (documentary filmmaker currently producing *NOTAFLOF*, a film about Montreal's small venues), Michael Kalman (musician performing in Alicia Clara and luthier at DaMichaelZone), Rosie Long Decter (musician performing in Bodywash and Una Rose), Seamus Dalton (musician performing in Nap Eyes), Seamus Hickey (musician performing in Babyteeth and Fleeting Colours), Sebastian Cowan (owner of Arbutus Records and founder of the DIY space Lab Synthèse), Solomon Azrieli (musician and founder of venue Mai/son), Tess Roby (musician and founder of the SSurroundss record label), and Tobin Belanger (artist and founder of Silver Door). Two additional participants chose to remain anonymous. One, under the pseudonym "Bones," is a musician signed to Arbutus Records; the other, "Legare," is a long-time local musician.

This research prioritizes contextualized, participant-centred accounts and explores the spatial and social relationships within Montreal's indie-Anglo music scene. As both a researcher and an active participant in the scene—through my work at a local venue, involvement in a band, and long-term presence as a community member, I conducted interviews that were grounded in pre-existing social connections. Many participants were friends or acquaintances, often introduced through mutual contacts. This familiarity fostered rich conversations, resulting in a

wealth of material. While not all quoted or included in the final text, it was valuable in shaping my understanding of the broader cultural context and informing the analysis throughout the thesis. Participants generally spoke positively about the indie-Anglo scene, often agreeing on its value while finding it more difficult to articulate critiques. Many expressed uncertainty when recalling specific details, yet their accounts frequently overlapped, allowing for the reconstruction of a shared history of particular spaces and practices. All participants expressed enthusiasm about having the scene documented, noting that recording this moment in its history felt both timely and necessary for a variety of reasons.

In addition to interviews, I incorporate a range of supplementary historical documentation to add depth and context to participants' accounts. This includes photos, archived webpages, and other digital artifacts that captured how the scene communicated and represented itself over the past 30 years. The Internet Archive's Wayback Machine was particularly useful for accessing material that is no longer publicly available, offering a clearer view of how key ideas, events, and relationships were presented at different points in time. By integrating this historical documentation, I argue that participants' responses can only be fully understood within a broader temporal and cultural framework. These archival sources do more than enrich and contextualize the interview data, helping to place individual narratives within the evolving scene itself.

I combine a multi-sited ethnographic approach with insights from spatial theory to conceptualize the scene not as a fixed location or community, but as a set of dynamic, situated processes shaped by everyday practices, relationships, and movements through space. This conceptual and methodological foundation enables a grounded analysis of how the indie-Anglo music scene in Montreal takes shape through localized acts of cultural production. The shift from class-based frameworks of subcultural theory to the more fluid and spatially attuned concept of

scene reflects a broader epistemological movement away from fixed categories of resistance and identity toward more processual, localized, and embodied practices. This shift allows for greater attention to the everyday spatial tactics that sustain music communities beyond spectacular or oppositional frameworks.

Drawing from Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, de Certeau's emphasis on spatial tactics, and Massey's temporal and relational geography, I argue that scenes are best understood as spatial practices that create and transform place through ongoing, often improvised, acts of cultural production. Rather than simply locating people in space, the concept of scene captures the ways in which cultural activity actively makes space meaningful, contested, and dynamic.

A scene does not "win" a space, rather winning space can be understood as the production and negotiation of space by refiguring previous places and spaces. A scene does not necessarily function as a form of resistance to a dominant or parent culture but instead emerges as an amalgamation of diverse spatial tactics. The concept of scene, then, involves everyday tactical practices that actively contribute to the production of space. I propose this interpretation to account for how scenes sustain themselves through localized spatial engagements. This framework will guide the following analysis of how particular music scenes emerge, persist, and evolve through the spatial practices of their participants.

Chapter 2: The Development of Montreal's DIY Live Music Spaces

Since the early 19th century, Montreal has been a city well-known for its live music. The development of its robust cultural scenes throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been shaped by the city's unique economic and industrial landscape (Mouillot 2017) as well as its distinct linguistic composition (Straw 2004). As francophone music scenes gained traction in Montreal in the latter half of the twentieth century, the indie-Anglo scene was left to be resourceful and carve out alternative avenues for production, distribution, and consumption. One of the defining outcomes of these independent methods was the proliferation of small venues and DIY spaces. The emergence of DIY spaces in Old Montreal, followed by the later proliferation of such spaces in the Mile End neighbourhood in the H2T area code—historically a working-class area that evolved into a cultural hub known for its affordable rents and artist-run spaces—laid the foundation for the thriving DIY scene.

Given the central role that small venues and DIY spaces play in building and sustaining local music scenes (Whiting 2023; Verbuč 2022), Montreal offers a compelling case for examining the development and longevity of its indie-Anglo scene where such spaces have been integral, providing not only performance opportunities for emerging artists but also functioning as social infrastructures where musical styles, networks, and communities form (Holt and Wergin 2013; Whiting 2023). This chapter incorporates case studies to offer concrete examples of how these dynamics play out in practice, revealing the spatial strategies that sustain independent cultural production in the scene. Given the transient nature of DIY spaces, case studies help illuminate how dominant spatial norms are refigured through spatial tactics, and

maintained through localized, everyday practices. This emphasizes the importance of place-based analysis in understanding this music scene.

This chapter focuses on case studies of two specific venues, Lab Synthèse and Drones, to explore practices of space within Montreal's DIY music scene. Examining the social and creative dynamics that emerged from these venues reveals the role of unregulated spaces in fostering alternative cultural production and community-building (Gibson 2012). The legacy of DIY spaces from the late 1990s and early 2000s in the Mile End neighbourhood established a clear pathway for newcomers seeking to continue the pragmatic repurposing of unconventional spaces for music. These case studies also highlight the challenges and tactics that contemporary DIY spaces navigate to sustain Montreal's independent music scene. Tactics developed and maintained over the course of the last 30 years include anti-commercialized attitudes towards music spaces such as affordable entry, community-run organization, a reliance on word-of-mouth to promote live performances, and following unspoken rules of DIY spaces. To understand how the cases studied in this chapter represent and are developed from the broader historical and geographical context unique to Montreal, it is important to situate the spaces within the city's longer history of live music practices. The emergence of new DIY spaces and small venues have not occurred in isolation but rather have developed from a well-established tradition of musical activity rooted in earlier spatial configurations and social conditions. An overview of historical events helps contextualize the ongoing dynamics and practices that continue to shape the contemporary interaction of Montreal's indie-Anglo music scene.

Background to Live Music in Montreal

In 1825, Montreal welcomed its first institution devoted exclusively to performing arts, Theatre Royal (Cummins-Russell 2009, 67). The city became well-suited for classical music, marked by the founding of the McGill University Conservatorium in 1904 and the Conservatoire national de musique in 1905 (Ibid., 6). From the early 20th century onward, Montreal developed a vibrant nightlife culture, influenced in part by Quebec's decision to vote against prohibition in the 1898 referendum—the only Canadian province to do so (Weintraub 2004). In addition, the enforcement of prohibition laws in the United States further contributed to Montreal's reputation as an entertainment destination (Cummins-Russell 2009, 69). By 1948, the city was home to fifteen large nightclubs and twenty-five smaller venues featuring live music, reflecting its status as a major site for live performance and social outings (Ibid.; Weintraub 2004). Many of these venues were concentrated in and around the downtown core and entertainment districts like St. Laurent Boulevard.

Between the early 1900s and the 1960s, Montreal's nightlife was heavily influenced by organized crime, with nightclubs serving as hubs for bootlegging, gambling, prostitution, and protection rackets (Cummins-Russell 2009, 69; Weintraub 2004). Musicians were expected to ignore the illegal activities around them. Mayor Jean Drapeau's 1954 crackdown targeted these venues, leading to widespread club closures, reduced performance opportunities, and lower pay for musicians (Gilmore 1988). Although coffeehouses emerged as alternative spaces, they lacked the commercial success of the earlier nightclub scene. Additional pressures such as the rise of

television, suburban migration, and the growing use of recorded music further reduced opportunity for live performers (Cummins-Russel 2009, 70; Weintraub 2004; Gilmore 1988).

Montreal's deindustrialization began with the opening of the Saint Lawrence Seaway in 1959. This infrastructural development redirected maritime traffic away from the Lachine Canal, contributing to the decline of adjacent industrial neighbourhoods such as Pointe-Saint-Charles, Saint-Henri, and Griffintown (Steinberg 2019; Weintraub 2004). While the Port of Montreal remained active, the canal area lost its status as the city's industrial core, a shift reinforced by the canal's full closure to shipping in 1970 (Steinberg 2019). At the same time, a significant change began in 1960 when Jean Lesage was elected premier of Quebec, and the Quiet Revolution took form. Before this shift, from the late 1800s until the 1950s Montreal's Anglo-Scottish business elite dominated the city's commerce, controlling a substantial portion of Canadian wealth and maintaining power through alliances with the Catholic Church (Cummins-Russel 2009; Weintraub 2004). French Canadians, despite making up the majority of the population, were largely excluded from economic and cultural leadership prior to the 1960s. The Quiet Revolution marked the rapid secularization of Quebec society and the political ascent of French Canadians, reshaping cultural institutions and public life (Gilmore 1988; Prévost 1993). The city's economic downturn, compounded by deindustrialization and the political tensions surrounding Quebec separatism, led to Toronto overtaking Montreal as the centre of Canada's Anglophone music industry (Cummins-Russel 2009, 71; Prévost 1993). French Canadians gained political control following Lesage's election, and French Quebecois music surged in popularity in the 1970s, establishing its own star system based on local French acts (Cummins-Russel 2009, 71; Gilmore 1988; Prévost 1993). The de-industrialization of the city as well as the rise in French Canadian

political power, marked again by the Parti Québécois' 1976 election and the 1980 separation referendum, contributed to major record labels withdrawing from Montreal (Cummins-Russel 2009, 72; Germain and Rose 2000). In response, independent Quebec music companies formed l'Association *quebecoise de l'industrie du disque, du spectacle et de la vidéo* (ADISQ) in 1978 to fill the gap left by the departing industry (Ibid.).

By the mid-1980s, Montreal was facing severe economic challenges. Ongoing spatial transformations in manufacturing districts like Old Montreal left lofts and warehouse spaces abandoned in their wake (Stahl 2003, 163). While many Anglophones left the city, artists from across Canada were drawn to Montreal for its cheap, spacious lofts suitable for creative work. For example, the Belgo Building, originally a garment industry hub, saw artists renting spaces in the 1980s as the garment district moved, transforming it into a centre for contemporary art galleries (Boisseau 2022). Recently, the building has been put up for sale, prompting concern that its status as space for artists may change under new ownership (Gravenor 2025).

The late 1970s to early 1980s fostered a sense of leisure and play, as abundant space provided a backdrop for creativity. In the absence of formal venues, musicians staged performances in their own lofts, where shows were informal and authorities generally turned a blind eye (Cummins-Russel 2009). A promoter compared Montreal at the time to Berlin in 1984, describing the prevalence of empty buildings and the ease with which artists could rent cheap lofts and host shows (Ibid., 73). This freedom allowed artists and musicians to create a scene on their own terms, with warehouse parties becoming key social events, offering a sense of community and experimentation that would come to define the city's independent music. This period was the springboard for the city's thriving independent punk and new wave scene, giving

rise to numerous new bands such as Terminal Sunglasses and The PinUps (Stahl 2003, 164). As Stahl writes, musicmakers were “guided by a standard do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos characteristic of punk” and supported by small, enthusiastic audiences (Ibid., 166). Several small-scale record labels (Og Records, YUL, Pipeline, Psyche Industry, and EnGarde) emerged in support of the growing independent scene (Ibid., 167).

Throughout the 1980s, Anglophone musicians in the city faced significant challenges in gaining broader exposure. Local artists received minimal representation on commercial radio; however, university-based stations such as CRSG (Campus Radio Sir George Williams) at Concordia played a crucial role in supporting the scene by providing airplay and offering studio space for bands to record (Ibid., 170). To a limited extent, the emergence of small-scale alternative magazines in the mid-1980s also increased the visibility of musicians (Ibid.).

In the 1990s, the Anglophone scene expanded in many musical directions. The suggestion of a minor renaissance was marked by the emergence of bands such as the Snitches (who, from the early to mid-nineties, ran their own loft/performance space in Old Montreal, C-Pig or Seapig), Pest 5000 (the “houseband” for derivative records, which operated out of Old Montreal), and the appearance of new gallery spaces which hosted live music events (Ibid.). One loft at the intersection of De La Gauchetière Street and Beaver Hall Hill in Old Montreal was known as Sex Garage, an after-hours venue popular with the LGBTQ+ community in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was the site of a significant police raid in July 1990. After the raid, The Snitches transformed the space into a hub for late-night parties and performances (Hammond 2005). Throughout the 1990s, activity in the Anglophone scene would move towards St. Laurent Boulevard, where bars such as the Bifteck and small venues such as Barfly were important in the

evolving musical network. The Plateau neighbourhood was especially appealing due to its commercial loft spaces and proximity to downtown. Bands began to perform in these spaces in the absence of traditional venues. In Louis Rastelli's novel, *A Fine Ending* (2007), he describes a typical night out in this area:

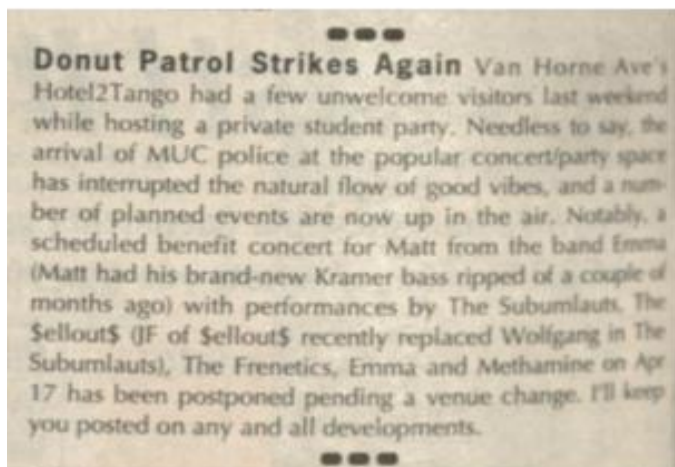
Kirsten was at the Bifteck, which was how it always was: bowls of free popcorn everywhere, the occasional person we knew passing through... Later on, we went to the Barfly for a free show by the resident blues band. On the way, we ran into a local show promoter... ripping posters off poles... 'they covered up other people's posters' he explained... Posters are the main way to promote shows here because everyone's always walking around. (2007, 122)

With the emergence of independent labels such as Derivative and Cargo Records, access to distribution improved, and the low cost of living made Montreal, particularly the Plateau, an attractive base for musicians (Cummins-Russel 2009, 73). Rastelli describes this era being a particularly hard time to find an apartment in the Plateau, as the newly "hip" area drew a more high-income crowd. He writes, "After a few years of us artist types living here, we'd helped change that reputation, and now many affluent yuppies were attracted by the neighbourhood's hip artsy allure" (Rastelli 2007, 128). Artists continued to be squeezed out of the area in search of lower rents.

The 1990s saw the emergence of new DIY spaces north of the Plateau neighbourhood. While Straw frames the Montreal indie-Anglo scene in terms of "invisibility," this is complicated by the visibility granted through alternative weekly magazines (2018, 22). While the scene may have been illegible to the mainstream (city officials, big media, commercial industry), it was legible within certain creative media circuits. Alternative magazines have a specific readership that has already identified with alternative culture. Reporting on the scene not only documented it but also had a role in producing it. By mentioning DIY spaces, these magazines were part of an

infrastructure of visibility that supported the scene's growth, because the scene relied on a certain kind of member: people who respected its codes but also showed up and participated. Alternative magazines such as *The Hour*, an English-language alternative weekly magazine published in Montreal from 1993 to 2012, were curating not just information but also an audience compatible with the scene. The following mentions of DIY spaces are drawn from *The Hour* between 1993 and 1999.

In November 1993, *The Hour* reported that the band The Snitches performed at private warehouse shows across the city. The article notes that the band cultivated a “large and loyal following while helping put something back into access-level indie, something that goes beyond the artificial separation of bands and fans that characterize the vast majority of shows at a club level” (*The Hour* 1993). In September 1997, in an interview, Tom from the band Shifter described their early performances: “We started Shifter playing lofts. The first show we did was a loft party—there were 200 people drinking, having fun. You tell people it’s a party, and people show up” (*The Hour* 1997). That same month, the magazine’s “Locals at Large” section observed a growing disinterest in traditional live music venues, with musicians and audiences seeking alternative performance spaces. The article states: “There is a genuine move toward finding music- and people-friendly venues, the more unconventional the better” (Ibid). From 1997 onward, *The Hour* frequently referenced Hotel2Tango as a DIY space that hosted shows and parties on Van Horne Avenue in the Mile End neighbourhood. The loft space, opened in 1995, seemed to answer a call within the community for spaces that fostered a more egalitarian and independent approach to live music. It marked an explosion of musical activity in the Mile End, moving further north of the Plateau Neighbourhood to the H2T area code (See Figure 1).



(Fig. 1. *The Hour*, vol. 6, April 2–8, 1998, 16.)

By 1995, Montreal was still facing major political and economic challenges, worsened by the uncertainty surrounding Quebec’s potential secession from Canada in the second referendum (Catchlove 2016). In this context of post-industrial decline, artists and musicians found inspiration in the empty, unused spaces in the Mile End. This political-economic environment directly influenced the creation of DIY spaces such as Hotel2Tango. The absence of large-scale development meant that rents were low. Two members of the Canadian post-rock band GY!BE, Kiva Stimac and Mauro Pezzente, moved into one of these spaces on Van Horne Avenue, intending to live there and naming the space Gallery Quiva (Khanna 2008). As Ali Rahman and Lorraine Carpenter write:

“We moved there in 1995,” recalls Pezzente, “and we thought it’d be a really great place to put on shows. So we started playing maybe one show a month and called the place Gallery Quiva. We’d sell beer and make a little money but after about six months, we couldn’t handle living there anymore because of the constant exhaust and carbon monoxide from the garage below. So we left, and Effrim [another ninth of godspeed!] moved in, and renamed it Hotel2Tango.” (Rahman and Carpenter 2000)

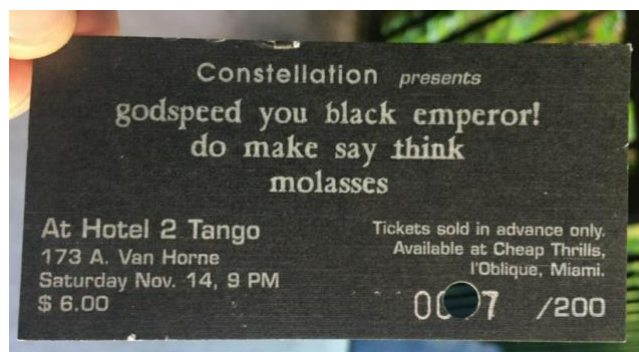
The venue quickly became a hub for underground performances spanning genres from punk to experimental music. GY!BE's Norsola Johnson reflected on Montreal's DIY ethos, stating: "I can only speak really for our little world, but I think a lot of that just came from punk rock backgrounds... You want to make something happen, you have to do it yourself, that's the only way to do it" (Catchlove 2016). Hotel2Tango took its name from the NATO phonetic alphabet, as the area code of the neighbourhood begins with H2T, pointing to the significant geographical association that these spaces had. Various websites documented performances held in such spaces, underscoring their significance in the local music scene (see Figure 2).

Godspeed You Black Emperor Concert Chronology			
if you have any info-show review that could be added to the page, even a partial setlist would be useful. please mail-me			
[1997 1998 1999 2000 Note]			
date	location	venue	extra info
april 1998			
25	ottawa, ont	saw gallery	with Smallmouth and Guh
may 1998			
2	montreal, pq	hotel2tango	w/ Shalabi Effect
4	new york, ny	the cooler	opening for Wharton Tiers Ensemble
10	montreal, pq	metropolis	opening for Sonic Youth
august 1998			
14	toronto, ont	club shangai	w/ Shalabi Effect
september 1998			
10	montreal, pq	hotel2tango	w/ Fly Pan Am

(Fig. 2. Concert listing for Godspeed You! Black Emperor, April 1998. Screenshot taken in 2025 via the Wayback Machine (Internet Archive).)

The 1999 concert ticket for a show at Hotel2Tango featuring GY!BE, Do Make Say

Think (a band from Toronto), and Molasses, illustrates the space's significance for influential post-rock acts (see Figure 3). This event highlights how Hotel2Tango was not only central to Montreal's underground music scene but also attracted prominent artists from outside the city, solidifying its role as a key performance space in the broader independent music network.



(Fig. 3. Concert ticket, 1999. Image uploaded to Imgur, 2025.)

Following the opening of this DIY space as well as others in the area, by the late 1990s, Montreal's indie-Anglo scene had developed distinct spatial and cultural infrastructures shaped by decades of political, economic, and industrial change. The availability of abandoned spaces from the deindustrialization of the Mile End and the general lack of institutional support led to a pragmatic DIY ethos that defined the city's alternative music culture. These conditions laid the groundwork for the next wave of DIY activity in the early 2000s, centred around new DIY spaces and small venues in the Mile End.

The Late 1990s and Early 2000s: The Independent Anglophone Scene moves North

Montreal's indie-Anglo music scene gained international acclaim in the early 2000s, with attention focused on the Mile End neighbourhood (Carr 2005). As reporters came searching for signs of this scene, they quickly discovered it was difficult to locate, as it lacked visible cues (Straw 2018, 21). The music expressed a "cultivated casualness," often consumed in dark rooms,

lofts, or bars, and inconspicuous spaces that did little to convey the presence of a scene to outsiders (Ibid.).

Although the Mile End was already home to a well-entrenched post-punk scene in the early-to-mid 1980s, in the early 2000s, following the emergence of various DIY spaces, more small venues began to open in the area. Casa del Popolo opened in 2000, followed by sister venues La Sala Rossa and La Sotterranea. Even before its official launch, some events were already being held in the Casa del Popolo space (see Figure 4) (ARCMTL 2015).



(Fig. 4. Poster for *ARTSiSHOW*, July 1999. ARCM TL collection, digitized 2015.)

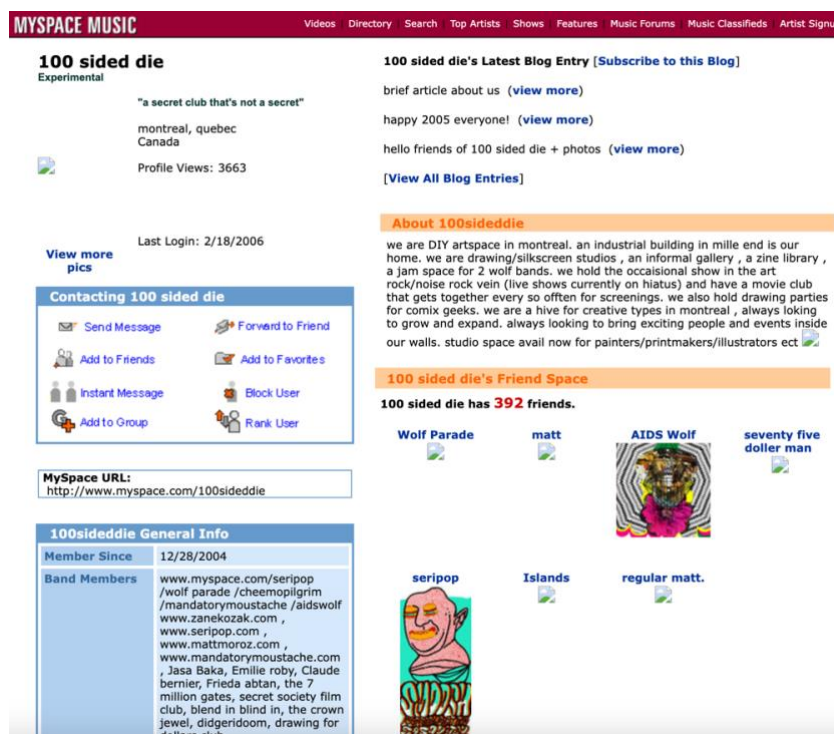
Casa del Popolo quickly became a centre for experimental and alternative music. It was opened and operated by Kiva Stimac and Mauro Pezzente, the two members of GB!YE who had started their popular DIY space just a few years prior. They opened the venue and founded the Suoni Per Il Popolo festival, continuing the DIY tradition of Hotel2Tango by creating spaces for

“odd music, arts and crafts, and community” (Catchlove 2016). The opening of this venue addressed problems for bands who wanted to be treated fairly and paid decently, as Kronick writes, “100 percent—that’s every last penny—of the door goes to the performer” (*The Hour* 2000). This maintained the ethos of experimentation and musician-forward spaces of live music performance intended by Stimac and Pezzente, but now in a legal setting. Straw describes the 100-person capacity venue as “the most important venue for alternative rock-based forms of music in Montreal” (2018, 21). Stimac emphasized their goal of providing quality despite limited resources: “Even though it was very DIY, just a stage and a storefront, we tried to have good sound and lights, and respected musicians” (Catchlove 2016).

The success of this venue marked a significant turn in the valuation of labour for independent musicians in the indie-Anglo scene. At the same time, concert promoters such as Blue Skies Turn Black and record labels like Constellation Records emerged out of the budding scene. These extensions of the indie-Anglo scene maintained the pre-existing DIY culture in the Mile End, further solidifying the neighbourhood’s growing significance as a site of musical activity.

Hotel2Tango was undeniably influential, as many other DIY spaces began opening in the surrounding area. Figure 5 shows the Myspace page for one such venue: the 100 Sided Die. Myspace, a social networking site widely used by musicians in the 2000s, allowed users to share music, post updates, and connect with fans and other artists. This example illustrates a broader shift in how information about shows and event spaces circulated with the advent of Web 2.0. Whereas earlier promotion relied heavily on alternative music magazines and physical posters, social media increasingly became a key tool for spreading news of events. The screenshot

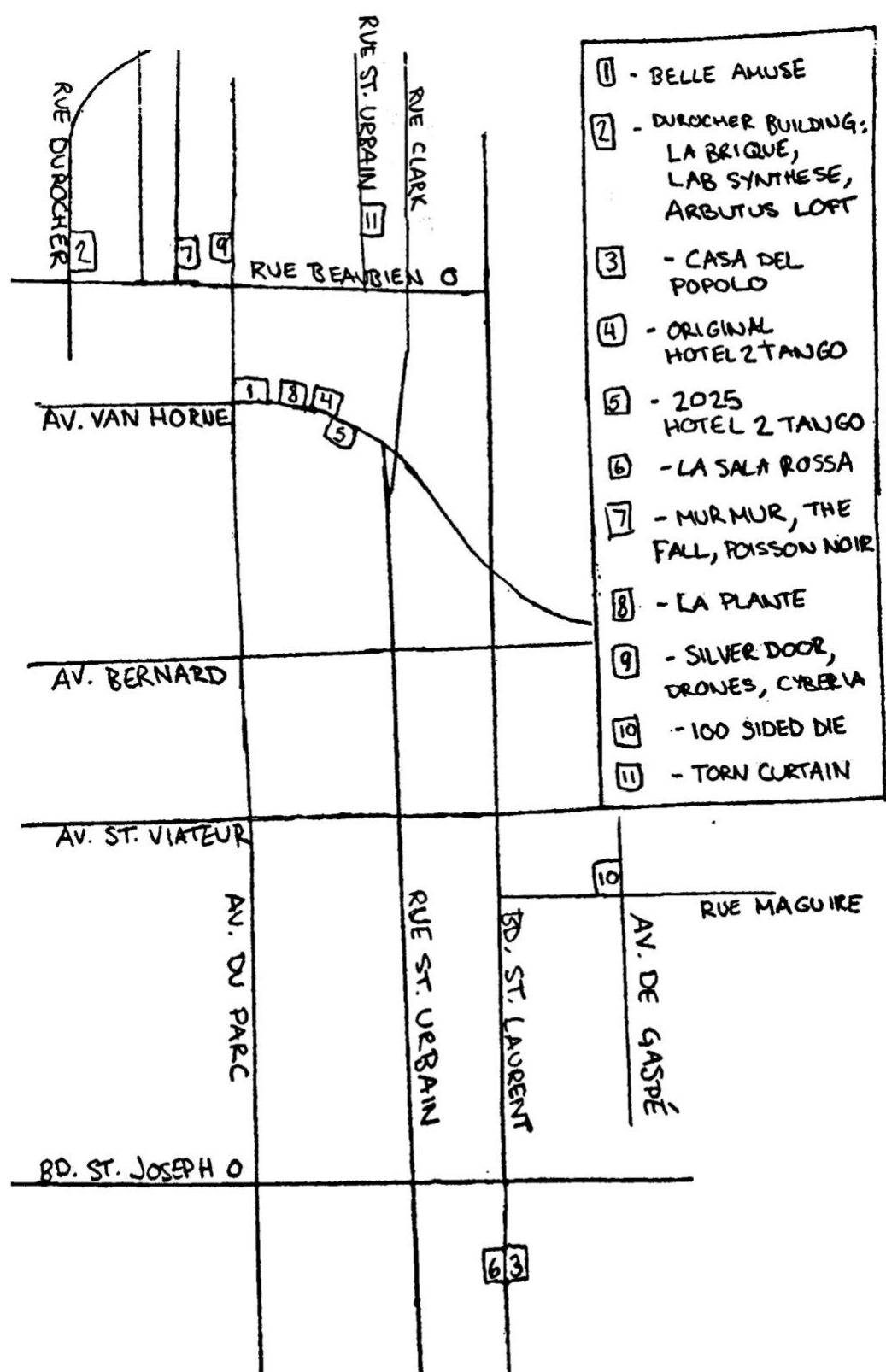
documents a page from 2005 advertising this space on De Gaspé Avenue (see Figure 5) (Discogs). Through these platforms, users gained greater access to information about the spaces and the artists who regularly played at and supported them. This image shows support from Wolf Parade and AIDS Wolf, two prominent indie bands from this time. The venue ceased hosting shows following an overcrowded after-party for Bright Eyes, an influential indie folk-rock band from Nebraska. Many would-be attendees were denied entry, an incident that signalled the precarity of these unregulated spaces (Coleman 2010). Despite their mainstream success, as a major part of the early 2000s “emo” and “indie folk” genres, Bright Eyes’ performance at a DIY space in Montreal highlights how central these locations were to the infrastructure of the indie-Anglo scene during this period.



(Fig. 5. Myspace page for 100 Sided Die, 2005. Screenshot taken in 2025 via the Wayback Machine (Internet Archive).)

2007 - 2012: Lab Synthèse

From approximately 2007 to 2019, the indie-Anglo music scene centred around the area surrounding the intersection of Du Parc Avenue and Beaubien Street. This area was home to numerous DIY spaces that hosted live music events. After the closing of many loft spaces like Hotel2Tango, these new spaces played a significant role in shaping the scene in the following years. The building at 435 Beaubien Street West, the Durocher building, housed many venues and performance spaces during this time. Meanwhile, Van Horne Avenue remained active with DIY spaces, preserving connections to the earlier infrastructure of the scene. The following map illustrates the proximity of spaces in the area, demonstrating the importance of this neighbourhood during that period (see Figure 6).



(Fig. 6. Illustration by the author, 2025.)

Lab Synthèse opened in 2007, when 20-year-old Sebastian Cowan (now the owner of Arbutus Records and Montreal nightclub Le Système) moved to Montreal with the express purpose of opening a warehouse venue. The space hosted a variety of events but mostly catered to live music performance. Though short-lived, closing in 2009 after a police raid, the space gave rise to the Arbutus Records label, which went on to support internationally recognized artists such as Grimes, Blue Hawaii, and TOPS. Cowan opened the Arbutus Loft in the Durocher Building and continued to occasionally host DIY parties, although the new space was not the dedicated DIY hub that Lab Synthèse had been. This marked the beginning of the professionalization of the scene that grew out of Lab Synthèse; the ethos of DIY remained, but the infrastructure was formalized and further integrated into other forms of cultural production (such as a record label with international reach). Artists on Arbutus Records benefited from both the label and the venue's DIY ethos, supporting unconventional and experimental musicians outside traditional venues.

Cowan was deeply influenced by the experimental scene that emerged from Hotel2Tango and neighbouring DIY spaces in the late 1990s. Inspired by the ethos of community and self-initiated action, he and his peers applied a similar spirit to their approach to pop music, emphasizing experimentation and momentum (Olbrich 2013). As Mouillot notes, "In many ways, Lab Synthèse and Arbutus Records took over a previous generation of independent cultural workers that became associated with Mile End in the 1990s" (2017, 104). This continuity was evident in Cowan's pragmatic use of DIY spaces to support independent musicians in Montreal.

Cowan described his impression of the indie-Anglo scene and the neighbourhood it grew out of prior to moving to Montreal himself:

When Mauro and Kiva started Casa del Popolo, it was considered far north. No one had ever gone up that far north and like, Godspeed, their loft H2T on Van Horne was like The Wild West or something. I thought I was late to the party, like it had come and gone. (Cowan, Interview 2024)

These venues had a substantial influence on what he would do next. He described his intentions in opening his own venue:

I'd been to a party in Vancouver, BC at a warehouse venue that kind of sucked but was very inspiring. I thought, "I could do a better job." I knew that Montreal was a place you could do that, I had heard about warehouses in Montreal. I found a few other friends and we all decided to move here to open a warehouse venue. I came in 2007, sleeping on a friend's couch in the Plateau, and within a month found a warehouse on Durocher and Beaubien. The building was the size of a city block. An existing tenant was Nice Music, which is now Death of Vinyl, the record store. They used to just be distributor warehousing. La Brique, which was a francophone equivalent of what we were doing in Lab Synthèse, was starting. There was a studio called Super Studio, a collection of artists. Other than that, it was a bunch of empty lofts. At night you could wander through them all. That was pretty special. People had to trek up to come to parties, and for the first few parties, no one came. It took a while to integrate and build a scene, to find our footing. (Cowan, Interview 2024)

As this scene grew, it attracted people from all over Montreal interested in the indie-Anglo scene. Bones, who played in a band at Lab Synthèse before being signed to the Arbutus Records, described their first time going to Lab Synthèse in 2008 with friend and collaborator, Sean Nicholas Savage:

We met some other people who had gone to Concordia, and they took us up to a party that Seb was throwing that I don't remember much about. I remember it feeling like it was far away from the village. I thought everybody around Seb's scene with Claire [Grimes] was very cool. They do drugs and drink and were down to stay up late and party all the time, so I was like "These are my people, I guess." (Interview 2024)

Although Lab Synthèse felt far, the allure it built was compelling enough to bring people across the city. The respondent's remark that "these are my people" enforces the idea of a distinct music

scene surrounding the space. Cowan also noted that, “there was this cohesive scene around, a lot in the same way that Hotel2Tango had a really cohesive scene that emerged from it, people making similar kinds of music” (Interview 2024). There was a clear overlap in inspiration between the 1990s shows at Hotel2Tango and Lab Synthèse. Although Cowan had his own space, he often hosted parties in other DIY spaces. He explained:

I had Lab Synthèse, but sometimes I wanted to do a show somewhere else. I did quite a few shows at Hotel2Tango over the years. When I moved here in ‘07 the people who ran Hotel2Tango didn't do shows there anymore. I was pretty much the only person that they would let do shows there. The people who started it weren't interested in throwing DIY shows so much anymore, and it was just a sort of studio space for them. I had met them one way or another and convinced them to let me. I'd bring all my own sound stuff. (Cowan, Interview 2024)

Cowan recounted another show he hosted, an event at Torn Curtain, another nearby DIY space known for its “lawless” environment. The Torn Curtain was an expansive, 800-square-foot underground after-party venue in Montreal that opened in August 2009 on St. Urbain Street. Its name was inspired by the building’s tattered drapes, reminding proprietor Phil Borden of both the Alfred Hitchcock film and song by the band Television (Pemberton 2016). The space hosted an array of events, such as post-punk shows, techno nights, experimental noise, poetry readings, theatrical plays, and even trapeze rehearsals, and served emerging artists such as Grimes, Majical Cloudz, and Doldrums.

The event hosted by Cowan was the final event held at the space, and ended due to a large-scale police raid, during which approximately 30 officers established a temporary processing station, individually identifying attendees. Many provided false names to evade penalties. However, one individual who disclosed his real identity later received a fine and, upon requesting evidence, obtained access to mugshots with fictitious names attached. Cowan also

referenced a similar police intervention at the Arbutus Loft in the Durocher building, noting that the resulting police report contained strikingly ominous photographs (see Figures 7-9). His reflections highlight the persistent tension between underground music spaces and law enforcement, as well as the tactics employed by participants, such as avoiding direct confrontation, managing noise complaints, and generally minimizing visibility to evade legal scrutiny and preserve the longevity of DIY spaces.



(Figs. 7–9. Photographs from a 2011 police report. Provided by Sebastian Cowan)

The Arbutus Loft and Lab Synthèse left a lasting impact on Montreal’s DIY music scene, shaping the trajectories of many musicians who followed. Rosie Long Decter of the band Bodywash reflected on the significance of the Arbutus Loft, recalling how being there felt momentous. She recalled thinking to herself when in the space, “I’m at the Arbutus Loft” (Long Decter, Interview 2024). She describes how the post-Arbutus wave of artists, including her own band, was deeply influenced by labels and musicians from that era, with albums like *Picture You Staring* by TOPS being formative: “This album that meant a lot to us... teenagers trying to make music that was informed by indie music and pop music, but that also kind of had a distinct style or a distinct sound to it” (Ibid.). Similarly, Jean-Sebastien Audet, known for his music as Yves

Jarvis, situated his move to Montreal in the Arbutus era as being in the “afterglow” of artists like Mac DeMarco and Grimes. He recalled how acts like TOPS, Sean Nicholas Savage, and Cadence Weapon were central to the scene: “I was listening to all those Arbutus guys, because I knew a lot of them from playing Edmonton and Calgary” (Audet, Interview 2024). These reflections highlight how Arbutus cultivated a distinctive sound and artistic community that influenced musicians beyond Montreal.

The Durocher building was a significant yet precarious home for Montreal’s underground music and arts scene. Housing various DIY spaces beyond Lab Synthèse and the Arbutus Loft, it became known for its vibrant but sometimes chaotic atmosphere. Seamus Dalton, a member of the band Nap Eyes, recalled the building’s basement was particularly unsettling and at times unsafe due to the lack of visibility and occasional problematic individuals. He explains that “the only time I had experienced something really unsafe [in a DIY space], was at five in the morning in that space” (Dalton, Interview 2024).

Despite these concerns, the Durocher building remained a vital gathering place for the local alternative music community. On any given weekend, multiple parties took place simultaneously, creating a dynamic and intense atmosphere. When hosting parties in his spaces, Cowan always exercised caution by managing external appearances—limiting disturbances, controlling graffiti, and ensuring minimal public nuisance—allowing the venue to persist as long as possible in an increasingly regulated urban environment. He also suggested that the survival of similar venues in the 2010s, despite earlier police crackdowns on spaces like Lab Synthèse, indicated a possible shift in law enforcement policy. Cowan’s efforts to sustain the scene around

Lab Synthèse reflected the evolving strategies and conditions necessary for its survival within a changing urban and regulatory landscape.

2012 - 2019: Silver Door / Drones Club / Poisson Noir / La Plante



(Fig. 10. Drones, 2014. Photograph by Tess Roby.)



(Fig. 11. Homeshake at Drones, 2014. Photograph by Tess Roby.)

I definitely remember the first week of university. A friend of mine, her brother, was in that band Telstar Drugs. They were playing a show at a venue called Drones. I remember going to that and being so blown away and intimidated by the Montreal scene. Walking into this venue, imagine a smoke machine, but it was cigarettes. Homeshake played, Telstar Drugs played, Preoccupations (formerly Viet Cong) played. At the time, I didn't know the Calgary post-punk scene, but I was like, "Oh my God, Montreal music. What is going on?" I was used to indie rock, like Grizzly Bear and Radiohead. And it was just so not that while also being that. I was excited and intimidated, but intimidation for me is more like excitement, like, "Why? How can I get more?" (Soil, Interview 2024)

Drones, that's my favourite venue of all time. Best place ever. (Audet, Interview 2024)

At 6502 Park Avenue, a dance hall called *Espace Sans Luxe* now occupies a space that has undergone several transformations. Those who remember its past as the DIY space Silver Door in 2008 would hardly recognize it today. Silver Door was an after-hours space that later changed hands and became Drones Club—often simply called Drones—an apartment converted into a DIY space for local and touring bands, as well as after-hours DJs. Beyond concerts, it also served as a recording and jam space. At its peak between 2014 and 2017, the space hosted a wide range of rising and established musical acts, including Mac DeMarco, Homeshake, Weyes Blood, and Preoccupations. Drones was located on the second floor of a two-storey building. The entrance was at ground level, followed by a narrow, steep staircase leading up to the space. The main room was the size of a large apartment, and often smoky, as smoking cigarettes indoors was a frequent practice. There were a few other rooms, which were typically not open to showgoers during night-time events. To the average attendee, it was unclear if people were living in the space. There was a dirty bathroom with a long line of concertgoers waiting to use it. Beers were inexpensive, and so was the door cover, both usually around \$5. By 2017, a new wave of organizers rebranded the venue as Cyberia, shifting away from live music in favour of after-hours parties. Beyond a performance space, this address served as a social meeting point and an

affordable night out. A welcoming atmosphere that prioritized artists and community engagement made it a defining space for the scene. The DIY spaces La Plante and Poisson Noir (see Figure 6) feature in this discussion because they attracted overlapping audiences and operated during the same years as Drones. Similar events were unfolding in these nearby spaces, each shaped by its organizers and unique social dynamics. As a result, interviewees often drew comparisons between these spaces, highlighting their distinct yet interconnected roles in the scene.

2008 - 2012: Silver Door



(Figs. 12–13. Photographs taken between 2008 and 2012. Provided by Tobin Belanger.)

Silver Door was an underground music venue and after-hours spot that operated between 2008 and the early 2010s. Tobin Belanger began hosting shows in the space after successfully running a DIY space in Halifax, Nova Scotia called AND art space. Located above Tobin’s furniture store called Gilgamesh, Silver Door was one of many spots he ran in the building. Next door, he opened The Fall, which later changed hands and became Poisson Noir. Below The Fall, he had a shorter-lived space called Mur Mur. Belanger recalled encountering “tough young mafia types,” prompting him to shut the venue down immediately (Interview 2025).

Silver Door hosted various artists, including alternative musicians such as Postcards and Grimes and DJs such as Jacques Greene. It attracted an early-evening arts-focused crowd, followed by a nightlife audience later on. Belanger noted that he encouraged DJs to perform well into the early morning. He wanted to ensure that the crowd coming up north from the bars on St. Laurent Boulevard would have a chance to listen to the live alternative music beforehand. He eventually decided to open Belle Amuse, another DIY performance space in the Bovril Building on the corner of Park Avenue and Van Horne Avenue. Silver Door attracted large crowds, sometimes resulting in long lines outside, and the consequent increased police attention led to its closure, as late-night gatherings became difficult to manage. The space was handed off to newcomers from Nova Scotia, who reoriented the space by tearing down a wall.

Several respondents provided their impressions of the space during its time as Silver Door. These accounts point to the fact that Silver Door was an established DIY space within the scene by the early 2010s. Silver Door would act as a precursor to Drones, solidifying the site as geographically important within the independent music scene. Legare described an early experience at Silver Door, after just having moved to Montreal to study at Concordia University:

It was my second or third night. I went to Silver Door because we had friends who invited us. We met a lot of people from Concordia who were studying Fine Arts. There were a lot of people from the creative writing program. I think a lot of people there worked for American Apparel, they were into the fashion scene. There were musicians and other artists. Silver Door was a staple, I think. It was a loft that you could smoke inside, and it hadn't been renovated for quite a long time, so it had a bit of a grungy kind of feel to it. (Interview 2023)

Tess Roby, a local musician and founder of the Ssurroundss record label, recounted her impression of Silver Door:

The first time I went to Drones, it was still called Silver Door. Silver Door was known as being a more drug-oriented after-hours space. While it did host shows at some point, it was kind of just the place you went after. (Roby, Interview 2024)

Dalton described his impression of the area upon moving to Montreal from Halifax. Having worked at Drones alongside several of his bandmates, he recalled:

There had been Torn Curtain and Silver Door. Those were, in my mind, kind of historical venues that I had just missed out on. By the time I came, Silver Door had become Drones. (Dalton, Interview 2024)

These accounts suggest that Silver Door was a foundational venue, evolving into a key institution within Montreal's indie-Anglo scene as Drones.

2012 - 2017: Drones



(Fig. 14. Brad Loughhead and Yves Jarvis performing as Real Life at Drones, 2013. Photograph by Tess Roby.)

In 2012, Silver Door was renamed Drones. Dalton described inheriting the space with several friends. It became a focal point for many musicians:

Brad Loughhead, who plays guitar in Nap Eyes, came a few years before I did. A wave of people moved here and inherited the Drones space. It was mainly Nova Scotians who inherited this Drones place and used it as a recording studio, jam space and a live venue. By the time I moved here, every weekend, or even every day, someone was using the space. (Dalton, Interview 2024)

Drones relied on several informal revenue streams. The space was sustained through rent-sharing among multiple individuals, with as many as eight to ten people splitting costs. They also made money through door fees and bar sales. This allowed Drones to operate with no commercial interference, maintaining its DIY ethos. The space also benefited from a lax regulatory environment compared to other cities. As noted by Dalton, in Halifax, DIY house shows were frequently shut down due to noise complaints, whereas in Montreal, Drones was often able to continue operating even when authorities were aware of it:

Drones used to sell beer without a license. When the cops would come they would just take the money that we had made that night, which was like 300 bucks and let you keep partying. It was crazy. I feel like that is not the case everywhere else. (Dalton, Interview 2024)

This lack of oversight seemed to be a common interpretation of one of the reasons that Drones was able to operate for so long. Roby also discussed the lack of police oversight at Drones and neighbouring venue Poisson Noir (which she helped run):

In 2014 the police were on strike. I think this was a huge part of why our shows and that scene were able to thrive. All the police were wearing cargo pants. They honestly did not give a f**k about what we were doing. I think if we were doing this now, there would be noise complaints. Now there are condos across the street from where Drones Club and Poisson Noir used to be. Those didn't used to be there, there was no one around this industrial area. It was like a playground, you know? (Roby, Interview 2024)

When police did intervene, their approach was lenient. This relative tolerance enabled Drones to remain active.

Many interviewees mentioned Drones' uniquely inviting atmosphere due to its affordable entry, BYOB policy, house-party energy, community-run organization, and the level of care

given by both attendees and organizers. Respondents consistently highlighted the sense of community and comfort that the space fostered. Many said it felt more like a party than a show and noted the amount of care put into making a fun time by the organizers. For many, Drones felt non-intimidating and accessible. As Konner Whitney of the band Whitney K noted:

I think the first show I played here might have been Drones. I played lots at the little bars around, like Barfly. Drones was a more inviting spot to play in than some of the other places. I don't know if it was just the combination of the people that ran it and the people that were there playing music, it was just the right place at the right time. There was definitely an effort to make a cool space people feel comfortable in. They had jam spaces there and even a recording studio. (Whitney, Interview 2024)



(Figs. 15–16. Whitney K performing at Drones, 2013. Photographs by Tess Roby.)

The space's DIY ethos extended to its affordability, making it an accessible space for artists and audiences. Shows typically cost around \$5 or pay-what-you-can, and BYOB (bring your own beer) was encouraged. As local musician and luthier Michael Kalman noted,

At La Plante or Drones, it was nice to have stuff to do that was really cheap. It was like five bucks to get in, or some weaponless fee, and BYOB. I definitely met a lot of people through that. (Kalman, Interview 2024)

These spaces fostered environments where people connected over shared interests, combining a DIY, house-party vibe with the stability of a dedicated venue. Dalton described the convivial nature of the space:

It was like a house party, but you didn't have to worry about noise complaints. It was like the perfect mix of being stable enough to be a consistent venue but still run by just your friends. (Dalton, Interview 2024)

Maintaining this balance was essential for Drones to sustain its activities over time.

Events at Drones were often advertised on social media. Shows were advertised on Facebook; however, the address was not on the show posters or event pages. The space was somewhat elusive to outsiders but easily accessible to those within the scene. Legare described the scene's difficulty in being "easily understood or decoded" as many of its activities were hidden (Straw 2018, 22). When prompted on the atmosphere at Drones, they explained:

It's kind of hard to find out about those events, the secrecy involved in underground music at the time maybe contributed to the allure, and the fact that everyone there kind of had to find out about that event from someone else. It was kept within a general circle of artists. (Interview, 2023)

This account describes how the scene relied on word-of-mouth and informal organization rather than traditional marketing. Two respondents described how events and spaces were discovered and communicated informally, without advertising or public visibility.

In that era, the Facebook event was the thing. You couldn't say the address, so it would be like "Doctor Drones." (Roby, Interview 2024)

I can't even remember ever having to look up Drones. I just knew people that were like, "We're going to Drones. What's up? It's here." I'd be like, "OK, cool. Now I know where this place is." I don't remember ever seeing a poster. (Whitney, Interview 2024)

This underground feature of the spaces within the scene produces a certain bond amongst scene members. That said, Long Decter described that this elusive feature can be paradoxical:

It's partly just to not attract the cops. When I was younger, I used to find that there was definitely gatekeeping in Montreal that felt like people were very obsessed with image in a superficial way, and "coolness." I think the underground-ness of some of those spaces plays into that as well, having to be in-the-know of what's happening or not. But, I think it's also about creating spaces that won't be overrun with the types of people who don't care about the music or don't care about the culture or the spirit of things. (Long Decter, Interview 2024)

This tension was also described by other respondents, who mentioned the balance between exclusivity and preservation in underground music and cultural spaces in Montreal.

While secrecy helped avoid police attention, it also reinforced gatekeeping and a “coolness” hierarchy, ensuring that only those truly invested in the scene were present. Not everyone who wants to be part of a scene has access to the necessary knowledge or connections to do so. This exclusivity functions as a strategy to sustain scene activity over time but also results in exclusionary practices. In attempting to protect these spaces from municipal authorities and preserve creative autonomy, an environment can develop where not all individuals feel welcome. What begins as a protective measure risks creating new structures of authority that limit access. Although secrecy can prevent unwanted attention and commercial pressures, it also restricts accessibility and conflicts with ideals of openness and collaboration. This paradox meant that belonging at Drones often depended both on insider knowledge or social connections and on genuine artistic interest and contribution. Balancing the need to safeguard the community with the importance of welcoming newcomers remains an ongoing challenge for these underground spaces. Nonetheless, this exclusivity has been one of the methods used to sustain activity within the scene over an extended period.

Drones’ location also contributed to its scene-building atmosphere. It was in an area of Montreal where many musicians and artists lived, before the area became increasingly gentrified. As Michael Eidelson, a local documentary filmmaker and scene member noted: “La Plante, Poisson Noir, Drones—those specific spaces were so inviting because they were smaller and in a very specific area of the city that everyone just happened to be living in” (Interview 2024). This

convenience reinforced Drones' role as a known meeting place for the creative community.

Activity at Drones inspired Roby to get involved with the opening of another DIY space, Poisson Noir. The venue was on the same block, and hosted shows less frequently than Drones but was also a part of this cohesive scene, hosting internationally successful artists such as Alex G and local bands such as She-Devils. Tess described her reasons for helping organize events at Poisson Noir:

We were obsessed with Drones Club, we just wanted more. We were like “we want to do it too.” We thought it was really cool, and I was there every weekend. Sometimes you'd be back and forth between the two venues all weekend. (Roby, Interview 2024)

Drones' location made it not only a convenient gathering place, but also a catalyst for the growth of nearby venues like Poisson Noir, expanding the neighbourhood's network of artist-run spaces.

However, Drones faced infrastructural and social challenges. The venue suffered from unreliable electricity, as Kalman recalled:

The electricity was so bad. I would be curious to hear the tape machine recordings, and if the tape was always running the right speed. We would blow fuses all the time and the breakers would flip. (Kalman, Interview 2024)

Beyond technical issues, Drones also struggled with a culture of sexism, which had profound consequences for the community. As one of the respondents noted, “one of the main people in Drones got called out” which was one of the reasons that Drones eventually ended. These problems highlight the dual nature of DIY spaces—while they provide creative freedom and community, they can also suffer from a lack of accountability and structural support. As Whitney explained, when those who initially ran the space moved on, there was no formal handoff to new organizers, and the venue eventually changed into a strictly after-hours space named Cyberia.

Cyberia was a DIY after-hours venue that took over the space Drones had previously occupied. It functioned as a rave venue, shifting from the live band performances that defined Drones. Kalman, who worked at Cyberia selling drinks at the bar, recalled the venue's transformation: “Cyberia became a rave spot. Mostly DJs. Maybe they did one live set once” (Kalman, Interview 2024). While Drones had been a hybrid space for both live music and social gathering, Cyberia leaned more heavily into DJ culture. This separated it from the previous indie guitar music that was distinct to Drones.

Memorable Performances at Drones



(Fig. 17. Setting up for Weyes Blood at Drones, 2016. Photograph by Tess Roby.)

Drones was intertwined with Montreal’s broader DIY network, fostering connections between local and touring artists. Roby explained that bands from the United States and across Canada frequently played at Drones, introducing local audiences to new sounds and strengthening the cross-border indie music network. This connection was further facilitated by

the strong presence of cassette culture, a preferred medium for independent artists to distribute music at the time.

Among the many memorable performances that took place at Drones, one particular concert stands out in the recollections of those who attended and those who regretted missing it. When asked to describe a night that left an impression, multiple respondents referenced a performance by Weyes Blood in 2016, with Tess Roby as the opener. Weyes Blood was an emerging artist at the time. She later collaborated with artists such as Lana Del Rey and performed at major festivals such as Coachella. Because she was gaining traction as an artist, it was significant that she was playing this small DIY space. As Audet remarked, “I’ve never heard better sound in a DIY space,” indicating the exceptionality of the performance despite the venue’s modest setting (Interview 2024). Long Decter reflected on having missed the concert, stating, “I have extreme FOMO [fear of missing out] from that show. All my friends talked about it afterward, and I missed it. It feels like a classic one” (Interview 2024). The sense of exclusivity, of having witnessed something singular and unrepeatable, contributed to the allure of this event.

For Roby, who opened the show, the experience was surreal: “I think it was her first Montreal show, and Seb Cowen from Arbutus booked it” (Interview 2024). She recalled: “People were really pissed that it was at Drones Club. They were like, ‘Can you please move this to a bigger venue?’ ... I remember I was kind of pissed because I thought, ‘I could get more money if I were opening for her at a bigger venue.’ I think I got paid \$100” (Interview 2024). Despite these concerns, the performance at Drones retained a distinct and irreplaceable quality.

This was not an isolated instance, as several emerging artists performed at Drones before attaining broader recognition. Legare recalled attending a Walter TV concert in which Mac DeMarco, then relatively unknown, played bass guitar: “It was before he was famous—probably 2013” (Interview 2023). They noted: “They did a cover of ‘Money’ by Pink Floyd, which was quite memorable. DeMarco was just beginning to gain traction, and while people in Montreal may have been aware of him, he had not yet attained international recognition” (Interview 2023). Drones exemplified a broader DIY scene that fostered emerging talent in intimate, informal settings, where audiences witnessed pivotal moments in artists’ early careers.



(Fig. 18. Yves Jarvis playing guitar while sitting on top of a ladder, 2014. Photograph by Tess Roby.)

Drones' Impact

Montreal's indie-Anglo music scene has evolved since the 1980s, characterized by a pragmatic repurposing of urban spaces for cultural production. DIY venues like Hotel2Tango, Lab Synthèse, and Drones illustrate how unregulated spaces became central to the scene. Legare noted that these spaces may move, close, and reopen, but their core activities remain consistent (Interview 2023). Despite challenges such as gentrification in Mile End, unreliable infrastructure, and legal complications, the scene's mobility allows it to find new venues and maintain networks for musicians. These venues, despite facing infrastructural challenges like unreliable electricity and legal complications, represent a resistance of traditional, commercial music spaces, creating room for experimental and boundary-pushing music. They are emblematic of a recurring pattern within Montreal's indie-Anglo scene, where DIY spaces resist strategies that value commercial success. Operating outside regulations, rejecting permits, high rents, and soundproofing requirements, embraces impermanence and adaptability. This instability is not just a logistical constraint but also a deliberate mode of operation that enables creative freedom, community-building, and low-cost access to performance opportunities.

Focusing on sustaining DIY spaces rather than commercial venues allows for the creative autonomy valued by the indie-Anglo scene in Montreal to continue on as was intended by artists in the 90s whose derelict lofts turned into spaces of sumptuous noise. These hidden spaces—lofts, unregulated buildings, and apartments—resist commercial music expectations structurally, aesthetically, and economically, though not always overtly politically. The tactical use of these venues allowed musicians to maintain control over their creative output. At Lab Synthèse, musicians like Grimes and Blue Hawaii were able to develop their sound in a space designed by

Cowan and his friends explicitly for artistic freedom run by peers. Cowan and his collaborators brought in their own sound gear, managed their own promotion, and curated events that reflected a shared commitment to community and experimentation. Similarly, Drones offered a low-cost and discreet environment where bands such as Homeshake and Weyes Blood played intimate sets to tightly packed rooms. These were spaces of sociability amongst scene members, and the infrastructure itself reflected the values of those within the scene. Despite their closures, DIY spaces like Hotel2Tango, Lab Synthèse, and Drones continue to sustain Montreal's indie-Anglo music scene, informing future generations of independent musicians and solidifying the city as a place for creative music production.

Chapter 3: Scene as a Practice of Space

When people talk about how pizza tastes different in Italy, they say it's because the bacteria in the water and air are different, and that's why pizza is different everywhere. There are a lot of fun-loving cities, but they're all different, not because of the bacteria. The people and the histories of the places are the bacteria. There are definitely adjacent places, but obviously none of them are quite like this, which is why we're here. (Ratchford, Interview 2024)

The lasting presence of DIY spaces in Montreal over the past 30 years has helped the indie-Anglo scene thrive beyond its inception. The Mile End neighbourhood continues to host many DIY spaces and small venues, although due to the rising cost of housing in the Mile End there are now many more in other parts of the city that support the scene. Current spaces within the Montreal scene exemplify the practices passed down from previous scene members. This chapter focuses on how tactics such as language use and protective policies are employed to sustain representational spaces. The opening and closing of small venues also play a crucial role in the scene's evolution, reflecting broader political and social dynamics. These include rising housing costs and shifts in municipal funding priorities. As the landscape changes, so too do the tactics used by participants to navigate and preserve the scene. Sites are refigured through culturally creative acts. The reappropriation of physical sites and continued dedication to them solidifies the scene's presence, inscribing its own stories into the city's cultural history. These tactics not only occupy space but actively produce it within the present context.

DIY Spaces in Montreal in 2025

A brief survey of current DIY spaces demonstrates the diversity of the environments appropriated by members of the scene. DIY spaces and small venues are both central to the

ongoing indie-Anglo scene, providing artists with small audiences and limited venues and spaces to play music regularly. Notable venues that support local and independent musicians include L'Escogriffe, Casa del Popolo, La Toscadura, La Sotterranea, La Sala Rossa, Bar de Courcelle, Barfly, Hemisphere Gauche, Brasserie Beaubien, Turbo Haüs, and P'tit Ours, among others.¹

Alongside more established small venues, a wide network of DIY spaces continues to support the indie-Anglo scene in Montreal. These spaces emerge in response to rising rents, zoning restrictions, and limited access to traditional venues. As scene members transform basements, living rooms, warehouses, and even outdoor urban spaces into intimate house shows and large gatherings beneath highway overpasses, the ongoing transformation of everyday and marginal spaces into venues highlights the variety of DIY activity across the city. A number of these spaces are active across Montreal today, each reflecting different facets of the scene's adaptability and reach. Holy Mountain Sound (which doubles as a recording studio) is in a small house near the Atwater metro station. Nearby is Ratwater, an apartment space regularly transformed into a packed, makeshift venue for live shows. In Saint-Henri there is the Bog, a long running DIY basement venue. A recent festival called "Plateausheaga," a play on the name of the established Montreal music festival Osheaga, made use of several apartment spaces (Spider's Web, Sandwich Shop, and Rat's Nest) in the Plateau and Mile End neighbourhoods. Other 2025 DIY spaces include The Bedroc, a Little Italy basement apartment space, Lamphouse, a DIY apartment space that often houses stripped down performances in Hochelaga,

¹ For further context on the state of small venues in Montreal, see T'Cha Dunlevy's 2023 article "POP Montreal Fest Stands by City's Struggling Small Music Venues" and Lamoureux's 2024-piece "Turbo Haüs and the Fight for the Soul of Montreal's Cultural Scene" (Dunlevy 2023; Lamoureux 2024).

and The Crumper, which operates out of a music rehearsal space in the Outremont neighbourhood and supports alternative music from both local artists and touring acts. The Van Horne Underpass (also referred to as the “Troll Zone”), located below a highway underpass next to train tracks appropriated by both Montreal’s indie and punk scenes, has become a popular site in the Mile End for high-energy outdoor shows. Mai/son, also called *La petite maison des arts*, is a highly organized quasi-DIY venue that holds many shows and art events in Mile End. It is quasi-DIY in that it runs similarly to a licensed venue, while still having the status of DIY because zoning laws in the residential area do not permit commercial activity. Additional spaces such as Thrash Can (also known as *La Biu* or *traxide*), *neverclub*, The Zamalek Loft, and The Squat reflect the DIY scene’s ongoing adaptability. While some venues cater to a more indie-oriented aesthetic, others are rooted in punk traditions, and many exist in the overlap between these scenes.

What follows is a discussion of The Van Horne Underpass, The Crumper, and Mai/son. Due to the precarity of these spaces, I refrain from providing exact addresses, instead referring to their approximate locations. The Van Horne Underpass, The Crumper, and Mai/son highlight different but necessary ways that the scene currently produces its DIY spaces. The Van Horne Underpass represents the tactics, craftiness, and resilience of scene members to occupy any space and turn it into a new part of a story (a spatial trajectory) or tour (the “chain of spatializing operations”) that makes reference to “what it produces (representation of places) or to what it implies” (a local order) (de Certeau 1984, 120). It often attracts a young crowd because of its accessibility. The Crumper exemplifies similar spatial tactics, though in a distinctly different context as the shows are confined to a smaller, more organized space, and attended by a slightly

older crowd, although many attendees and local bands frequent both spaces. The example of The Crumper provides support for Lefebvre's argument that the production of space is historical as well as de Certeau's notion of space as being "haunted" by the lingering presence of past narratives and practices, since many participants who attended defunct spaces such as Drones and Lab Synthèse now frequent The Crumper (de Certeau 1984, 123; Lefebvre 1991, 46). Mai/son serves as a case study in formalization, as it operates with a level of organization uncommon in DIY spaces. While it operates with the structure and organization of a formal venue, it remains constrained by zoning regulations that tether it to the informal DIY sphere. This raises questions related to how the varied goals of DIY spaces shape a fluency with the scene in different ways based on the unique sociality developed in each setting.

A scene is fundamentally a story of space. Stories are culturally creative practices that establish and shape space (de Certeau 1984, 123). Rooted in places animated by past events and collective memory (de Certeau 1984, 125; Lotman 1976, 89), a scene—such as the Montreal indie-Anglo music scene—becomes a narrative of urban space.

“Winning” Space - The Van Horne Underpass



(Fig. 19. Poster for The Van Horne Underpass show, September 12, 2024.)



(Fig. 20. Photograph of The Van Horne Underpass by Seamus Hickey, September 12, 2024.)

The Van Horne Underpass has been in use as a DIY space for several years. The space can accommodate hundreds of attendees and often does. A typical event draws anywhere from 50 to over 200 people. Those organizing an event show up with their equipment, plug in, and

play. The artists themselves are responsible for bringing and setting up their own speaker system. While these shows are generally free, a hat is sometimes passed around to collect donations, especially when touring bands are involved. Bands typically advertise shows through Instagram or Montreal's Ask A Punk website and hope that no other band shows up on the same day, as there is no official booking procedure. Shows typically begin earlier than at conventional venues, starting around 7:00 p.m. and concluding before 11:00 p.m. or earlier, as police often intervene after that time in response to noise complaints. It has become what Hickey described as a "classic spot":

In any coming of age story, there's always something going on by the train tracks. In Montreal, hearing about that being a show venue, it's like the ultimate 20 year old experience. A 20s experience of misbehaving by the train tracks to loud music. (Hickey, Interview 2025)

Hickey characterizes The Van Horne Underpass as a space where music and misbehaviour by the train tracks feel formative. In Lefebvre's terms, it exemplifies a "representational space" produced through everyday practices that resist the functionalist logic of the map (Lefebvre 33, 1991; de Certeau 1984, 121). How we name spaces defines their use. An "apartment" or "market" describes both a physical space and the practice associated with those spaces (Lefebvre 1991, 16). When the dominated employ their "ingenious ways of consumption," they rename spaces, causing tension between the strategies of the dominating class and the tactics of the dominees. Spaces (public or private) imply uses and conceptions that usually benefit certain classes or hegemonic ways of viewing the world or defining and treating a space. For those in the indie-Anglo scene, the very words "The Van Horne Underpass" take on new meaning. They do not only refer to that liminal space under the bridge where the train passes but rather to the act of

participation. The sociality of the scene is associated with its name, and the now-social space is transformed into a site of meaning. Thus, the DIY space known as The Van Horne Underpass is produced, and the language comes to symbolize a different spatial practice, disrupting dominant spatial orders. The term “underpass” inherently evokes a subterranean, marginal space, underscoring its unregulated nature and its position outside formal oversight.

Resistance through resilience is key to maintaining this space. This calls back to what Hebidge described as “learning how to refigure authority” (2012, 405). Essential to this refiguring is the refiguring of space. De Certeau explains that “consumption” is a form of “production,” noting that “it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant social order” (de Certeau, xiii). As Ratchford explained,

People are too creative and scrappy to be stopped, which is why there’s always a new spot outside, or a beach in Longueuil to have a rave. Somebody will realize they can have shows in their basement. People are crafty. They have the indomitable will. (Ratchford, Interview 2024)

Ratchford emphasized the resilience and ingenuity of the indie-Anglo scene, asserting that creative expression will persist despite obstacles through the constant reinvention of space.

When spaces are repurposed in opposition to their original functions—such as hosting a rave on a Longueuil beach or a punk show in a basement—they are reclaimed from the logics of private ownership, zoning restrictions, and normative use. In doing so, participants refigure space into something with a new meaning for their scene. This is representative of de Certeau’s assertion that people necessarily “have to make do with what they have” (de Certeau 18, 1984). The

dominees win space and in turn produce that space in an act of resistance through reappropriation.

While the concept of “winning” space captures the active reappropriation and cultural production that scene members engage in, it is important to recognize that such victories are often temporary and contested. Spaces like the Underpass are not permanently “won” in a fixed sense but are continually negotiated through ongoing use, and at times, displacement. These moments exist within broader social and political dynamics that can threaten their longevity. The persistent and insistent use of this space is one of the “innumerable ways of playing and foiling the other’s game, the space instituted by others” that characterizes “the subtle, stubborn, resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations” (Ibid.). It challenges strategies that assume a proper use of space (de Certeau xix, 1984) and fosters shared sensibilities through situated practices that reinforce the scene. Winning space is less about permanent possession and more about persistence.

Eidelson emphasized that DIY scenes persist by adapting to constraints, using informal spaces like The Van Horne Underpass to create events outside institutional control:

These things can still exist. It’s just a way of working around certain confinements that are imposed on us. The Van Horne Underpass is another space that people have been utilizing. The Van Horne Underpass feels especially DIY, because it’s just people showing up with speakers and their equipment and then plug in and play. (Eidelson, Interview 2024)

This also highlights non-labour as a productive act. Borden writes that “the triumph of non-labour does not entail so much an absence of effort as a redefinition of what ‘production’ might

mean” (Borden 2001, 233). The effort of musicians to set up and play, despite not being economically productive, actively creates a representational space.

The continued use of The Van Horne Underpass as a social site is contingent upon the prevailing attitudes and practices of law enforcement toward this location, as no space exists free from power relations. Often, when police show up at the underpass, they do not interfere (Hickey, Interview 2025). This lax regulatory atmosphere fosters a sense of both uncertainty and instability, as well as a sense of adventure. Whitney explained that the precarity of such spaces is appealing, describing the sense of risk-taking involved: “There’s a thing that I always liked about the adventure. When something’s a little sketchy, personally I’m kind of into it” (Interview, 2024). As Whitney noted, there’s an allure in the precarity of navigating risk, where the uncertainty itself becomes part of the excitement. Many described this sense of adventure as “fun” and essential to the sociality of the scene in Montreal. Spaces like The Van Horne Underpass become emblematic of this allure of precarity, as they are not given, but made, negotiated, and mythologized through dedicated use. Stories of The Van Horne Underpass have already canonized the site within the scene’s informal history.

“Haunted by the Story-Spirit” - The Crumper

The past leaves its traces; time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now and formerly, a present space, given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality. Thus production process and product present themselves as two inseparable aspects, not as two separable ideas. (Lefebvre 1991, 37)

While scenes may appear informal or transient, they are sustained through a commitment to tactics over time that both reflect and refigure the spaces in which they emerge. Straw (2004)

writes that “the challenge for research” on scenes “is that of acknowledging the elusive, ephemeral character of scenes while recognizing their productive, even functional, role within urban life” (412). Key to this functional role is the ongoing effort to reproduce the scene as former spaces close. The Crumper fulfils such a role within the indie-Anglo scene, preserving an underground culture and DIY aesthetic familiar to members who attended spaces like Drones and Lab Synthèse. It attracts a crowd already deeply fluent with the Montreal scene.

The Crumper hosts shows in a music rehearsal space that has a capacity of roughly 80-100 people. There is no booking fee to use the space. Inside the large building which houses many other art spaces, one must navigate the hallways following signs to reach it. Hickey described The Crumper as an improvised space where social rituals and movement are shaped by its physical attributes and informal rules:

When I’m at The Crumper, I’m trying to get around the pole in the center of the room. Talking to people. Hiding my jacket in the corner. Putting my beer in the corner. Going outside and smoking cigarettes and feeling ill. Walking down the rickety staircase off the side of the building. There’s an area that people go to in between shows where people smoke outside. It’s down a long hallway and down the staircase off the side of the building. I just follow everyone else. You’re not allowed to smoke in front of the building because that’s where people live. There’s apartments close by in the neighbourhood, but The Crumper is in a big building with a bunch of art spaces. (Hickey, Interview 2025)

The experience of navigating the building, performing acts such as stashing belongings, dealing with annoying obstacles, and following unspoken rules, reveals how the scene and its spaces operate through collective habit. Hickey’s description also describes a tour—his account organizes the space through the description of tactics. By watching others and picking up on informal cues, tactical knowledge creates a sense of fluency with the spatial practices involved in maintaining a scene.

The Crumper hosts many bands who have previously played at spaces such as Drones and Poisson Noir, and functions as a similar space. Referencing Roland Barthes, Peer D. Bode (2019) asks whether or not the obsolete is a contemporary mythology (161). A music scene is tied to a history of entanglements that have come together in its current form, containing within it many “lines and branches of development, many dead ends, and many lines waiting, ready to begin again” (Bode 2019, 148). The scene produced at The Crumper is shaped by the residual practices of the earlier Drones space, creating continuity between past and present DIY spaces. It brings newcomers into play with those who have been engaging with these spaces for much longer. The use and experience of spaces suggests their use to others. A fluency developed at previous DIY spaces persists, transformed, in new contexts. Hickey described an interaction with a member of a band at The Crumper:

One of the members of the band Sunforger was working sound for a show at The Crumper. I recognized them and I went up and talked to them. A couple weeks later, I was playing in Kingston for POP Montreal and we were on the same bill, so it was a good opportunity to be like, “Oh, I recognize you from The Crumper.” It’s validating that the people you’re playing with are also in the same scene, going to the same events rather than a completely unrelated band from Montreal. There’s a connection that’s beyond just playing this show. (Hickey, Interview 2025)

Hickey’s account aligns with Massey’s understanding of “local” culture as a dynamic articulation of global influences shaped by power relations, fashion, and habit (Massey 1998, 125). The Crumper illustrates how spaces that are central to local scenes are points of sociality, enabling participants to carry and adapt cultural practices across urban contexts. This mobility highlights how scenes are reproduced through ongoing relations within social spaces, further emphasizing that “(social) space is a (social) product” (Lefebvre 26, 1991).

Most participants who visit The Crumper discover the space through word-of-mouth. This continues to be a central form of communication within the scene. As Cowan noted, at Lab Synthèse he used to advertise shows through “just word-of-mouth and a Facebook event” (Cowan, Interview 2024). In contemporary contexts, most DIY events are disseminated via Instagram. To discover the accounts that share such information, an individual typically relies on referrals from those already familiar with the space—whether they have organized an event, performed, attended, or learned about it through others who have. As Whitney and Long Decter explained, this forces scene members to put in effort to know of and travel to a specific space, attracting only those who are interested in the specific event or space itself:

As far as DM for address and word-of-mouth, I think it can help a lot. People have to put some effort into going. (Whitney, Interview 2024)

It’s about creating spaces that are not going to get overrun with the types of people who might not care about the music, the culture, or the spirit of things. (Long Decter, Interview 2024)

The informal, word-of-mouth nature of DIY events creates a filter for genuine interest and commitment. This intentional obscurity helps preserve the culture and spirit of the scene by attracting those who actively seek it out, rather than passive or indifferent attendees. While the informal dissemination of knowledge about events helps preserve the scene by attracting genuinely invested participants, it can also create barriers to entry. This mode of communication, reliant on existing networks and referrals, risks excluding those who might share the scene’s values but are unfamiliar with the social dynamics or hesitant to navigate these informal channels. Such exclusion can contribute to narratives of insiders and outsiders, reinforcing social boundaries and the “othering” that often accompanies tightly-knit social groups. For example,

the emergence of new DIY spaces can create shifting hierarchies that determine who is ‘in the know’ and who feels included or excluded from these environments. These dynamics often reflect broader social groups within the scene, reinforcing exclusivity even as new venues aim to foster fun and open atmospheres. Recognizing this tension is crucial to understanding how DIY scenes balance openness with the desire to maintain a distinct cultural identity.

DIY spaces, though precarious and ephemeral, leave durable imprints on a scene’s history, embodying a material yet elusive form of continuity. Stahl argues, referring to Appadurai, “There has been a notable return to the imagination persisting as a repository of nostalgia engendering and preserving collective experiences constituted through mythology, and guaranteeing the promise of individual agency” (Stahl 1999, 25; Appadurai 1996, 187). Spaces can store memories clustered around a certain site. Recalling a particular location brings to mind many practices attributed to the specific site, which is important in the production of the historical knowledge of structures within a scene. After spaces like Drones and Poisson Noir close, they continue to exert influence through the memories of tactics used to maintain them, shaping how similar efforts are approached in new contexts such as The Crumper.

Memories of spaces circulate informally among scene members, who share stories of pivotal moments, but also through material artifacts like tapes, zines, and posters. More formal preservation efforts, such as those by ARCMTL (Archive Montréal)—a non-profit organization that archives and promotes Montreal’s independent and underground cultural production—further support this process by safeguarding the ephemera and practices that define and sustain the scene’s collective memory (ARCM TL 2025).

Mai/son: DIY vs. Quasi-DIY

Mai/son is a multi-disciplinary arts space located in a historic Victorian house in Montreal's Mile End. Hosting events such as concerts, poetry readings, and exhibitions, it is a space for artistic collaboration. While its architecture reflects its early 20th-century origins, its current role as a contemporary art space highlights the adaptive reuse of spaces in fostering community and cultural engagement. The cost to rent Mai/son is similar to that of other small venues in the area and has a capacity of roughly 80 people.

The creative director of Mai/son, Solomon Azrieli, described his intention opening the space:

I've tried to make it as professionalized as possible. I would like to think that there isn't much of a difference between booking here and booking at Casa del Popolo. You send an e-mail, you pick a date, you get an agreement that you must sign. There's a load-in, there's soundcheck. I really try to make it as legitimate as possible. More traditional DIY spaces might be more of a party that the organizers are simultaneously organizing, playing, and promoting. Whereas here, we are a more traditional venue. (Azrieli, Interview 2024)

Although Mai/son is a highly utilized space within the scene, several interviewees expressed that the hybrid DIY-but-also-legitimate venue angle of Mai/son could not serve their needs. Because Mai/son does not have the advertising capabilities and draw of a venue like Casa del Popolo that can acquire a licence to sell alcohol, it relies instead on artists, social media, word-of-mouth, and partnerships to promote events. There is no clearly defined artistic community that consistently centres around Mai/son, so attendance is often event-specific; individuals typically visit only when a particular show interests them. In contrast, more mythologized venues and spaces tend to cultivate dedicated followings, with patrons attending regularly out of loyalty to the space,

regardless of the specific programming. This means that for promoters like KickDrum, a local indie-Anglo scene promotion collective, booking at Mai/son is not worth the price:

Mai/son is one of the venues that's been like the biggest problem for losing money, because Mai/son is run like a house venue. However, one of the big advantages of a DIY house venue is that the people who live there will bring people to the show. At Mai/son there's not that extra audience outside of the band's audience. On top of that, they charge a venue fee, which most house venues do not. They don't bring extra people, and it's still house venue rules where it's word-of-mouth, you can't advertise the address. That means that I've run Mai/son shows where I've lost hundreds of dollars because I also want to make sure that I pay the bands. (Ho, Interview 2024)

In this context, word-of-mouth promotion proves ineffective, as Mai/son lacks an established, engaged community that might organically support and enrich the venue. This disconnect is further compounded by concerns within the Montreal music scene regarding the building's ownership. Specifically, some musicians have raised questions about the private ownership of the house by a director on the board of the Azrieli Group whose financial involvement remains opaque.

That being said, Mai/son has provided a space that is used by many artists. Its unusually high level of organization—hosting festivals in collaboration with local radio stations and featuring well-known acts like Patrick Watson and Brad Barr—sets it apart from typical DIY spaces. The organizers aim to balance a sense of intimacy and sophistication and offer better acoustics compared to many DIY spaces while preserving some informal and imperfect qualities that contribute to the warm atmosphere that its attendees value.

The building's ownership by wealthy individuals offers a degree of financial stability that shields Mai/son from some of the economic precarity that DIY spaces typically face. However, this protection does not extend to regulatory pressures. In October 2023, the venue was forced to

shut down temporarily due to zoning violations triggered by noise complaints, drawing the attention of the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM)'s Eclipse Squad. This incident underscores how, despite financial backing, DIY and independent cultural spaces remain exposed to municipal scrutiny and regulation. Precarity in such contexts is not solely economic but also spatial.

Without a stable group of regular participants or a shared culture rooted in mutual support, Mai/son functions more as a rental space than a hub of ongoing social relations. Moreover, because the venue is insulated from financial precarity through private ownership, there is little structural need for mutual aid among its users. Unlike more vulnerable DIY spaces where collaboration and resource-sharing become essential for survival, Mai/son lacks the conditions that typically give rise to deeper communal bonds. As a result, while Mai/son facilitates artistic activity within the scene, it does not cultivate collective interdependence that builds a sense of community found in more ad-hoc spaces. No participant in this study referenced Mai/son as emblematic of the DIY practices and attitudes that have sustained the indie-Anglo scene over time. In contrast, venues like The Crumper and The Van Horne Underpass, with their low barriers to entry, informal organization, and ethos of “scrappiness”, embody a familiar tradition of resistance to formalization. These spaces reflect a lineage of DIY spatial practices grounded in mutual aid, improvisation, and a shared commitment to maintaining cultural life outside institutional control. The spatial practices used to maintain representational spaces such as The Crumper and The Van Horne Underpass are part of the refiguration of space that promotes a sense of adventure and resilience that inspires newcomers to continue these practices.

Scene vs. Community

In Montreal's indie-Anglo scene, the distinction between scene and community often lies in the depth of relational ties and the conditions under which spaces operate. "Scene" does not necessarily imply emotional investment or mutual care. As Stahl (2022) notes:

Scenes... are at once profoundly local, but also produce a space looking to absorb other outside influences (in this respect, as Straw notes, they are different from musical communities which tend to be bound more to local musical traditions and histories). (9)

Here, community "presumes a population group whose composition is relatively stable" and "whose involvement in music takes the form of an ongoing exploration of one or more musical idioms said to be rooted within a geographically specific historical heritage" whereas a scene "is that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization" (Straw 373, 1991). A music scene involves the excess of sociality surrounding active participation and therefore can be understood as a process or action, whereas a community can be understood as a group of solidified allegiances. A scene exists as a practice, with new actors passing through who commit to its tactics for participation (maybe for only a short period of time) but do not stabilize. Of course, a scene can promote a sense of community. Many respondents spoke of a communal atmosphere in the indie-Anglo scene after having interacted with it for an extended period and forming relationships.

Communities emerge within the scene where participants share responsibilities and support one another. As Audet notes, the atmosphere in community-rooted DIY spaces is "loose and welcoming," built by people who "have grown up in these spaces themselves" (Interview 2024). These tight-knit environments reduce liability through trust and familiarity rather than

regulation. Similarly, Bones explained that DIY spaces helped foster care across international borders, where bands and venue operators were part of an informal network offering each other sustained support. For Bones, DIY spaces

foster a cooler community and you usually meet cooler people who are down to help you down the road when you play... on all of our first tours, two thirds of the shows in the States were at places like this, and there was a bit of a path you could take around America because these like DIY venue owners also knew each other. I thought that was really cool. (Interview 2024)

These connections not only make touring logistically possible but also reinforce a sense of “coolness” rooted in mutual support and shared ethos.

Artists and organizers often pursue DIY projects explicitly to build or maintain this sense of community. Roby started her label to “create community and to support community,” to make space for underrepresented voices like her own in a music industry that had failed to do so (Interview 2024). This relational ethos is echoed by Eidelson, who describes the scene as a space where community is built, where “people have made their longest lasting relationships,” (Interview 2024) and by Kalman, who highlighted how the sense of community in the scene made DIY shows often feel like “a party instead of just a show” (Interview 2024). Community fosters a sense of collaboration, not just in organizing but in the creative process itself. As Cowan and Audet point out, musical influence becomes a conversation as artists “copy each other,” learning and developing a shared language. As Straw writes, “to be invisible is to find places, not just of refuge, but of community and self-development” (Straw 2019, 24). This kind of creative dialogue creates spaces of refuge in which people congregate and build community, and in turn this sense of community promotes a dedication to DIY spaces.

Revisiting Style

Style within a scene serves as both a personal expression and a socially learned practice, offering identity play while also potentially reinforcing shallow divisions and lacking inherent potential for building collective resistance. The production of a scene's aesthetics, such as its expression in certain music styles or ways of dress, coalesces in DIY spaces and is then transmitted by scene members to the outside world. The less-explored relationship between music and material culture "involves those material forms in which music is aggregated, its individual instances brought together in places of storage or collection" (Straw 2011, 231). As a collective interaction, "musical activity inscribes itself within bodies, within collectivities, within ways of doing things, within movement" (Straw 2004, 413; Hennion 2000, 10). Clothing style as an expression of this inscription is valued by many within the indie-Anglo scene. A space accumulates experience and transmits it through processes of participation and imitation. Style forms a key part of this spatial practice, shaped by the ways people interpret the scene and transmit it through aesthetic and embodied choices.

Style occupied a privileged position as a symbolic form of resistance among early subcultural theorists. As Stahl argues:

Style should be understood neither as a decoding tool that is solely oppositional, nor as something internal to the group itself. The convergence and mingling of mass culture and subculture through the *détournement* of appropriated objects are much more nuanced: they are trickle-up as much as trickle-down. (Stahl 1999, 11)

For Stahl, the work of Hebdige presented too rigid a notion of resistance and a reductive take on style. Stahl proposes a shift where taste and preference function as flexible and context-dependent ways of understanding identity and belonging:

Tastes, alongside dispositions, preferences and affinities, all systems of classification and organization, are terms used throughout to denote social activities and attitudes that influence as much as they are influenced by the spaces where they reside. They suggest a rhetorical move away from rigidly vertical models that rely upon universals such as class and enable a nuanced examination of individual identity and group dynamics and how they are articulated (often unevenly) to large scale cultural arenas. (Stahl 1999, 3)

As he notes, these are active social practices that are shaped by and help shape the spaces where they occur (Ibid.). This move away from universalist, class-centric models allows for a more nuanced examination of individual and collective dynamics within everyday practices. It follows that style can be addressed within the scene without being overvalued. Style represents a certain inspiration and mode of expression in the indie-Anglo scene rather than a symbolic system that can be decoded. This understanding of style helps to unpack how current members of the indie-Anglo scene understand their use of style in order to relate to other members of the scene.

There is no unified or cohesive visual style within Montreal's indie-Anglo scene that insiders can easily identify. Several respondents described the style of the scene as loose, relaxed, and "thrifty" (Bones, Interview 2024; Dalton, Interview 2024). Ho described "an indie look, it's an I thrift my clothes kind of look (Ho, Interview 2024). Typical attire often includes band T-shirts, plain tops, knit sweaters, loose-fitting jeans or work wear, with a notable preference for avoiding overtly logo or brand-focused graphics. Footwear tends toward practical choices like loafers, plain sneakers, and simple boots, whereas high heels are less common within the scene's style norms. Typical hairstyles within the scene tend to be shaggy, low-maintenance, and unpolished. As Ratchford observed, "In a general sense, people have long hair and short hair at the same time" (Interview 2024), capturing the layered, mixed-length styles

common among participants. These characteristics do not constitute a uniform however, and a variety of styles very different from the above description can be seen at shows.

Some participants noted that the wearing of thrifted clothing suggested an ethical stance, as participants appeared to avoid the overconsumption associated with environmentally harmful fashion trends. Several participants noted that higher-end fashion has increasingly influenced the scene in recent years, in contrast to a decade ago when the “Vans and band tees” look popularized by artists, namely Mac DeMarco, was more dominant. That said, many described a loose and relaxed attitude towards fashion, Kalman noting that “I just like to have fun and I like things that have a pretty natural feeling. I don't necessarily like to dress up or put on a spectacle” (Interview 2024). Expressing the same sentiment, Ho noted that “There's other scenes where I felt excluded where the vibe is fashion. The vibe is like ‘we rave while wearing expensive \$300 neon coloured clothing.’ So, I don't really participate in them” (Interview 2024). Interestingly, younger scene members continued to describe their friends’ style using that same “Vans and band tees” aesthetic. Despite these shifts, most interviewees agreed that style remains a significant aspect of the scene’s identity.

For many artists, style of dress is an important mode of expression and taste. Sebastian Cowan described,

When they [Mac DeMarco and Grimes] got popular, everyone had Claire’s haircut with the fringe. With Mac, there were all these Mini Macs all over the place. Style is important and I think that’s good because that's just like another artistic choice in which you’re influenced by each other. That's part of what makes Montreal interesting. (Cowan, Interview 2024)

Style is not a necessary indicator of any fixed or uniform identity within the scene, nor does it serve as a strict code that defines membership. Rather, it functions as a flexible and personal

mode of expression, one of many ways participants relate to the scene and to each other. Many respondents expressed that as artists they make aesthetic choices and style is one of these choices:

People resent the fact that how they present themselves plays such a huge role in how they're received. It's easy to resent that because we can be misunderstood. But it's just important to have intentionality and artists understand that. So it's important when a scene cultivates a look. (Audet, Interview 2024)

For Audet, a scene's cultivated "look" plays a role in shaping identity and reception. Long Decter described style as important "to an irritating extent" (Interview 2024). She described both the positive and negative impacts of style being seen by members of the scene as an important definer of personality:

I think people are judgemental in music scenes, myself included. Everyone in music is judging people by some criteria, whether it's their music taste or their style. That can also be like a cool and positive thing. It's a place where people can kind of invent their own aesthetic or a collective aesthetic or extend their like artistic personality through style. (Long Decter, Interview 2024)

Discussions of style often echoed the sentiments present in conversations about community and scene. While scenes can inspire and gather people, they do not inherently imply mutual aid or care. Similarly, style, though a form of self-expression and a potential marker of group belonging, does not guarantee solidarity; it can just as easily become a surface-level measure through which people judge or exclude others, reinforcing boundaries rather than breaking them. Style is thus both meaningful and ambivalent: a creative extension of self, but one that does not inherently build community or resist the commodification of culture. Instead, as some suggested,

it has the potential to invite play and identity experimentation but can also reinforce superficial divisions.

Hickey observed contrasting atmospheres at Holy Mountain and The Crumper, demonstrating how style functions as a form of unspoken communication within a scene. At Holy Mountain, overtly alternative fashion choices make it immediately clear who belongs and who performs as an artist: “everyone looks like they aggressively know that they’re in the band” (Hickey, Interview 2024). At The Crumper, that same artistic identity is present but less visually pronounced, suggesting a subtler form of affiliation. This distinction points to how style, like many other everyday practices, is a learned language within the scene picked up through repeated participation in shared spaces. As members gather, observe, and imitate one another, they begin to internalize not just aesthetic preferences, but the social cues and codes that define their belonging.

Style is also linked to lifestyle, attitude, and a shared sense of creative independence. Roby noted her day-to-day life mirrored that of many self-employed friends, something she deeply valued about the city (Interview 2024). For Ho, within the scene, there’s a kind of curated vulnerability that’s considered cool: “Indie comes with a sense of vulnerability, some sense of revealing yourself...What's considered to be cool is kind of being emotionally vulnerable and honest, and there are issues with that” (Interview 2024). He observed that emotional openness is central to the indie aesthetic but noted that relying on vulnerability can be psychologically taxing for artists.

Style can be seen as a form of sociality because it is used as an expression of relation to others as well as its own extension of creative practice. In this way, style becomes one of many

cultural practices through which a scene is circulated and expressed, whether or not it is intentional. Simply, style is a tactic. It is a spatial practice and creative act, drawing inspiration from history as an everyday practice.

Refiguring Space

The indie-Anglo scene is a set of practices that refigure space. These tactics are not usually recorded formally but observed and adopted practices from those who actively produced previous spaces. Repeated actions, such as following the rules in a DIY space or dressing in certain clothes, create routines of behaviour. In this way, every action maintaining the scene helps to forge a path that future scene members can look to. When the original act itself is forgotten and no longer practiced, the path that the repetition of these actions created can be traced on a “map,” a strategic generalization. Some paths are well-trodden and some are faint, but all delineate previous action that informs future action (de Certeau 1984, 97).

For de Certeau, “A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables” (1984, 117). Space is temporal, enacted through movement and lived experience. Once this spatial practice is formalized and mapped, it becomes a conceptual abstraction, stripping away the embodied and transient realities that originally gave it meaning. When a strategic map is drawn, it generalizes action, aiming to demonstrate how space is intended to be used based on its previous uses. However, the tactical, creative actions that subvert the intentions of a strategic map cannot themselves be accounted for by the map. Without accounting for these actions, the depiction on a map can never be truly accurate. The indie-Anglo

scene persists because it is in motion. As new DIY spaces close and open, the scene transforms itself but persists as it refigures space. A scene is a set of spatial practices that resist strategy.

In this process of mapping, what de Certeau calls the “secret” of a way of being in the world is lost (Ibid., 96). De Certeau writes:

The panorama-city is a “theoretical” simulacrum...whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices. The voyeur-god created by this fiction...must disentangle himself from the murky intertwining daily behaviours and make himself alien to them. (Ibid., 1984)

Here, he understands that the strategic conception of space must forget the lived daily behaviours. Thus, space “becomes the blind spot in a scientific and political technology” (Ibid., 95). Because the state ignores the daily production of space, it does not account for real space in its ideology. It accounts for the myth of the city while ignoring the lived reality. Action is stripped from the map, and with it, “a way of being in the world [is] forgotten” (Ibid., 97).

For de Certeau, a story is a “spatial trajectory” (Ibid., 115). He states: “Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice” (Ibid.). If a scene is considered a story, it transforms a space into a site of cultural significance. Similar to de Certeau’s “story,” a scene “transforms places into spaces or spaces into places” (de Certeau 118, 1968). In doing so, stories shape and reinvent the relationship between places and spaces over time (Ibid.). It is through refigurative action that a scene takes shape. As a cluster of like-minded individuals engaging in shared activities and spatial practices, the scene forges a path, one that becomes fully legible only to those who understand the way of being in the world that produced it. This path, while often invisible to outsiders, holds meaning for those attuned to its rhythms and histories. While outsiders may

interpret certain aspects correctly, it would not be possible to grasp the overall scene without sharing in these spatial practices.

The elusiveness of DIY spaces is essential to their survival; it prevents tactics from being captured and institutionalized as strategies. Writing on the absence of music in images of the Mile End neighbourhood, Straw explains that when people went searching for evidence of this scene, they would “scan these images for evidence of music, but in doing so they are mapping a space rather than observing a cultural activity” which was not visible to outsiders (2019, 22). If “power is bound by its very visibility” then the tactic or “trickery” of scenes avoids legibility (de Certeau 1984, 37).

Participants in the indie-Anglo scene use language to resist dominant spatial logics: when a living room or concrete underpass becomes a “venue,” participants subvert the hegemony that defines and controls space (Lefebvre 1999, 11). This redefinition is both discursive and experiential. Scene members tell stories about how they move through these spaces, building a story based on memory, improvisation, and shared knowledge. The reliance on word-of-mouth communication further solidifies a language within the scene, pointing to the desired autonomy and control over access and legitimacy from within rather than through external validation.

Spaces like The Van Horne Underpass, The Crumper, and Mai/son exemplify the layered tensions in how space is created and sustained in the scene. Each represents a different relationship to intention, use, and access: Mai/son is more formally structured, while The Van Horne Underpass reflects more spontaneous or adaptive forms of spatial practice. The Crumper represents the interplay of current spatial practices embedded and imbued with the collective memory of former practices passed on through shared spaces. Participants internalize a fluency

of space that exists in tension with strategic spatial norms. This learning process has maintained the reliance on DIY spaces within the scene since its inception. If space is never neutral or passive, as a story of space, neither is a scene.

Conclusion

The indie-Anglo music scene remains highly active in Montreal in 2025, sustained by inventive, community-driven tactics that continually push back against restrictive policies. In July 2025, the City of Montreal proposed noise bylaw targeting two downtown areas known for their vibrant nightlife and received over 13,800 overwhelmingly negative public responses (Lofaro 2025). The proposed legislation, which included fines of \$10,000 for a first infraction and up to \$20,000 for subsequent violations, was widely criticized for endangering small venues vital to the cultural life of the city.

This response underscores the role of collective action in defending Montreal's musical infrastructure. Advocacy groups such as MTL 24/24 (a nonprofit promoting inclusive, sustainable nightlife) and Les Scènes de Musique Alternatives du Québec (SMAQ, an organization representing independent music venues) warned that the bylaw could lead to widespread closures and erode the city's creative economy. In response, municipal officials acknowledged the concerns and pledged to revise the bylaw in an effort to balance residential quality of life with the continued support of independent music and nightlife spaces. This demonstrates how through the everyday efforts of its people, Montreal has solidified its presence as a musical city. The cultural narrative surrounding the city is supported not only by the efforts of small venue owners and pushback from nightlife organisations, but also by the continued efforts of DIY practices that sustain the scene.

This thesis employed a theoretical framework grounded in the social dimensions of space, drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, Michel de Certeau's analysis of strategies, tactics, and difference between mapped and practiced space, and Doreen Massey's understanding of spatial temporality, to explore dynamic processes shaped by ongoing

negotiations of space and authority. I combined a multi-sited ethnographic approach with insights from spatial theory to conceptualize the scene not as a fixed location or community, but as a set of dynamic processes shaped by everyday practices and social relations. My position as researcher and participant revealed rich, reflective stories, which uncovered consistent patterns and allowed for the reconstruction of a shared spatial history. Archival sources, including photographs and digital records, were used to contextualize and historicize these accounts, situating them within a broader trajectory of scene development. Taken together, the research highlights how collective memory, informal networks, and spatial practices have shaped and sustained the scene over time.

Montreal's live music scene has evolved since the early 19th century, shaped by its unique economic conditions and linguistic diversity, leading to the emergence of a vibrant indie-Anglo DIY music culture reliant on small venues and alternative spaces. The city's history of nightlife, influenced by factors such as prohibition, organized crime, and deindustrialization, created a landscape for artists to repurpose abandoned industrial spaces for creative use, fostering an arts-driven, anti-commercial ethos within the music scene. Alternative media outlets and university radio supported the scene's visibility to those within networks that actively participated in maintaining it, while ongoing affordability struggles and gentrification influenced the geographic and social dynamics of Montreal's indie-Anglo music landscape.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Montreal's indie-Anglo music scene began gaining attention, with the success of both DIY spaces and small venues transitioning the scene from relatively local obscurity to international recognition, particularly in the Mile End neighbourhood. Characterized by hidden DIY spaces and a cultivated sense of underground casualness, the scene resisted easy visibility and commodification, contributing to its allure. It

has thrived through its pragmatic use of DIY spaces like Hotel2Tango, Lab Synthèse, and Drones, which created space for experimental music outside traditional commercial venues. These unregulated spaces reject formal permits, high rents, and polished aesthetics in favour of creative autonomy, low costs, and adaptability, despite legal issues and unreliable infrastructure. By prioritizing artist control and sociability over profit, these venues maintain an enduring legacy of resistance to mainstream music industry norms. Despite their precarious nature, DIY spaces continue to sustain Montreal's indie-Anglo scene.

The elusiveness of DIY spaces is crucial for their survival, as it allows them to evade strategic constraints. Language and spatial practices are used to subvert dominant controls over space, transforming everyday places into spaces through shared stories and word-of-mouth communication. The Van Horne Underpass, The Crumper, and Mai/son illustrate varied ways in which the scene negotiates intention, use, and memory, maintaining a dynamic and autonomous relationship to space that resists neutral or passive definitions.

DIY spaces and small venues repurpose unconventional urban environments such as basements, living rooms, warehouses, and outdoor underpasses in response to rising rents, zoning restrictions, and a rejection of more formal venues. The Van Horne Underpass embodies spontaneous, high-energy gatherings marked by creative resilience and a youthful crowd, while The Crumper serves as a smaller, organized rehearsal and performance space connected to the scene's history and collective memory, and Mai/son balances formal structure with informal status. These spaces are not only physical locations but also socially produced sites of meaning, sustained through shared habits, stories, and language that resists dominant spatial norms and institutional control. These spaces enable the scene to persist through continual refiguration and negotiation of urban space.

Lefebvre's introduction of "social" space, de Certeau's strategies and tactics, and Massey's focus on historical temporality collectively reveal how everyday actions and social relations produce dynamic, processual cultural spaces. Space is a practised place produced through strategies and tactics and simultaneously generates the very tactics that subvert and reconfigure it. A scene is a process of space, and space needs to be refigured in order to maintain a scene over time. Key to the refiguration of space is a refiguration of authority. In the Montreal indie-Anglo scene, this refiguration of authority is enacted through a resistance to hegemonic pressures to conform to strategic conceptions of space and commercial valuation of labour. The scene transforms ordinary places into meaningful cultural spaces through shared stories, legible mainly to insiders. The concept of scene, therefore, emphasizes the localized, processual, and relational nature of spatial production.

At the time of finishing this thesis, The Van Horne Underpass is no longer hosting shows. Over the summer of 2025, noise complaints from nearby residents led to the cancellation of many events, with many moving to new locations. This exemplifies the fragility and transience of these spaces, and the resilience of the scene to continue the activity in new locations. It speaks to the need to record and share these tactics in order to write them into the history of this scene. This space allowed participants opportunities for experimentation, self-expression, collaboration, and a place to play music and put on a party in an otherwise unnoteworthy space.

Many DIY spaces have short life-spans, and their ephemerality leads to questions of how to engage with their histories. Throughout the history of independent music in Montreal, certain DIY spaces have been idealized while others may have been left out of the social memory. However, spaces resist their perceived obsolescence by engaging the present through documentation and narration of past events and practices. The stories of these spaces unveil less-

documented past spatial practices and lived cultural engagements. These tactics operate in the present, where the production of space emerges through the active recollection of a scene's past practices, informing those who maintain it. Thus, past DIY spaces still play an ongoing role in the scene through their residual presence, as their histories connect past cultural practices to present spatial experiences. Their material and narrative traces complicate notions of obsolescence, revealing how memory, invisibility, and storytelling sustain the cultural relevance of these spaces even after their physical closure. The documentation of these spaces not only preserves overlooked histories but also offers warnings and insights that can shape the future of DIY cultural production.

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