

The Point(e) of the Interstices: Tensions between Community and Capitalist Appropriation over  
Interstitial Spaces

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## Abstract

### The Point(e) of the Interstices: Tensions between Community and Capitalist Appropriation over Interstitial Spaces

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Following the shift from an industrial economy to a capitalist and consumerist one, the legacy of an industrial past has left its marks on the landscape of North American cities in the form of disused train yards, spaces on street edges, spaces under infrastructure lines, and abandoned industrial sites. These spaces are often referred to as *interstitial spaces* (Matos, 2009). While city governments, urban planners and developers see them as an opportunity for urban regeneration and capitalist investment, community members view them as an opportunity to cater their needs and desires. These different visions around the re-purposing of interstitial spaces has rendered them sites of tension. In this study, I seek to understand the tension between the capitalist and community appropriation of interstitial spaces, explore how the community manages this tension and examine the factors that are affecting how the tension is being dealt with. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork based on *urban walking*, in-depth interviews as well as online content analysis, and building on literature around the topics of *assemblage*, *the right to the city*, *production of space* and interstitial spaces, I explore these questions in Pointe Saint Charles, a post-industrial neighborhood in the Southwest of Montreal, undergoing rapid gentrification and known for its community activism. Analysis revealed that interstitial spaces grappled with the clashing objectives of each force and its subsequent vision for the use of space. In particular, interstitial spaces acted as sites of tension between profitability vs. affordability, identity erasure vs. identity reinforcement and separation vs. inclusion of the population. To navigate these tensions, the community of Pointe Saint Charles deployed a set of tactics that either prevented a certain use of space, reconciled both uses or responded to a certain use. The thesis concludes by providing implications that consider assemblage as a main interpretational tool to study the contested nature of interstitial spaces as more than a simple dichotomy between capitalist and community appropriation. It also reconceptualized the perception of interstitial spaces from meaningless static gaps in the city to dynamic and complex sites.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	vii
List of Figures .....	vii
Preface.....	ix
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Statement of Problem .....	1
1.2 Case Study: History and Context .....	2
1.3 Theoretical Framework .....	5
1.4 Study Overview.....	5
Chapter 2. Literature Review.....	7
2.1 Interstitial Spaces: Definitions and Approaches .....	7
2.2 Interstitial Spaces as Sites of Tension.....	9
2.3 Capitalist Appropriation of Interstitial Spaces .....	11
2.4 Community Appropriation of Interstitial Spaces .....	12
2.5 Interstitial Spaces as Assemblages.....	15
2.6 Conclusion.....	18
Chapter 3. Methodology.....	20
3.1 Urban Walking .....	20
3.2 Interviews .....	25
3.3 Online Content Analysis .....	27
3.4 A Note on Methodology and Research: Situating Knowledge in the Field of Urban Studies .....	28
Chapter 4. Results.....	30
4.1 Profitability vs. Affordability .....	31
4.2 Identity Erasure vs. Identity Reinforcement .....	42
4.3 Separation vs Inclusion .....	54
4.4 Summary .....	56
Chapter 5. Discussion.....	58
5.1 Contextualizing Tensions and Strategies .....	58
5.2 Theoretical Implications.....	63
5.3 Methodological Implications.....	63
5.4 Practical Implications.....	64
Chapter 6. Conclusion .....	66

6.1 Limitations and Direction for Future Research.....	67
6.2 Concluding Remarks .....	68
References.....	69

## List of Tables

Table 1. Diagram representing the different components and the refined categories of the observations (Source: the author) .....	25
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## List of Figures

Figure 1. Aerial view of Montreal with the location of the Southwest district and Pointe Saint Charles (Source: the author) .....	3
Figure 2. Map of Pointe Saint Charles that is enclosed by Lachine Canal, the railway lines and surpassed by the elevated railway line (Pointe Libertaine, n.d.) .....	3
Figure 3. Diagram showing the different areas and sections (Source: the author) .....	22
Figure 4. Location of Jardin des Voisins in Pointe Saint Charles (Source : the author) .....	33
Figure 5. Location of Jardin de la Liberté (Source : the author).....	34
Figure 6. The space before the intervention (La Pointe Libertaine, 2007).....	35
Figure 7. Residents participating in the execution of the garden (La Pointe Libertaine, 2007)....	35
Figure 8. Location of Jardin des Citoyens in Pointe Saint Charles (Source: the author) .....	36
Figure 9. Jardin des Citoyens located at the corner of the street, adjacent to the elevated railway (Source: the author, Mtl, Qc, October 2018) .....	37
Figure 10. The location of the vacant terrains of the CN in Pointe Saint Charles and the different zones (Source: the author) .....	39
Figure 11. Location of Batiment 7 in Pointe Saint Charles (Source : the author) .....	41
Figure 12. Image showing the Pointe Saint Charles Library, previously a fire station and adjacent buildings (Source : the author, Mtl, Qc, October 2018) .....	44
Figure 13. Image showing clear contrast and clash between the different colors and characters of the buildings (Source: the author, Mtl, Qc, October 2018) .....	44
Figure 14. Location of the Black Rock Monument in Pointe Saint Charles (Source: the author)..	46
.....	
Figure 15. Location of the CN wall in the middle of Pointe Saint Charles (Source : the author)	49
Figure 16. The first action of La Pointe Libertaine on the wall (La Pointe Libertaine, 2006) .....	50
Figure 17. The ‘Velo-rution’ Painting that got the painters arrested (La Pointe Libertaine, 2006)	51
.....	
Figure 18. The wall with the acts of La Pointe Libertaine (La Pointe Libertaine, n.d.) .....	52
Figure 19. Mural showing the history and evolution of the neighborhood (Source : the author, Mtl, Qc, October 2018).....	52



## Preface

My interest in post-industrial landscapes inspired me to enroll in a course titled *Industrialization and the Built Environment*, which Professor Cynthia Hammond taught through the Department of Art History at Concordia University in 2016. It was this place-based learning course tackling the deindustrialization of Southwest Montreal that introduced me to Pointe Saint Charles. This neighborhood, referred to as “The Pointe” by residents, intrigued me as a landscape marked with the legacy of an industrial past and urged me to explore its abandoned and left-out spaces. My first impression of the neighborhood was ambivalent: when asked about it, I described it as a neighborhood with an identity that is not lost, but rather still grappling with an industrial past on the cusp of erasure through the process of urban regeneration. However, after several walks in the neighborhood accompanied by narratives of locals telling stories about each corner (over audio-walks<sup>1</sup>), my image of a perishing neighborhood changed. I quickly observed that Pointe Saint Charles is alive with different forms of activism that have popped up in the neighborhood’s abandoned spaces as a form of resistance to the process of gentrification.

The everyday Pointe Saint Charles, which I got to know through community-planned spaces rather than pre-planned spaces, in addition to the controversy over the re-development of such spaces in the Global North, inspired me to write this thesis. The process of producing the text was, on many levels, like its topic. I did not only explore tensions between different efforts to repurpose *interstitial spaces*, as I refer to them throughout the text, but also tensions with my design background. This process, in addition to my parallel involvement in the research groups ‘Cities X Citizens’ directed by Dr. Silvano De La Llata and ‘Performative Urbanism’ directed by Dr. Shauna Janssen, called me to question the extent to which urban practitioners should shape urban space and made me both contemplate and clash with my practice as a landscape architect. This pushed me to reflect on my positionality not only as an outsider to the neighborhood, but as a practitioner in the design discipline. Therefore, I have allotted time to volunteer in the neighborhood, aiming to understand the community of Pointe Saint Charles, which eventually revealed to me how and why it was a self-planned/ close-knit one. This experience proved to be a crucial part of my self-reflexivity as it dictated the course of the research. Looking at the

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<sup>1</sup> “Canal” and “La Pointe: the Other Side of the Tracks” are two memory based audio-walks I listened to, that were produced by Professor Steven High and students and faculty at Concordia University's Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling. For more information of the audio-walks, see <http://postindustrialmontreal.ca/audio>

community as the expert in research and being aware of my design background, I found many similarities between research and design. Just like static space production exists in planning and design, static knowledge production exists in research. Therefore, I made sure to keep the research project a space of constant dialogue with community members, by sharing with them my analysis and conclusions. Ultimately, I learned not only from and about The Pointe, but also expanded my knowledge of my own practice. As will be thoroughly unpacked and expanded on in subsequent chapters, this thesis has significantly reshaped my position as a landscape architect and shifted my interpretation of interstitial spaces from valueless and problematic gaps in need of change to spaces that are worthy.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

Like several American and European cities, Montreal suffered the consequences of unemployment and displacement following the shift from an industrial economy to a consumerist and capitalist one. Alongside these severe social changes, the physical manifestation of de-industrialization emerged through a landscape featuring residual spaces, which some scholars regard as a “symbol of failure of the industrial age” (Langhorst, 2014, p. 1110). Gil Doron (2000) assumes that these spaces are “the effects of post-industrialism, the passing of time, wars, the nature of capitalism and parsimonious speculation” (p. 252). Such spaces, which once served industrial purposes, manifest as disused train yards, spaces on street edges, spaces under infrastructure lines, and abandoned industrial sites. “Dead zones” (Doron, 2000), “terrain vague” (Sola-Morales, 1995), “no man’s land” (Woods, 2002), and “urban cracks” (Eeghem et al., 2011) are terms scholars frequently use to describe these spaces. In this thesis, I choose to adopt the term interstitial spaces (Matos, 2009), as it has a connotation of in-betweenness rather than emptiness.

### **1.1 Statement of Problem**

The abundance of interstitial spaces led to the fragmentation of the post-industrial landscape’s urban fabric. From an urban planning perspective, these spaces embodied the declining social and physical aspects of the post-industrial city as they became problematic, undeveloped spaces host to so-called vandalism and potential crimes. Moreover, urban planners and developers often regard these spaces as eyesores that decrease property values and cause a loss in tax revenue. These recurrent concerns in planning fueled revitalization efforts that would re-integrate an area’s interstitial spaces into its urban fabric. Therefore, along with the gentrification process of de-industrialized areas, planners and developers transformed many former industrial spaces into residential and commercial complexes aimed at profit, leading to the arrival of higher-income people and a subsequent change in the local culture. As many scholars consider gentrification a consequence of late capitalism (e.g., Harvey, 2008; Lee, 1996; Smith, 1979), I will use the term *capitalist appropriation* throughout the study to emphasize that, from this perspective, the appropriation of interstitial spaces comes with the pursue profit and consequent changes in sociocultural values. This new kind of investments clash with the local

community's vision: it sees interstitial spaces as ones of opportunity and self-expression functioning outside the formal use of traditional spaces and catering to its needs and desires. Here, the conception of community that I refer to is not only a group of people living in the same geographic area, but rather a larger group of people who share the same values, beliefs, or concerns (Bell & Newby, 1971; Bender, 1978; Effrat, 1974).

The different visions around the re-purposing of interstitial spaces has rendered them sites of tension. Therefore, interstitial spaces as a concept does not only emphasize physical in-betweenness, but also, as Andrea Brighenti (2016) suggests, implies that the spaces are surrounded by and in between forces. This conception of interstitiality challenges the idea that interstitial spaces are gaps in the city and counters the idea that the planning and revitalization of such spaces is only defined by authorities. Having said that, in this study, I seek to understand the tension between the capitalist and community appropriation of interstitial spaces by scrutinizing the objectives of each force. Then, I will explore how the community manages this tension by examining the varying tactics it employs. Finally, I will examine the factors that are exacerbating the tension or facilitating its negotiated solutions.

## **1.2 Case Study: History and Context**

This research examines the tension between the capitalist and community appropriation of interstitial spaces in Pointe Saint Charles, a neighborhood in the Borough of The Southwest in Montreal (Figures 1 and 2). This case is illustrative of the topic of study given that it is a post-industrial neighborhood undergoing major gentrification and has a long history of community activism. The beginning of the industrial era of Pointe Saint Charles was marked by the opening of the Lachine Canal in 1825, subsequently ending the agricultural era that once characterized the neighborhood. As the only link between North America and the other continents, the construction of the Lachine Canal spurred economic growth and employed many workers, including French Canadians and Irish immigrants. In the mid-1800s, major transportation changes prompted industrial development. Together, the expansion of the railway system, named the Grand Trunk Railway (currently known as the Canadian National Railway), and the construction of the Victoria Bridge employed numerous workers and defined Pointe Saint Charles as a working-class neighborhood, making it, with its marshalling yards, industries, worker's houses, and engine shops, the center of Canadian industry.

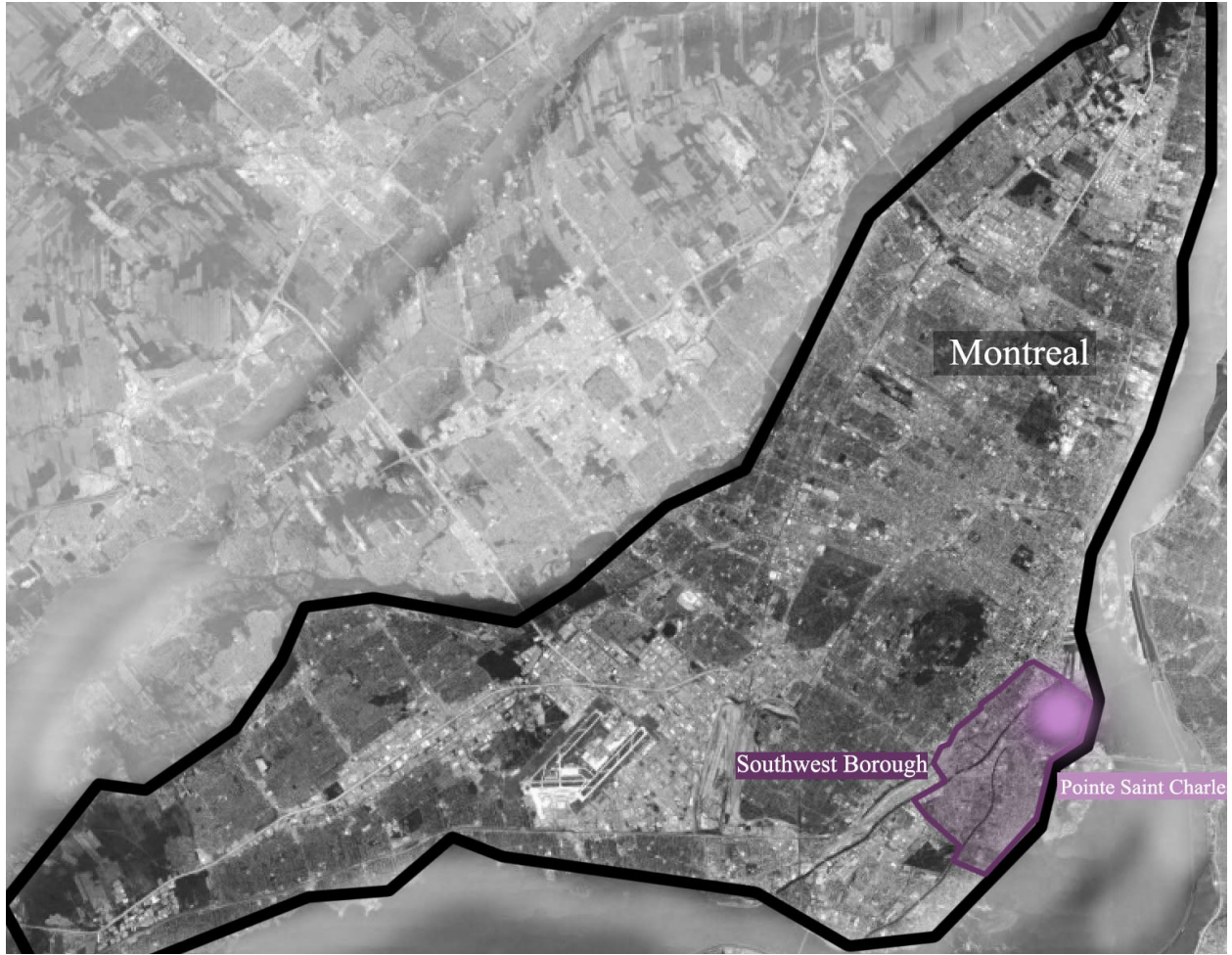


Figure 1. Aerial view of Montreal with the location of the Southwest district and Pointe Saint Charles (Source: the author)

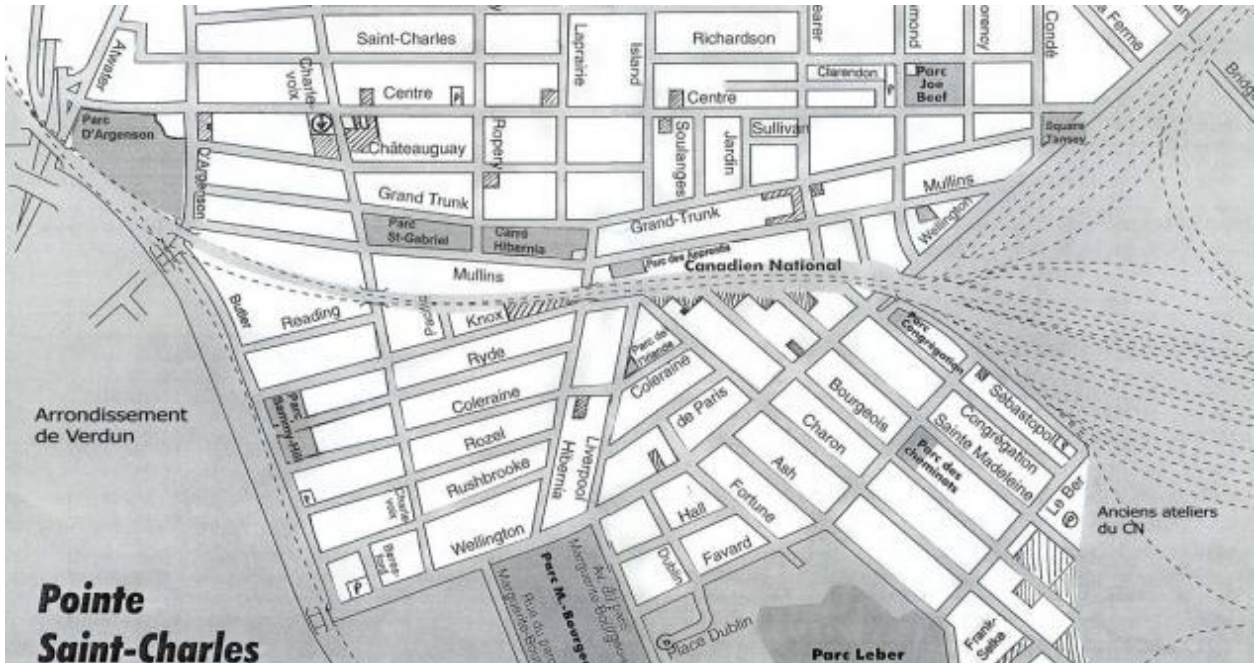


Figure 2. Map of Pointe Saint Charles that is enclosed by Lachine Canal, the railway lines and surpassed by the elevated railway line (Pointe Libertaine, n.d.)

While the beginning of the 1900s marked the industrial heyday of Pointe Saint Charles, the Great Depression of the 1930s hindered the district's economic activity. In the following decades, the development of the highway system, the opening of the Saint Lawrence Seaway, and the closing of the Lachine Canal stripped the area of its industrial activity. Industries that once lined the Lachine Canal and provided work to the neighborhood eventually moved away, leaving their buildings empty and abandoned. Pointe Saint Charles, along with other neighborhoods in the Southwest like Goose Village and Griffintown, suffered the severe consequences of de-industrialization. Shauna Janssen (2014) describes this process in a neighborhood in the Southwest situated north of The Pointe (i.e. Griffintown). She notes that “de-industrialized urban landscapes like Griffintown reveal the ruins of mass production and faint traces of working class histories... From a municipal urban planning perspective, postindustrial neighborhoods like Griffintown are problematic within the urban condition because they are perceived as empty, urban voids, and wastelands” (Janssen, 2014, p. 14). Hence, as part of the revitalization of the district, the City’s planning strategy was based on developing residential and commercial complexes whereby former factories became condominiums, and many vacant lots housed new developments. These revitalization initiatives increased following the reopening of the Lachine Canal in 2002 as a national historic site. This new investment in spaces (mostly private development projects) accelerated gentrification through the arrival of higher-income people, an increase in rent and property values, changes in the neighborhood's character and culture, and the displacement of locals. In Pointe Saint Charles, these new uses clashed with the community’s aim to use these spaces as an opportunity for self-expression and a way to cater to its needs. Having said that, this thesis takes a critical stand towards gentrification to address concerns around its process of capitalist appropriation and static planning; gentrification transforms the spaces remaining from post-industrial cities into assets that privilege capitalist interests, thereby disregarding and marginalizing existing local culture and community. This echoes Janssen (2014)’s critique of gentrification: she notes that the concern with gentrification is that it is “moving beyond economic urban development and reaching into much wider issues of power, the social, public, and cultural spheres of civic life” (p. 13).

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework**

The urban planning and urban studies disciplines are based on theoretical frameworks that can offer rich, deep insights into the contested nature of interstitial spaces. Of particular relevance are the notions of *production of space* (Lefebvre, 1991), *space and place* (Massey, 2004), *assemblage* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), and *Actor Network Theory* (ANT), developed by scholars such as Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law in the 1980s. The latter two concepts have recently gained much attention in urban studies for the investigation of urban and public space. I will draw from these theories as guides for interpreting and questioning the static status of interstitial spaces while instead examining their dynamic nature. From these perspectives, interstitial spaces are not as simple and meaningless as they appear, and their contested nature is far more complex than a lucid dichotomy between capitalist and community appropriation (see more in Chapter 2).

### **1.4 Study Overview**

With the abundance of interstitial spaces in the neighborhood and the on-going gentrification being resisted by the community, this controversy over interstitial spaces is worth investigating. An overview of the literature on interstitial spaces reveals that scholars have studied them both for their potential for community appropriation through insurgent and informal uses, as well as for their potential for capitalist appropriation by private development projects. A common narrative that emerges from these studies is that interstitial spaces are contested (Brighenti, 2016; Doron, 2000; Husdon & Shaw, 2011; Pearsall et al., 2014; Phelps & Silva, 2018). However, this line of research has not yet explored the tension that underlies this contestation in depth. I find this gap remarkable given the emergence of community-oriented planning on one hand and the rapid gentrification process on the other, and am impelled to investigate how the actors negotiate this tension. Therefore, through well-founded courses of scrutiny into topics of community appropriation of public space (e.g., Carmona, 2010; Crawford, 1995; De La Llata, 2016; Holston, 2009; Hou, 2010; Madanipour, 2013), the notion of the right to the city (e.g., Crawford, 2011; Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre, 1996; Purcell, 2002), an interest in the relationship between gentrification and public space (e.g., Atkinson, 2004; Fraser, 2004; Slater, 2011) as well as alternative approaches to interstitial or “ludic spaces” (Stevens, 2007), “loose spaces” (Frank & Stevens, 2007), “everyday spaces” (Crawford, 1999), “parafunctional space”

(Papastergiadis, 2002) and “guerrilla spaces” (Hou, 2010), I wish to examine the tension between community and capitalist appropriation of interstitial spaces. By drawing from the case of Pointe Saint Charles, I aim to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the tension between the two forces, and to scrutinize the tactics used by community members to manage this tension by making two contributions. First, I draw from the theories of assemblage and ANT mentioned above to re-conceptualize how interstitial spaces are perceived. Second, I provide an empirical contribution that does not only aim to discern the tension in interstitial spaces, but also to expand on strategies used by the community to manage it.

In the chapter that follows, I review and engage with some of the extant literature in geography and urban studies on interstitial spaces. This also sets the stage for an examination of interstitial spaces as sites of tension through a provided theoretical framework. In Chapter 3, I lay out the qualitative ethnographic methods (urban walking, in-depth interviews, and online content analysis) I used to conduct an examination of the tensions in Pointe Saint Charles. Then, in Chapter 4, I discern and unpack the tensions in the interstitial spaces of Pointe Saint Charles, along with the strategies the community employed to navigate them. Indeed, findings revealed that interstitial spaces acted as sites of tension between capitalist appropriation and community appropriation, specifically between *profitability vs. affordability*, *identity erasure vs. identity reinforcement*, and *separation vs. inclusion* of the population. In each case, the community deployed a variety of strategies that allowed them to prevent, reconcile with, or respond to a certain future use of space. Finally, in Chapter 5, I interpret these findings and position them in the context of relevant literature in order to provide recommendations I gleaned from the neighborhood. This is followed by a discussion of limitations, future research directions, and concluding remarks that emphasize how interstitial spaces, although supposedly empty and abandoned, are in fact complex and dynamic sites.



## Chapter 2. Literature Review

This chapter weaves the way to examining interstitial spaces as sites of tension in Pointe Saint Charles. First, I will engage with existing research that looks into definitions of and approaches towards interstitial spaces. Then, I will turn my attention to interstitial spaces as contested sites in the urban fabric and look at how they are used in the context of two forces explored in this thesis: capitalist appropriation and community appropriation. Finally, I will present my theoretical framework, which delves into the concept of assemblage as a guide to interpreting interstitial spaces as sites of tension.

### 2.1 Interstitial Spaces: Definitions and Approaches

In order to interpret the nature of interstitial spaces, I have examined studies that adopt differing approaches towards such spaces. A review of the literature shows that the studies on interstitial spaces center around two main points. First, some scholars argue that their indeterminate and vague nature is fundamental to their definition and attribute to them terms that reflect these characteristics. Across this literature, interstitial spaces typically cast signs of ambiguity or abandonment on the urban landscape. One influential concept is *terrain vague*, proposed by architect Ignasi De Sola-Morales (1995). *Terrain* in French implies “greater and perhaps less precisely defined territories, connected with the physical idea of a portion of land in its potentially exploitable state but already possessing some definition to which we are external” (p. 119); *vague* suggests “empty, unoccupied yet also free, available, unengaged” (p. 119). Other labels assigned to interstitial spaces are “dead zones” (Doron, 2000), “no man’s land” (Woods, 2002), “hollow places in which the past sleeps” (De Certeau, 1984), “the passive, victimized or invisible other to global spaces” (Nagar et al, 2002), and “spaces of uncertainty” (Cupers & Miessen, 2002). Another body of literature focuses on the physical character of interstitial spaces and assigns terms such as “voids” (Armstrong, 2006), “SLOAP” (spaces left over after planning) (Doron, 2007), “gaps” (Phelps & Silva, 2018), “urban cracks” (Eeghem et al., 2011), “physical holes”(Florentin, 2010), and “empty zone” (Doron, 2008).

I have expanded my conception of interstitial spaces by analyzing Ray Northam’s work (1971). He distinguishes the types of interstitial spaces through their shape, location, size of parcel, and ownership. Northam identifies five types: remnant parcels, unbuildable lands, corporate reserve, land held for speculation, and institutional parcels. The first one, remnant

parcels, is made of land irregular in shape and leftover from other developments. In fact, this type mirrors many spaces in Pointe Saint Charles, as Sijpkens (1989) affirms that the development of the neighborhood was ad hoc, whereby the streets were set out in a way that would fit the lands left between the railway tracks. The second type, unbuildable lands, consists of spaces that cannot be developed due to physical limitations, such as a steep slope. Such spaces exist in Pointe Saint Charles; they have resulted from the elevated railway track that cuts through the middle of the neighborhood. The third type that Northam identifies, corporate reserves, await possible future development by firms (e.g., lots in a gentrified neighborhood). The fourth is land held for speculation, which is made for profit at a later time. Finally, institutional parcels are owned by public or semi-public organizations for future development. Bowman and Pagano (2004) expand on Northam's work and add derelict land as a new type. Another descriptive label for it is TOADS (temporarily obsolete, abandoned or derelict sites) (Bowman & Pagano, 2004; Nemeth & Langhorst, 2014), which "cover a wide range of sizes and previous uses, but frequently are the sites of former industrial or commercial activities" (Nemeth & Langhorst, 2014, p. 144) such as the marshalling yards in the eastern part of Point Saint Charles.

The studies that I have presented above give interstitial spaces static and unproductive connotations related to decay and fragmentation, suggesting that they are not normative or typical spaces (Woods, 2002). As opposed to the orthodox planned and designed layouts in cities, "the fragmented urban landscape is not yet seen as part of our culture" (Sieverts, 2011, p. 20). Since Pointe Saint Charles' development did not follow an urban vision (Sijpkens, 1989), its de-industrialization and the landscape that emerged from it reflected the declining physical and social characteristics of the post-industrial city. This landscape has triggered the interest of many scholars who have described it as "superfluous landscape" (Nielsen, 2002), "landscape of contempt" (Giro, 2005), and "ambivalent landscape" (Jorgensen & Tylecote, 2007). However, scholars in several disciplines have adopted a different approach towards this landscape. From an interdisciplinary perspective, Griffintown's post-industrial landscape inspired Janssen (2014) as one that could welcome productive responses to the socio-historical particularity of the neighborhood, and she notes that "the unprogrammed and often contested nature of postindustrial urban landscapes has an active indeterminacy and the capacity to harness a more direct relationship with the specific qualities of an urban place" (p. 2). Similarly, Historian Steven High (2013), who explores the de-industrialized landscape of Pointe Saint Charles,

describes its images as romanticizing the past while serving as a means to reimagine the future. According to High, “ruin-gazing or ‘ruin-porn’ therefore has become more voyeuristic than nostalgic, as there is no lament for the loss of industry” (2013, p. 140). From an architectural and planning perspective, architect Francesco Careri (2002) posits that this landscape is passing through a state of “urban amnesia” whereby a residual identity and gaps are awaiting new meanings. Hence, some authors propose strategies to deal with the spaces of this landscape by introducing concepts of “patching up” the gaps (Salerno, 2011), “suture” (Kullman, 2011), and “filling up” (Harris, 2015). In this study, I proceed on the premises advanced by these scholars (from different disciplines) who do not consider interstitial spaces merely abandoned and left-over, but rather active and capable of harnessing potential meanings. Most importantly, I stress that various forces contest and shape interstitial spaces, thus forming a landscape of contested meanings. In the section below, I will proceed to elaborate on this perspective and will review studies that approach interstitial spaces as dynamic and contested spaces.

## **2.2 Interstitial Spaces as Sites of Tension**

The topic of contestation in interstitial spaces has garnered scholarly interest in many fields, including architecture, urban studies, geography, and social theory. A common assertion for scholars across these areas is that interstitial spaces are dynamic and active spaces, not static and dormant ones. Brighenti (2016), who defines the interstice as a space in-between, argues that this notion suggests that the interstices are surrounded by other spaces that are more powerful, and that subsequently they are defined by issues of power. Similarly, Nicholas Phelps & Cristian Silva (2018) explain that the pending state of interstitial spaces is awaiting a new purpose that is subject to the economic interests at play. This approach is better understood by discerning Massey’s work on the relational quality of space (2004). She interprets space as the product of complex systems and relations, referring to it as the global force that becomes embodied in the local place. Moreover, she claims that the local is not a victim of the global, but it has agency in molding global forces, so it either accommodates for them, or it resists. Similarly, in this thesis, I look into how capitalism as a global force is taking shape in Pointe Saint Charles, and how, instead of being a victim, the neighborhood demonstrates spatial agency and activism to resist it. In her book, *For Space*, Massey (2005) expands on this concept and develops the notion of *throwntogetherness*, which, as Alistair Fraser (2012) clearly puts it, is “the sense that an

unpredictable heterogeneous mix of ‘distinct trajectories’ meet up, interact, and get thrown together in space” (p. 2), arguing that space is the product of throwntogetherness. In addition, Massey notes that “from the greatest public square to the smallest public park these places are a product, of and internally dislocated by, heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting social identities/relations” (p. 152). Drawing from Massey’s theory, I am approaching interstitial spaces as active components subject to conflicting power relations, as well as fields of play between different forces, or, as Brighenti (2016) declares in a more practical explanation, different interactions among several stakeholders. On that point, the work of Pearsall et al. (2014) on managing vacant lots confirms that cities develop policies to reuse interstitial spaces that do not respond to the needs of the various stakeholders involved, which consequently provokes contestation.

To explain this contested nature, scholars have sought to discern the diverse reuses of interstitial spaces. Central to this is the research of Joern Langhorst & Jeremy Nemeth (2014), who identify two models in re-purposing interstitial spaces. The first one is the temporary use model, which encourages the community’s performance of recreational and social uses, and the second is the traditional model, which cares for long-term interventions the state and developers implement. In addition, Jimenez-Dominguez’s work on the urban landscape of Guadalajara “reveal[s] the coupling of globalized/controlled and localized/loosened” (2007, p. 100). These two models can be paralleled with the concept of strategies and tactics introduced by Michel De Certeau (1984). Strategies are formal and aim to define and control space; they can include land uses, zoning, codes, and so on, which are mainly determined by the state. For example, the municipal revitalization strategies for Pointe Saint Charles and the de-industrialized Southwest in general both involved repurposing former industrial buildings into condominiums. In addition, both Griffintown and Goose Village demonstrate such top-down strategies, as, according to Sijpkens (1989), both were largely affected by “thoughtless zoning practices on the part of the municipal administration” (p. 184). On the other hand, tactics are opportunistic and autonomous; local actors use them to negotiate space outside the formal use of the built environment. For instance, the Darling Foundry, a former metalwork factory located in Southwest Montreal, was reclaimed by the arts organization Quartier Éphémère, which brings temporary artistic projects to vacant spaces in order to preserve the cultural identity and collective memory of post-industrial Montreal. This adaptive re-use brought the building back to life, making it possible to repurpose

it and prevent its demolition (Janssen, 2009). From a planning and design perspective, Nemeth & Langhorst (2014) assume that two factors seem to be controlling these strategies and tactics. First is the developability of the land, which is dependent on its physical condition and whether it is buildable or not. Second is the ownership of the land, which gives power to a specific party to determine its future. Hence, interstitial spaces become embedded with contested meanings and torn between community and capitalist-driven aims. This goes in accordance with the work of Pearsall et al. (2014), who affirm that “municipal governments may view tax-revenue generating uses such as residential, commercial or industrial uses as preferable” (p. 163), while community members would favor turning them into public and collective spaces. In the following two sections, I will elaborate on this point and I will turn to study interstitial spaces as contested sites by investigating two forces in re-purposing interstitial spaces: capitalist appropriation and community appropriation.

### **2.3 Capitalist Appropriation of Interstitial Spaces**

The first force I will discuss in this thesis is gentrification, which is tagged with the term capitalist appropriation when applied to interstitial spaces throughout this study. The term *gentrification* was initially introduced by Ruth Glass (1964), who defines it as the change in the social structure of a working-class neighborhood due to the moving in of the middle class, which increases the price of housing and displaces residents. Another recent definition by Eric Clark (2005) notes that gentrification implies renovating the decaying built environment to suit the incoming middle class, stressing that it is one of the products that align with capitalism. Many urban practitioners and developers consider interstitial spaces part of this deteriorating environment, as they regard them as signs of abandonment and decay that devalue the properties around them. Consequently, the government has sought out plans and regulations to repurpose them for a greater benefit that aligns with capital investment (Bowman & Pagano, 2004), hence the term capitalist appropriation.

Several examples in post-industrial cities mirror forms of appropriation that favor a re-use that goes in line with capitalist values. In Southwest Montreal, former factories along the Lachine Canal were transformed into condominiums. One example is the Redpath Sugar Refinery, situated in Pointe Saint Charles, which was taken over for revitalization attempts. It has, with no regard for its industrial heritage, undergone major renovations and now houses

sumptuous lofts (Deverteuil, 2004). The Redpath Sugar Refinery, in addition to many other former industrial buildings, has endured tensions between the interests of capitalist projects and heritage preservation. This erasure of the local heritage and the promotion of these renovated buildings as luxurious and prestigious script a new way of life for the neighborhood. On that point, Lehrer & Wieditz (2009) emphasize how the “condofication” of Toronto resulted in the division of the city into distinct cities separating three social classes: the rich, the middle income, and the poor. This has also affected Pointe Saint Charles; it became divided into two social classes: the incoming middle class and the locals referred to as the Pointers (Mills, 2011). Another example of capitalist appropriation is the New York City’s Highline, a former railroad that became a linear park. It started as a citizen initiative and received crowdfunding with the help of a non-profit organization called Friends of the Highline, which advocated for its preservation and reuse as a public open space when it was threatened with demolition. Before its redevelopment, it was a space of self-expression for less-formal agents like graffiti artists. In his paper, Kevin Loughran (2014) states that “most politicians and developers saw the hulking, decaying structure as a serious impediment to the neighborhood’s renewal” (p. 54). He proceeds to comment on how appropriation by elite actors altered the surrounding area to unequivocally suit the middle class, stating: “elite actors developed a public space to spur economic growth and structure the leisure and consumption patterns of the new urban middle class” (p.52). Throughout his paper, he shows how privilege is experienced in the Highline, and discusses “spatial privilege” as a propagating phenomenon in contemporary urban space that limits the uses or the spatial practice of individuals.

The examples and studies I mentioned above demonstrate that the way interstitial spaces are re-used is accompanied with capitalist values that provoke spatial privilege and exclude certain social classes, hence fabricating a new culture for the neighborhood. This clashes with another pole that favors other types of values. In the section below, I will examine the second force in re-imagining interstitial spaces: community appropriation.

## **2.4 Community Appropriation of Interstitial Spaces**

**2.4.1 The right to the city and the production of space.** In this context, appropriation is defined as an act of exerting *the right to the city*, Henri Lefebvre’s (1976) concept underlining the people’s right to change by changing the city (Harvey, 2008). Jimenez-Dominguez (2007)

argues that what renders community appropriation distinct and different from other practices is that it involves collective action; thus, it becomes part of the fight for the right to the city. To achieve this right, Lefebvre discusses two points. First is the right of the community to produce the city, which he calls the *oeuvre*, making it closer to a vivid work of art than a monotonous physical artefact. For him, the *oeuvre* is a spatial and social product of human relationships. The second is the right of appropriation, which means not only granting access to public spaces, but taking over urban spaces for self-expression, hence resulting in a sense of ownership (Crawford, 2011; Purcell, 2004). Anna Pluyshteva (2004) stresses that the practice of the right to the city should not be restricted or limited to urban planners or politicians; it should extend to include the community in the production of urban space, as it will not be effective if experts realize it and then impose it on citizens. Many have described the community of Pointe Saint Charles as a self-planned, solid, and collaborative one, and, according to Sijpkens (1989), the Pointe was saved thanks to its residents, who were by the 1960s “the most organized community in Montreal, if not in Canada” (p. 184). Cynthia Hammond (2018) explains how residents of Pointe Saint Charles, particularly women, formed the committee Action-Boulevard to take over their built environment by mobilizing against the construction of a highway that would demolish their cherished fire station and displace many families.

To explore the re-use of interstitial spaces for community appropriation, I drew from theories on the production of space. One of the most relevant sources is Lefebvre’s spatial triad (1991), which discerns three aspects of space: (1) the spatial practice or *perceived space*, which is how people use the space, (2) the representational space or *lived space*, which is replete with meanings and symbols, and finally (3) the representations of space or *conceived space*, which is the set of maps and plans made by planners, urbanists, scientists, and so on. For Lefebvre, planners privilege the elements of the conceived space and suppress those of the lived space, thus creating a monotony of everyday life. Philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault (1986) introduces the concept of *heterotopia*, one which describes spaces that perform in non-hegemonic conditions. As opposed to *utopia*, which is an unreal space, heterotopia is real and it “encapsulates the contrasting characteristics of both utopia and dystopia and highlights the contested nature and the plurality of futures” (Wang, 2017, p. 5). Edward Soja (1996) expands on Lefebvre’s work and combines it with Foucault’s concept of heterotopia by introducing the *thirdspace*, which is the experience of the first place (the urban built form) mediated through

second place (how space is perceived). In summary, it is a space to which we give meaning, and in which the first and second space are negotiated. As such, many scholars (Doron, 2008; Stavrides, 2007; Barron, 2015) consider interstitial spaces those where differences meet, and they match them with heterotopia, thirdspace, and lived space, where their function is not a normative one, and plans and authorities do not dictate them. Based on this understanding of interstitial spaces, alternative terms have come to further establish them as site of potential and creativity.

**2.4.2 Community re-use of interstitial spaces.** As I introduced in the first chapter, terms such as “ludic spaces” (Stevens, 2007), “loose spaces” (Frank & Stevens, 2007), “everyday spaces” (Crawford, 1999), “parafunctional space” (Papastergiadis, 2002), and “guerrilla spaces” (Hou, 2010) shape different approaches to interstitial spaces when communities appropriate them. What characterizes these spaces is that they possess “multiple and shifting meanings rather than clarity of function” (Crawford, 1999). They become spaces of opportunity and potential where, according to Franck and Stevens’s concept of loose spaces, “many of the activities that generate the looseness are neither productive nor reproductive – being instead a matter of leisure, entertainment, self-expression or political expression, reflection and social interaction” (Frank & Stevens, 2007, p. 3). As opposed to the capitalist appropriation that results in social class separation and spatial privilege, community appropriation strives for a collective aspect. Constant Nieuwenhuys (1974), also known as “Constant”, a member of The Situationists (a revolutionary organization from the late 1950s), introduces the concept of the ludic society, one which is classless and in which everyone is free to create their own space. New Babylon, an anti-capitalist city perceived by Nieuwenhuys, is not the result of isolated and separate spaces, but rather of every human being engaged in a dynamic relation with their surrounding built environment. More recently, Stavros Stavrides (2007) puts forward the notion of porosity in the urban environment. Rather than a physical entity, the urban space becomes perforated with “a rich network of practices [that] transforms every available space into a potential theater of expressive acts of encounter” (p.175). In other words, porosity is considered an experience where everyday life happens. Interstitial spaces are hosts for these situations, thereby forming a ludic social order that resists authoritative planning and responds to the right to the city. According to Shaw & Hudson (2009):



Marginalized groups transform derelict spaces into places of creation, encouraging possibilities for new spaces to emerge. These tactics of re-appropriation allow them to take back space for improvised activities that could not otherwise happen in our over-commercialized society, whilst also highlighting the point that land and space should not only be available to developers (p. 6).

Such initiatives take the form of small-scale interventions such as community gardens, murals, small parks, markets, and more, and fall under alternative approaches to planning, such as tactical urbanism (Lydon & Garcia, 2015; Silva, 2016) and DIY (Do It Yourself) urbanism (Finn, 2014). In fact, Hou et al. (2009) insists that such spaces function as “hybrid public spaces” that are different from traditional open space since they are expressions of public space activism. In addition, Mitchell (2003) argues that struggle “is the only way that the right to public space can be maintained and only way that social justice can be advanced” (p. 5). For him, a space is public through these initiatives of appropriation.

## **2.5 Interstitial Spaces as Assemblages**

In this study, I use the notion of *assemblage* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and the ANT that Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law developed in the 1980s to understand and re-conceptualize interstitial spaces. Assemblage rejects essentialism, which is the belief that things have a set of characteristics that make them what they are. Instead, Manuel DeLanda (2006), one of the most influential interpreters of Deleuze & Guattari’s theory, claims that entities emerge from the interaction of components of what can be called an assemblage, and that the components that make it can join with others to form a different assemblage. Therefore, an important characteristic of an assemblage is that it is multi-scalar, so it can be applied to people, organizations, cities, and states. DeLanda (2006) also points out two central characteristics of an assemblage. First, that “the parts that are fitted together are not uniform either in nature or in origin, and that the assemblage actively links these parts together by establishing relations between them” (p. 2). Second, DeLanda states that the assemblage will have new properties irreducible to its parts. In simpler terms, an assemblage is a whole that is more than the sum of its parts (or components); it emerges from the ongoing interactions among its heterogenous parts. This suggests that an assemblage is dependent on the co-functioning of these components, and that one component can either constrain or enable the whole. On this point, DeLanda gives a

good account of agency to assemblages. He argues that the interaction of the components is how agency is expressed. However, this agency is determined by the capacity of the component, which is the potential it has. Therefore, the agency is only due to the capacities that components accomplish through these interrelationships. ANT parallels assemblage theory with an additional claim that these components are all actants. For Latour (2005), the network is a tool to be explored, and it is based on understanding the dynamics in which the actants are related and connected. He stresses that the actants can be both human and non-human. Thus, with ANT, the focus should be on the fluid relationships between these actants, all of which have agency (Callon & Law, 1995; Latour, 2005).

In recent years, assemblage and ANT have been adopted by many scholars in urban studies to reconceptualize cities. For instance, Pablo Sendra (2015) writes:

This reading of assemblage is useful to rethink rigid urban spaces which were conceived as rationally finished whole structures. The city as assemblage contrasts with the Athens Charter's concept of the city as a machine where every function is rationally distributed. In contrast, assemblage theory is interested in the process and how different situations emerge in the city (p. 823).

Similarly, Kim Dovey (2009) applies assemblage to urban spaces and says that the city is a series of assemblages made of different actants. For example, the city is an assemblage of people, institutions, communities, streets, infrastructure, and so on whereby each of these components can be a lower-level assemblage. In the same vein, Ignacio Farias (2011), who uses ANT to understand cities, claims that the city is regarded as multiplicities rather than a whole. Hence, and according to Colin Mcfarlane (2011), "the city emerges here as a series of more or less open assemblages, structured by a range of forms of power, capital, discourse, and groups, but always exceeding those structures and always with differential capacities to become otherwise" (p. 667). These ideas echo Christopher Alexander's (1965) concept that the city, or even a building, is not only a thing or a product, but a continuous process that synthesizes different relations and forces.

Another important topic to explore when it comes to assemblage is the twofold concept. Kamalipour & Peimani (2015) explain:

Assemblage thinking offers a range of twofold concepts that can be used as a theoretical toolkit to understand the underlying processes of continuity and change in the cities.

Formal/informal is one of the key twofold conceptions...The formal/informal twofold

can elaborate on the ways in which the “strategies” of the state collide with the everyday “tactics” of the citizens. Moreover, assemblage thinking has the capacity to explore the in-between conditions where the boundaries between the two ends of a twofold conception are blurry (p. 407).

The twofold concepts are thus not regarded as binaries, but rather as two concepts that feed into each other and “co-exist in a mixture rather than a dialectic relation; they morph or fold into the other rather than respond to it. In this sense, being emerges from becoming, identities from differences” (Dovey, 2009, p. 20). In a later paper, Dovey applies the twofold concept to informality and states that “one of the key tasks in rethinking this informal/formal relation is to overcome the tendency to give priority to the formal as if informality is a response or reaction to formality” (Dovey, 2014, p. 35), thereby blurring the dichotomy between the formal and the informal, and focusing instead on the dynamics between them. In the same vein, De la Llata (Forthcoming a) studies protest encampments in public space by applying the twofold concept of being/becoming. He states that “becoming operates both temporally and spatially. That is to say, a place (i.e. the encampment) is constantly transforming into something different through time and, at the same time, the square (and the activities happening in it) gradually becomes another place across space” (p. 22), therefore establishing the temporal aspect of assemblages.

These aspects render assemblage thinking and ANT useful for understanding the complexity of interstitial spaces as contested sites. Firstly, they re-conceptualize the view of interstitial spaces as meaningless gaps, turning them into meaningful spaces. In particular, the multi-scalar thinking of assemblage has important implications for re-establishing interstitial spaces as significant sites in the city. This approach pushes their interpretation as components of Montreal’s assemblage, which insists that they should not be omitted or regarded as only fragments of the city. Hence, applying this approach to the post-industrial landscape counters how it was previously described as a superfluous landscape or one of contempt. Moreover, as assemblage thinking does not only help in understanding interstitial spaces as a separate entity, but also as part of the complexity of the city, interstitial spaces become reflective of the city. In fact, Langhorst & Nemeth (2014) argue that examining interstitial spaces can expose social and environmental issues and injustices. Along those lines, Kamalipour & Keimani (2015) state that “the ways in which socio-spatial multiplicities link at various scales need to be analyzed to contribute to the most effective interventions in urban environments” (p. 405), which further

establishes their significance in the city. Secondly, the principles of these theories place an emphasis on the importance of the different components and the dynamism between them. They have largely guided the study in examining the contested nature of interstitial spaces as more than a simple dichotomy between capitalist appropriation and community appropriation. First, I refer to assemblage thinking to examine the contested nature of interstitial spaces through twofold concepts that fall under capitalist appropriation/community appropriation, taking into consideration that the two poles of the twofold concepts cannot be understood separately or one as the result of the other. As such, community appropriation cannot be understood as the result of capitalist appropriation. Second, as assemblage thinking focuses on the exploration of the relationships between the components, it stands useful by cramming the varying actants, not limited to humans (such as stakeholders), within interstitial spaces. Exploring these components and the interaction between them can then clarify what is affecting the tension and problematizing the use of interstitial spaces, or, in other words, what components have the capacity to affect the entity and to enable or constrain the assemblage. Finally, as assemblages are spaces in a fluid state of becoming, and since they have emergent properties, they are ever-changing and cannot be analyzed as fixed objects of study. This means that I do not explore the fixed state of interstitial spaces as former industrial spaces, nor their current state, but rather look at their evolution and emergence from and between these states.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Existing studies have distinct approaches towards interstitial spaces. In this study, I draw from and build on theories that look into their tensional and contested nature, implying assorted and often clashing uses for interstitial spaces. On this point, Phelps and Silva (2018) state, “the competing interests operative on interstitial spaces lead directly to the question of ‘whose city?’ so central to theories of elite and grassroots urban politics” (p. 1218). Similarly, Ali Madanipour (2013) writes:

a primary concern in the production and use of a place is the intention by some agencies to narrow and control participation so as to ensure particular outcomes... Another reductive pressure on public space is the assumptions made by the designers, developers and local decision makers concerning who people are and what they need... they may impose an abstract geometry without paying attentions to the patterns of lived experience

among the users, creating lines on the map rather than places defined by physical enclosures and supported by a range of activities (p. 240).

Following the notion of assemblage, this study seeks to explore the tension between capitalist appropriation and community appropriation in interstitial spaces and to examine how the community in Pointe Saint Charles navigates it. Having established a review of interstitial spaces in existing literature, and how Pointe Saint Charles fits within that, the following chapter will present the methodology that enabled an in-depth exploration of these questions.

## Chapter 3. Methodology

Power plays a key role in dictating the future uses of interstitial spaces. According to the theories of assemblage and ANT, power is neither defined a priori, nor is it equally distributed between the actants. Instead, it is the interaction between actants that nurtures a power to define the space. Hence, to understand interstitial spaces as sites of tension between capitalist and community appropriation, it is central to unfold their complexities and explore the dynamics between the actants. In order to do that, an ethnographic, mixed-methods analysis is useful. As I will elaborate on below, details of the tension between capitalist appropriation and community appropriation in interstitial spaces, presented in the following chapter, resulted from urban walking in Pointe Saint Charles, in-depth interviews with key community members, and online content analysis of documents posted by the neighborhood's various community groups.

### **3.1 Urban Walking**

Recently, mobile methods have been gaining increasing attention in the social sciences as tools for the creation of a more engaged understanding of space and place (e.g., Cresswell, 2006; Edensor, 2010; Latham & McCormack, 2004; Moles, 2008). In fact, *walking* is a method that has a long history in urban scholarship. It stems from a reformed version of *flâneurie*, a 19<sup>th</sup> century method of exploring the urban environment that Baudelaire developed to study the capitalist lifestyle then emerging in Paris. It has been associated with leisure, gender, and privilege, and it later became a subject of scholarly interest, particularly when developed further by Walter Benjamin. Jenks & Neves (2000) explain how it can be used as a research method and state: "Flâneurie, the flâneur's activity, involves the observation of people, social types and contexts; a way of reading the city, its population, its spatial configurations whilst also a way of reading and producing texts" (p.1). The Situationists have also promoted walking as a method to engage with the city, especially in their texts on the Theory of the *dérive* and have suggested that organic walking and drifting is a way to experience the city (Débord, 1956). Similarly, Lefebvre (2004) has called for a study of the rhythms that can be made by walking and observing the city.

In this thesis, the objective of urban walking as a method is to explore and engage with the contested landscape of Point Saint Charles by observing the material tension between the production of space and spatial appropriation (De La Llata, forthcoming b). This enables an

engagement with the lived space of Pointe Saint Charles which the walker can only experience through embodiment; this is opposed to the produced space which a viewer can detect from afar through architectural plans and maps. In fact, many scholars discuss the benefits of urban walking as a method that provides researchers with insights that come from the observation of space and that they cannot easily capture through other methods (Anderson, 2004; Edensor, 2010; Moles, 2008). For instance, Joseph Pierce & Mary Lawhon (2015) review walking as a method in geographical research and affirm that “identification and delineation of important sites, processes, and questions for examination often proceed from an embodied knowledge of a city, or local literacy, that can be produced through observational walking and related techniques” (p. 1).

**3.1.1 Fieldwork and Analysis.** Tanu Sankalia (2011) argues that we can better comprehend the city by exploring overlooked spaces. Sankalia uses observation as a method to analyze the memory of the city through interstitial spaces. By reviewing Benjamin’s work, he has formulated an urban observation analysis strategy that stresses on looking past the enticing forms of the city to its hidden places, focusing on the “minutia and marginalia”—trivial details and marginal spaces like derelict buildings. In the same line, Pierce & Lawhon (2015) stress that urban walking should include a careful act of observation and documentation:

Certainly, embodied socio-spatial experiences in a city or neighborhood spent in activities other than formal interviews or surveys likely affect findings. When scholars do engage in sustained personal observation, they should explicitly document the data collection, highlighting how it shaped other aspects of the research. Alternatively, the absence of such reporting might impact readers’ evaluation of a project’s validity and rigor (p. 4).

Thus, although my engagement included aspects of spontaneity and curiosity inspired by flâneurie and the theory of the dérive, I eventually focused the documentation of my observations on the area along the railway track due to its importance to the cultural landscape of The Pointe, its placement in the middle of the neighborhood, its juxtaposition to former industrial spaces, and its elevation. To organize fieldwork and achieve organized documentation of my observations, I divided the railway track into five main areas (Figure 3). Then, I sub-divided these areas into 5-meter sections and annotated them with numbers, enabling me to note thorough and detailed observations for each section of each area. Subsequently, I annotated the sides of the railroad tracks with side A (facing north) and side B (facing south) to explore both sides of the track. I visited each area three times during different times of the week and day (weekdays and weekends at daytime, noon, and night) to engage differently with the space and note any variances in my observations.

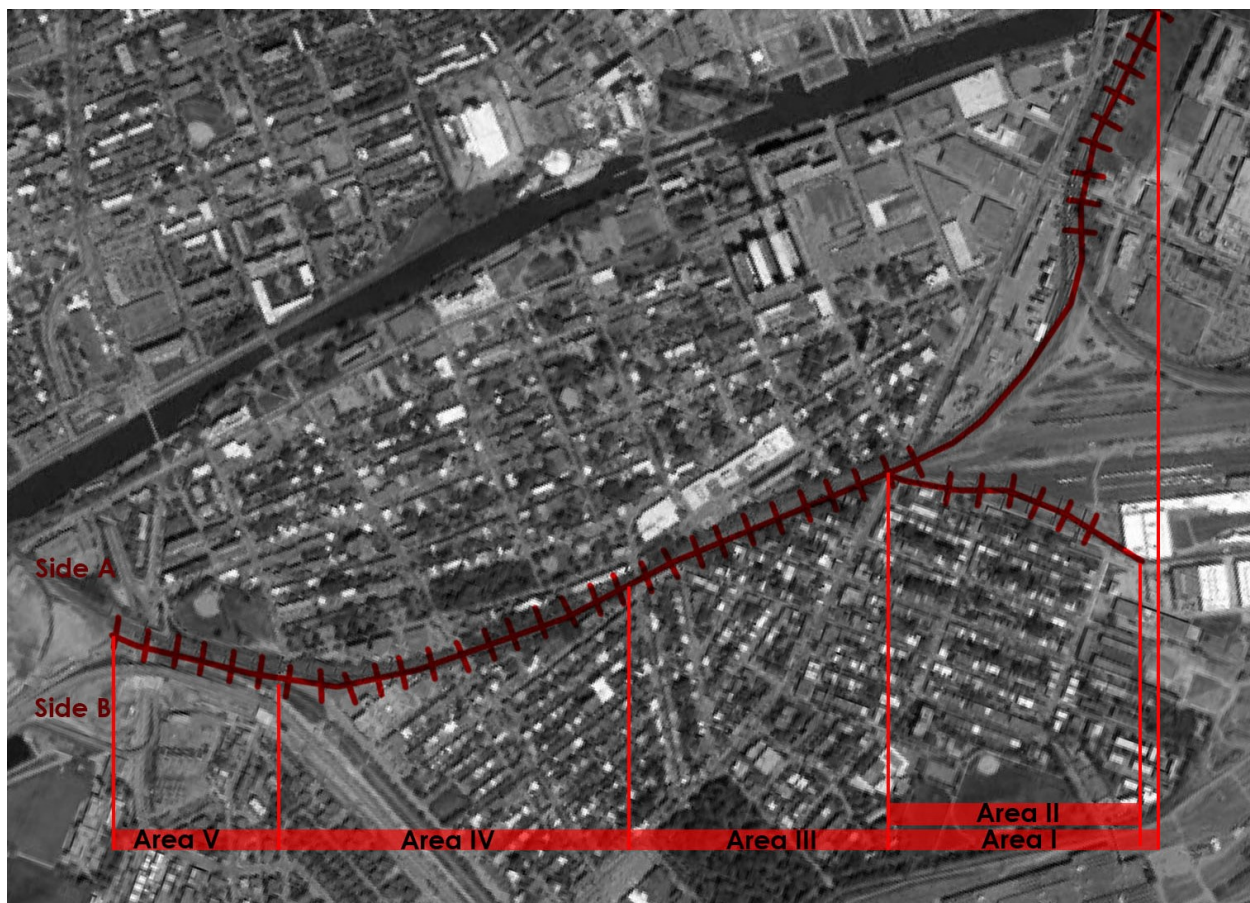


Figure 3. Diagram showing the different areas and sections (Source: the author)



To unpack the landscape, I referred to literature on cultural landscapes and urban design (De La Lata, forthcoming b; Jackson, 1984; Jacobs, 1993; Mehta, 2014; Sankalia, 2011). Cultural geographer and landscape studies pioneer J.B. Jackson (1984) views landscape as a cultural process and an ensemble of ordinary features that can exhibit much of the course of a society and he encourages a focus on the vernacular landscape—the surface of everyday life. This parallels assemblage thinking, for the landscape becomes an assemblage of these connected, assorted features which illustrate sociocultural issues. Moreover, the notion of everyday life implies that the vernacular landscape is created and recreated daily, which resonates with the concept of being and becoming. The connection, therefore, between the landscape of contested meanings and assemblages is fundamental to understanding, examining, and unfolding both its visible and hidden layers. De Landa (2006)'s work on the components of an assemblage relates to this point. He claims that assemblages are made of material components (human, trees, buildings, etc.), expressive components (colors, shape, texture, etc.), and processual components that maintain the relationship between the different elements and stabilize the assemblage. To further determine these components, I referred to urban design and planning studies. Jacobs (1993) and Mehta (2014) provide guides to evaluate the quality of public space. While Jacobs focuses on more expressive components (colors, light, transparency of barriers, etc.), Mehta gives more attention to material components (public seats, physical artefacts, trees and canopies, etc.) and processual components (community gatherings, activities and behaviors, etc.). By recognizing landscape as an ongoing relation between these components, I adopted Mehta and Jacobs' guides to, rather than evaluate public space, observe features and qualities of the contested landscape of Pointe Saint Charles. The components that I examined were as follows:

- Material Components: building condition, vegetation condition and maintenance, people's behavior and activity
- Expressive Components: colors, sounds, transparency and porosity of barriers (specifically the edges of the railway that cuts the neighborhood in the middle)
- Processual Components: people's use of space, recreational activities

Following an ethnographic approach to analysis, I revised my empirical and descriptive data collected during fieldwork and divided it into categories. Table 1 shows these descriptions and categories, and it reveals how the qualities of the landscape change with the presence of

community actions. For example, with the presence of community gardens, expressive and material qualities significantly differ from when they are absent. This method ended with a reflective description for each area related to concepts like interstitiality, appropriation, and gentrification, in the form of ethnographic memos. As Pierce and Lawhon (2015) suggest, “the central goal of walking is to shape questions rather than support specific conclusions, requiring the researcher to further interrogate impressions generated from walking” (p. 6). This method enabled me to develop questions to explore in my subsequent methods. For example, I mapped a variety of spaces (such as community gardens, murals, community farming, small parks, etc.) to discuss with the interviewees and shaped questions related to the industrial heritage, character, and identity of the neighborhood.

		<b>Signs of Community Appropriation</b> ↔ <b>Absence of Community Appropriation</b>		
<b>Material Elements</b>	<b>Buildings</b>	Typical buildings with red bricks from the XIX and early XX Centuries (See Figure 12)	Modernized, unusual elements that appear on the typical red bricks buildings such as colored windows (See Figure 13)	Industrial/commercial architecture such as warehouses and containers
	<b>Vegetation</b>	Landscaped with small gardens (See Figure 9)	Landscaped with street trees	Abandoned/un-maintained
	<b>People Presence in open spaces</b>	Significant (See Figure 7)	Minimal	Absent
<b>Expressive Elements</b>	<b>Colors</b>	Complexity and harmony of colors (See Figure 19)	Patches of complexity and monotony	Monotony and uniformity
	<b>Sounds</b>	Quiet	People, Cars, Trains	Industrial Works
	<b>Transparency of edges of railway</b>	See-through architectural elements (fences and vegetation)	Accessible void (tunnels, paths, gateways)	Unpleasant elements blocking view (containers, construction trailers)
<b>Processual Elements</b>	<b>People Use of Space</b>	Community activities such as gardening or farming	Informal or insurgent interventions such as graffiti or informal seats	Minimal or Absent
	<b>Recreational Spaces</b>	Community Gardens (See Figures 7 & 9)	Open public places such as parks and playgrounds	Minimal or Absent

Table 1. Diagram representing the different components and the refined categories of the observations (Source: the author)

### 3.2 Interviews

Urban walking helped me to discern the qualities of the components of the contested landscape in Pointe Saint Charles and the material aspect of the tension between capitalist

appropriation and community appropriation. Since assemblage invites to understand the complexities of the tension (as opposed to perceiving it as a binary), the interviews were central in uncovering its dynamics. By giving participants space to openly reflect on the gentrification of their neighborhood, the community's activism, and the concerns they have, these interviews offered valuable insight into the contested meanings of interstitial spaces and what importance these spaces have for the Pointe Saint Charles community.

Seven semi-structured in-depth interviews with key community members proved valuable for unpacking and fleshing out the tension between capitalist appropriation and community appropriation in Pointe Saint Charles. All the interviewees were active community members who were involved in several community initiatives. I met some of the interviewees while volunteering (see more in Section 3.4), and they in turn introduced me to other potential community members who could contribute to the study. It is also worth noting that some of the participants were not born and raised in the neighborhood and even called themselves “gentrifiers” since they had moved to the Pointe with the gentrification process. This provided me with an interesting window into the interpretation of the tensions. Concerning the logistics of the interviews, all of them took place in Pointe Saint Charles in local or community-oriented spaces that the members chose. I had the chance to visit Action-Gardien (the main community organization in Pointe Saint Charles), local coffee shops, and reclaimed community spaces, all of which were spaces that reflected the values of the community. Three interviews were conducted in French, and after their translation by the author, the selected transcripts were emailed to the interviewees for approval. I followed a semi-structured interview format, accompanied with maps and pictures of the neighborhood, to allow for a natural flow of information framed within a consistent topic with the use of an interview guide (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), allowing new topics and unanticipated information to emerge. This structure of the interviews, combined with my familiarity with the neighborhood gained from urban walking, allowed them to be a space of dialogue, collaboration, and sharing. Prior to starting the interview process, I explained the research in a detailed written consent form.

In line with an ethnographic analysis approach, my analysis of the interviews involved 2 main analytical steps: initial or line coding, also called *open coding*, and *focused coding* (Emerson et al., 2011). As they explain, initial coding entails the reading of transcripts and documents as a data set, line by line, to identify ideas and themes; focused coding is reading

them closely again to classify information based on the topics identified initially. Keeping this analytical direction in mind, I transcribed the interviews, read through the text, and made key points on emerging themes such as gentrification concerns, community characteristics, and background information. I then attempted to narrow down these themes into topics to get a sense of tension between gentrification and community activism. The codes captured notable and recurrent discussion topics such as high rent housing, displacement, and social change. Finally, as I coded again for a more focused understanding, I scrutinized the testimonies of the interviewees for preliminary insights into the way in which the community manages the tension (e.g., affordable housing, collective spaces, etc.).

### **3.3 Online Content Analysis**

Aside from interviews and urban walking, I sought to supplement my study with content analysis. This method is one aspect of an ethnographic approach and is also referred to as “the reflexive analysis of documents” (Plummer, 1983). Since the purpose of this study is to examine the tension in interstitial spaces, I focused on documents that tackle topics related to activism and reclamation of spaces. In order to do that, I referred to Altheid et al. (2008) and Altheid’s (1987) procedures for conducting content analysis. First, they propose the exploration of possible sources of information that present facts related to the investigated topic. Thus, to identify documents and articles that fit within these topics, I reviewed the websites of four community groups that interviewees had mentioned to me: Endangered Spaces, Action Gardien, Bâtiment 7, and La Pointe Libertaire. Subsequently, after a careful examination of the topic of documents, I excluded all the ones that did not relate to the topic and keywords of this thesis. According to Altheid et al. (2008), the dynamic utility of content analysis comes from its ability to track a certain issue over time and across different medias. This proved central to my approach towards interstitial spaces as assemblages and spaces of becoming. By following how particular spaces had evolved and how the tension had been negotiated, content analysis helped clarify, enrich, and validate interpretations from the first two methods. Consistent with an ethnographic approach, the analysis process was similar to that of the interviews.

### **3.4 A Note on Methodology and Research: Situating Knowledge in the Field of Urban Studies**

The thesis' argument that counters the narrative of static space production encouraged me to keep a similar approach in research and knowledge production. Similarly to planning and design, researchers can have a privileged position since they have the final power over interpretation and presentation of information. The influential work of Donna Haraway (1988), who coined the term *situated knowledges*, explains that all knowledges originate from somewhere rather than nowhere, and that they are partial, specific, and limited. She states that:

Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular. The science question in feminism is about objectivity as positioned rationality. Its images are not the products of escape and transcendence of limits (the view from above) but the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradictions – of views from somewhere. (Haraway, 1988, p. 590).

When situating knowledge, a reflexive approach was crucial to recognizing my positionality and how it may influence the interpretation of the data. Therefore, before my fieldwork, I allotted time to engage with the community by volunteering and opening informal conversations that were not intended to elicit information related to the research topic; rather, I aimed to understand the community of Pointe Saint Charles and break my position as an outsider in research. One of the most critical things to consider when identifying and articulating my positionality was my background as a landscape architect trained to produce and redevelop spaces. With a continuous process of reflection and awareness of my background, I approached this study not as a landscape architect who sees these sites as problematic and in need of redevelopment, but rather as a researcher who sees them as spaces of opportunity and resourcefulness replete with social and cultural processes. This reflexive act resonates with Chiseri-Strater (1996), who states that “in ethnography...a major goal of the research process is self-reflexivity– what we learn about the self as a result of the study of the ‘other’” (p.119), which echoes England (1994), who describes reflexivity as a process of self-discovery. Thus, this thesis did not only explore how the community produces and envisions these spaces, but also how I, as a researcher and landscape architect, chose to approach, perceive, and potentially develop these spaces. In fact, what

clarified my positionality even further was the embodied experience of urban walking, which allowed me to familiarize myself with the community action-filled landscape of Pointe Saint Charles. This has majorly shifted my approach from a person who creates and re-develops these spaces to one that aims to give visibility to them.

Since walking and reporting my observations only revealed the material and visual aspects of the landscape, they offered little insight into the dynamics of the tensions in interstitial spaces. Thus, the interviews and insights from community members were significant for unpacking the tension and documenting the strategies that the community deployed to navigate it. To enrich the input drawn from interviews, online content analysis was central for probing the evolution of the tension and scrutinizing the various strategies that the community adopted. As a complimentary method, it helped confirm and elaborate on the tensions and strategies reflected during interviews and urban walking. By sharing the findings and interpretations of the research with the community members, I was able to keep the collaborative space of the interviews throughout the research process. In the following chapter, I will answer the question of how interstitial spaces act as sites of tension between capitalist appropriation and community appropriation and how the community of Pointe Saint Charles manages this tension.

## Chapter 4. Results

My interaction with the community members in Pointe Saint Charles, in addition to my engagement in the neighborhood, revealed how assemblage theory is useful to interpret interstitial spaces. As I analyzed and examined the interviews, online content and documents, and my observations, I realized that the dynamics were indeed complex and that the potential use of space was contingent on the interrelations between its components. The analysis showed that the community viewed gentrification as a threat to their neighborhood's quality of life on different levels. The proliferation of high rent housing, the erasure of the heritage and identity of the neighborhood, the emergence of a new social class, and the creation of spaces that do not accommodate the needs of the local community were the main concerns. In face of these trends, the community sought to appropriate interstitial spaces in a way that fits their desires. As a consequence, interstitial spaces were divided between two diverging purposes which turned them into sites of tension between capitalist appropriation and community appropriation. I referred back to the immersive conversations I had with community members and to the articles and documents posted by different community groups, and I was able to identify three tensions that fall under capitalist appropriation and community appropriation. Profitability vs. affordability was the most salient and recurrent one. During the interviews, the first subject the participants mentioned was the use of interstitial spaces for affordable basic needs, specifically food and shelter. The second tension was identity erasure vs. identity reinforcement, which centered on the heritage of the neighborhood as well as on its traditional values of collaboration and collectivity. The final tension was separation vs. inclusion of the population, notably between the incoming middle class, the "gentrifiers", and the local working class, the "Pointers". To navigate these tensions, the community deployed a set of strategies that varied in their actions. The primary option for community members was to seek preventive and proactive measures by appropriating interstitial spaces which according to them, succeeded in preventing potential capitalist appropriation of interstitial spaces. Such strategies managed to change the zoning of the space and to preserve historical spaces. Second, they attempted to reconcile both uses. For example, they compromised the space for residential development but managed to raise its proportion of social housing. Finally, when none of the first two options were feasible, they employed responsive strategies. The analysis also revealed that the tensions varied in intensity and types of stakeholders involved, and that the main factors that influenced the navigation of tensions were



the physical conditions of the land and its significance for each stakeholder. The following sections elaborate on these findings and presents in detail the tensions and strategies that the community used.

#### **4.1 Profitability vs. Affordability**

The use of interstitial spaces for both capitalist and community appropriation centered on basic needs, notably housing and food. However, each pole had a different approach. On one hand, the community of Pointe Saint Charles had a multi-faceted approach that envisioned interstitial spaces as ones that cater to the collective good, including creating affordable access to food and housing. On the other hand, capitalist appropriation had a one-dimensional approach, with a return on investment set as priority that ultimately rendered spaces unaffordable for the local community. In fact, a recurrent theme in the interviews was that high-rent housing, which has pushed many locals to leave Pointe Saint Charles, is the community's main concern. Hence, the community's first instinct was to argue for more social housing, specifically in vacant spaces. In addition, the community members I interviewed also argued that the development projects taking place are catering to the needs of the new higher-income class, thereby excluding or marginalizing the needs of the local community. In fact, I first noticed this during urban walking, where the variety of services and goods was limited. The analysis of the areas I observed showed that most of them were either purely residential, industrial/commercial, or a mix of both, with very minimal presence of basic services such as grocery stores. Going through the documents posted by community groups, I noticed that Action Gardien tackled this particular point as well, and stated on the current conditions and issues of the neighborhood that:

The three shopping streets of the district (Centre, Wellington and Charlevoix) offer few businesses. South of Wellington Street, there are 5 convenience stores but there is no grocery store within 500 meters. In Pointe-Saint-Charles, as elsewhere, there is an increase in the cost of groceries and the recourse at food banks is steadily rising. Access to food is a physical and economic issue (Action Gardien, 2018).

During a conversation with Cédric Glorioso-Deraiche, a non-resident and an urban planner at Action Gardien, he told me that although the community expected more services to settle in the neighborhood to change its economic situation, the change was purely focused on development projects. This is clear in this interview excerpt:

Not all the developments have been appropriate or corresponding to the needs of the population, just for an example there are two or three 'Centre de Toilettage pour Chien',

Dog Grooming, like to take care of your dog. But, like there are two of them next to the other and the third one a bit further away. So I mean it is interesting to have one, but have two, three I don't know. Maybe, some other people prefer a bakery or a little fruits and vegetable business or something like that. But some of these things are out of our control. We think they are out of control because they seem too far and so autocrat to decide which businesses are able to move into the neighborhood and which are not to move in. But I think these are things we can try to work out in collaboration with the borough, to see how we can use the zoning, to try and limit different types of commercial development to be implemented in our neighborhood and actually favor different commercial initiatives to come in and that correspond more thoroughly to the needs of the community (Cédric Glorioso-Deraiche, Interview, 2018).

Following my interview with Cédric, I learnt that the neighborhood was open to new spaces (such as dog groomers), but only if they were balanced with other necessary and affordable services, since the former are regarded as only a luxury and a target for the new wave of people coming to settle in Pointe Saint Charles. Subsequently, the community followed specific strategies to manage this tension.

**4.1.1 Preventive Strategy: Zoning.** With several ongoing development projects, many interstitial spaces in the Pointe were under threat of privatization. The urgency to reverse this future use propelled the community to appropriate interstitial spaces and repurpose them into green spaces with the aim of pressing the city to permanently change the land's zoning. From an urban and municipal planning perspective, Cédric informed me that by doing this, the land cannot be sold to a private party, and cannot be developed. Jardin des Voisins (the neighbors' garden), a collective gardening initiative in the eastern part of Pointe Saint Charles (Figure 5), illustrates this strategy. Cédric pointed out to me that the collective effort to repurpose the space prevented future development on the land:

The Jardin des Voisins was an empty vacant space that was present for a long number of years, and the residents living behind it decided to invest in it and put in some plantations, and they really made a lovely spot. And then came the time-since it was an informal context- trying to do representations with the Southwest borough so that they can permanize this initiative and change the zoning from vacant to a park. It is not exactly a park zoning, but it is a green space that they put in, because if they zone it as a park, [the City] has to take care of it, and it doesn't want to take care of it because it doesn't have the money for it. But we don't want that either because the residents are really taking great care of it, they initiated it from a to z, and possibly that has helped stop housing development in that area, that could have happened, in contrast to the area right next to it, where there has been a lot of new condo units developments. Between Wellington and Favard, there is a bunch of condo units that were built and in an empty space that was present. So I think that would be a great example as urban agriculture as a

stop to a possible gentrification or a project that would not have responded to the needs of the community. I mean it is always hard to figure out what would have happened to this space if it was not taken care of by the citizens (Cédric Glorioso-Deraiche, Interview, 2018).

The community's mode of action in this strategy was proactive rather than reactive. It suggests that the community members view interstitial spaces as both a threat and an opportunity: a threat of redevelopment and, as they claim, an opportunity to counteract gentrification.



Figure 4. Location of Jardin des Voisins in Pointe Saint Charles (Source : the author)

This was not the only space locals used by community members to prevent a possible capitalist development project. Jardin de la Liberté (Garden of Freedom-Figures 6 to 8) is another case that displays the same strategy. *La Pointe Libertaire*, an anarchist group, initiated the space using

direct action, a strategy in which the actors execute interventions to directly reach political and social transformations instead of waiting for approval from the state and that encourages the self-management of the neighborhood. It was dissolved in 2014 and its members are currently involved in the movements of Action Gardien. Marcel Sevigny, who lived in the Pointe for 36 years and one of the former members of the anarchist group, explained that Jardin de la Liberté was one of the first actions that La Pointe Libertaire carried out with the goal of protecting the vacant space from privatization:

We occupied for 5 years a vacant space close to Lachine that we called Jardin de la Liberté. So we appropriated the abandoned space that belonged to the city to prevent that it becomes privatized. Then eventually there has been some public consultations and the space was protected. Today the city made it something like a small park, so this space became like a park, its zoning is actually a park (Marcel Sevigny, Interview, 2018).



Figure 5. Location of Jardin de la Liberté (Source : the author)





Figure 6. Image showing the space before the intervention (La Pointe Libertaire, 2007)



Figure 7. Residents participating in the execution of the garden (La Pointe Libertaire, 2007)

Similarly to Jardins des Voisins and Jardin de la Liberté, the community appropriated another space to prevent future developments: Jardin des Citoyens (Citizens' Garden- Figure 9), a vacant space next to the railway. The community demanded that the City cede it to them as a green space, arguing that there were not enough green spaces in the neighborhood. When I spoke to Nathacha Alexandroff, who lived in the Pointe for around 30 years and is a member of the Historical Society of Pointe Saint Charles, she described to me how they acquired the space after their legal battle with the city:

The problem is that the city never answered, the borough as well, they said that they couldn't answer us quickly, so we said we're going to do it, we are going to do it before the approval. The residents who lived close by started to take care of it and it was something really beautiful, and then they got scared because they said if ever the city wants to sell it we will lose everything. And so we worked with the mayor at that time to do something about it and just before the election, he agreed. It is for the election! But now it is a green space so the city cannot sell it so it is protected. There is a space like that close to here, like a parking space that belongs to the CN, and that was sold and we might have some condominiums (Nathacha Alexandroff, Interview, 2018).

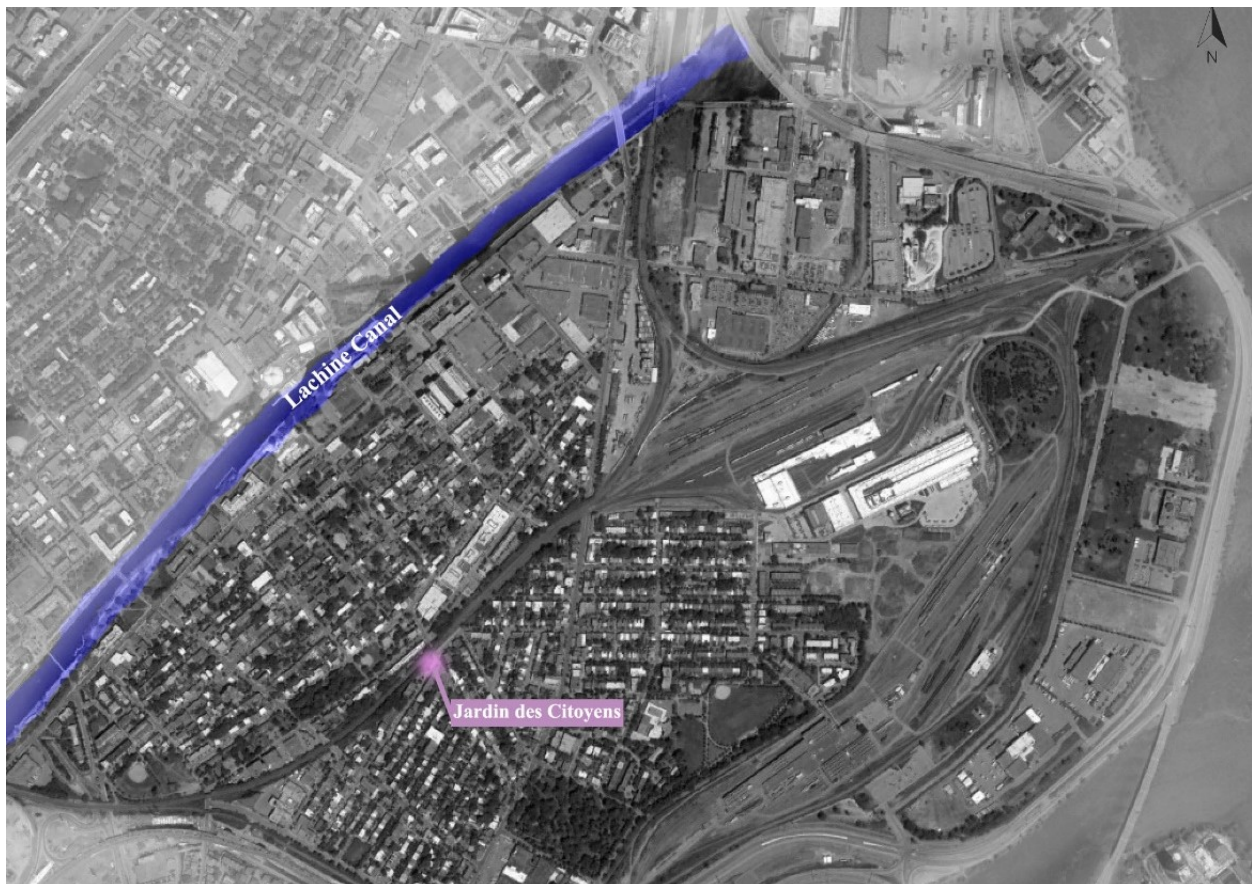


Figure 8. Location of Jardin des Citoyens in Pointe Saint Charles (Source : the author)

The discovery of the large role that the physical conditions of the land played in managing this tension (Figure 10) was a particularly thought-provoking result of my interviews with community members. For example, Marcel told me (in an ironic tone) that although this space was protected, it “was anyway a space hard to build on, very close to the railway”. Similarly, Michael Hind, the former president of a community farming<sup>2</sup> in the Pointe, was involved in this project and pointed out that “the Jardin des Citoyens, that was also a vacant space, when these condos were built, what was left was this tiny corner that was owned by the city, for whatever reason, very bizarre little triangular space at the end of the street that the city owned”. From a planning perspective, this physical limitation was a constraint for development, which implies that the land was of no real worth. Moreover, in my conversation with Nathacha, I learnt that the mayor agreed to cede the space for the election and the image of the campaign. Hence, the community managed the tension in this space in a fairly temperate way. However, the cases that follow show that when the scale of space has more potential and value for the city or the



*Figure 9.* Jardin des Citoyens located at the corner of the street, adjacent to the elevated railway (Source: the author, Mtl, Qc, October 2018)

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<sup>2</sup> Pointe Verte is a community farming in Pointe Saint Charles. It is located on a former vacant land that was leased for a period of time to the CN to store equipment. Then local groups got together and wanted to create a space for the community, and so it was established in 1986 (Michael Hind, Personal Interview).



developer, the tension becomes harder to deal with, and the appropriation turns into a battle.

**4.1.2 Reconciliatory Strategy: Negotiating the proportion of social housing.** The prevention of possible capitalist appropriation was not always feasible, especially in larger projects and spaces. This challenge pushed the community to look for other strategies to manage this tension by negotiating and raising the proportions of social housing units in large development projects. In fact, development projects in Montreal should assign a standard average of 15 % to social housing. In Pointe Saint Charles, the community was able to increase this to 25-30%, making the total proportion of social housing in the neighborhood around 40% (La Pointe Libertaire, 2011). However, in different documents and interviews, I learnt that this percentage is becoming less and less significant because of the acceleration of the gentrification process. On this issue, Marcel commented that:

There is a lot of cooperative housing in the neighborhood to assure a security on the level of housing for the population of the neighborhood, a working-class population. This battle had an impact to slow the gentrification of the neighborhood, this made it slower for a certain number of years but now it has less impact because there has been an acceleration of gentrification in the neighborhood. Eventually the main method that the groups use is to demand to have more social housing, on the terrains that are not used, so it is one way of fighting poverty, it is the only demand or the only concrete intervention for the government to have more social housing (Marcel Sevigny, Interview, 2018).

This strategy particularly manifested on the vacant terrains of the CN (Figure 11), which was a long battle for the community. The history goes back to when Alstom, a French company operating in railway transport, rented the terrains from the CN but stopped its activities in 2003. After a few years, CN sold it to a private developer<sup>3</sup> who wanted to sell it to Loto-Quebec to construct a casino. Thanks to the community's opposition and activism, the developer called off the project. Ever since, the community has been fighting to re-purpose CN's vacant terrain spaces into something that goes in line with the social and economic needs of the neighborhood. Eventually, as is explained in the following passage, the community was able to raise the proportion of social housing on the terrains:

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<sup>3</sup> After Alstom stopped its activities, the CN sold the terrains to real estate investment and property management company Groupe Mach, and the terrains were divided into three zones. Zone (1): Groupe Mach was expropriated by the AMT (Agence Metropolitaine de Transport), a public transportation provider in Montreal which operates train lines, for the maintenance of trains in the northern zone of the terrains. Zone (2): Group March wanted to repurpose existing buildings for industrial and residential activities. Zone (3): Group Mach chose Samcon as the real estate developer for residential units.



The real estate developer company Samcon wanted to build around 1000 new dwellings. It was open to social housing inclusion policy in Montreal (15% affordable and 15% social). The neighborhood demanded 30% social housing and no luxury condo. Finally, the agreement stipulated 25% social housing and no luxury condo... Therefore, about 800 condos and 225 units of social housing... With this agreement, the percentage of social housing throughout the neighborhood will drop. However, it must be said to the defense of local actors that it is currently very difficult to negotiate social housing and that most Montreal real estate projects show less than the "voluntary standard" of 15%. If we put the agreement in reference to the Montreal context, it's pretty good. If we place it in the context of Pointe-Saint-Charles, it is less good. Whatever it is, it is the best agreement for social housing in recent years (La Pointe Libertaire, 2012).



Figure 10. The location of the vacant terrains of the CN in Pointe Saint Charles and the different zones (Source: the author)

As per the community members' discussions and conversations, this was not an ultimate victory for them, as they did not achieve what they had initially wanted. Thus, coping with capitalist appropriation becomes an alternative strategy when preventing it is not possible. However, an

intriguing comment from my interview with Marco Silvestro, a former member of La Pointe Libertaire, caught my attention, as he pointed out that when managing to raise the amount of social housing, the victory lay within the logic that is counteracting capitalist appropriation: “It is part of a vision of a movement that tries to fight against real estate development, that is very capitalist and that would just sell houses, sell them as high as possible, without building schools, without offering services. Always trying to reduce expenses to make the most money. So this was the logic”.

#### **4.1.3 Responsive Strategy: Programming interstitial spaces as affordable spaces.**

“Dormitory” is a word that community members used often during our conversations to refer to the state of Pointe Saint Charles as a purely residential space. They explained to me that the neighborhood is becoming a space where the middle class comes to sleep, but does and buys everything from elsewhere, and from which the working class cannot afford to buy. This pushed the community to use interstitial spaces to accommodate their need for affordable spaces, such as was the case with Bâtiment 7, a former industrial CN shop located on the vacant terrains of the CN (Figure 12). As defined by the committee 7 à nous,<sup>4</sup> Bâtiment 7 is “a heritage industrial building, a fragment of the popular history of Pointe-Saint-Charles, converted into an alternative accessible gathering space packed with projects”. Mark Poddubiuk, an architect in the Pointe who participated in the initiative of Bâtiment 7, mentioned that one of the main aims of the building was to provide a space that secures their local needs:

I think it was a need to provide an area in Point Saint Charles, some space for alternative activities, community activities, as it was becoming kind of a dormitory very much, very residential, impossible to very little in terms of public equipment. There was a need for local services, there was a need for community space, a need for arts workshops and the projects emerged and developed. There was a plan initially trying to attract the daycare in Bâtiment 7, a cooking center, arts studio, urban agriculture projects, food production projects, and it is really just trying to provide the diversity of public services. Rather than being provided by the city and the municipality, they are being provided by community organizations (Mark Poddubiuk, Interview, 2018).

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<sup>4</sup> Bâtiment 7 was appropriated by 7 à nous, that was founded in 2009 in Pointe Saint Charles in the aim of protecting the space and convert it into a community-oriented space for social, political, economic and ecological change. For more information about the committee, see <http://www.batiment7.org/qui-sommes-nous/>.



Figure 11. Location of Bâtiment 7 in Pointe Saint Charles (Source: the author)

Currently, some of the spaces at Bâtiment 7 include “Le Détour”, a not-for-profit neighborhood grocery store, Pointe Saint Charles Art School, “Les Sans-Taverne” a cooperative brewery, “Arcade Press Start” a youth led cooperative as well as many cooperative workshops such as metal, ceramics, and wood.<sup>5</sup> What makes this space unique is that it is completely managed by the community. In fact, my interviews with the members of La Pointe Libertaire who are currently involved in Bâtiment 7, Marcel and Marco, revealed that it is a representation of what they call a self-governing social center (a concept wherein the community manages and directs everything by and for itself) and a miniature of an eco-urban village (the concept of a small community-oriented and sustainable city). According to them, Bâtiment 7 was not the first interstitial space they occupied to provide local and affordable services managed by the

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<sup>5</sup> These spaces were the result of the first phases of re-development of the building by the community. For more information on the phases of development of programs and spaces, see [http://www.batiment7.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/B7-DocumentPresentation\\_201609.pdf](http://www.batiment7.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/B7-DocumentPresentation_201609.pdf)



community. Marco mentioned that, in 2009, La Pointe Libertaire occupied a former industrial building called Seracon, near the Lachine Canal:

In 2007, Pointe Libertaire set up the self-governing social center that existed from 2007 to 2015. In 2009 we occupied a building near Lachine canal called Seracon, we were then forced out by the police. The first time we wanted to make an occupation was this building here the Bâtiment 7, but as the community had representations with the city and then public consultations, the city asked the community group not to occupy this building, so that is why we chose Seracon. Then the situation changed in 2009 and it became an important issue to appropriate the building, and the self-governing social center joined with other community groups to reclaim the Bâtiment 7 (Marco Silvestro, Interview, 2018)

Marco elaborated on how this appropriation helps in solving their need for local and affordable services in the face of the gentrification process taking place in the neighborhood:

We appropriated [Bâtiment 7] in the logic of self-governing social center, logic of eco-urban village, then in the logic that we need self-managed services rather than to ask for services, instead of approaching Tim Hortons, demand to open a Tim Hortons, because there are people that want that, this is their vision of development, McDonald, Couche Tard, this is a capitalist logic of development. But it is more like it is us that will do it, we will give services that we need, and outside of franchise, so Bâtiment 7 was just like that... the rest of Bâtiment 7 we will develop it by ourselves, without calling big companies. The person who bought this location said that what I want to do with this land is the idea of making car dealerships, shopping center, cinema, something like the Palais des Congrès. We said we did not want it, we do not want that 1/3 of the neighborhood to be developed as the consumerist market, we want to have services to our needs. There was the intention to fight against gentrification in it (Marco, Interview, 2018).

He emphasized on the idea of expropriating community spaces from capitalism and consumerism, thereby creating a defense mechanism against capitalist appropriation.

In summary, interstitial spaces grappled with both gentrification's goal of profit and the community's goal of affordability (which mainly centered on housing and food), consequently rendering them contested. To navigate this tension, the community sought first to prevent possible gentrification projects by appropriating spaces and changing their zoning to that of green space, which does not allow for future high-rent developments. Second, they reconciled both uses by successfully raising the percentage of affordable housing in developments taking place in interstitial spaces. Finally, they programmed interstitial spaces in a way that responds to their need for affordable services.

#### **4.2 Identity Erasure vs. Identity Reinforcement**

The interviews and content analysis revealed that the identity and heritage of the neighborhood, formerly industrial and working-class, is significant but threatened by the rapid process of gentrification. While the latter erases the identity of the neighborhood by repurposing important former industrial spaces and introducing a new culture, the community is seeking to reverse these effects by reinforcing the local identity. Cédric pointed out that this tension has also created a dialectical relationship with the industrial heritage between community members themselves:

It's a love/hate relationship for the industrial heritage... We love it because it reminds us of identity, when we had jobs, everybody had a great livelihood, the businesses were blooming in the neighborhood. Now with the de-industrialization, a lot of people left the neighborhood, a lot of people have been pushed out with gentrification. All the redevelopment initiatives that we are trying to work in the Pointe, are actually to have a beneficial effect to the citizens living in the Pointe and that are in line with our identity, and not just to build a project that would be 'interesting' (Cédric Glorioso-Deraiche, Interview, 2018).

This tension was also very visually apparent when I took part in urban walking. For instance, I noted that:

In Area III, two sides clash in character: local vs gentrified. This is apparent from the buildings character, where some seem renovated in a more modern way that does not seem to respect or follow the more traditional buildings of red bricks with a specific design of façade and windows. Some buildings look very alien in their surrounding environment, with green and brown blocks attached or continuing the red bricks blocks. It looks like a patchwork.

In fact, Pieter Sijpkens (1989) describes the typical building design in Pointe Saint Charles: "the design recipe throughout called for a flat brick facade, set on a narrow rubble foundation, standard windows cut sharply, balconies and entrance porches protruding in wood, the whole capped by a cornice that might show some decoration" (p. 182). He mentions that this quality unified the whole district, but the redevelopment and the renovations taking place neither reflect nor respect this. Figures 13 and 14 below show this contrast clearly.



*Figure 12.* Image showing the Pointe Sainte Charles Library, previously a Fire Station, and adjacent buildings  
(Source: the author, Mtl, Qc, October, 2018)



*Figure 13.* Image showing clear contrast and clash between the different colors and characters of the buildings  
(Source: the author, Mtl, Qc, October, 2018)

What my observation and Cédric's comment show is that this tension is both physical and social. However, it is worth mentioning that my analysis showed that the interviewees neither brought up nor tackled the physical aspect of the tension. The concern when it comes to this tension was purely focused on the social sphere—particularly historical identity—and the traditional values of the neighborhood. The following sub-sections discuss strategies the community used to handle this tension.

**4.2.1 Preventive Strategy: Preserving historical spaces.** Appropriating and fighting for threatened historical buildings was one of the strategies the community used to prevent capitalist appropriation. In addition to being a space that offered local and affordable services to the community, Bâtiment 7 was one of the former CN shops that employed many local workers, so it carried a lot of significance to the community as a reflection of the industrial identity of Pointe Saint Charles. The importance of this space is reflected in a report published following a public consultation on the future of the vacant terrains of the CN: “we consider the old shops of the CN as an integral part of Pointe Saint Charles, and their redevelopment should be under the responsibility and conduct of our community and not those of some speculators or private promoters” (La Pointe Libertaire, 2009) and “we would like to see a redevelopment consistent with the architectural, social and historical fabric of the neighborhood, while the stated objectives of the owner, real estate developer and elected municipal is to build essentially denser and more expensive condos than local dwellings” ( La Pointe Libertaire, 2009). These quotations revealed a clear tension between identity erasure and identity reinforcement on behalf of the community who wanted to preserve their heritage through the reclamation of this building, and the developers who had another capitalist aim towards advancing development projects. After a decade of negotiation and struggles, the developer ceded Bâtiment 7 to the community, preserving the building. On that point, Marco commented that:

The fight against the Bâtiment 7, it has been 10 years that we fight, it is in the same idea, it is ours, it is the history of the district, the 5000 workers, 5000 people who worked in the land here. Pointe Saint Charles is an important industrial neighborhood of Canada, so it is one the most important lands for local history, labor history, and when it was sold for real estate capitalism, it was threatened to be all developed into a capitalist space. So we said we want to appropriate it (Marco Silvestro, Interview, 2018).

In my interview with Mark, I realized how the scale and value of the redevelopment of the land were important factors that dictated the course of the tension. Mark pointed out that:

The initial plan for the CN terrains called for the demolition of Bâtiment 7 and construction of condominiums. In the end, the community pushed to preserve the building... Originally the idea was just try to negotiate a lease from the developer, that he would continue to own it and negotiate gradually to see how the building can be acquired, but at some point it became clear that the developer was prepared to, for a variety of reasons, mostly because he needed to score points, he was prepared to donate the building to the community, in exchange for getting his zoning approved. And it also, in the end, it suited him very well because one of the problem with the project is the initial plan that he has done was that he has proposed a residential development next to major industrial structures and Bâtiment 7 serves very well a sort of a buffer between the two, even from an urban planning point of view, from the developer's point of view, it was a win-win situation for everybody (Mark Poddubiuk, Interview, 2018).

**4.2.2 Reconciliatory Strategy: Memorializing historical spaces.** The Black Rock Monument (Figure 15) is another case that illustrates how the community navigates the tension of identity erasure vs. identity reinforcement, and how this tension can be both internal and external (in this case, between Action Gardien, the small Irish community group, Hydro-Quebec and the city).



Figure 14. Location of the Black Rock Monument in Pointe Saint Charles (Source: the author)



The space around the Black Rock Monument is a vacant lot (previously a parking lot) that contains the Irish Black Rock monument which commemorates the Irish who died of hunger while fleeing to Canada. This historic space is particularly significant to the Irish community living in the Pointe. In my interview with Nathacha, she pointed out that:

All the terrains of CN were part of the historic sites of Canada. At a certain moment, it was given to the City of Montreal to protect it, but the City already forgot that Parks Canada gave it to them. There is a small power station for Hydro-Quebec there, and they just bought the land around to enlarge it. And we did not know about that, while we have already told the city not to sell anything without us knowing about it... it is a terrain that was a parking spot and that served no one, it is in front of the Black rock monument. When the Irish knew about Hydro-Quebec's project, they said this is our rock here, if you want to put something, you have to make us a park (Nathacha Alexandroff, Interview, 2018).

Nathacha's excerpt reveals three of the stakeholders: the City, Hydro-Quebec, and the Irish community, which has a unique vision for the space. During my interview with Fergus Keyes, the leader of the project, I learnt that Action Gardien was another stakeholder in the project and had an initial plan to build social housing in the space. However, the Irish community argued with them and explained the significance of the monument:

[Action Gardien] came to me and asked me to do a presentation. Nathacha knew and told them and since then, they backed off. They understand, I think they understand. understands the history now. Because that's the other thing when you have a lot of community groups and a small community that don't cross each other, this can happen, when one wants A and one wants B and they both care about the community but they have different tokens (Fergus Keyes, Interview, 2018).

Fergus's comment enlightened me to a compelling point in the research: contestation can happen between community groups, and not necessarily only between clashing forces. However, this contestation more easily and smoothly resolves itself because both groups have the same objective: caring about their neighborhood and its history. On the other hand, the Black Rock monument case demonstrates that the external tension can be smooth, but long. On that point, Fergus said:

...at this moment, Hydro has been very good with the citizens, trying to lessen their footprint. They have to put a substation there, because they have to supply more power to Griffintown and all these areas where there is gentrification and a lot of condos, and also to the light transit railway, they have to put something there, but they are working very

hard to make their footprint the smallest possible to get us as much space as possible to build a certain memorial space (Fergus Keyes, Interview, 2018).

What this excerpt reveals is an understanding of both sides' needs, which entails that the Irish community reconciles the space for both uses—that of Hydro-Quebec and that of the community—to preserve its history. Fergus continued this point to say that:

The monument has been there a long time, there are people who are very much into Irish history and heritage, and some people come right now from around the world to come and see it, not many but some. So for the City of Montreal the argument we had for them is that it could be a tourist attraction. So it could bring in people from around the world (Fergus Keyes, Interview, 2018).

Using the historic tourist attraction argument implies two things. The first one suggests that this project might be paradoxical, as it can contribute to another internal tension with Action Gardien. From a planning perspective, the presence of a tourist attraction and a park can increase land values, which can involve more gentrifying projects—exactly what Action Gardien is trying to prevent. The second point is related to the significance of the space. The City's view of the space as a potential attraction has helped resolve the tension more easily.

**4.2.3 Responsive Strategy 1: Interstitial spaces to remember the past.** Besides preserving and re-purposing historical spaces, the community viewed interstitial spaces as an opportunity to both reminisce about and commemorate the neighborhood's heritage. A wall belonging to the Canadian National Railway (CN-Figure 16) illustrates an example of community appropriation that responds to the erasure of history. In fact, the CN wall has always been an eye sore for the residents of the Pointe, who have long demanded that it be repurposed:

This wall of 400 square meters was identified as one of the saddest corners here. Long sightless wall, 80 meters long and 5 meters wide, is lined by a bike path, a sidewalk and the street. One of three tunnels that pierce the wall is located right next door. This space is one of the large points of passage of the neighborhood. But the owner, CN, does not want the people to use it, since its construction, this wall has only imposed a gray mass to passersby (La Pointe Libertaire, 2013).

Although the community did not give significant attention to the physical aspect of the tension (such as the clash in building characters), it did care about the physical appearance of the neighborhood in terms of its green spaces and accessibility (such as the case of Jardin des Citoyens). As I learnt from my interviews with community members, the conversation around the wall began with the simple aim of fixing its appearance, but it ended with a long and contested story. As a member of La Pointe Libertaire, Marco was one of the main actors in re-

purposing the wall. He started his story by explaining how the group decided to intervene on the wall:

...the wall belongs to the CN and it existed since 1930 and it divides the neighborhood in two. So the people said that this wall is a problem, it is space where people pass by, so the community said we should do something about this wall, so they said to either demolish it, to make it a green wall or make a mural. These are aesthetic improvements if I can say, and if we analyze it, it can contribute to gentrification because it is a working class neighborhood and in these neighborhoods, aesthetics attract people who are not from the working class, so it is paradoxical, so we can say that the idea of improving the visual aspect around this wall can be part of gentrification, so us, the Pointe Libertaire, said okay we are going to appropriate this wall (Marco Silvestro, Interview, 2018).



Figure 15. Location of the CN wall in the middle of Point Saint Charles (Source: the author)

As mentioned, La Pointe Libertaire works by direct action, so it is imperative to highlight Marco's emphatic comment regarding this project: "we do something knowing that it is ours, it is our property, so our aim is not to steal something to profit from it, but it is more like to appropriate spaces, appropriate what capitalism has left on the side, what capitalism wants to re-

develop”. As La Pointe Libertaire views interstitial spaces as those that are left out of capitalism, the main aim was not to simply improve the appearance of the wall, but to have a social and political provocation that is anti-capitalist.

The detailed story of the CN wall was both extensive and profound across my interviews with Nathacha, Marcel, and Marco. The first action La Pointe Libertaire performed was the drawing of a bicycle lane disappearing into the wall (Figure 17) to imply that the wall no longer exists.

Eventually, the City erased all of the drawings on the CN wall. Following this undertaking, Marco participated in another political drawing (Figure 18) to raise awareness about bicycle safety in the area. However, this drawing did not end as expected:

The following year, I think, my partner and I arrived to the site to make another drawing on the wall, in the idea that we want to provoke a little bit more, we wanted to test the limit. Here we were stopped by the police, we did not have time to finish it. The following day, I came again to finish it, and here we were accused of misdemeanor, and since the wall is enormous it was a misdemeanor of more than 5000\$, we could have even gone to prison for this. We said okay, we are going to defend in court for this, and at the same time, we will negotiate with the CN, the owner of the wall, for the possibility of doing a mural, a political mural and a significant one. This took a lot of time, 2-3 years, this process of negotiating with the CN (Marco Silvestro, Interview, 2018).



Figure 16. The First action of La Pointe Libertaire on the wall (La Pointe Libertaire, 2006)





Figure 17. The ‘Velo-rution’ Painting that got the painters arrested (La Pointe Libertaire, 2006)

When the CN agreed to make a mural on the wall, the community appointed Marco to take care of the project. Going in line with an anti-capitalist and community-driven approach, he described that the process of producing the mural was community-oriented, from brainstorming and planning to the actual execution<sup>6</sup>. He then affirmed that:

It is really a community process of appropriating a space. So trying to do something with people who are around, is a way of counteracting gentrification. Because you are creating a work of art through people who are around, and the people put on it what is significant to them, it is not only an embellishment, it is not just cleaning it, it is a process that creates a sense of belonging. Now, it is almost 5 years since it has been painted, then like any other artwork, when you make one, you put it in public with your process, your significance but then the artwork does not belong to you anymore, people can do whatever they want with it, they can interpret it like they want. So nowadays, we have newcomers that take part of gentrification who find this really nice and so they appropriate it in their own significance. It is escaping us a bit, but at the same time, there

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth mentioning that in December 2013 the mural was vandalized. The residents of Pointe Saint Charles were outraged as the racist act white-washed the face of a black women on the mural.

are all the people who participated, all the people who are from the Pointe who consider it as a significant artwork for the neighborhood with the story that we are telling, and that resonates with their experience of the neighborhood, so it is always ambivalent. From one side, we are countering the gentrification, from the other side, developers and gentrifiers use what we did to promote (Marco Silvestro, Interview, 2018).

According to Marco, although the original aim of the artwork was to reinforce history and mitigate gentrification, it carried a possibility of contributing to it. In this case, a paradoxical effect exists, as the artwork depends largely on who is going to use, interpret, or ‘take advantage’ of the space. It did promote a sense of belonging and identity in the neighborhood, but it can also attract developers and gentrifiers, as per Marco’s comment. However, during the interview, he stated that “the wall, we took it out of capitalism, then we told people, use it, it is yours”. This point relates back to the case of the vacant CN terrains, when the victory was not in acquiring the space and preventing gentrification, but rather in the logic of anti-capitalist values. Figures 19 and 20 show the transformation of the wall into a mural that reflects key moments in the history of Pointe Saint Charles.



Figure 18. The Wall with the acts of La Pointe Libertaire (La Pointe Libertaire, n.d.)

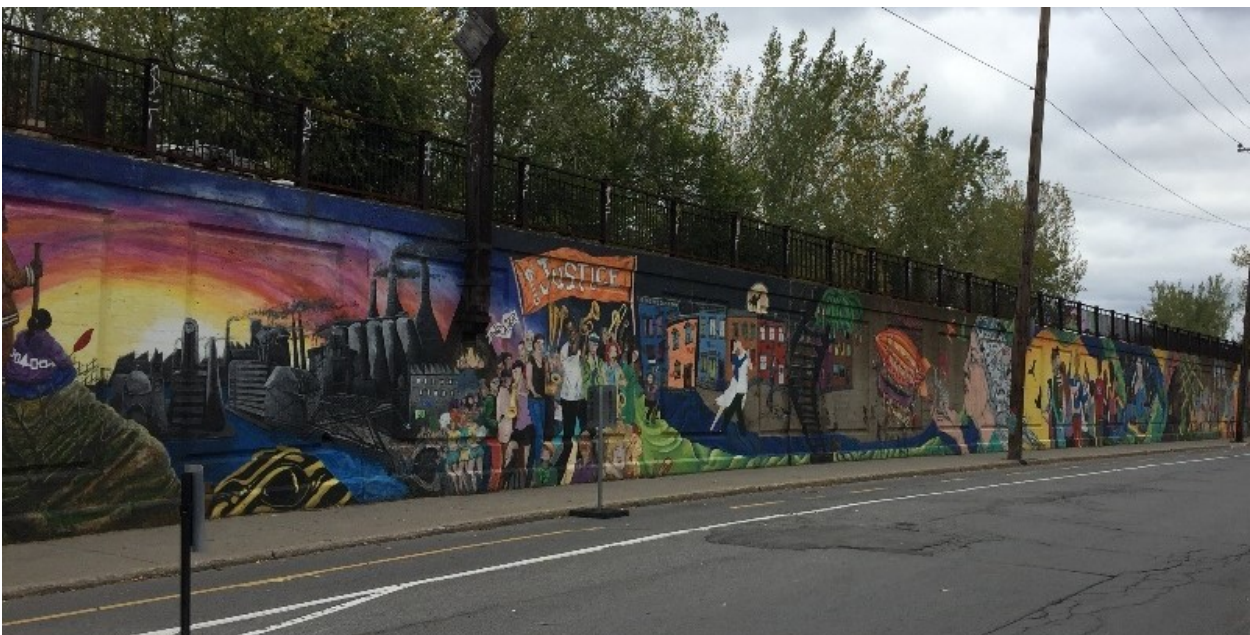


Figure 19. Mural showing the history and evolution of the neighborhood (Source: the author, Mtl, Qc, October 2018)

A last point that is worth highlighting in this case, and that relates to some of the cases mentioned above, is the significance of the intervention to the other party, as was stressed in an article by La Pointe Libertaire:

It is not a CN project. This project is not financed or sponsored by the CN. The project is not intended to promote the CN. In fact, this is a pilot project accepted by the company to improve its image across Canada (La Pointe Libertaire, n.d.).

#### **4.2.4 Responsive Strategy 2: Programming interstitial spaces to translate values.**

Besides preserving the heritage and history of the neighborhood, the community sought to reinforce its traditional values by appropriating interstitial spaces and translating local neighborhood values such as cooperation and collaboration. On this point, Cédric stated that:

We have launched this committee last year ‘Espace en Diparition’ which we call endangered spaces in English. Because it is the notion of these spaces disappearing whether they are housing spaces but also commercial spaces, spaces where we can assemble, and walk in the neighborhood and public spaces that people used to join... there is less of these spaces available or that seem available to the population. We don’t have any coffee shop where you can just walk in and stay the day talking. When you walk in into a coffee shop now, people are all with their computers alone, bugs in the ears. While, on the other hand you have people who have this different mentality of how things used to be and used to enjoy better exchange and discussion groups inside these spaces which doesn’t seem to be accessible anymore... so these are the spaces that are disappearing and this is why it’s the campaign of endangered spaces. These vulnerable, low revenue people who do not want to seem related to the developments going on, they are much more implicated in community groups because they see it as that space that is still available to implicate themselves and socialize and meet people that are, that look like them, that act like them. And not only people who want to have a coffee and write on their computer for a few hours. I mean, it is a changing mentality. It is not that these spaces exist is the problem, but it is that the other spaces are disappearing and these spaces are replacing them, so there is a lack of adequate development for this population (Cédric Glorioso-Deraiche, Interview, 2018).

Cédric’s excerpt affirms that gentrification and development projects provoke values that oppose the collectivity, sense of ownership, belonging, and gathering that the community is used to. This pushed the community to appropriate interstitial spaces where they can nourish these values again. Often, this strategy accompanied other tensions in some of the spaces mentioned above. For instance, it is reflected in the collective gardens of Jardin des Voisins and Jardin de la Liberté. The community appropriated these spaces to prevent potential capitalist appropriation, but also to reinforce the value in the collectivity of the neighborhood. As Nathacha informed me, these gardens are different from community gardens in the sense that everyone shares the

products. Another example that demonstrates this community strategy is *Bâtiment 7*, which the community appropriated firstly to protect its history and significance, and secondly to repurpose it into a self-governed center that reflects the values of collectivity and collaboration through spaces such as cooperative workshops and the not-for-profit grocery store.

To summarize, the community deployed several strategies to deal with the tension surrounding identity (which includes both the heritage and the values of the neighborhood). First, they preserved significant historical spaces like *Bâtiment 7* and prevented their redevelopment. Second, they reconciled the use of the space to join both capitalist and community appropriation, such as was the case with the Black Rock Monument park. Finally, they responded to the tension by using interstitial spaces to reminisce about the past, like in the example of the mural, and to reflect their traditional values of collaboration and collectivity.

#### **4.3 Separation vs Inclusion**

A recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense amongst the interviewees that gentrification created a divisive feeling between the various populations in the neighborhood. As opposed to the local community, which is very attached to their neighborhood, most of the incoming class is not immersed in the neighborhood, and regards it only as a dormitory. In our interview, Mark stressed on this point:

You know the traditional population that moved here and worked here, those were in industries and businesses that don't exist anymore, and really with the new population coming in, it is one of these other parameters that [Pointe Saint Charles] is becoming a dormitory neighborhood... I personally think that the problem with gentrification is the risk that the neighborhood is getting boring, employment or diversity disappearing. We become obsessed about the discussion of gentrification and I think that one of the phenomena is the disappearance of place of birth, we just create a dormitory and entertainment district (Mark Poddubiuk, Interview, 2018).

On the same line of thought, Nathacha pointed out:

When we say gentrifiers, they are people who have a higher social level than others, I know a lot of them ... who get involved and who love the neighborhood, then there are some who are often maybe in the periphery in the condos then they turn their backs, they go shopping in the city, they will have fun in the city, they will eat in restaurants in town, then here it's the dormitory, so that's what I call the true gentrifiers because they flee. It insults me personally, even if I am not originally a 'Pointer', but it is where I chose to live as long as possible (Nathacha Alexandroff, Interview, 2018).



Nathacha continued, saying, “I am a gentrifier as well, but the difference is that I was with the neighborhood, not in the neighborhood without implicating myself” (Nathacha Alexandroff, Interview, 2018). For them, the main problem with gentrification is that it chips away at a sense of attachment and belonging to the neighborhood. This stems from the fact that gentrification is focused on packaging the neighborhood as a commodity that bears a new culture targeted at the incoming class. It does not engage with the local culture, which is largely based on a sense of ownership and belonging to the neighborhood. According to Michael, this has changed the dynamics of the neighborhood:

This is an interesting neighborhood because it has a very established community. You got what you call the Pointers who have been here for generations. The old pointers that are concerned with the changing mix of the neighborhood ...and fears about too many newcomers who would change that kind of a village like feeling that the community enjoys and that has been part of the strength and social cohesion (Michael Hind, Interview, 2018).

Although the local community is concerned about the social mix, it was not resistant to new people coming in. As Marco emphasized to me during the interview, gentrification and the arrival of a new social class can sometimes be beneficial, as they can bring new services to the neighborhood. The problem with gentrification, however, is the capitalist process that disregards the local culture of the neighborhood and focuses purely on profit.

On this point, he stated:

I always have an ambiguity between what can be called the natural change of the population that happens everywhere, and in addition to or besides, the change brought by capitalism...the people who move here, who have more means, are not bad people or people that I do not want to get to know ... I'm saying that the problem with gentrification is somebody who buys 8 houses, that demolishes everything and then builds it. That's the problem. It is not necessarily the people who are going to buy, it may be, but the main problem is capitalism. Real-estate developers, in my opinion they are the main adversaries of a process of gentrification (Marco Silvestro, Interview, 2018).

These testimonies made me realize that this tension is not focused on locals versus newcomers, but that it is concerned with the change in the community's dynamics, and how it is affecting the traditional values of Pointe Saint Charles. Hence, to respond to this tension, the community sought to program interstitial spaces in a way that is inclusive to both social classes.

**4.3.1 Responsive strategy: interstitial spaces to merge social classes.** To respond to the tension that is separating the two social classes in Pointe Saint Charles, the community looked at

Bâtiment 7 as a transformative space that represents a miniature and ideal image of Pointe Saint Charles, as La Pointe Libertaire implied in the following quote:

Bâtiment 7 is a major project that will change the demographics and physiognomy of the neighborhood. As a working class neighborhood, Pointe-Saint-Charles is becoming more and more a place of residence for a middle class that does not fit so much into history and into the community. Indeed, most newcomers see an opportunity "to access a property" near the city center, but very little participate in community life in the neighborhood (La Pointe Libertaire, 2011).

On that point, Marcel stressed that one of the objectives of Bâtiment 7, besides protecting the history of the neighborhood and providing for local needs, is the coexistence of different classes:

One of our objectives is to have members who are of different social classes. In a nutshell, we want to understand the capitalist society and understand the mechanism of gentrification through the use of space, and accessibility, so there must be affordable services for everyone, even the non-rich are able to come and use the services. It is through this, that we develop a level of social and political awareness around the issues of autonomy and self-management of the neighborhood and by questioning what is provoking gentrification and causing it. Obviously the real-estate market, speculators, real estate developers, landlords and government law ... and therefore the idea is how can we rebuild a social base that would be made up of people who live in the neighborhood, whatever the origin and the social class of the people (Marcel Sevigny, Interview, 2018).

In the same mindset towards expropriating spaces from capitalism, Marcel's comment hints that the community is trying to dissolve the barrier between the two social classes in order to create one social base that shares not only the same spaces, but also concerns around social equality. It is imperative to stress that in this tension, the community's strategy focuses on targeting the problem and treating it from its roots by raising awareness about gentrification for the different social classes.

#### **4.4 Summary**

In summary, interstitial spaces in Pointe Saint Charles grappled with forces surrounding capitalist and community appropriation. However, through preventive, reconciliatory and responsive strategies deployed in interstitial spaces, the community was able to creatively reformulate the contested implications of profitability vs affordability, identity erasure vs identity reinforcement, and separation vs inclusion. This was largely dependent on the physical conditions of the space, as well as on the involved actors and their ideologies, which either facilitated or complicated the potential use of interstitial spaces. In the following chapter, I will

discuss these tensions and strategies in existing research in order to come up with research implications and recommendations inspired by the self-planning of Pointe Saint Charles.

## Chapter 5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to understand interstitial spaces as sites of tension between capitalist and community appropriation in Pointe Saint Charles. By adopting assemblage thinking, the objectives of this study were to determine the tensions that problematized the use of interstitial spaces and to examine the strategies used by the community to manage these tensions. As assemblages contain a series of twofold concepts, the analysis focused on examining tensions that fall under the construct of capitalist appropriation/community appropriation, and scrutinizing the varying components that affected the dynamics of the tensions and controlled the use of interstitial spaces. In this chapter, I will turn to the interpretation and positioning of the findings presented in the previous chapter in the context of relevant research in urban studies and planning in order to analyze their implications for theory and practice.

### **5.1 Contextualizing Tensions and Strategies**

I will discuss the findings of the study in light of two points. First, I will look into the tensions that I explored in chapter four, along with the factors that controlled how the tensions were dealt with and how they influenced the use of the space. The second point concerns the strategies that the community used to manage the tensions and that, according to the community of Pointe Saint Charles, helped in counteracting gentrification.

**5.1.1 Tensions.** Although Loretta Lees (2008) suggests that gentrification encourages social mix and less segregated neighborhoods, I find that it has contributed differently to Pointe Saint Charles. Indeed, gentrification aims for social mixing by introducing a new social class to a neighborhood. However, its subsequent acts can invoke otherwise as it appears to achieve only social integration, not social interaction. A study done by Tim Butler (2003) in a gentrifying neighborhood in North London shows how most gentrifiers choose to live apart from non-middle-class residents, accessing exclusive services. This is an issue that Pointe Saint Charles community members pointed to constantly, describing themselves as Pointers and the incoming middle class as the gentrifiers. However, what was problematic for the community was not the fact that there was a new incoming social class, but rather that the two social classes did not interact in the same space, creating, as Butler (2003) suggests, a polarized social structure. The research of Chaskin & Joseph (2003) on mixed-income developments elaborates on this point by

questioning the extent to which these efforts seek to integrate the two classes. As they describe, these developments have the potential to isolate social classes by providing disparate amenities and opportunities. This issue echoes both the tension of separation vs. inclusivity I described in the previous chapter and that of profitability vs. affordability, creating a polarized set of spaces that do not merge the classes. Chaskin & Joseph (2003) continue to explain how developers have “a market orientation and concern about investment that privileges exchange value over use value” (p. 482). This was an issue that members of La Pointe Libertaire emphasized by affirming that developers favor the value return on investment over value and uses for the collective good. In that sense, they viewed interstitial spaces as left-out of capitalism, and they sought to prevent their redevelopment into what goes in line with capitalist values. Besides the tensions on the social-class separation and the focus on profit, scholars have also tackled identity erasure in existing research. Roza Tchoukaleyska (2016) argues that regeneration initiatives of areas similar to Pointe Saint Charles provoke two kinds of erasure. First is the physical erasure that demolishes the identity of historical buildings. Second comes cultural erasure, which was an important focus for community members. On that point, Kadirgamar (2014) stresses that “gentrification, and the movement of people to previously forsaken areas results in a vast disconnect between people who originally inhabited an area, and the people who move in and introduce their own customs and values” (p. 3), hence changing or disregarding the traditional values of the local community, such as, in the case of Pointe Saint Charles, collaboration, cooperation, and the industrial heritage that the community is striving to preserve.

A common link between all of these tensions is that social integration does not reach the level of social interaction. This echoes Joanna Duke (2009), who says that social mix should go beyond physical integration and refers to the right to the city as a foundation for mixing the two classes:

Through encouraging diversity, a respect for different cultures can be fostered. Through appropriation, residents can feel meaningful connections to their communities, and through participation, residents can help shape outcomes for their communities (p. 115).

In the same vein, the community of Pointe Saint Charles sought to handle the tensions by achieving this social interaction in interstitial spaces. Yet, certain factors influenced these tensions and their navigation, either limiting or permitting the community’s actions. Consistent with Nemeth and Langhorst’s (2014) concept of developability and ownership, one could argue that the main factors influencing the tension and its management in interstitial spaces are the

stakeholders involved, what the land means to them (ownership), and the physical condition of the land (developability). By way of illustration, Jardin des Citoyens was a small, oddly-shaped piece of land next to the railway and was hard to build on. Consequently, the city easily ceded the land to the community. This is in stark contrast to the case of Bâtiment 7, which was on a large piece of land aimed for profit by the developer.

**5.1.2 Strategies.** Although Tom Slater (2006) argues that gentrification's effects can't be lessened, community members claim that their actions were able to, in one way or another, alleviate and counteract gentrification and its effects. Consistent with Lawrence (2002), Newman & Wyly (2006), and Ghaffari et al. (2018), my analysis of the community's acts revealed that they can mitigate gentrification by following specific strategies. The community in Pointe Saint Charles deployed strategies that go in line with the mentality of the right to the city (Harvey, 2008, Lefebvre, 1996), resisting authoritative and top-down planning and follow community-oriented planning approaches. These include tactical urbanism (Lydon & Garcia, 2015; Silva, 2016) and DIY urbanism (Finn, 2014), which use small-scale interventions to achieve long-term changes. In addition, the set of strategies that the community used connects to the term *social innovation* initiated by Chambon et al. (1982) and discussed further by Moulaert (2010) in the book *Can Neighborhoods Save the City*. These authors claim that social innovation serves to satisfy local needs through collective efforts in reaction to social change (in this case, gentrification). In the sections below, I discuss the strategies the community used in the context of relevant existing research.

***Placemaking-related strategies.*** Placemaking is a bottom-up planning approach that stems from the community's assets and potential to improve the livability of cities (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Examples of placemaking activities include greening, street arts, and temporary spaces such as parklets. In Pointe Saint Charles, the community employed placemaking interventions in interstitial spaces by turning them into community gardens (Jardin des Citoyens), collective gardens (Jardin des Voisins, Jardin de la Liberté ), and murals (CN mural) in an effort to not only stop or prevent possible forms of capitalist appropriation, but also respond to needs like food security, merge new and old populations, and reinforce history and identity. Recently, some scholars (e.g., Fincher et al., 2016; Rich, 2017) have started to discuss how placemaking can contribute to gentrification, as developers can exploit these interventions for their regenerative aesthetic quality and use them for capital interests. Thus, it is imperative to

scrutinize the strategies that the community employed and examine how they sought to prevent this paradoxical effect.

Whereas the Pointe Saint Charles community used urban greening as a placemaking intervention to mitigate gentrification, some scholars argue that it can have paradoxical effects (Krueger & Gibbs, 2007; Martinez, 2010; Zukin, 2010). As Krueger & Gibbs (2007) affirm, community gardens are spaces of anti-gentrification activism and the fight for the right to the city, but they are also spaces within which gentrification eventually takes place. This effect has been referred to by several scholars as *ecological gentrification* (Dooling, 2009), *green gentrification* (Gould & Lewis, 2012) and *environmental gentrification* (Checker, 2011). However, my interviews revealed how the community members of Pointe Saint Charles were aware of the paradoxical effect of their actions. To prevent it, they followed a community-centered process to produce these spaces. The strategy that they used in their collective and community gardens goes in line with the *just green enough* strategy discussed by Curran & Hamilton (2012), which aims to produce spaces at the scale of the population as opposed to the scale of new developments. As they explain in their research in Newtown Creek in New York City, these interventions “will be just green enough to improve the health and quality of life of existing residents, but not so literally green as to attract upscale “sustainable” LEED-certified residential developments that drive out working-class residents and industrial businesses” (p. 1028). In the case of Pointe Saint Charles, these spaces reflect Sharon Zukin’s (2010) typology of gardens that progress from garden as social movement to garden as site of local and sustainable food production, and which “reflect normative notions of community and civility, as well as local memory and identity, and are inextricably connected to social inequalities and power hierarchies beyond the garden gates” (Aptekar, 2015, p. 212).

Besides greening projects, developers can also exploit art projects for capitalist interests (Crim et al., 2017; Rish, 2017). While informal actors temporarily appropriate interstitial spaces through such projects to influence urban planning agendas and resist the commodified aspect of urban development, some stakeholders and institutions appreciate their interventions as a way to revitalize the spaces of the city (Groth & Corijin, 2004). Similarly, Matthews (2010) claims that “over the past couple of decades, the arts have been placed in a position of privilege by city officials, development agencies, and private investors for their ability to catalyze and naturalize reinvestment in declining or underdeveloped areas of the inner city” (p. 672). Thus, to prevent

this paradoxical effect, scholars have recommended embedding art projects with community values to make them a social change tool for community development (Felshin, 1995; Jones, 1988). Seana Lowe (2000) notes that what makes this approach distinct from other arts projects is the process of producing it, and she tags it with community art and collective art. Consistent with this process, the CN wall mural, which reflected the history and identity of the neighborhood, was characterized by the inclusion of community members in the design process, from sketching and brainstorming to the actual execution. On that point, Weber (2003) asserts that:

All of the community murals, like any other public art, whether abstract or figurative, assert moral claims to public space, claims concerning the history, identity, and possible future of the surrounding area. Developers may prefer a blank slate, without the cultural or thematic specificities of the existing art. Thus, art may become an important symbolic element in struggles over public space, a point of contention and a rallying point (p. 7).

***Policy-related strategies.*** Ghaffari et al. (2018), in their paper on gentrification and housing, argue that gentrification is manageable and that counteracting its negative effects requires more than just reducing displacement. Referring to the strategies that the community of Pointe Saint Charles employed, this study expands on their work by looking into interstitial spaces as a way to mitigate the effects of gentrification. Ghaffari et al. discuss three different strategies to manage gentrification: tenants' protection, controlling ownership and development and community empowerment. The findings of this thesis go in line with the last two strategies. First, the authors suggest that controlling ownership and development encompasses the inclusion and provision of housing cooperatives, affordable housing, and housing trust funds as tools to control private developments. This is consistent with the Pointe Saint Charles community's strategy for negotiating the increase in the proportion of social housing in existing developments and for demanding more social housing on vacant lands. Second, Ghaffari et al. (2018) discuss how community empowerment and participation in the decision-making process and social movements can lessen the effects of gentrification by including the residents in the production of spaces. This re-enforces a sense of community and belonging that gentrification puts in jeopardy. This is illustrated in the case of Bâtiment 7 and the mural, both of which resulted from an ongoing consultation with community members in every phase.



## **5.2 Theoretical Implications**

This research followed a theoretical framework that adopted the assemblage theory and ANT in order to re-conceptualize interstitial spaces as sites of tension and break the traditional binary understanding of tensions in planning. In accordance with Dovey (2012), who studies the informal/formal construct based on Deleuzian philosophy and who affirms that we should not look at one pole as the result or reaction of the other, the results of this study proceeded from looking at the dynamics of the tension between capitalist appropriation and community appropriation, rather than looking at them as binaries that do not connect. The potential use of interstitial spaces was not dependent on the most powerful force, but rather on the interrelations and dynamics of the different components, including the stakeholders involved, their ideologies, and the physical conditions of the land. Hence, interstitial spaces take neither a form of capitalist appropriation because it is a global force nor a form of community appropriation because it is a reaction to capitalist appropriation. Instead, they are constantly produced through the interaction of the different components of the entity. On this point, Shaw & Hudson (2009) argue that:

Pervasive dichotomies of public/private, planned/non-planned and power/resistance, we believe, are inappropriate. We suggest the city's continuing transformation cannot simply be defined by built form that is planned and managed by an elite group of professionals, nor is it merely defined by 'the people'. We argue that it is an interplay between all forces, and in subtler ways, can be shaped by changing urban cultures and collective actions (p. 2).

## **5.3 Methodological Implications**

I designed the methodology of the research in a way that responds to the concepts of assemblage and ANT and how they re-conceptualize the way scholars perceive interstitial spaces. I considered the components of the contested landscape and those of interstitial spaces by undertaking urban walking, examined the dynamics in those spaces through the interviews, and looked at their evolution through the online content analysis. Although the methods were all complimentary, this research demonstrated how urban walking is an essential method in urban studies since its implications dictated the course of the research. Drawing from research on public space (Mehta, 2014; Jacobs, 1993; De La Llata, forthcoming b), cultural landscape studies (Jackson, 1984), and assemblage (De Landa, 2006), this research was able to elaborate and build

on urban walking as a method by providing a framework that guides fieldwork. Having said, walking did prove useful and central to research in urban planning. It is particularly suited to research tackling community-oriented planning, as such spaces are often not represented through maps and require a physical presence to understand the everyday landscape. Rather than just an embodied engagement in the neighborhood, urban walking reflected a narrative of the neighborhood.

## **5.4 Practical Implications**

**5.4.1. Paradoxical spaces.** In this study, I looked to situate interstitial spaces as contested spaces that allow the community to enact spatial activism in the face of gentrification. The results hint that even if they are appropriated for the community's use, interstitial spaces can remain contested, which further validates and establishes them as complex sites in a fluid state of becoming. Thus, the paradoxical effect is—in some cases—inevitable because capitalism can always find a way to co-opt these spaces. With the idea of *spaces of becoming* (De La Llata, forthcoming a), the state of interstitial space as a community space cannot be regarded as fixed, as the tension can keep evolving. For instance, the mural case shows how, although it was a community-oriented process, it is “escaping” the community. While the main aim was to showcase the proud storyline of the neighborhood celebrating its heritage, developers can appropriate and exploit it for capitalist interests, as mentioned earlier. Therefore, this study provides practical implications that can help both community members and urban practitioners in regulating these tensions.

**5.4.2 Recommendations.** This research considers the notion of assemblage as a potential design approach. In the planning and design disciplines, different layers such as softscape, hardscape, species, people's use of space, and history are explored before proceeding to design interventions. However, planners and designers often understand these layers separately. It is necessary to understand the relations between them to know how they can affect the potential use of space. Thus, applying the notion of assemblage in design is crucial to understanding how the current, past, and future conditions of the land will affect the proposed design, and vice versa. Keeping this in mind, this research builds on Northam (1971) and Nemeth & Langhorst (2014)'s work, as the conclusions drawn from the case of Pointe Saint Charles put forward a framework that can prove useful for better navigating the tension happening in interstitial spaces. To start

with, it is imperative to identify the type of interstitial space to foresee any physical limitations in its potential use. Then, determine the various stakeholders involved and examine each stakeholder's values (such as profit or collective good). Interstitial spaces become a reflection of these and will affect the stakeholder's agenda of the space (such as developing condominiums or social housing). Second, the findings can suggest practical strategies for urban practitioners. These strategies can regulate potential tensions in repurposing interstitial spaces. To begin with, it is crucial to include the community in the zoning of the neighborhood, specifically the zoning of interstitial spaces, as most of these spaces can be historically significant or even spaces of opportunity for meeting the community's needs. For example, the Pointe Saint Charles community argued with the city in order to receive more green spaces and found that interstitial spaces were potential greening spaces instead of spaces for private development projects. Similarly, it is important to include the community in the decision-making process of assigning a reasonable proportion of both affordable housing and accessible amenities to new developments. This will cater to both the newcomers and local residents, and ensure a social mix and integration between the two social classes. Finally, this study recommends two points that community groups should focus on when repurposing interstitial spaces, taking into consideration paradoxical effects. First, the focus should be both on the outcome and the process because making it community-centered can nourish a sense of togetherness and ownership in the neighborhood. Second, I recommend that community-oriented spaces become a material translation of the local community's values, potentially helping them strengthen the bond between community members, including local and incoming social classes.

## Chapter 6. Conclusion

The driving force in this research was the ongoing controversy over the redevelopment of interstitial spaces. These spaces, that characterize the post-industrial landscape, were found to reflect the declining social and physical characteristics of de-industrialized cities. From an urban and municipal planning point of view, revitalizing and repurposing them into residential and commercial condominiums was one of the solutions that aligned with capitalist development. This, however, clashed with the community's vision of these spaces, as it considered them spaces that could embrace its needs. Subsequently, interstitial spaces became sites of tension between capitalist appropriation and community appropriation. To date, the literature tackling the tensional nature of interstitial spaces has mostly remained silent on providing a detailed and nuanced understanding of the tension between the two forces. By referring to the self-planned and vigorous community of Pointe Saint Charles, this study aimed to bridge this gap by achieving two objectives. First, it articulated a detailed understanding of the tension between capitalist and community appropriation that takes place in interstitial spaces. Second, it provided practical strategies used by the community of Pointe Saint Charles to manage these tensions.

Drawing from the theory of assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986; DeLanda, 2006; Dovy, 2009) and ANT (Callon & Law, 1995; Latour, 2005), the proposed framework in this thesis looked to situate interstitial spaces as complex and dynamic components in the built environment. To examine this complexity and explore their dynamism, this study investigated the tension between capitalist and community appropriation happening in Pointe Saint Charles through in-depth interviews with key community members, online content analysis, and urban walking, all following an ethnographic approach. Indeed, my analysis demonstrated how the redevelopment of interstitial spaces was at the juncture of two opposing yet concurrent forces: capitalist and community appropriation. In Pointe Saint Charles, interstitial spaces grappled with three tensions, namely profitability vs. affordability, identity erasure vs. identity reinforcement, and separation vs. inclusion. To navigate these tensions, the community employed a set of strategies that were either preventive (by stopping potential capitalist appropriation on an interstitial space), reconciliatory (by accommodating the space for both uses), or responsive (by programming interstitial spaces in a way that retaliates against the tension). In addition, the redevelopment of interstitial spaces was more complex than a simple dichotomy between the two

forces. Consistent with assemblage thinking, it resulted from the dynamism and interrelations of the various actants, including the stakeholders involved, their ideologies, and the physical conditions of the land. Putting these findings in the context of relevant literature in urban studies and planning, it was evident that the main provoker of these tensions is the fact that capitalist appropriation achieves a social integration that does not extend to social interaction. This implication justifies why working around the issue of social mix is an ongoing strategy that the community is seeking to achieve in Bâtiment 7, and how this strategy is a way to both manage the tension and transcend it by raising awareness about gentrification throughout the community, both amongst The Pointers and the newcomers.

### **6.1 Limitations and Direction for Future Research**

When considering the practical, theoretical, and methodological implications of this study, it is important to note some limitations in the research design. First, like any qualitative study, it can be criticized for sample bias. This study focused purely on the community's perspective when it came to studying the tension between capitalist and community appropriation; I did not consider other perspectives that could have potentially contributed to a more holistic understanding of the dynamism of this tension. In addition, most relevant documents in the content analysis were produced by La Pointe Libertaire, an anarchist group that is strongly opposed to capitalism. Thus, this study might have been unable to fully explore dynamics and perspectives related to both sides of the tension, which is crucial to further understanding interstitial spaces as assemblages. Second, another limitation could be my focus in urban walking on the railway, which could have limited my observation of a certain typology of interstitial spaces and consequently omitted other spaces worth discussing with the community members. For example, most interstitial spaces around the railway were left over from planning, or former CN shops. On the other hand, I believe the interviews were structured in a way that allowed more information to emerge, which is what happened in the case of Jardin des Voisins and Jardin de la Liberté, both spaces I did not observe during my urban walking. Finally, it is noteworthy to mention that the study involves a community that is highly active, very attached to their neighborhood, and implicated in initiatives to improve their livelihood. There are many other neighborhoods in Montreal that have not yet formed community groups, so the implications of this research might not be applicable to them.

This study serves as another step towards a thorough understanding of interstitial spaces as sites of tension between capitalist appropriation and community appropriation. However, in order to develop a deeper understanding of interstitial spaces as assemblages and fully explore the dynamism of the tension, further research is needed. Whereas the current study takes a community-centered approach, it is still necessary to understand the multiplicity of perspectives involved. By examining the strategies of capitalist parties and how they respond to the community's actions there could be a more nuanced understanding of the tension between the two forces. This can also establish and elaborate on how interstitial spaces as sites of tension act as assemblage and can possibly shift the understanding of tension from a negative dichotomy to a dynamic and possibly (re)productive process. Lastly, this research suggests using assemblage as a design approach. However, it is still to consider how this approach can be contrived into a design methodology as it remains an underexplored topic in the design and planning discipline that is worth developing.

## **6.2 Concluding Remarks**

By illuminating important points, this research challenged the idea that interstitial spaces are meaningless, static gaps in the city and that planning is restricted to authorities. First, it demonstrated that interstitial spaces are resourceful and opportunistic spaces in the city. With assemblage thinking in mind, they are central spaces of the everyday landscape. Second, it showed how, even if they look empty, interstitial spaces act as hosts for a tug of war between community and capitalist actors, making them sites of tension. Having said that, it is not the most powerful force, or the most powerful actant, that dictates the future use of interstitial spaces. It is, rather, the associations between the different actants, human and non-human, that give insight into what can determine the potential use of the space. Third, it showed that the tension in interstitial spaces is productive, as it enabled the community to creatively reformulate it and thereby find innovative strategies to manage it. As Ghaffari et al. (2018) state, when the negative effects of gentrification are put forth and controlled “we can then move from a state of resistance towards a resilient situation” (p.11). Hence, against the grim narrative of gentrifying neighborhoods and the displacement of residents, the empirical perspective that the study presented provides optimism by foregrounding the community's spatial agency in interstitial spaces.

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