

**Not Your Shock Troops:
Queer Artists Disrupting Gentrification in Montréal's St-Henri Neighbourhood**

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ABSTRACT

Not Your Shock Troops:

Queer Artists and Gentrification in Montréal's St-Henri Neighbourhood

Estraven Lupino-Smith

This thesis develops a queer(ed) analyses of gentrification, one that troubles the current analysis of the role of artists and cultural workers in the process. It does so by drawing on critical race, queer, and feminist theory and through empirical research in St-Henri that investigates the nuances of the cultural dimensions of urban redevelopment. Without denying the importance of economic processes in driving gentrification, this research suggests there is a need to think about the way that normativity is entangled with gentrification. In doing so, the research also seeks to uncover queer resistance to these changes in urban space and investigates how certain forms of queer resistance, even when embodied in artists, might disrupt rather than propel gentrification processes.

Contents

1. Introduction	3
1.1 A Few Words on Positionality	7
1.2 Cultural Dimensions of Gentrification	10
1.3 Gentrification and Normativity	15
1.4 Queering an Analysis of Gentrification	19
1.5 Research Questions	22
1.6 Methods	24
2. Making Queer Space	27
2.1 3942 Rue Ste Emilie	28
2.2 Skillshares, DIY and Queer Community Institutions	34
2.3 Autonomous Creative Space	40
2.4 Zines, Art, and Alternative Medias	47
2.5 Conclusion	52
3. Rogue Unicorns	54
3.1 Actions, Campaigns, and other Troublemaking	56
3.2 Interrogating “The Artist”	60
3.3 What makes art queer?	70
3.4 Conclusion	76
4. Blighted Bodies and Gentrification	78
4.1 Blight and the Queer Body	80
4.2 Evictions	87
4.3 Conclusion	95
5. Conclusions	97
6. References	104

1: Introduction

The Ste. Emilie Skillshare was a community arts space started by and for people who are Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous and People of Colour. The idea of Ste Emilie was to provide space and resources to these marginalized people to create art for self-representation. Over the years it operated it hosted workshops, events, dance parties and maintained open hours for a gallery space, zine library, photo darkroom and screenprinting studio. Ste Emilie operated out of an apartment in the Neighbourhood of St-Henri in the Southwest of Montréal. In 2007, when Ste Emilie began, it was a gentrifying neighbourhood, still at the beginning of a process where residents and businesses were shifting.

Ste Emilie raises complex questions about the relationship between art/artists and gentrification. Artists generally positioned as agents of gentrification (Rose, 1984; Clay, 1979; Deutsche, 1996). While there is evidence to suggest that there are artists who support and benefit from gentrification (Ley, 2003; Zukin, 1987), this analysis presents a limited understanding of artists as white educated people who create work that aestheticizes space in the service of capitalism (Lees, Slater, Wyly, 2008; Harvey, 2002). This conception of the artist excludes marginalized people who create art and the potential of their creative work to interrupt gentrification, or at least to provide critical voices against it. This imaginary also fails to examine how gentrification tends to impose normative modes of being on urban space that are not reducible to economic characteristics like higher incomes and higher property values.

To address this limitation, I draw connections in this thesis between discussions of gentrification and queer theory to produce a queer(ed) analysis of artists and gentrification. Such an analysis, I argue, can move beyond this limited conception of creative

work, and can reveal the ways that bodies and cultural production are subject to a conformity through gentrification (Duggan, 2003; Schulman, 2012). As I explain in the following thesis, queer theory helps to illuminate how normativities structure social relations, casting some bodies as normative and others as deviant. This work, when integrated into social analysis, reveals the different bodies and practices that exist alongside and in opposition to capitalist narratives about space, exposing the vulnerabilities of the dominant discourses (Gibson-Graham, 1997). When used to analyze gentrification specifically, it can help to bring attention to the way that gentrification is structured by bodily norms and how this process, then, is not just about the revitalization of buildings; it is also a removal and constriction of blighted bodies. It is a spatial shift that produces a normativity wherein policing, criminalization and eviction become the processes that transform streets, and create the conditions for ‘prosperous’ and ‘ordered’ urban space. Queering our understandings of how gentrification works means not only to talk about queer bodies and how they are included and excluded from urban redevelopment, but to amplify the work of marginalized people to resist assimilation and to use their creative work to mobilize and resist shifts in the city.

The focus of investigation is the Ste Emilie Skillshare found within the St-Henri neighbourhood, an art collective and community space that was organized by and for queer and trans people, as well as people of colour, thus centering marginalized identities and experiences. An examination of Ste Emilie provides a new perspective on artists in gentrifying neighbourhoods, as it did not function in the way that most artist spaces and artists are currently discussed in the literature. Instead, the artists of the Ste Emilie Skill-

share sought to intervene in capitalist narratives and disrupt normative ideas about bodies, racialization, gender, sexuality and the urban environment, among other things. In 2014 the Ste Emilie Skillshare was evicted but leaves a legacy in Montréal (and beyond) that questions heteronormativity and whiteness in urban space.

I begin the thesis with a brief note about my positionality and a review of the pertinent literature on gentrification. It felt necessary to define myself and my position in relationship to the space, and to the process of gentrification. This is precisely because this work is about identity and experience in relationship to social dynamics, power, and urban space. Additionally, positioning oneself in relationship to research is a practice from feminist and queer scholarship, and I understand myself and this work as part of that tradition, while continuing to expanding it.

Following the literature review, I outline my research questions and my research methods. I conclude by underscoring the contribution of this research. Using queer theory to trouble narratives about gentrification, I explain, can help to illuminate the role of societal norms in shaping and propelling gentrification. It can also help to understand the efforts of individuals and groups to create autonomous spaces of resistance to this normative pressure on urban space. In investigating the work of the Ste Emilie Skillshare, I examine the effects of a queered resistance to gentrification and queered cultural production. All of this, I claim, will help to unsettle the taken for granted representations and understandings of cultural production in urban centres within gentrification studies. In the mentioned research “the artist” is positioned as “offbeat and disdainful of the market system” (Ley, 2003), but this characterization does not wholly account for artists of marginalized identity or experience. Further, Ley portrays the artist as a special member of the

middle class, who “deliberately presses the borders of conventional middle-class life, while at the same time representing its advancing, colonizing arm” (2003, p 2533).

This research seeks to develop a queer(ed) analyses of gentrification, one that troubles the current analysis of the role of artists and cultural workers in the process. It does so by drawing on critical race, queer, and feminist theory and through empirical research in St-Henri that investigates the nuances of the cultural dimensions of urban redevelopment. Without denying the importance of economic processes in driving gentrification, I suggest there is a need to think about the way that normativity is entangled with gentrification. In doing so, the research also seeks to uncover queer resistance to these changes in urban space and asks how certain forms of queer resistance, even when embodied in artists, might disrupt rather than propel gentrification processes.

1.1 A few words on Positionality

I completed this work while living on Lkwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ territories. In relation to this acknowledgement, I want to identify myself as a white settler from a Scottish, Irish, and Italian family who migrated to Tkaronto/Dish with One Spoon Territory in the 1950s. The research is about St-Henri, unceded Kanien'kehá:ka territory known as Tio'tia'ke (the island of Montréal). My positionality as a settler, artist, researcher, and writer is rooted in a responsibility to understanding how capitalism and colonialism produce the conditions for gentrification, that, despite my critique of, I benefit from.

This is a master's thesis. There are limits to this kind of project as it is a work for school, and cannot a complete history of Ste. Emilie, nor the definitive work about queer and trans or BIPOC artists in their relationship to gentrification. By being realistic about

those limits and setting a boundary around what I felt I had ownership over to communicate made the work easier to produce, and gave me some peace about this thesis and it entering the world outside of my computer and beyond the endless chats and discussions I had about it with people around me. Those boundaries are understanding this work as one piece of writing about the space and conditions of the neighbourhood in relationship to gentrification. Not every single person with ideas and opinions could be interviewed, not every single piece of art produced in relationship to Ste Emilie could be part of the analysis.

I struggled with whether or not I was the right person to tell this story because I do not represent all of the identities and experiences of the people and communities that are discussed. After a decade of community work before I returned to school for graduate work, I wanted to bridge the gap between community organizing and academic work in a responsible way. I felt humbled by the trust that people had to share their narratives about art and queer organizing. Over time I realized that I am the right person to tell the story I have, because I made clear my intentions, spoke to people at the source, and understand myself as one voice in investigating queerness, marginalization, and the culture of gentrification. This work is rooted in the stories shared with me by people who were excited about being able to speak about a project they were involved with, and to speak both critically and with some nostalgia about a part of their lives, and a time in St-Henri.

What came together through my research was a wide range of people who identified as queer and/or trans (trans, non-binary, Two-Spirit, and otherwise gender diverse), some who were members of Ste Emilie, some who used the space, some who helped

events there or worked in some kind of proximity to the space, its artists and active members. The truth is that among DIY projects there is often large crossover, and sometimes strict divides, as interpersonal issues overlap with group dynamics. This is the complexity of queer organizing, and of queer community.

This thesis is not just about art and activism in the southwest. Instead, it is an attempt to weave together the stories of some LGBTQ2S+ people in relationship to gentrification. It is also about how the conditions of gentrification are connected the white spatial imaginary, a concept developed by George Lipsitz. This concept was key to my defining of the blighted body and a normative urban imaginary, and the interruption of gentrification as it relates to artists who do not fit that imaginary.

While working on this thesis I often had to remind myself that it is a research paper, not a memoir about queer activism in the 2000s in Montréal. It is also not a definitive history of the Ste Emilie Skillshare. I did not set out to interview only those involved with Ste Emilie in an organizing capacity. Instead, the purpose of this thesis is to highlight the ways that queer and trans folks, specifically those most affected by anti-queer and anti-trans violence and discrimination, namely Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, can be part of disrupting gentrification, and how that is related to their creative work. I wanted to bring to the forefront a different narrative than one that sees “artists” as the shock troops of gentrification. Through this work, I hope to make clear that if “the artist” is simply a white person who went to art school or has an MFA, that scholarship address that specifically, rather than erase so many identities and experiences of artists in urban areas.

This work was also about having conversations. During my time in Montréal I talked to many people formally and informally about artists, about Ste Emilie, about gentrification in St-Henri. When I asked people if I could interview them, many declined. Of course, I only expect so many people in networks of activists and marginalized people to say yes to “can I interview you, it’s for a school project.” Most often the response was that they didn’t feel qualified to speak on behalf of either the groups they were part of, or in general as a queer/trans/BIPOC person, they weren’t sure what they had to say would make the kind of contribution I was looking for. It is possible my proposal too narrowly defined what the interview was about, but what I felt more of, and what came up in the interviews I did have, was that people did not feel that they could speak with authority about their experience or from their identities.

This project, then, is one conversation about art and queerness and gentrification. It counters some narratives that were already committed to paper, while attempting to amplify some voices that are not as clearly heard. It was my privilege to immerse myself in the words and creative works of so many LGBTQ2S+ people. I was charmed, full of nostalgia and also critical of the work that we have done, and of how much work there is to do. As urban space becomes increasingly valuable and gentrification continues to apply pressure to marginalized people, queer and trans communities will need to continue to work together to counter these forces, while centring the voices and experiences of those most affected by cis/heteronormativity, namely Indigenous and other racialized people.

1.2 Cultural Dimensions of Gentrification

Originally built as the housing for workers in the factories along the Lachine Canal, the St-Henri neighbourhood has seen rapid changes in recent years. With the decline of industry and the related factory work when the Lachine Canal was closed in the 1970s, the area was nationally recognized as a struggling neighbourhood (Ley 1996). The city neglected it for decades as residents organized against poverty and stigmatization (Twigge-Molecy, 2013). Saint-Henri was a poor and working class neighbourhood, primarily Francophone, and not highly desired as a place to live in Montréal. With low rent, the neighbourhood also housed marginalized people who were not part of its history of factory work, including the queer and trans people who started Ste Emilie.

With its proximity to the downtown core, developers and the city have seized St-Henri in the last 15 years as a site for urban redevelopment projects (Twigge-Molecy, 2009). This is aided by individual property owners, banks, and other agents of capitalism. Part of the process of transformation in the streets of St-Henri has been an aesthetic one, especially cultural shifts in space as new residents change home facades and store facades, especially along the main commercial corridor of Notre-Dame Street. St-Henri became an ideal place to pursue a middle class lifestyle of consumption and leisure: upscale cafes, bistros, and stores replaced pawn shops and diners. Tracing this aesthetic and cultural shift as it shapes urban space can illuminate an interesting dimension of gentrification and its effects.

There is, however, more to gentrification than these aesthetic changes as gentrification involves complex economic, social, and cultural transformations of space. Discussions of culture, particularly art, are where I situate my intervention in this thesis. In what follows, I review the major contributions to the literature on gentrification and the main

scholars who have made interventions about the importance of culture in gentrification. I then look at scholarship outside the gentrification literature, including the work of George Lipsitz and queer geographers; I show how this work, though not usually applied to the study of gentrification, can bring new insights to the latter.

Gentrification is a process that transforms poor, working class or otherwise divested neighbourhoods of the central city to middle class residential and/or commercial use (Lees, Slater, Wyly, 2008). The earliest critical analyses of gentrification – still relevant and well-cited today – were developed within a Marxist framework. This work frames gentrification as the reinvestment of capital through central cities after decades of disinvestment (i.e., after decades in which capital was invested primarily in suburban expansion). For Smith (1979), the gentrification process is primarily about the movement of capital, not of people, and it is capital that determines where and how investment and displacement will occur. His work, along with that of other Marxist scholars (see Harvey, 2002), shows how disinvested urban spaces slowly became a new site for investment and fictive capital, where the purchasing and upgrading of central city real estate came to hold the potential for profits (N Smith, 1986). Along with capital investment, the city and developers pushed a political agenda of revitalization: the bringing of life to dilapidated areas, through capital and state policies, that they perceived as underutilized and failing to be productive.

This process sees these poor, working class and/or post industrial neighbourhoods in the inner city redeveloped with an influx of private capital and middle-class home owners and renters (N Smith, 2002). Many theorists have discussed the displacement of the working class populations, and the growing tensions and conflicts as space and place

are seized, segregated, and otherwise face the tensions of gentrification (Marcuse, 1985, 2009; Slater, 2002; Atkinson and Bridge, 2005; Blomley, 2009). As these new owners and renters move in, and the property values begin to rise, there is pressure on the existing working class and poor residents if they lack the access to resources necessary to pay the rising costs of housing. Many of these original residents are evicted, or face pressure through rising property taxes, alienation from the shift in neighbourhood establishments, or the community resources they rely on are no longer located in the same neighbourhood they live in.

Some scholars have sought to complicate this Marxist analysis, suggesting that capital makes use of culture in the process of gentrification. These scholars suggest that artists, cultural producers, and the aestheticization of space contribute to gentrification (Ley, 2006; Zukin, 1987, 2009; Lees, 2000). Using Bourdieu's¹ conceptions of cultural and social capital, some suggest that artists are often low in economic capital, but high in cultural capital, which they leverage and cultivate in gentrifying neighbourhoods to acquire economic capital (Ley 2006; Rose, 1984; Clay 1979). In this analysis, artists are not the only actors to have cultural capital, but their position of being low in economic capital draws them to less valuable places in cities in order to do their work while paying low rents. As artists move to these neighbourhoods, they can begin a displacement process through their own presence and by attracting other actors who will displace people. This framing states that artists use their cultural production to valorize post-industrial and

1 For Bourdieu, cultural capital acts as a social relation that rests on acquired cultural knowledge which represents power and status. His ideas suggest that the cultural distinction in taste is not just about aesthetic choice, but rather based on power and translate to authority and authenticity.

otherwise neglected areas of the city that then attract those richer in economic capital (Ley, 2006, Lloyd, 2006). Through this process, the artists are often displaced themselves.

Although there are some examples of these assertions about artists, the characterization is problematic and limiting. In the work of Clay (1979), Lloyd (2006), Rose (1984), and Zukin (1994), artists and their work are situated as a stage of gentrification. These positions do not provide a complete understanding of who artists are, or what the varied nature of their work is. Ley's (2003) description of the artist is a case in point. The artist, he claims, is "offbeat and disdainful of the market system" (p. 2530), but this says nothing about the social position (e.g., race, class, sexuality) of the artist. Further, Ley portrays the artist as a special member of the middle class, who "deliberately presses the borders of conventional middle-class life, while at the same time representing its advancing, colonizing arm" (p. 2533). This depiction of the artist leaves out cultural producers who are working-class or otherwise marginalized by systemic power, not by choice. It also ignores cultural producers who already existed in these working class neighbourhoods, and also constructs an imaginary of artists as young, white, and educated. The same view appears in the other major contributions to the literature, including Rose (1984), Lloyd (2006), and Zukin (1994, 2009). This literature omits discussions of the blighted bodies of queer, trans, and racialized artists in relationship to the production of space in gentrifying neighbourhoods. These artists might have already been living in these neighbourhoods as part of the communities that are long time residents. They might also have a different relationship to capital and to gentrification, and not have the same social capital to leverage for economic gain.

While Deutsche (2002) offers the suggestion that the work of certain artists can be part of cultivating space as professional, white, and middle class, it is necessary to ask happens to the artists who don't fit this category. This thesis will reveal narratives not currently included in the literature, specifically investigating the Ste Emilie Skillshare and how the artists involved there interrupt current analyses. In doing so, the research provides a critical perspective on gentrification called for by Slater (2006), through amplifying the voices of artists working in the margins of gentrifying neighbourhoods that seek to interrupt and counter the process and its negative effects.

1.3 Gentrification and Normativity

In examining the cultural dimensions of gentrification, contemporary critiques also suggest that racism informs the process (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005; Shaw, 2000). It is not just that the new gentrifying residents are predominantly white, but that the “aesthetic and cultural aspects of the process assert a white appropriation of urban space and urban history” (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005, p. 2). Atkinson and Bridge further suggest that gentrification is “a cultural force in its privilege of whiteness” (p. 2). Through this analysis of race and gentrification, Atkinson and Bridge are also outlining a way that a normative spatial imaginary is idealized and enforced, rooted in cultural values of a white, middle class, and other dominant identities.

In his analysis of urban space in the United States, Lipsitz (2011) identifies a white spatial imaginary, which he says was based on “exclusivity and augmented exchange value that forms the foundational logic behind prevailing social and spatial policies in cit-

ies” (p. 455). This means that whiteness is a key factor in the development and redevelopment of urban space; that white aesthetics, cultural practices and values are what inform the predominant policies that produce and construct a city. The white spatial imaginary is not only embodied by whites, but is widespread in public and private spheres, and further supported through the financial rewarding of projects, people and businesses that serve whiteness (Lipsitz, 2011). As a result, the white spatial imaginary can be understood as a structuring phenomenon that also affects all parts of the process of gentrification.

Lipsitz’s argument is not simply that whites are innately racist and favour land use policies that increase a racial gap, but instead recognizes that dominant land use policies produce a *certain kind* of whiteness that offers inequitable incentives in a system that has substantial racial impact (Lipsitz, 2011). This suggests that the production and dominance of whiteness is pervasive and institutional, not simply an issue of access to resources. Lipsitz’s work, however, is not taking up gentrification specifically. When urban development and the gentrification process is examined through the lens of the white spatial imaginary, the production of whiteness is connected to the perception that prosperous urban space must exclude those deemed different, deviant, and non-normative.

In order to expand an understanding of the white spatial imaginary to apply to queer and trans people it is necessary to understand how whiteness and heteronormativity are intertwined. As gentrification is a force entrenched in European ideas about the use of space for capital exploitation, it enforces other bodily norms of colonial capitalism. This means that queer and trans people do not always satisfy the needs for bodies that support the conditions for gentrification to thrive. This is because gentrification idealized a kind

of homogeneous space, with controlled and predictable patterns of design and behaviour (Lipsitz, 2011).

There are, of course, some people who do fit these idealized kinds of space, and encourage them. Castells (1986) noted that during the early redevelopment in the Castro district of San Francisco there were middle class gay men who were able to buy houses and buildings, increasing the value of the neighbourhood. In contrast, Castells notes that there were many who “were willing to make enormous economic sacrifices to be able to live autonomously and safely as gays” (1986, p. 160). This suggests that for decades there has been fractures in the LGBTQ2S+ community. These fractures included those who were able to - and willing to - accept and benefit from being agents of capital and gentrification, while others were either unable to, or committed to a politics that interrupted queer and trans involvement in urban redevelopment. This means that there are some LGBT people who can benefit from the white spatial imaginary as long as they satisfy some part of what that imaginary demands, namely class privilege and a certain kind of whiteness. While their sexuality may be at odds with normative ideals, their other behaviours, identities, and actions exist within a normative spatial imaginary that deems them acceptable to dominant culture. They are also invested in prosperous, ordered urban space and can be understood as homonormative as defined by Duggan.

The white spatial imaginary, therefore, is related to a heteronormative and homonormative imaginary. This means that gentrification attempts to produce and enforce a normative urban imaginary, one that also structures the kind of people who are idealized in urban space. LGBTQ2S+ can be in opposition to this normative spatial imag-

inary as their bodies and behaviours are seen as deviant and disruptive. As I have mentioned earlier, the transformation of urban space into a place of consumption and leisure means that a middle class (and wealthier), are needed to maintain these commercial and cultural spaces. Queer and trans people, specifically those without class privilege or who lack other access to middle class cultural knowledge and experiences cannot produce and maintain those spaces.

It is important, finally, to define what is meant by *white* in the white spatial imaginary, as it rests on a particular definition of whiteness. Not all white people are able to assimilate into this version of whiteness and the white spatial imaginary. This is because whiteness is itself a flexible set of social and symbolic limitations that shape the meaning and power of the social category *white* (Wray, 2006). Wray (2006) looks at the construction of whiteness in relationship to “white trash”, a category of white person who is poor and often conjured as ignorant, dirty, and violent. These white people lack the economic and social class to support a productive, ordered urban space. This is particularly important when examining gentrification, normativity, and St-Henri, as it is a traditionally white working class neighbourhood where residents and businesses are being displaced by other white people, as a white spatial imaginary also excludes non-normative white bodies. Therefore, it is not all white people that are part of the white spatial imaginary. This imaginary also sees poor and working class white people as deviant. Poor and working class white bodies are not part of the revitalized city, and are not able to contribute to the economic and cultural norm of consumption and leisure in these urban spaces.

The white spatial imaginary, conceived this way, can help to make sense of the role of artists in gentrification processes. It helps to distinguish between artists who further

gentrification logics, and those who potentially disrupt them. Artists can become part of upholding a normative spatial imaginary in urban districts where cultural (and even sub-cultural) products, events, and fashion are commodified in the pursuit of capital accumulation and the valorizing of decaying urban space. Global capital, in the form of developers and other agents of gentrification, seek out the perceived authenticity, particularity, and originality that cultural producers and artists bring to these neighbourhoods (Harvey, 2002). This search for an authentic aesthetic that can be commodified is part of the cultural capital of whiteness, and includes the work of many artists. However, not all artists can be easily seen as part of this aestheticizing force that supports gentrification. These artists, because of their identities, experiences, or political views, do not fit this normative ordering of space that gentrification imposes. Their bodies, their practices, and their art operate in opposition to the white spatial imaginary, and therefore to a normative urban imaginary, that propels gentrification.

1.4 Queering an Analysis of Gentrification

In order to investigate this exclusion of the non-normative from urban space, I suggest that queering an examination of gentrification is needed. Queer theory engages an analysis of urban space that questions not just sexuality, but the production of normativities through and in space (Bell and Binnie, 2004; Oswin, 2013; Browne et al., 2007; Knopp, 1995). A queer geography of gentrification can help to understand how normativities operate to produce space and to mark bodies as valuable or deviant in those spaces. In this way a queer geography of gentrification draws from feminist, post-colonial, critical race, and materialist approaches to question the production of urban subjects (Oswin, 2008).

In taking up a queered geography of gentrification, I look to queer theory as it challenges the idea of fixed identities and understands power as not simply oppressive but productive of certain kinds of social relations and spaces (Oswin, 2008). By this I mean that queering the study of gentrification is not just a matter of locating the bodies of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans) people within the process of capitalist redevelopment of urban space (Binnie and Valentine, 1999; Hubbard, 2012), but also is a project of uncovering the way that people of non-normative identities and experiences embody resistance to these forces of redevelopment. This approach means positioning queer as not as simply a sexuality that can easily be understood and assimilated, but rather a deviance that presents a problem for capitalism and its proponents.

Queering the interrogation of the cultural dimensions of gentrification also means questioning the position of the queer artist. Artists who identify as queer or LGBTQ2S+ are not necessarily making art to support capitalist redevelopment of urban space, but they are also not necessarily in opposition because of their marginalized identity. Sarah Schulman suggests that queer art and artists can be subject to a kind of conformity under gentrification (2011). This means that all art is not simply an aestheticization, and that the cultural production of queer and/or LGBTQ2S+ people faces assimilationist pressure as well as the potential for cooptation in gentrifying neighbourhoods. The work of this thesis is to reveal the work of queer and trans artists of marginalized identities and experiences, and to posit that these artists are not part of a normative urban imaginary that supports the development of gentrification.

The pursuit of an assimilationist, normative existence by LGBTQ2S+ identified people is referred to as homonormativity, and is a normativity deeply connected to the

kind of civilized whiteness I discuss above (Duggan, 2003; Oswin, 2008). Lisa Duggan says that homonormativity is “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture” (2003, p. 157). Therefore, homonormativity supports capitalism and the dispossession and displacement of people through redevelopment strategies. Artists who embody and profit from normativity through whiteness, wealth, or other means receive capital or attempt to benefit from the social structures that also bolster gentrification.

This intervention from queer theory connects with Lipsitz’s claims about the white spatial imaginary, where the queer body, the non-white body, and the white body when not meeting class expectations, is deviant, non-normative. Marginalized people do not support a normative urban imaginary of assimilated and productive residents. They are not simply ones that cannot afford to pay higher rent or more for a cup of coffee; rather, their blighted bodies appear to disrupt a normativity that supports a thriving capitalist expansion and its proponents claim to space. In queering an analysis of gentrification, I seek to tackle the nuances of power and the cultural dimensions of urban change and uncover autonomous resistance to these pressures.

This analysis of gentrification can be developed by looking at the Ste Emilie Skillshare. This group and the space it operated made claims to act autonomously and in resistance to colonial capitalism, to challenge the frameworks of normativities, and to create art in the spirit of collective liberation (Ste Emilie, 2007). This group is the site for generating a more complex understanding of cultural producers in gentrifying neighbour-

hoods. Their existence creates new questions about artists and gentrification, about identity politics and the politics of inclusion. What does it mean to have a place that housed radicals, and offered space and time for people-of-colour-only events? What is the relationship of this space to the aesthetics of whiteness? To the white spatial imaginary? What does rooting an analysis of Ste Emilie allow and limit in an interrogation of artists and their relationship to gentrification? Through analyzing the queer practices of resistance and models of autonomy offered by the Ste Emilie Skillshare, I will complicate the discourse about art, gentrification and the roles of normativities in the spatial shifts of urban redevelopment.

1.5 Research Questions

This research will investigate the role of artists in gentrification, seeking to illuminate the role of artists of marginalized identities and experiences in resisting urban redevelopment. Through examining the art and cultural production of the Ste Emilie Skillshare, and through in depth interviews with its members, this research will focus on this space and how it interrupted traditional narratives about artists and the gentrification process in the neighbourhood of St-Henri. Drawing on queer theory, this research will examine art, artists, and marginalization in relation to gentrification, seeking to amplify narratives about the effects of urban change and forms of resistance to it.

The Ste Emilie Skillshare was a community art collective space in this DIY tradition devoted to “empowerment, self determination and collective liberation” (Ste Emilie, 2007). A skillshare is related to the DIY or “do-it-yourself” cultural movement, where people are encouraged to create something on their own outside of or in opposition to

mainstream consumer culture. This particular collective was run by and for people who are trans, two spirit, queer, indigenous and/or people of colour. As a collective of artists and activists, the Ste Emilie Skillshare worked within an anti-oppressive framework toward social and economic transformation (Ste Emilie, 2007). In practice, that took the form of sharing skills through workshops, providing resources for people to create art with a focus on self-representation and put their art up in the space and in the streets, and participate in demonstrations and other forms of dissent in the neighbourhood and beyond.

This research seeks to answer the following questions about the transformation of urban space through gentrification:

- 1) How did the group of queer artists at Ste. Emilie Skillshare contest an assimilation through gentrification?**
- 2) How did this queer artist group relate to mainstream art and/or mainstream LGBTQ2S organizations both in and outside of St-Henri?**
- 3) How does this group enable a new analysis of gentrification, one that can be understood as a part of a normalizing project by the city and developers.**

This investigation of the Ste Emilie Skillshare situates it as a queer space not because of the presence of queer people, but rather because it operated with a queer politic that both embraced and went beyond the boundaries of traditional identity politics. Ste Emilie and the groups it was affiliated with made a deliberate departure from what can be characterized as a mainstream, assimilationist, gay and lesbian agenda. They rejected the idea of pursuing the normative markers of hetero conformity as the goal of queer success

(Sycamore, 2004) Ste Emilie was rooted in a politicized queerness that focused on intersections with race, and was applied to aesthetic practice. The work that was created in the space, the kinds of skills and workshops that were presented there, and even the style of organization, made it clear that it was more interested in expanding the ways that art and cultural production are made rather than finding ways to funnel more queer artists into the traditional institutions of art and culture in Montréal.

The artists of Ste Emilie also queered the ways that resistance to gentrification can take form. Instead of looking to a politics of inclusion (which seeks a greater diversity of people to be included into plans for neoliberal development as set out by the city and developers) the kinds of events and workshops organized at the space called for a radical re-imagining of marginalized bodies in urban space. Ste Emilie was a space created and utilized by artists of marginalized identities that can be connected with the analytical frameworks of queer theory and the white spatial imaginary. In this thesis I examine the relationships of these artists to the neighbourhood they lived in and to the process of gentrification there. If Ste Emilie was indeed a space for collective liberation, as I assert, what did the work look like, and how did it fit into broader movement building, specifically around displacement and capitalist urban redevelopment? What was the relationship of a space like this to an aesthetics of whiteness? To the white spatial imaginary? This thesis will focus on interrogating the work of this art space, specifically discussing the ways it challenged capitalism and cultural hegemony of normativity.

1.6 Methods

The research design for this study draws from a history of feminist, queer and critical race scholarship, employing the interdisciplinary approaches of critical geography. Guiding my work were the research questions: that is, queering an investigation of the cultural dimensions of gentrification, using the site of the Ste Emilie Skillshare and the neighbourhood of Saint-Henri as my case. The research methods consisted two main parts: First, interviews were conducted with twelve members and users of the Ste Emilie Skillshare. The interviews were semi-structured, with open questions that sought to understand the kind of cultural production in St-Henri by marginalized artists (specifically Indigenous, Black and other People of Colour, queer, trans, and disabled people) in the last 10-15 years. These interviews provided information about how artists functioned in the space and in Saint-Henri, what their work sought to do and how the pressures of gentrification shaped their work and their relationship to normative ways of being.

Second, I reviewed the archives of queer and trans art and organizing in St-Henri during this time. The Q Team, a queer artists' collective, published a document titled "Queers Made This" in 2010, with funding from the Quebec Public Interest Research Group (QPIRG). This document includes over forty pages of scanned posters and flyers, many of which were produced at Ste Emilie, and included events that took place there. The document is an archive of queer events in Montréal during 2005 through 2010. Along with the scanned materials, it includes textual descriptions of queer groups and events that were active during that time. I also reviewed archives of both Ste Emilie and QPIRG to find more information about activism and art production in St-Henri. This included online and hard copy archives from the institutions, as well as working with personal archives from artists and activists who lived in St-Henri in the last 15 years, many

of whom were involved in some capacity with Ste Emilie. The archive materials included art, photo documentation of art in the space and in the streets, photos of demos, maps, zines, and posters for varieties of events. I also had access to the archives from the Walking Distance Distro, which was a zine and art distribution project that focused on collecting and disseminating art and writing from and to residents of St-Henri. Their archives include the materials of distribution, maps of their delivery routes, and other ephemera that was created predominantly by people of marginalized identities living in St-Henri from roughly 2005 to 2012.

All of these materials assisted in developing an understanding of the kind of work made by artists associated with Ste Emilie, the cultures that the artwork was related to, and how this work related to or interrupted how gentrification is commonly associated with artists. Reviewing this work allowed me to understand the relationship of the artwork to queer forms of resistance, both by queer identified people and as the work relates to the ideologies of queer theory. The nature of these interviews and materials allowed me to share a particular history and analysis of the Ste Emilie skillshare and the artists that used the space in relationship to gentrification in St-Henri. It also allowed me to understand some aspects of queer organizing at the time, and how Ste Emilie offered alternative narratives about artists in gentrifying neighbourhoods. This research, is also about the defining of the blighted body and a normative urban imaginary, and the interruption of gentrification as it relates to artists who do not fit that imaginary.

2: Making Queer Space



This is the Ste Emilie Skillshare building, the top two floors on the right.

In this chapter I review the history of Ste Emilie Skillshare, how it was established, and what made it a queer and activist space. I review what the space offered in facilities and programming, as well as the organization of the collective. I discuss the concept and ethic of DIY (Do-It-Yourself) as foundational to Ste Emilie and what kind of media (art, etc.)

was produced there. I also review the concept of Ste Emilie as an autonomous zone, related to anti-authoritarian organizing, and how that relates to its commitment to making space for queer, trans, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) people.

This chapter takes up the first research question, by demonstrating what kind of people and what kinds of artists were a part of Ste Emilie and its foundation. I discuss the intentions and the channels through which the artists involved with Ste Emilie made art, organized, and had a presence in the neighbourhood. I also outline the kind of space that was created and how the people involved with Ste Emilie did not fit a normative spatial imaginary that is idealized through gentrification.

This chapter presents a different narrative about artists than what is commonly found in the literature on art and gentrification by discussing how those at Ste Emilie were involved with activism and other forms of socially engaged work to counter normative pressure on marginalized bodies and communities. They worked to resist not only mainstream narratives and the effects of gender discrimination, homophobia, and racism, but also to queer the subcultural spaces they worked within, namely punk, self-publishing, and other art making. This work disrupts the commonly held ideas about gentrification and artists, providing new areas of inquiry and analysis about artists their relationship to urban redevelopment. This chapter also provides background to the following chapter “Rogue Unicorns,” which provides a more in depth discussion of the conception “the artist” and how Ste Emilie provides an example of a queer and queered artist in urban space.

2.1 3942 Rue Ste Emilie

The Ste Emilie Skillshare was established in 2007, created by artists, activists and associated outcasts. It was located in a small quadplex building tucked away on a side street in St-Henri, right next to the tracks that bisect the neighbourhood. Housed in two floors of an apartment, Ste Emilie included a small gallery, zine library, kitchen, photography darkroom and screen printing studio (Ste Emilie, 2008). The space was up a flight of stairs and, in a building with 3 other units, operated in close quarters with its neighbours.



One logo used by the Ste Emilie Skillshare.

The space was queer and queered before 3942 Ste Emilie became a community arts fixture. The apartment had previously been home to punks and queer people, and had been “in the family” (as founding members stated) for a while. This means that the space was lived in and host to queer and trans people for at least a decade, passed along through

friends and acquaintances. The space was also described as being “kind of a hub for radical organizing” (Bran). This organizing reflected the mandate of the group, as well as the identities of the folks who were a part of it. Over the years there were meetings, queer dance parties held as fundraisers, punk shows, and activist pot lucks hosted in the space in support of issues and causes including queer liberation, critical views on marriage, migrant support work, and anti-racist organizing. This history made it an ideal location to create an art space by-and-for marginalized people. It was a place that people were already familiar with, a physical space that many LGBTQ2S+ people had already moved in or through. As one member said: “The apartment had a lot of history in our community. [When the previous occupants left], we saw it as an opportunity to take the place over and create this community art space that we all dreamed of and were wanting and needing” (Bran). This familiarity is an important part of queer space making; it was a place where queer and trans people lived, but also a politicized space before it functioned as a public one.

The idea of Ste Emilie was to make a space based on a shared politic that was reflected in the identities and experiences of marginalized people. The mandate stated that:

The Ste Emilie Skillshare is a community art collective devoted to empowerment, self-determination and collective liberation. It is a collective run by and for people who are trans, two-spirit, queer, Indigenous and/or people of colour* and friends. As a collective of activists and artists, we work within an anti-oppression framework toward social and economic transformation. We share skills and resources to create art in the spirit of self-representation and revolution (Ste Emilie, 2008).

The mandate focused on self representation not just because of the exclusion of marginalized voices from mainstream art and media, but also (as one member stated) because at

the time there was a feeling that “queer, trans, and/or POC were underrepresented in activist and punk spaces” (Bran). In addition, Ste Emilie was formed to counter mainstream LGBT narratives of assimilation and to make space for people to present other narratives about being queer, with an intersectional analysis. An intersectional feminist analysis considers the complex ways that gender and other marginalized identities compound the way someone experiences oppression. This term was first used to understand gender and race, and to broaden the way that gender and all other forms of discrimination were taken up and analyzed (Crenshaw, 1989). The Ste Emilie project overall was about amplifying these marginalized voices, and creating community around shared politics that reflected lived experiences. A Ste Emilie member commented: “We were there and important and had valuable things to contribute. We wanted a way of spreading the anti-oppression politics that we were really connected to. We also wanted to take the cool stuff our friends were making and make it more visible and more supported” (Kino). Thus, Ste Emilie became a way to support marginalized voices through providing space to create work and showcase it, as well as hosting numerous and varied events that made an impact in queer organizing at the time.

The members of the Ste Emilie organizing collective met through political organizing networks that focused on queer and trans issues and issues of race. Many of them were friends, with their relationships having formed predominantly through working together on a variety of political campaigns and projects, often that involved an element of art making or producing materials for the projects (Disco, Finn, Bran, Jesse). These networks were primarily Anglophone, and connected to student organizing circles doing work both on campus and beyond. Examples of the work they were involved with include

prisoner support through writing letters and noise demonstrations at the prisons themselves, making banners for large demonstrations like May Day or March 15 day of action against police brutality, organizing workshops or panels on racism, Islamophobia, and transmisogyny.

Interviewees talked about the connection to the Quebec Public Interest Research Group (QPIRG) at Concordia, an organization that “provided resources and training for many activist groups and campaigns” (Kino). QPIRG at Concordia is a “volunteer-driven, student-funded, non-profit organization that seeks to make campus-community links and inspire social change through engaging, inclusive and non-hierarchical approaches” (QPIRG, 2011). People involved with Ste Emilie consistently mentioned QPIRG as a place they connected with other people, that there was community around the organization where they had found people interested in the intersection between art and activism (Bran, Finn). This affiliation the QPIRG also reinforced the connection to Anglophone organizing tied to campus. QPIRG was also a source of revenue: Ste Emilie was a working group of the organization, which meant they received a small budget to support their activities. The group also received some funding from FASA: Fine Arts Students’ Association, also at Concordia. As some of the members of the organizing collective were also fine arts students, they were able to connect their school work to the organizing they were doing outside of their classrooms, and share resources. This small amount of university funding “assisted with paying bills, but also provided a budget for the acquiring of materials and tools for the studio” (Finn). It also connected the space to university communications and promotion, where the events of Ste Emilie could be advertised to a broader community that was connected through student activism.

This connection to art and activism at Concordia likely influenced the programming and activities of the space toward youth: primarily people under 30. Many members spoke about this with mixed feelings. One member mentioned that this was “a very important part of formative years” (Finn). It was also stated that it was an important time in the development of their political consciousness, where they were applying “the kind of hard line politics that are more common to younger activists” (Kino). The people involved at Ste Emilie were mostly between eighteen and thirty, Anglophones, and enrolled at one of the universities or had some familiarity with campus-based activism. While Ste Emilie was a public space that had open studios and public advertising of events, it was also part of a few overlapping scenes of sub-cultural organizing that used an aesthetic that was recognizable to those subcultures. Those aesthetics included handmade, drawn, or screen printed materials like posters or brochures, which featured reoccurring subjects like unicorns, other animals, and androgynous figures.

As many of the members had met through political organizing, they had skills and experience in setting up an organization, in facilitation, and in program development and implementation. Some members suggested that the commitment to making such a space was also in reaction to early 2000s anti-globalization organizing, of which there had been a critique about the absence of discourse concerning race (Bran, Curtis). They had a clear vision of what they wanted to space to be, and that was reflected in setting up the governance structure. It was an invite-only collective that made decisions by consensus. The governing collective was structured to always have majority racialized people. Members of the original collective also talked about how important the focus on leadership by peo-

ple of colour was to the practice of the space. It was about “uplifting the projects and personal work of those [QTBIPOC] (Queer and Trans Black, Indigenous and people of colour) members, while realizing that there would be white people involved in the space and that there was a necessity for white people to make the space function” (Bran). The key was to keep the decision making in majority QTBIPOC hands, thinking that this would also help to avoid tokenism, and the potential take over of the space by white people.

This organizational structure was also about resisting assimilation and cooptation. While the people that used the space and the kinds of activities that happened there went through phases of flux, the organizing and decision making continued to be QTBIPOC lead throughout the duration of its tenure. This means that QTBIPOC people had control of the inner goings on of the space. Interviewees outside of the organizing collective made suggestions that the space became more white as time went on, but this was because the organizing collective had less of a public presence. It was also suggested that these claims “erased to work of the BIPOC folks who were the engine of the organization, and were based on a kind of politics of criticism where people wanted to show how hardline they were” (Bran). This means that by outsiders making sweeping statements about who they thought used the space, they were erasing the work on QTBIPOC folks who were doing the majority of the work to keep Ste Emilie running.

This politics of centering the space for people of shared identity and experience is related to a legacy of women-only, POC-only and other closed spaces meant to create safer environments for marginalized people. The application of this to an art space was important because it gave specific ways for marginalized people to access both art making and a community building. One person who used the space talked about visiting the

Skillshare as a place of refuge in Saint-Henri. They visited Ste Emilie as a place to “find art and to have a place to fully be [themselves], while navigating hostile streets where harassment or bashing were daily realities” (Disco). In addition, it wasn’t only the broader world that was unwelcoming to queer and trans people, but also scenes of punks who were rowdy and homophobic were not always spaces of safety despite being sub-cultural or alternative.

2.2 Skillshares, DIY, and Queer Community Institutions

The Ste Emilie Skillshare is a part of a lineage of community art spaces, info shops, social centres, and related places. One member noted that: “the idea came from somewhere, maybe somewhere in the US, to start a Skillshare” (Bran). The Skillshare model was developed in the US, connected to autonomous spaces and DIY, punk, and anti-establishment cultural movements. As a model, it is part of a legacy of autonomous spaces and social centres in Europe. The Ste Emilie Skillshare was a progression of these spaces, influenced by anti-oppression and identity politics of the early 2000s.



Poster for Ste Emilie Skillshare workshop series in 2009.

In the North American context, DIY, or Do-It-Yourself is largely connected with the punk subculture that followed 1960s radicalism, and to anarchist organizing. Within these sub-cultures an adherence to a DIY ethic is a rejection of capitalist market logics, and instead is meant to be a way of interrogating consumer culture through cultural production that refuses the normalized hierarchies of dominant culture such as hierarchy and imperialism, and is centered on the interests and desires of white, cis, hetero men (Culton and Holtzman, 2010). The concept of skillsharing emerged from DIY as a way to make and do things oneself, and without buying items from mainstream capitalist production that could potentially be oppressive and wasteful. Skillsharing is also about the exchange of ideas and experiences, to subvert the idea of authoritarian experts, and to use limited resources collectively (Hemphill and Leskowitz, 2016). DIY is also connected to women

and trans health movements that would distribute pamphlets on self examinations, learning about the body, and sexual health. These practices were about empowering people with knowledge about their own bodies as a way to take back control of the narratives about health and sexuality that were damaging and rooted in sexist and homophobic ideologies.

The DIY movement came to punk after many people involved with independent music scenes across North America adopted anti-capitalist and anti-establishment ideals. In doing so, they began to record their own music, produce albums and merchandise, promote and book their own shows, and create their own distribution networks (Anderson and Jenkins, 2001). A DIY performance venue often means that the location is either a community space or someone's home, where costs are low and the events are able to remain all ages, and where corporate or other profit-driven entities are not involved in any way (Climenzi and Wells, 2008). It became common that if a suitable venue could not be found because of lack of funds or because of cultural limitations, it was accepted and celebrated to open a private home to the event. In many cities across North America there are houses that are known venues, having been lived in and otherwise occupied by punks, queer and trans people, and other radicals. These houses have become known among these DIY networks, much like Ste Emilie was a known space before it was an art space.

The Ste Emilie Skillshare applied these concepts of DIY to arts and cultural production beyond music. Zines, screenprinting, photography, and social events like dance parties are the kind of activities that embody the DIY ethic. Having a space that was also a production studio for art and other cultural work that was subverting paradigms, sharing

information about queer and trans resistance, culture, and resilience is an important part of these spaces in general, one that Ste Emilie continued.

Ste Emilie was also a part of queering the DIY ethic. Beyond a surface attempt at “doing it yourself,” a queer analysis of DIY recognizes that power is still at work in these subcultural spaces. Queering DIY meant addressing the structures of social power that even with a collective governance structure will fall back on hierarchies. By centering Queer and Trans Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour, the space was making an attempt to bring clarity and accountability to the way this power plays out in group dynamics. Where skillsharing was seen as countering a culture of professionalism and experts – many of whom are also white, men, and have other dominant identities – Ste Emilie’s moves for collective liberation through cultural production were about recognizing the expertise and skill level of members of marginalized communities. As one interviewee stated, “DIY made me feel legitimized after being rejected from other more mainstream spaces, but then I just wanted DIY, like the lack of pressure from funders and the whole tone and atmosphere were way more relatable to me and accessible, I felt like I had a fighting chance to be there” (Disco).

The connection to this lineage while still being an important intervention into DIY politics is clear in the guiding principles of Ste Emilie:

This mission is founded on the understanding that our experiences of (capitalism/poverty), racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia are interlinked. They work to undermine the strength, skills and knowledge within our communities. Having access to resources, skills and spaces helps us to combat these political, economic and social realities. As we learn from and teach each other, we acknowledge how we may be complicit in each other’s oppression in order to develop stronger, more accountable communities. We also equip ourselves to reclaim our images through self-representation from a dominant culture that often times appropriates, digests and serves to us cold that which we hold most dear.

We are a part of a community of powerful individuals that defend who and what we love. We want to help it grow stronger. (Ste Emilie, 2007)

The way the space operated is one part of how Ste Emilie emerged as a community institution of politically engaged art in St-Henri. A large part of the work that happened at the space also focused on the types of art being made. Using media connected to DIY and underground ways of disseminating ideas, Ste Emilie became a hub for both making and distributing radical, queer, and otherwise politicized art and media.

Ste Emilie also became a community institution through a lot of unpaid labour. The people who started the space and were otherwise involved in it poured countless hours of time into the physical and cultural infrastructure of the space, into programming, into making things work. This is also a part of queer space. Gavin Brown (2008) has noted this in his writing about queer autonomous space:

for the most part... my experience of these queer spaces is that a small group of people will take responsibility for ensuring that something they are interested in, or that they recognize is essential, takes place. After that, the success or failure of the space largely relies on who turns up and the part they play in making the space 'work' (p. 153).

This is a key part of how these small institutions flourish: there is not space for marginalized people in the mainstream institutions, and so alternative spaces are created that cater to those specific needs. Often, the reward is in the creative work and community building, but very little monetary reward comes to those working on these organizations.

This in itself part of countering the logic of gentrification. Instead of investing in property or something that could be lucrative, the only goal of a space like Ste Emilie was providing resources to marginalized people. None of the interviewees spoke about a

potential to make money or to be able to move to a model where members could see a return on an investment in the space. The reward was in the relationships made, the ability to produce creative work, to have parties, to celebrate resistance and resilience. Although this is a romantic view, it is part of understanding the relationship of the space to other gentrifying forces that were investing in art and artists in St-Henri in order to see an aestheticizing of the neighbourhood, or to have other returns on cultural investment. Ste Emilie never received that kind of investment, nor sought it. Instead posters that stated “gaylords not landlords” and “condoms not condos” decorated the walls, as well as the surrounding streets.

It is important to note that Ste Emilie was not functioning on its own or in a vacuum. It was part of a handful of community institutions that popped up in the Southwest during the period of the mid 2000s until around 2014. Other DIY spaces that were collectively run include the Death Church: a repurposed church that was home to 12 or so people, had a large venue space, and included a tattoo studio, music practice space, and hosted a variety of events (Winter). The Decadent Squalor, also located in Saint Henri and only a short walk away, had a basement space that was used for band practices and shows, dance parties and other events (Winter). It was also a known queer punk space, that had an organizing collective and a set of guiding principles about who could play at the venues and how shows would operate in the space. The Walking Distance Distro (abbreviated for distribution or distributor), was not a space but was a community institute that collected, made copies, and distributed zines and small art works in St-Henri. They also consistently held events to fund their work at Ste Emilie and the Decadent Squalor.

2.3 Autonomous Creative Space



This poster is for an art show in the Ste Emilie gallery space that was in partnership with the Justseeds Artists' Cooperative, a decentralized network of artists committed to social, environmental, and political engagement.

Queer space is often shifting and unstable. For example, queer dance parties might happen at a space not normally designated queer, but the way the event is put on, what kind of people it brings together, the goal of the event (such as being a fundraiser or celebrating a historical event) designate it queer through the intention of the space and how it is produced. Outside of the party, the space may not be known to have dance parties or queer specific events, and the dance party may never use the same space again. These

ephemeral spaces have a long history of being hidden purposely for survival, as queerness was and continues to be unwelcome in many places. Queerness is still non-normative, and as much as battles for the acceptance of queer relationships have progressed, queer is still seen as an exception to a norm, however tolerated or accepted (Ghaziani, 2014). As queer space has struggled to exist, it has morphed, shifted, and even disappeared, and relied on the manufacturing of temporary physical space that can exist between or outside of ordered and surveilled capitalist norms.

In anti-authoritarian organizing, this kind of space is sometimes called a temporary autonomous zone. A temporary autonomous zone is a space that circumvents conventional control - however short term - and attempts to counter hierarchies, power relations and other forces of capitalism (Bey, 1991). Temporary autonomous space is created through intention, from how decisions are made about how the space will be governed, to what kind of activities happen there. From its inception, Ste Emilie was planned to be a space that offered an alternative to mainstream LGBT and art spaces, one that considered and attempted to ameliorate oppression and create something that met the needs of marginalized people. The space was also not planned as an institution that would exist in perpetuity, instead it was a coming together of people when an opportunity arose through an available space. It was a chance to make an autonomous art zone through creating a queer space that was distinct from mainstream LGBT organizing and also from mainstream art (Bran, Disco, Allie).

Temporary autonomous zones can have particular goals about the social production of the space that are defined against urban development and the pressures of the

white spatial imaginary. These centres often remain as hold outs as the rest of a neighbourhood is transformed around them. While European Social Centres are where much of the writing about autonomous zones has been applied, there are many examples in Canada and the US that provide a helpful context to locate Ste Emilie in the tradition of these spaces. ABC No Rio in New York's Lower East Side is one of these. Founded in 1980, the ABC No Rio continues to be a community center for the Lower East Side of Manhattan, as well as a center of radical activism in New York City, promoting "do-it-yourself volunteerism, art, and activism, without giving-in or selling-out to corporate sponsors" (ABC No Rio). The space began as an art gallery and venue space, and its longest running project is a punk hardcore collective that hosts an all ages matinée music show every Saturday (Law, 2015). They have several other projects, and similar to Ste Emilie, house a zine library, screen printing facilities, and a darkroom for film processing and photo printing. They also host a variety of community events and projects. One of the most visible ways that the ABC No Rio attempted to create autonomous space was through their music policy. Bands who wish to play the space are required to submit their lyrics and a recording to the booking collective before they are accepted to play the space. This is because the venue has a strict no tolerance policy towards racist, sexist, homophobic or other oppressive lyrics or behaviour at their shows. This began in the 1980s, when most of the hardcore punk scenes in New York and California had right leaning politics and the shows were often violent (Law, 2015). The policies of many DIY punk venues that seek to combat oppressive politics have continued to the present day.

While these autonomous spaces were against hierarchy and social control, issues like homophobia or racism were often not explicitly named as the forms of discrimination

that are central to social domination. This form of autonomous space is part of building a prefigurative politics on utopian ideals. The application of autonomous space theory to marginalized people is through closed spaces for people of similar identities or experiences to gather. For example, queer meet ups for people to talk about their experiences living in a heterosexist world, or people of colour only spaces, for racialized people to be able to exist together outside of the mainstream stereotypes that permeate their every day lives (Blackwell, 2018). In recent years, events have come together to take up the traditions of DIY, punk, and autonomous space while making identity an explicit part of countering domination. This started with events like Ladyfest festivals, which happened all over the world, and combined music, workshops, panels, and other activities to bring people together to think about culture and gender. There are also events like Fed Up Fest, a queer and trans punk festival in Chicago, that held three days of performances and also included workshops and discussion panels on issues like police brutality and the history of the Black Panthers, and The Universe is Lit: A Bay Area Black and Brown Fest, which was held over four days and included bands, djs, performance artists, and local vendors.

Following the tradition of using cultural events to prioritize marginalized people and create autonomous space, Ste Emilie hosted a “Queer Black Punk Show” in 2008, that was open to Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour only. The show featured Black musicians, and attempted to make space and a statement about the ways that subcultures, like punk, were exclusionary and racist. A write up for the event stated:

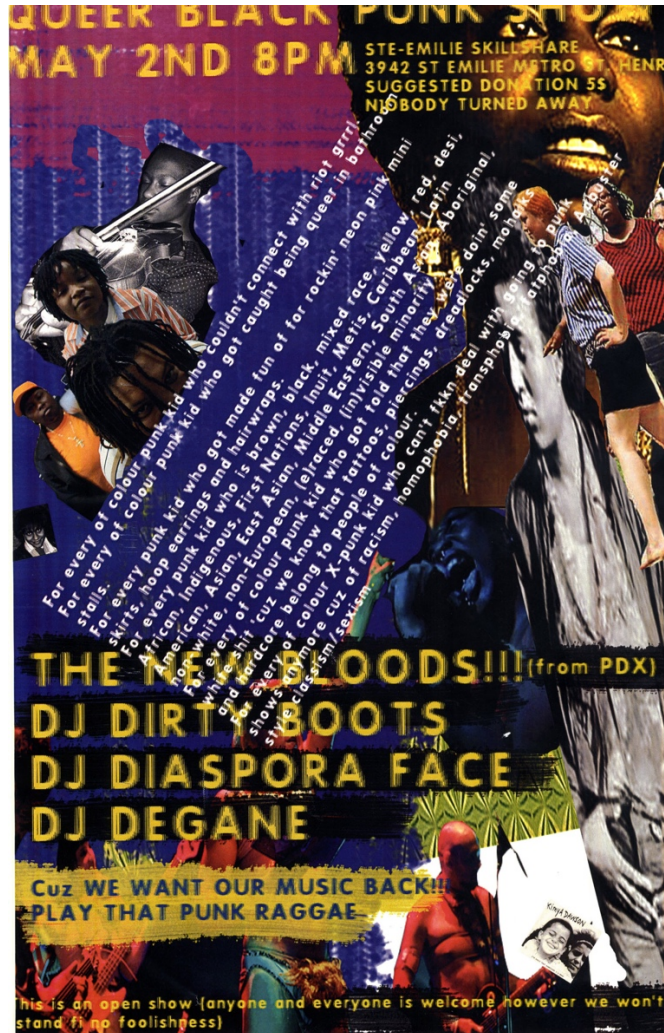
For every of colour punk kid who couldn't connect with riot grrrl.
For every of colour punk kid who got caught being queer in bathroom stalls.
For every punk kid who got made fun of for rockin' neon pink mini skirts, hoop earrings and hairwraps.

For every punk kid who is brown, black, mixed race, yellow, red, desi, African Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, Métis, Caribbean, Latin American, Asian, East Asian, Middle eastern, South Asian, Aboriginal, non-white, non-European, (e)raced, (in)visible minority.

For every of colour punk kid who got told they were doing some white shit... cuz we know that tattoos, piercings, dreadlocks, mohawks and hardcore belong to people of colour.

For every of colour ex-punk kid who can't fkkn deal with going to punk shows anymore cuz of racism, homophobia, transphobia, fatphobia, Adbuster style classism/sexism (2008, write up from poster).

The show created some push back from white punks, some interviewees even saying that the white punks were angry with them, and that the hostility proved exactly why this kind of event was necessary. Bran said: "We didn't overlap that much with the punks. It was a little animosity and a little we were shy and awkward. We lived next to them, but we were territorial about our space. We were explicitly against white scenes, so we weren't that welcoming to white punks in the space." The Queer Black Punk Show is an example of how Ste Emilie practiced autonomy through both the actions of the space and through social relations. As Gibson-Graham (2006) have suggested, creative experimenting with alternatives in the present, rather than slipping into a "nihilist stupor or postponing all dreams until after the revolution" is a practice of collective autonomy.



Poster for the Queer Black Punk Show at Ste Emilie Skillshare.

Other examples of collective autonomy included “POClucks” (potluck meals for BIPOC people to gather around food to support each other), creating space for queer and trans people to make art work and develop campaigns and actions, and to make space for people to be queer without threat of violence. These aspects of the programming at the space were a chance to put into action the politics the collective members identified with and felt strongly about, while also creating social relationships built on those politics.

Gavin Brown (2007) asserts that “Autonomy’s refusals are acts of creation. Where other anti-capitalist political traditions have bogged themselves down in polemic, critique and endless analysis, autonomy creates the tools and strategies for changing the world through its creative experimentation” (p. 1325). Here Brown is referring to Queeruption, a queer festival that took place annually at several different international locations between 1999 and 2017 (Brown, 2007; Vaneslander, 2007). Queeruption is one example of a queered autonomous space that was formed as an act of creation, as Brown suggests. Ste Emilie was also an act of creation, one that queered the traditions of temporary autonomous zones and further applied an intersectional analysis. It was the creation of a space that was temporary in its relief from hierarchical structures, as well as being temporary in its existence. It could never be something that lasted forever, at least not physically. This is not only because of the nature of queer and autonomous space, but also because of the reality of the conditions of gentrification in St-Henri. Eviction was always a looming threat, especially as the commercial corridor on Notre-Dame Street was experiencing changes in the businesses housed there, as well as new building developments that were springing up around the neighbourhood (Twigge-Molecey, 2009).

Ste Emilie was autonomous in several ways from mainstream LGBT spaces in that it insisted on centering these marginalized people, work, and activities. It was also autonomous from other subcultural spaces that failed to consider marginalization even as they attempted to make a space away from the dominant culture. Ste Emilie wasn’t about making art by marginalized people more accessible to a mainstream audience, nor did it seek to participate in a parallel way to those mainstream standards and conventions. In-

stead, the space was an alternative in the way things were created and the way information and resources were dispersed, shared, understood. In this way, as Brown (2006) suggests, the process of collective experimentation to build autonomous queer spaces is ultimately more transformative and empowering than the resulting structures.

2.4 Zines, Art and Alternative Medias

The kinds of media produced at Ste Emilie are connected to DIY cultural production, and to subverting mainstream art and LGBT organizations. Alternative medias and ephemera were produced in many ways, mostly in “small studios that were once bedrooms, and with a messiness that rejected the kind of perfection and professionalism related to high art” (Allie). This rejection of professionalism defined Ste Emilie and shaped the kinds of media that were produced there.



The zine disto at Ste Emilie Skillshare.

Zines and the zine library were a foundational part of the Ste Emilie Skillshare. Zines are self-published works on paper, motivated by the need or desire for self expression and creative control, and not driven by profit (Barnard College Zine Library, 2005). These self-published works rose to prominence in the 1990s with a flourishing of independent media in response to corporate media outlets. Despite the pressure of online publications with the rise of the internet, they remain an important tool in self publishing and the dissemination of marginalized ideas.

The zine library connected Ste Emilie to a network of people across north America, and even the world, that are part of their own publishing world, where small photocopied books are bought, sold, and exchanged. Some of these have become more established writers or worked with small independent or larger publishing companies. The zine

library at Ste Emilie was also a distro - a distribution centre. The space was disseminating information and supporting other people getting their work to a broader audience, as well as archiving these pieces of queer history. A zine library can be a way of accessing a whole world that is not easy to find in other spaces, even the public library. The zine library and Ste Emilie itself became a window for some to learn about radical politics, to become politicized, to explore their identity and experiences, and also find a place to be themselves. Many interviewees recounted that ways that zines made in St-Henri and from all over the world circulated through the space, connected folks to ideas beyond the southwest and the city of Montréal (Finn, Deirdre, Disco, Jesse). One person said that they were “thrilled by the archive of things there: issues of *Doris*², or coming across a zine made by friends from Toronto or Halifax, getting to read about people from other places and what was going on there” (Disco). Well known zines in the DIY publishing world would be available at the library, as well as smaller publications only known about through local social circles.

Zines weren't the only kind of media produced through Ste Emilie. The screenprinting studio was a very active part of the space, “producing pamphlets, flyers, posters, t-shirts, and covers for zines” (Finn). Members of the space made work there, as well as people who accessed the studio during open hours. The production of goods for other groups was also a part of the screenprinting studio, mostly for non-profits and activist organizations that needed materials for programs or campaigns.

Screenprinting has long been a mainstay in DIY arts. This is because of its “reproducibility, low cost, and potential for graphic expressiveness... [which makes it] an ideal

² *Doris* is a zine produced by Cindy Crabb and is well known for bringing attention to sexual assault and consent issues, gender, abuse, anarchism, as well as personal issues.

way to voice opposition” (Caplow, 2009, p. 12). This sentiment was echoed by those involved with Ste Emilie who suggested that the prints they made were part of a history of socially engaged art (Bran, Finn). Screenprinting is also often not afforded the status of other traditional high art forms like painting or sculpture, and generally does not have high market value (Caplow, 2009). The iconic Mai 68 posters from the student strikes in Paris were screen printed in the occupied art school, Les Ecole des Beaux-Arts (MacPhee, 2007). A Sidetracks member recalled printing varieties of materials, including “posters announcing anti-colonial carnivals, queer dance parties, punk shows, and youth arts programs” (Deirdre). She continued, “Many of us also just printed our own weird work: either covers for zines, or packaging for our bands' tapes, or just weird art we wanted to make to give friends or put up somewhere” (Deirdre).



Posters and zine covers printed at Ste-Emile up on the wall of the screenprinting studio.

Screenprinting was also an ideal art form for the Ste Emile Skillshare because it is easy to learn. As one member said “It is an uncomplicated process that doesn't require a lot of toxic chemicals, and it is also easy to get the things you need, like emulsion and ink, especially if we got a large amount for the space to share” (Allie). Screenprinting is a skill that is easy to pass on to others, and this fit the mandate of making art making accessible and empowering. As more people were able to learn to screenprint, more members and participants at Ste Emile were able to create work and share it.

Screenprinting was one of the major art skills that was initially part of Ste Emile. Finn stated that they “learned how to screen print from Xavier, really all of us learned to

screen print from them.” Xavier³ was a key founding member who was cited by interviewees as someone who had the skills and experience with screenprinting that became the basis for much of the artwork that came out of Ste Emilie. Learning how to screenprint “felt like a revolution, because suddenly we could make whatever we wanted and make a lot of them for relatively cheap” (Disco). At least a few people also mentioned that having access to the studio was a way to create work to make money. As Deirdre noted: “I made a lot of t-shirts and posters there which was so necessary when I was really broke.” Another person mentioned that “being able to screen print covers for my zines was a really nice addition, and I even made patches one year for Queer Between the Covers” (Allie).

The screenprinting studio was so busy that it had its own offshoot organizing collective, called Sidetracks. They maintained the open screenprinting studio hours for the public to use, printed materials for other groups, and taught screenprinting workshops to new volunteers and other people who wanted to learn about this form of printmaking. Members of Sidetracks also taught workshops off site for community groups. Sidetracks was a major driver in the organization, keeping it open and making Ste Emilie a name outside of the social circles it originated in. They also produced materials to sell as fundraisers for the space. Often Ste Emilie and Sidetracks would table at “the Anarchist Bookfair, at Queer Between the Covers, at Expozine, any place we could sell some stuff and also do outreach” (Finn).

2.5 Conclusion

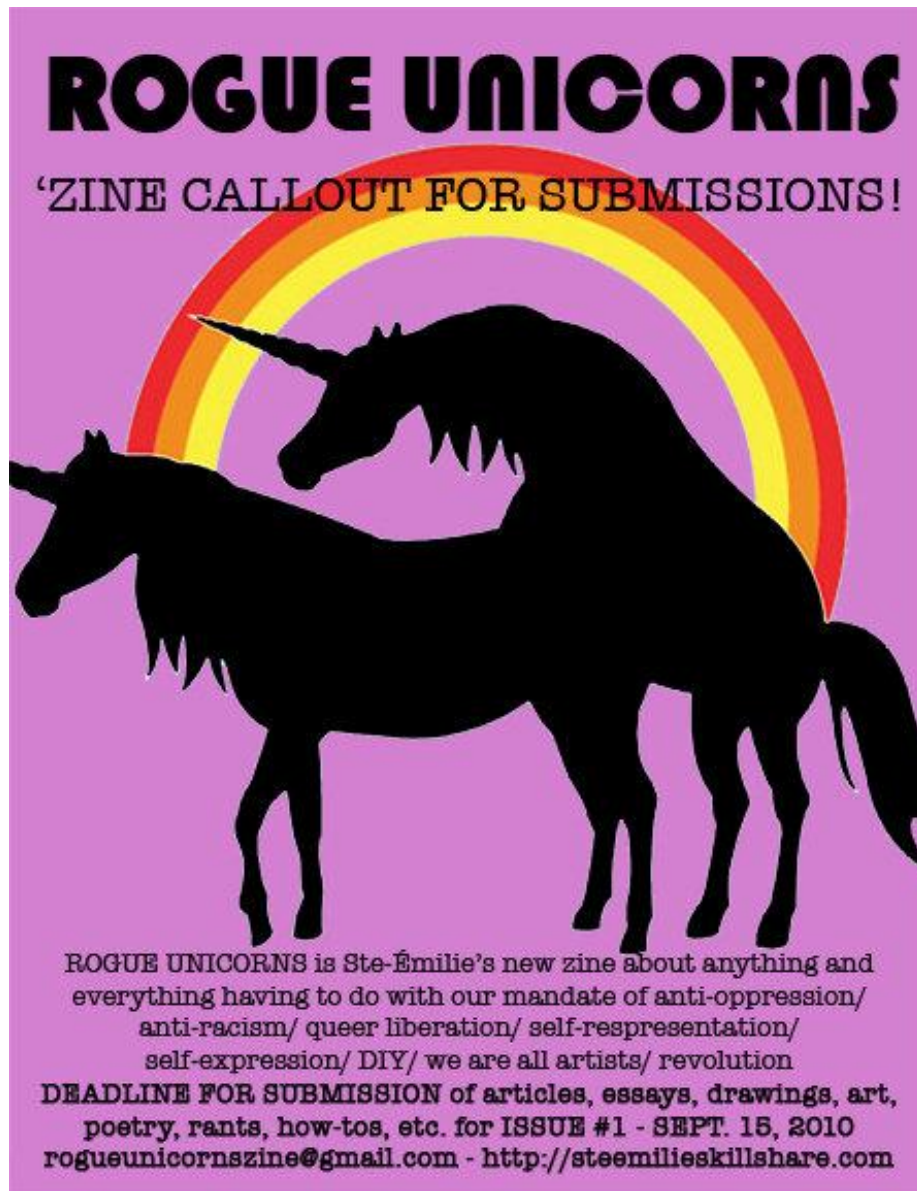
³ Name changed for anonymity

This chapter demonstrated how Ste Emilie was a queer space that was connected to a legacy of DIY, punk, queer, and autonomous organizing. This is clear in the origins of the organization, as it was formed out of connections made through activism, and was housed in a former apartment that had long been a hub of queer organizing. The kind of media produced at the space, namely zines and screenprinted art, were part of the kind of activist-art culture of the people who were involved there. The ways that the space was organized also reflected the way that they sought to counter the forces of gentrification. Maintaining a majority BIPOC organizing collective, and prioritizing politicized messages on all of their flyers, posters, and other outreach materials was a way that the space hoped to ensure that their mission of collective liberation and self representation was maintained and promoted, and would not be watered down or endangered by shifting demographics of people who came to open hours, participated in workshops or otherwise used the space in a non-decision making capacity. This way the power of the organization remained in control of queer and trans people who were the most marginalized, and ensured the core purpose of the space, of being against capitalism and oppression, would remain a focus.

This chapter also provides a basis for understanding how the artists at Ste Emilie were different than artists that are discussed in the gentrification literature. They don't fit the image of artists and urban redevelopment because of the way they organized themselves and the types of art they created. The bodies and practices of these artists don't further gentrification, and they present a potential interruption of it. This is because they don't fit a normative urban imaginary that gentrification seeks to produce and enforce. In

the next chapter I'll take up the idea of "the artist" as idealized through this normative urban imaginary, thinking about who does fit this imaginary and why the artists at Ste Emi-lie do not.

3: Rogue Unicorns



This chapter questions at the concept of “the artist” in gentrification narratives. It also investigates the relationship of Ste Emilie to other LGBT organizations, and what distinctions there are between the queer and queered art and activism of Ste Emilie vis-à-vis mainstream LGBT movement building. I review some of the campaigns and events at the

space, and what communities they supported. These show the connections of Ste Emilie to activism within St-Henri and beyond, and reveal the connections of the space to broader organizing for community goals. I look at the failure of mainstream Pride events to consider other forms of marginalization in their work, and why Ste Emilie was committed to BIPOC centered organizing within a queer framework. Finally, I explore the concept of queer art. I investigate what makes art queer. Where did queer art come from? How is Ste Emilie connected to a legacy of queer art makers?

This chapter connects the work of Ste Emilie discussion in the first chapter to how the space and the artists involved there related to other art and LGBT organizing, and how that was reflective of their resistance to assimilation into homonormativity. This chapter also lays the foundations for later explorations of how the artists at Ste Emilie disrupt the narratives about artists as the first wave of gentrification by positioning the space as a possible alternative. Ste Emilie was a space committed to making art in the spirit of revolution, and that was not part of the city or developer branding of the space or a normative urban imaginary. Therefore, these artists are against gentrification and provide a case for a new analysis of gentrification that can be understood as enforcing a normative urban imaginary, one that Ste Emilie did not fit. The artists involved with Ste Emilie provide an example of artists who were autonomous from mainstream art and mainstream LGBT organizations, and who resisted gentrification through building a queer critique of urban redevelopment through their anti-capitalist politics.

3.1 Actions, Campaigns and other Troublemaking

“We did... try to set up events to gather ‘trouble makers’ together to meet each other, and have skillshares where people learned how to make stuff that they could use to cause trouble (posters or self publishing or even self defense classes), get food and water for demos and use our networks and spaces to alert people to issues in the neighborhood, etc. Through these activities, we hoped to contribute to the already emerging culture of resistance in the neighborhood.” (Shanna, 2017)

Examining the kinds of activities, campaigns, events and other work of the skillshare assists in understanding the ways that autonomous space and queer art making were part of building a culture of resistance and resilience in St-Henri and more broadly in queer organizing in Montréal. These campaigns and collaborations also demonstrate the ways that Ste Emilie was working with other LGBTQ2S groups and other arts organizations and in what capacity. Bran stated,

many of us were very interested in helping people make art, either people in our community or groups we were connected to. Youth were involved in some of the projects, and we also made work for groups we were connected to. Groups in Little Burgundy and NDG.

Finn adds,

we were excited about community work or outreach, even if we weren't entirely sure what that looked like. People were really into working with youth, especially queer and trans youth and youth of colour. We wanted to help out young folks in a way we might not have had in our lives.

Ste Emilie partnered with these other groups to make space for radical or marginalized voices within these organizations. These partnerships were sometimes more explicit in their political alliances or ideology, and other times, the group participated in more mainstream events, but sought to make space within them for marginalized people.

Collaboration was central to how Ste Emilie operated. Building alliances with other organizations or artists was a key part of making space for exchange between queer, trans, BIPOC and activists who were using creative ways to build community and to make connections in activism. Bran said:

The collaborations and working on shared projects is one of the most tangible things I was involved in. We worked with QTeam, The Alfie Roberts Institute, we did a fundraiser and art auction for the Native Women's Shelter, which was called Haven, we screened Mira Soleil Ross's films and had her in attendance, we worked with Head and Hands a lot, the young parents program...

These connections show that Ste Emilie, as a community arts space, was working in a different way than other kinds of art galleries or creative industries. One group that Ste Emilie partnered with was Q-Team, a radical queer collective committed to “anti-imperialism, anti-racism, short shorts, queering activist spaces and politicizing queer spaces, the downfall of single-issue politics, raging pervy queer dance parties, destroying all prisons, opening all borders, burning pink dollar\$, and keeping on keeping on” (QPIRG, 2011). Clearly distinct from other LBGT organizing, the group was also a QPIRG working group and partnered or shared members with Ste Emilie. Another partner was the Alfie Roberts Institute, a Montréal based non-profit that seeks to “provide a critical voice for change within African and Caribbean communities” (Alfie Roberts, 2019). Through independent research, education, and community programming, the Institute engaged the African and Caribbean diaspora in Montréal. Ste Emilie members created partnerships with

this organization to work “directly with our own communities and other Black and Brown folks” (Bran). Another partner was the Native Women’s Shelter, that with an Indigenous framework to “provide a safe environment to women to rebuild their lives” (NWSM, 2017). Ste Emilie used art as a fundraiser for the space as well as being involved in programming. This kind of alliance is not usually found in mainstream art spaces, and Ste Emilie members talked about these relationships as being foundational to how they operated, and what set them apart from other art spaces like galleries or museums.

In addition to these partnerships, Ste Emilie was also involved with Pever/Cité, an alternative pride that is in contrast to Diver/Cité, the mainstream Pride organizing and events. Pervers/cité is a play on Divers/Cité, a now defunct queer arts and music festival that used to run along with the Montréal Pride event Fierté before folding in 2015. Divers/Cité was bred as a reaction to the 1990 police raid of Montréal venue Sex Garage, often called "Montréal's Stonewall" (Divers/Cité). Pervers/cité organizers say that they built on core tenets of anti-capitalism and queer cultural and social emancipation, and attempt to make the event a platform through which queer cultural and social evolution can occur, on terms established by our communities (Ross, 2017). As Divers/cite and Pride gained corporate support and were perceived to have less accountability to the history of queer struggle for human rights that they were born from, the Pervers/cité organizers identified a need for a community response to the de-politicization of Pride. As Allie suggested “Pervers/cité started as a coalition of queers who wanted to put on workshops, panel discussions, and actions at the same time as Divers/cite so there would be a commentary about the gaystream.” As the Pervers/cité website suggests, “The aim of

[Pervers/cité] is to address issues normally pushed to the margins by the mainstream gay agenda. Since 2007” (Pervers/cité).

The politics of Ste Emilie were also clear in the kinds of cultural production produced there. One member of the space was involved in curating and editing a zine called “Nailbiter, a zine about anxiety.” For the first and second edition, the launch of the zine was held at Ste Emilie. As Finn explained, the purpose of the Nailbiter zine was:

to share stories about anxiety and hope to soften the blows and foster support in our communities. We wanted to bring out in the open these struggles that are often so private. we wanted to bring up honest questions about how anxiety feels to us, how people deal and what we can do to support ourselves and each other.

Part of this zine was about queering support, and to draw on, strengthen, and make space for personal experiences of anxiety and trauma in queer, trans, and BIPOC communities. It was a collection of queer vulnerability and resilience that was handmade by members of Ste Emilie in the space.

Ste Emilie’s Sidetracks screenprinting collective did work for many local non-profits and activist groups, including Head and Hands. H&H is a youth support organization that works with youth to promote their physical and mental well-being. The screenprinting collective also partnered with the LGBTQ2S+ youth centre, P-10, to produce OUTwords, a collaborative photo voice project with queer spectrum youth. Other projects include the art zine titled “Unicorn Heroes on the Wrong Side of the Tracks,” made by Sidetracks volunteers; screenprinting workshops with youth at the annual NDG Art Walk, and partnerships with another local zine distro, called Fight Boredom, that hosted queer and trans writers in a residency in their home, a shared collective house named Full Homo.

In addition to these partnerships, the space also made clear its politics and intentions by hosting and promoting DIY queer dance parties, punk shows, and of course, skillsharing. Ste Emilie was supporting the creation of a culture that was actively against capitalism, and actively against assimilation. In reviewing the archives of the group, almost every poster produced featured the mandate. Additionally, they maintained a POC caucus, this was to ensure that those most marginalized by anti-queer and anti-trans violence and erasure were decision makers and in control of the direction of the space. This caucus also hosted POC-lucks, pot luck meals for BIPOC folks to meet and share a meal in a safer space to be themselves with less exposure to white people and white supremacy. This kind of politicization of their work meant that there was less investment in gaining cultural capital or economic capital. Instead they were investing in their community, and each other.

3.2 Queering “the Artist”

the ste emilie skillshare

3942 ste emilie
metro place st. henri

NEWS FLASH:
ste emilie is AMAZING!!!

the ste emilie skillshare is a group of artists & activists (primarily ppl of colour + queens) committed to promoting artistic expression & self representation in our community. The collective work we do allows for people to learn new skills, hone skills + create art in the spirit of reciprocity & mutual appreciation! we welcome volunteers + new collectors! number: 514-933-2573

to get on our super-cool low-traffic mailing list:
514-933-2573
mtlskillshare@gmail.com

to learn so much about us:
steemilie.com

BUST OUT YER SKILLZ version 3.000!!!
FALL 2008 PROGRAMMING

- oct 9- university of the streets
- oct 11- opening day of fall workshops!
-corn roast
-sound editing workshop
- oct 12- silkscreening 101(\$10-20)
- oct 18- buttonmaking!
- oct 19- intro 2 b&w darkroom (\$10)
- oct 25- felting workshop (\$5)
- oct 26- sewing machine workshop
- nov 1- pinhole camera workshop (\$5) bilingue!
- nov 2- intro 2 b&w darkroom (\$5-10)
- nov 7- art auction for tyendinaga
- nov 8- super 8 pt. 1 (\$10)
- nov 9- silkscreening 101 (\$10-20)
- nov 15- intro 2 bookbinding (\$5)
- nov 16- sewing machine workshop
- nov 22- super 8 pt. 2 (\$10)
- nov 23- silkscreening 101 (\$10-20)
- nov 29- intro 2 pottery (\$5)
- nov 30- intro 2 b&w darkroom (\$5-10)

long live skillsharing!

fall workshop low-down

- core workshops (silkscreen, photo & sewing) run on sundays from 1-4pm
- all other workshops happen during open studio saturdays & start at 2pm
- each workshop has a suggested donation so we can keep emilie running. PWYC. no one will be turned away.
- some workshops have a max # of participants. try to RSVP
- all workshops are given in english unless stated otherwise.

APIRG
community
action

Fall 2006 programming poster/flyer for Ste Emilie.

Much of the literature on gentrification and artists positions “the artist” as a person who desires low cost housing in cities, has low economic capital but high cultural capital, and is able to leverage that cultural capital through their aesthetic work to valorize the neighbourhoods they live in (Ley, 2006). This conceptualization of “the artist” relies on the assumed appropriation of their creative work by market forces, to support urban redevelopment (Harvey, 2002). Unpacking this understanding of “the artist” requires interrogating its connection to whiteness. An artist that has low economic capital and high social capital and can benefit from gentrification is often bolstered by whiteness. The ability to transcend social and economic class, despite being in a field not known for its lucrative rewards, rests on the value and privilege of whiteness. This is because the elements of the white spatial imaginary that shape urban space are also at work in the art world. White

artists can make work of high formalism or abstraction, and their work is seen as transcending everyday life. Artists that whose work supports gentrification benefit from the social capital of white supremacy that values these white voices and white aesthetics. This is because white experiences are positioned as a neutral standard, which is reinforced through white supremacy that sees the work of Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Colour as mired in cultural signifiers that are in relation to this cultural norm (Musson, 2010).

The notion of “the artist” also requires a queer analysis. This is because a normative urban imaginary relies on heteronormativity and the gender binary as a perceived natural sexuality and gender system. These forces structure who is and is not considered a productive cultural worker in the process of gentrification. These queered artists also often make work that speaks to their personal identities and experiences, which can be dismissed in the mainstream or commercial art world. Art that speaks to the lived experiences of marginalized people is seen as politicized, not universal as that of the conceptual work made that avoids these issues (Musson, 2010). Queer and trans artists who position themselves in opposition to capitalism, and therefore, gentrification, do not fit the definition of “the artist” as has existed in the literature about gentrification.

The contestation about who and what an artist is is central to understanding the dynamics of the Ste Emilie project in relationship to gentrification. Throughout the interviews people explained that they didn’t feel they could claim being artists because of the way the word and title “evokes a particular aesthetic,” (Deirdre) and an “engagement with the art market” (Finn). Additionally, people involved with Ste Emilie lacked the access of “artists” to legitimizing institutions, many of which are also part of capitalist

frameworks of understanding value in art. “The artist” is defined by these institutions of power brokers and taste makers that create a narrow definition of what art is of value or what work counts as art. These institutions include the schools, museums, and galleries that are the power brokers of culture (Deutsche, 1996). As marginalized people, the artists of Ste Emilie faced barriers to becoming these kinds of artists. Instead, and because of their politics, they made work to counter and critique exclusive, rigid, and problematic art worlds as well as how those exclusionary social forces were at work everywhere in their worlds.

Beyond identity and personal experience, the analysis that came through in interviews spoke to broader collective questions of the responsibility to a neighbourhood, to a history or heritage, and to youth. The Ste Emilie artists were mostly folks who were interested in community work, and, I would say, the disruption of normative narratives. This is where the art they made comes into contest with gentrification. The work they were doing wasn't so easily taken up for capitalist transformation of space because it was explicit in its contestation of the forces that produced gentrification like class inequality, criminalization of the poor, queer and trans discrimination, and violence directed towards people of colour.

In her work about gentrification of New York City, Sarah Schulman (2011) states that cities had vibrant art scenes before there was a connection between creative work and patterns of real estate values increasing. Urban artists were often queer, trans, Black, People of Colour, and were “freaky, faggy, outrageous, community-based, [and] dangerous” (2011, p. 101). These particular artists, marginalized by identity, experience, and seen as outlaws, were not as easily adopted into New York City redevelopment plans as agents of

gentrification. These people, like many of those who were part of Ste-Emile, saw their communities and spaces under attack by gentrification. Often their work about their experiences as queer or Black were dismissed by art institutions. These artists also lacked a connection to the professionalized paths of those associated with the art world of museums and commercial galleries.

The professionalized artists that are agents and potentially, proponents, of gentrification are also often white, raised middle class, and have MFA degrees (Schulman, 2011). This means that these artists are a professional class of white people that derive their value in the market through creative work, but they are also poised to profit from other parts of capitalism: a history of uneven development, racist housing and land use policies, and other oppressive conditions. These people are artists, but they are not the only artists that exist and, I am suggesting, there are important differentiations to make when considering the role of artists in gentrification.

These privileged kinds of artists are documented in city histories as part of shifts in urban demographics during redevelopment. One of these noted shifts is the return of white professionals to city cores, brought upon by cultural and economic changes, that include the reinvestment of capital into cities (N Smith, 1979). Another is the redefinition of artistic work as work by “creative,” which includes those with more power over the aestheticization of space like architects, graphic designers, and other affiliated professionals. Additionally, the art market greatly expanded, and became linked with global financial flows, while being increasingly professionalized as a career through the expansion of MFA programs (Moskowitz, 2017; Schulman, 2011). This professionalization of art is what Schulman calls a “gentrification of creation,” where artists move to cities wanting to

compete in an art market that they learned to exist in through MFA programs that train artists to monetize their work to be productive in capitalism. Schulman also suggests that these MFA programs favour people that are adapted and successful in the capitalist framework, which often means the programs select people based on social hierarchies. Marginalized people and their aesthetics face barriers to being accredited through these institutions since MFA programs often reinforce the aesthetics of a normative urban imaginary which in turn are put to work in urban redevelopment plans.

This idea was reflected in the interviews with Ste Emilie affiliated people as they often said they were activists before artists. Many suggested that they identified as such to create a delineation between the work they were doing and the work they saw of other artists engaged with capitalism and gentrification. Allie said “we knew people were making it by being artists, or throwing cool parties, but we didn’t want into that. I guess partly because we didn’t want to sell out or whatever...” Ste Emilie artists forefronted their activism in order to make clear the intentions of their creative work. Interviewees also said they didn’t feel like they were artists because there was no space for them in the art world, referencing issues related to what Schulman and Moskowitz identified as the exclusionary culture of art institutions. In Disco’s interview, they remembered a turning point in thinking that they could possibly be an “artist” after seeing an exhibition of Will Munroe’s work. They stated:

I was at an opening at Eastern Bloc for Will Munroe and I thought, shit, I have nothing... But there is this way I could make something out of, like, old fucking underwear and thread that people might care about... and here it’s in a gallery, and it’s a whole world that didn’t exist before.

They could see their own experiences and aesthetic in the work of this queer activist-artist, shown at an artist-run centre, and that gave them the belief in their own work, and

their own community. Most importantly, Disco could see themselves as a queer artist, in work influenced by DIY, queer culture, and anti-capitalist organizing.

This statement by Disco also hints at the queer networks that build community institutions like Ste Emilie, rather than being organized to move towards professionalism or elitism of the above mentioned MFA artists. Queer community building was also an attempt to avoid cooptation and assimilation in relationship the work being made at Ste Emilie. Even when artists are not interested in working for the state or climbing social ladders for their own gains, it is possible that the work they make can be co-opted for these purposes. As Harvey (2009) suggests, it is one thing to be aesthetically transgressive, but another to resist market forces with cultural production. Every interviewee suggested that they attempted at all costs to keep their work from being co-opted, either through absurdity, perversity, or otherwise making it not something that could easily be used by gentrifiers to make St-Henri appealing to developers. They suggested that instead of simply trying to make space for activists or artists, they were using cultural production to build a culture of resistance. As Shana said:

we hoped to use the neighborhood as a site to confront capitalism as manifested in gentrification, the police, commercialism, and the general alienation of everyday life. Clearly, these were all romantic ambitions that in practice looked more like kids with bags of zines, but zine culture values romanticized rebellion in a way that can be, at times, inspiring.

Additionally, the people at Ste Emilie sought to distance themselves from the idea of artists as first wave gentrifying high cultural/low economic capital people who were also at work in redeveloping Montréal and in St-Henri. As Disco said: “I didn’t get the sense that we were going to be art stars. Some people became more capital A artists, but the space itself wasn’t trying to be part of the fancy art world, or whatever.” Bran added:

No way, no one was interested in that kind of thing. We wanted to make art accessible to people, especially QTPOC folks, and have a space to make things, I guess, on our terms. We were also scrappy activists who liked making things. I never considered myself an artist, I felt like I wanted a space like Ste Emilie and to support my friends who did make amazing things.

They wanted their work to be about creating art for self determination and collective liberation, and that separated themselves from the kind of work that didn't reflect this kind of engagement, and didn't involve some kind of commentary or dialogue about the role of artists and cultural producers in capitalism. Because of this, the use of art or creative work to support gentrification in urban space is not always a natural fit.

Redevelopment plans by the city valorize artistic work, and create plans, sometimes in partnership with property development firms, to designate “creative” districts and fund art and culture initiatives. These initiatives are meant to bolster economic activity, and to re-brand and market areas slated for redevelopment by the city. An important example of this in the city of Montréal is the municipal investment in the Mile End neighbourhood to designate it a cultural district. Mile End was formerly a manufacturing area with large garment factory buildings and residential blocks home to predominantly Southern and Eastern European Jewish immigrants, as well as Italian, Portuguese, and Greek migrants (Rantisi, 2013). The waves of immigration began in the early 20th century through to the 1980s, when Mile End attracted artists and others looking for cheap rent as other parts of the city became established (Rantisi, 2013). The former factories were also converted to studio space for artists and musicians. There is no doubt that there were parts of the neighbourhood that were made attractive to development by artists living and

working there. However, the city's redevelopment plans favoured and supported economically productive creative work: graphic design, game development, commercial gallery space, designer furniture and other types of merchants.

In her work about artists and gentrification in Mile End, Rantisi (2013) states “artists are structurally positioned differently than many low income residents where, relatively speaking, they are less vulnerable... This is particularly the case in the contemporary moment due to the valourization of the arts by policy makers and by private development firms.” She further contends that there are possibilities of artists aligning themselves with low income residents, but also challenges as those artists with privilege and mobility can make use of their valourized work to carve out space in gentrifying neighbourhoods, or even mobilize to save studio space based on the importance of artists to the culture of a city. This argument does not align with supporting affordable housing for all as a right, but rather leverages creative work as giving artists a deserved spot in a gentrifying neighbourhood.

This part of artists and gentrification processes often comes with the support of the city to court large “creative” corporations. In the case of Mile End in Montréal, this was multinational gaming company Ubisoft, and other similar firms. This investment saw stark changes to the demographics of the Mile End. It was not artists that brought in Ubisoft, but state support for development under expanding creative industries. The state is a key actor in driving urban redevelopment, and this analysis is often missing in understanding artists as gentrifiers. Not only are artists of marginalized experience and identities outside of this perception of the gentrification process, even those artists with access to resources or who benefit from a normative urban imaginary are not capable of creating

the conditions for gentrification alone. As Moskowitz (2017) reported: “while white artists from MFA programs are often in a relatively privileged position compared to the working class populations..., they do not have the power to build condos, change zoning laws, and give tax breaks to corporations.”

In contrast to these marketable creative industries, Ste Emile was never a part of the branding for redevelopment in St-Henri. While it was a newer addition to the neighbourhood that was primarily focused on making art, it was not easily part of the marketing strategies of condo developers and city planning. Where brochures for new condos highlighted the Lachine Canal, new cafes, and commercial galleries along Notre Dame Street, Ste Emilie was never highlighted. It could neither be romanticized as part of the working class history, and it was also not a new hip spot that could be sold as a neighbourhood highlight for new condo residents and other people investing in property in the neighbourhood.

While artists at Ste Emilie were aware of the issues of gentrification in the neighbourhood, and understood themselves as outsiders, they present a different case for “the artist” in urban centres. These activist-artists were attempting to use their creative production to build a different, queered narrative about their work and themselves. Although not specifically organized around housing, they wanted to use art as a community building practice, and to create space for queer and trans people to make work that spoke from the margins, and that attempted to amplify cultural histories that were not present in mainstream or subcultural organizing in art, activist, and DIY spaces.

3.3 What makes Art Queer?

For those who claim it, “queer” is an inclusive identity with a critical perspective of the worlds in which we live, where a mainstream notion of normalcy of one kind or another spits many people out. In my neighbors and in their first-rate work, I see a wild celebration and provocation of each of our singular sexualities, genders, races, classes, abilities and regional origins, and a dissolution of the categorical segregation that previously ghettoized gays, lesbians and their art (Binns, 2016, p.3).

Queer art is as diverse and difficult to define as any other kind of art. There is art created by people who identify as queer and there is artwork that itself is queer in its representations, concept, political analysis or social commentary. In attempting to identify and define queer art as developed at Ste Emilie, I examined posters, flyers, zines, and pamphlets. People sent me scans and photos of dog eared pieces they had filed away, either through organizations they were a part of or as part of their under-the-bed archive. I also examined the archive of Ste Emilie which is collected in a binder, and a QPIRG produced publication “Queers Made This,” that documents queer activism and related social events from 2004 through 2010. These diverse sources allowed me to narrow a focus to identify themes in queer art from early 2000s through the end of Ste Emilie as it was produced in St-Henri and Montréal.



Poster made at the Ste Emilie skillshare, a drawing that was then screenprinted.

In the interviews I asked about how people knew art was queer. People said some of the art was “really gay,” while others mentioned that the queerness was subtler, but was clear to those who recognized the codes of queerness. Many of the pieces had what could be considered queer imagery: androgynous bodies in embrace, people in drag, slogans like “gaylords not landlords.” These images were explicit in their ties to queer life, and therefore relatively simple to classify as “queer art.”

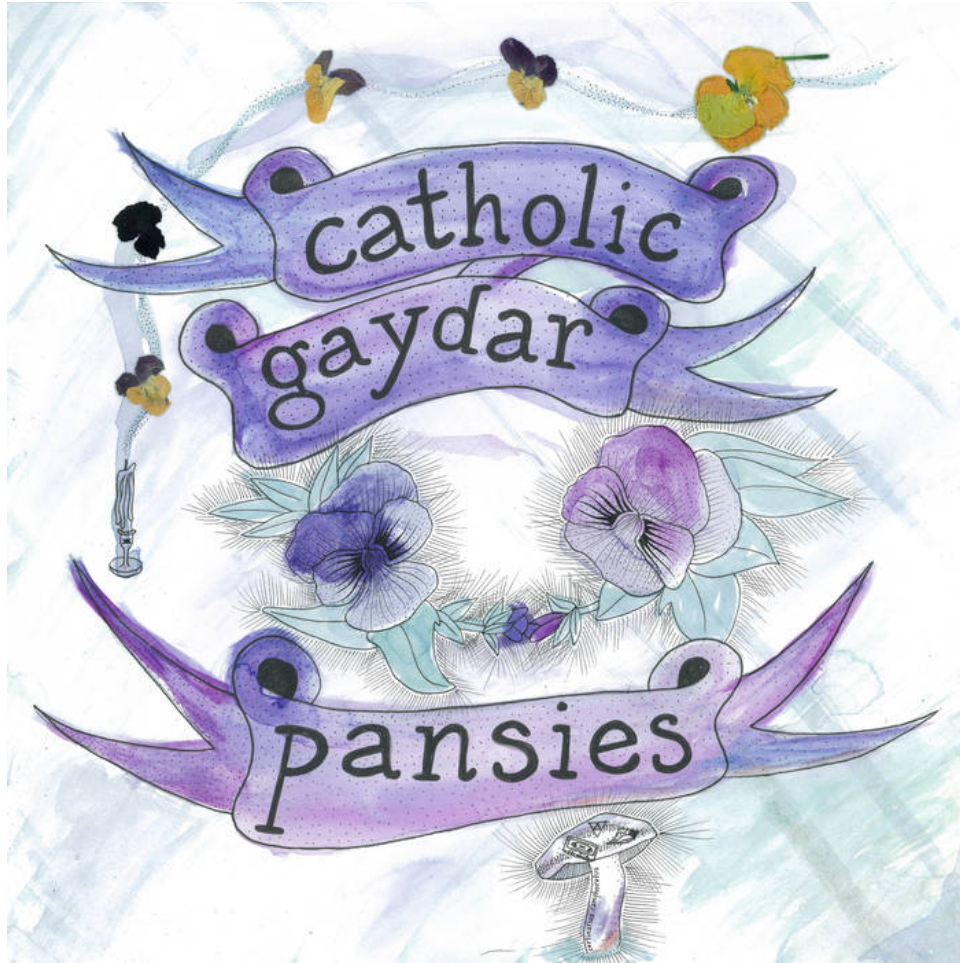
These codes also meant cultural expressions, symbols, or aesthetics that came from or were recognizable to queer and trans people. These included the use of the rainbow, pink triangles, androgynous bodies with body hair, animals like seahorses or unicorns. Queer codes in the art could also be recognized through seeing the trans symbol,

text or images depicting radical or non-normative sexuality, anything that questioned or presented something beyond a gender binary in its representation of figures or anything else. It is possible that other generations of queer people might not recognize the same symbols, but as mentioned, many of the people that were part of the space were under 30, and so the lexicon of that generation of queer people would be recognizable to their peers. The work of the space drew from a history of queer activism in Montréal and beyond, building on the visual cues of queer aesthetics and developing them for their own groups and experiences. As Finn said, “we made things that we thought other queers might recognize.” Disco adds, “I mean maybe sometimes the art said Queer this or that, but other times you knew queers were part of it or it was for a queer event. Like, that year the lookfair had two horses on the poster, or when the triangle is everywhere...” For Ste Emilie in particular, the cues included the use of unicorns, bright colours, and, as Bran noted, “often we put our mandate of QTBIPOC focus and collective liberation somewhere on the flyer so there would be no way for people not to know.”

General themes also emerged through reviewing the archives and through the interviews. One of ways that queerness came through in the art was through the use of the abject. As one person said, “I think maybe some art is about saying that Queers don’t play nice, and queerness wasn’t about assimilating into a good citizen of a state built on genocide” (Disco). The abject was also a reference to the dominant society’s view of queerness, as well as queer and trans bodies. Many people had been singled out or excluded from spaces like the bus, bathrooms, or using the public pool by being labelled as monstrous or unsafe, and some had lost their families because of coming out as queer or trans. Disco noted, “some of us couldn’t even use a shelter when we needed because

they didn't know what gender we were 'supposed' to be or where to put us." Deirdre added, "I guess corpse paint could be gentrified but it was also a bunch of us riding around on bikes looking like actual ghouls and it kinda felt like embracing the scum we were often made to feel like." Representing abject queerness was also a strategy against assimilation. Instead of quietly becoming a part of mainstream society and benefitting from that compliance, the abject was meant to be a way to destroy these norms, perhaps even mock them. The abject, even the grotesque, seemed part of a way that queerness was mobilized in critique of the neighbourhood shifting towards particular kinds of ordered space, to leisure for consumption and outcomes of prosperity.

The next theme that emerged was tenderness. In the images I reviewed, tenderness was often represented through androgynous bodies in embrace, or through the use of animals to represent acts of care like making tea or supporting someone through abuse or violence. Tenderness was an aesthetic that people struggled to articulate, but came through as interviewees talked about favourite zines or posters that sounded like more like valentines than any formal art work. From Disco: "I mean, I made these zines about life and being trans and filled tiny envelopes with tiny pansies I had picked and pressed in books, that's pretty gay art." The tenderness of queer art was also clear in representations of objects of sentimental value. Allie said, "there was lots of tenderness in queer art or queer zines, things like altars for people who died, magic for or against something, like for protection for existing between worlds." The art I reviewed also used flowers, lace, and images that conveyed daintiness.



*Cover for the “pansies” album by Catholic Gaydar, a queer band.
Drawn and designed by a regular user of Ste Emilie.*

The tenderness of queer art was sometimes described as being about addressing trauma. Through art, people who were a part of Ste Emilie were attempting to understand and process not only childhood or past trauma, but also the daily ways that queer, trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit people face violence by simply existing. Tenderness is an important part of some queer art because it makes a space that from the outside might not be recognized. The representations of care or protection are most recognizable to those who share the experience. As Allie said “It is about protection, and about building

chosen families that are not blood related.” Instead these families are related through histories of displacement, marginalization, and shared experiences of facing harm. Spaces of tenderness are well recognized by queer, trans, and BIPOC people as foundational to survival.



Poster Image for Radical Queer Semaine, 2016.

Queer art also often makes use of perverse imagery or innuendo. The unicorns mounting as a sort of mascot for Ste Emilie suggested a key element of a queer aesthetic that was consistently used by the space that was represented through the perverse. This

use of perversion is based in the idea that queerness is outside of or a kind of magical intervention into normativity. As Disco said: “I like the idea that queers or transes are more-than-human. Like, so often we’re seen as barely human, and maybe we’re not human, we’re more than that.” Perversion was also used to confront people not just with sex but being comfortable with bodies, as in bodies that are not conventional in gender, size, or other elements, and to question what bodies and people were respectable or acceptable in the mainstream or dominant culture. Perversion provided a queer point of access to give critical perspectives on these cultural norms. While sexual orientation defines queerness in relation to heterosexuality, the use of perversion beyond sexuality was used by queer art and artists to challenge norms about bodies, gender, class, respectability, conformity, and order. An example of this was a poster for the Radical Queer Semaine (Radical Queer Week) which depicted a raised fist that was drawn in a way to imply the sexual activity of fisting. The use of this imagery signaled queer sexuality while promoting a week long series of workshops, performances, discussions, direct actions, community building, and parties that in some way address issues its organizers didn’t feel were “sufficiently addressed in the gay mainstream” (Radical Queer Semaine, 2016).

Other subjects or concepts of queer art that were generated by artists in and around Ste Emilie included representations of love beyond monogamous romantic relationships, vulnerability, celebration of resilience, recognition of hardships, queerness beyond sexuality or sex, being against respectability politics or academic queerness, highlighting the joy and messiness of queer community both positive and negative. These themes indicate that the work is in opposition to gentrification because it doesn’t follow

the tropes of assimilationist messaging from mainstream LGBT organizations. These included slogans like “love is love,” which was often used by same-sex marriage campaigns to suggest that any monogamous partnership should be seen as deserving of a marriage designation and associated state benefits. Instead of assuming that marriage equality was a linear progression for LGBT rights, many people involved at the Ste Emilie skillshare questioned what and who this mainstream campaign really benefitted. Instead of making work that championed state-sanctioned marriage, a poster made by those affiliated with the space read; *Why buy gay marriage when you can get queer lovin’ for free?*

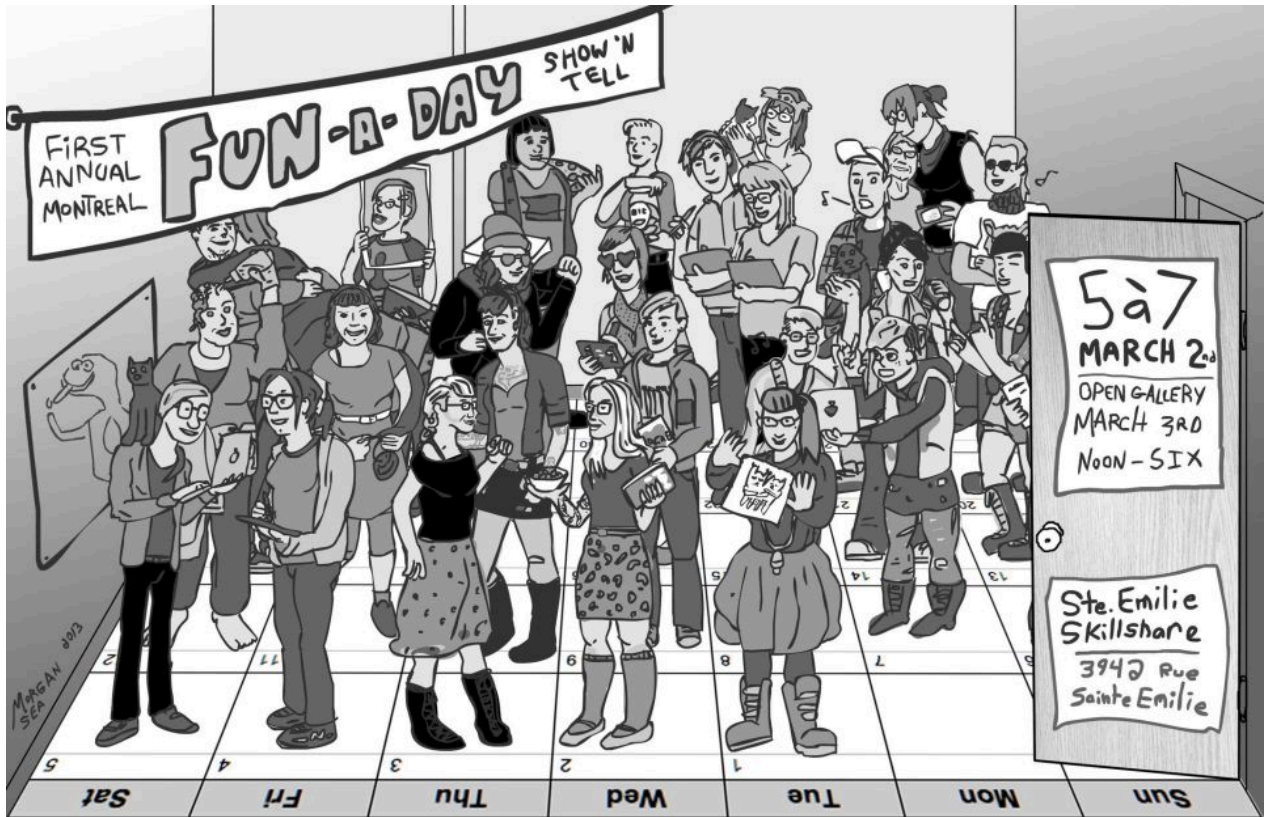
Conclusion

Ste Emilie provides an example of how some artists exist outside of the conception of “the artist” in the current gentrification literature. This is because the artists involved with Ste Emilie embody marginalization through their identities or experiences, or because they actively made work to counter a normative urban imaginary. This chapter identifies some themes in the work of queer artists, and these themes also counter normative ideas about art and capitalism through the perverse, grotesque, and even through the tender. This is because these forms of art are not about comfort; instead they are about dealing with trauma, about interrupting the mundane, and about resisting violence.

Ste Emilie skillshare was also never included in the branding of St-Henri by either the city or developers. Where other cultural producers and taste-makers were featured as selling points for the neighbourhood, Ste Emilie and its programming remained counter to the marketing of the neighbourhood, and counter to a normative urban imaginary. This

is because their queer messaging and their style of organizing did not easily fit into the narrative about artists and creativity in the district. Instead, Ste Emilie paired with groups like Pevers/Cité and Radical Queer Semaine to build alliances with other queer groups that wanted to maintain a politicized queer cultural production. In this relationship building and in their own work, Ste Emilie was actively building a culture of resistance in the neighbourhood, specifically among queer and trans people. With a focus on how those most affected by anti-queer and anti-trans violence, namely BIPOC and disabled people, they made art work and organized around a resistance to capitalism, and through that, to fight gentrification and its enforcement of a normative urban imaginary.

4. Blighted Bodies and Gentrification



In this chapter I examine the concept of blight as applied to urban decay and suggest that when the city and other forces designate an area as blighted, marginalized bodies are also seen as blight. I review the process of blight designation and how it has been used to appropriate property, and how the designation of blight relates to Lipsitz's concept of the white spatial imaginary. This line of inquiry engages with the potential for a new analysis of gentrification by establishing the idea of the blighted body and how gentrification enforces bodily norms as a civilizing project of the city, developers, and other proponents of capitalism. This normative urban imaginary has dire consequences for the

blighted bodies of people in marginalized communities. This is because instead of investing in blighted areas to support those communities, cities work to revitalize urban space by displacing marginalized people through removing blighted bodies to make way for prosperous, ordered urban space (Lipsitz, 2011). I suggest that for artists who are blighted, their work is not part of the aestheticization of space, as their work and the space that they use is not part of a normative urban imaginary. Instead, these artists, either through their identities or through their political engagement, have the potential to disrupt gentrification.

This chapter also outlines the eviction of Ste Emilie Skillshare from its building in St-Henri. I review the process of eviction, and what happened to some of the resources and ideas that were birthed at Ste Emilie, specifically looking at the Sidetracks screen-printing studio eventually being located at the Batiment 7, a cultural centre located in the neighbourhood of Pointe-St-Charles. I also outline the differences in the two projects and discuss the shift in the connection to gentrification between Batiment 7 versus the Ste Emilie Skillshare. Where Ste Emilie was grassroots and not organized through professional channels and receiving small amounts of funding through some student affiliated activist and art groups, the Batiment 7 is a large building with neighbourhood presence that began as a negotiation between neighbourhood groups and a large developer. Ste Emilie was started as a DIY space that was autonomous from any other groups or politics, and the Batiment 7 exists via a very particular negotiation with gentrification and neighbourhood change as part of a settlement in relationship to a large housing development.

The two examples of artists and art/cultural spaces in relationship to gentrification present different entanglements with neighbourhood change. Ste Emilie prioritized marginalized people, while the Batiment 7 focuses on preserving the culture of the neighbourhood and autonomy. The two spaces offer different approaches to resisting capitalism as manifested through gentrification, with very different approaches. Further, neither space has the capacity to provide or defend affordable housing. They remain spaces for cultural production, which could be linked with activism, but not necessarily when it comes to the Batiment 7.

4.1 Blight and the Queer Body

In the 2003 work “Extracting Value from the City: Neoliberalism and Urban Redevelopment,” Weber states that:

the definition of blight is vague; it is framed as both a cause of physical deterioration and a state of being in which the built environment is deteriorated or physically impaired beyond normal use. The discourse of blight appropriated metaphors from plant pathology (blight is a disease that causes vegetation to discolour, wilt and eventually die) and medicine (blighted areas of the body were often referred to as “cancers” or “ulcers”). (p. 526)

When blight is used to describe urban areas, similar to other meanings of the word, it is meant to convey death, disease, and decay. Blight, then, needs to be mended, cured, or removed. In cities that experienced mass disinvestment, the resulting lack of resources meant that buildings and other urban infrastructure fell into disrepair. Once cities became the target of plans for redevelopment, this infrastructure was termed blighted. Blight became a way to classify a space as needing redevelopment, both conceptually and technically, through the channels created by government and private developers. These actors

used blight designation to aid the expropriation and redevelopment process, which was almost always designed without benefit to the people who had owned the properties, or who had historically lived in the area.

Acquiring blight designation is a legal process that labels buildings and urban space as beyond repair, and needing action by government to appropriate the property for the common good. The redevelopment is positioned as countering blight where the common good is defined as job creation and a safer and more aesthetically pleasing community (Lee, 2017). These appropriations of property disproportionately affect marginalized communities, as they struggle with unfair offers on their homes, difficulty relocating, lack of access to legal resources to challenge against the claims to their properties, and the “loss of cultural capital and critical social networks” (Lee, 2017, 40). The classification of blight is different from city to city, and affords those mobilizing to claim urban space some power over defining how or why something is blighted. In general, a blighted area is identified through having an undesirable aesthetic and failing to be productive economically.

When a building, property, or area is designated blighted, the notion of blight is often mapped onto the communities or people living in the neighbourhood. It suggests that they cause the blight through their delinquency or some other flaw, and this justifies the government intervening to appropriate the space and revitalize it to serve the larger population. This line of thinking purposefully avoids the histories of how areas become blighted: that they have been neglected by the city or other state actors, and that the communities most affected by financial fallout are marginalized people, often queer, trans,

and those who face further marginalization within these groups, such as racialized people, disabled people, and chronically ill people.



A colonial map of Montréal, produced at Ste Emilie, date unknown.

There is no way to separate blight from racist and homophobic narratives about urban space. As outlined by Lipsitz (2011) in his writing about the white spatial imaginary, urban space is shaped and constrained by racist, homophobic, and other oppressive policies and realities. The white spatial imaginary structures a discourse about marginalized people that labels those who live in blighted areas as the source of the blight, and the people themselves as blighted. This can be related to the way that gentrification produces a normative urban imaginary that blights bodies, not only the buildings that people live and work in. This imaginary normalizes a narrative that has dire consequences for the

blighted bodies of people in marginalized communities. This is because instead of investing in blighted areas to support those communities, cities work to revitalize urban space by displacing marginalized people to make way for prosperous, ordered urban space (Lipsitz, 2011).

This expansion of the white spatial imaginary to queer and trans people in urban redevelopment strategies affects affects queer and trans people because whiteness and heteronormativity are intertwined. As gentrification is a force entrenched in European ideas about the use of space for capital exploitation, it enforces other bodily norms of colonial capitalism. This means that queer and trans people do not always satisfy the needs for bodies that support the conditions for gentrification to thrive. The blighted bodies of queer people in relationship to gentrification was clear during the HIV/AIDS crisis in New York City's East Village and Lower East Side. In *Gentrification of the Mind*, Sarah Schulman (2011) discusses the way that developers and landlords didn't have to evict people, they simply waited for them to die. The diseased body is a blighted body. In the 1980s, HIV/AIDS and queerness became conflated. This conflation meant that the removal of these bodies from urban space was deemed necessary for urban renewal (Schulman, 2013). These bodies were blighted: as queer people, they did not fit the normative urban imaginary of consumption and leisure as defined at the time and needed to be removed to extract value from the urban space where they lived as renters.

This kind of removal of blighted bodies of queer people continues to this day, with those most marginalized within the LGBTQ2S+ community facing the greatest threats to housing security. They face marginalization and displacement living in a neighbourhood that is being gentrified, and then facing marginalization for being visibly queer

and trans. Those most vulnerable within LBGTQ2S+ communities are those with intersecting identities that are also at odds with a normative urban imaginary. Queer and trans people who are also Indigenous (Two-spirit), Black, People of Colour, disabled, poor, face compounded marginalization in relationship to capitalism and gentrification. When a bodily norm of white, middle class, able bodied, and adhering to gender and sexual normativity is conflated with safety, productivity, order, and respectability, it isn't enough to fix up the buildings, but necessary to reorder the bodies that are in the space.

Blight also contravenes a normative urban imaginary as it is not controlled and it does not cooperate. Within this imaginary there is no way to handle blight other than to excise it. Similar to the way that Lipsitz (2011) describes the white spatial imaginary, a normative urban imaginary does not seek to solve social ills, but rather to hide or obscure them. When an area is blighted, this can mean removing the buildings, people, and conditions that are the perceived cause the blight. Instead of addressing the root causes of blight, such as disinvestment, economic marginalization, and other forces of capitalism, a normative urban imaginary enforces spaces of order and predicted use based on white middle class values (Lipsitz, 2011). This can be the razing of entire neighbourhoods and the redevelopment of them, or the redevelopment of space building by building to transform a neighbourhood. Urban development as shaped by a normative urban imaginary therefore understands queer and trans people, and specifically those with intersecting identities and experiences with queerness, as part of a barrier to productive urban space. Where blight is a designation equated with being cancerous or conveying a kind of dying, and there is little room for improvement. It must be taken away completely and replaced.

In St-Henri, deindustrialization during the 1970s was a key part of the neighbourhood becoming amongst the nation's most disadvantaged areas (Ley, 1996). With the decline of industry and the related factory work, the area was nationally recognized as a struggling neighbourhood. The response from the city was to forget about this area, to build a highway through it, and to neglect it for decades as residents organized against poverty and stigmatization (Twigge-Molecy, 2013). Saint-Henri was a poor and working class neighbourhood, and not highly desired as a place to live in Montréal. With low rent, the neighbourhood also housed marginalized people who were not part of its history of factory work, including the queer and trans people who started Ste Emilie.

People involved with Ste Emilie spoke in their interviews about the way that they, as marginalized people, were marked against the normativities of urban space. One member suggested:

It felt like we were marked, and at the same time invisible, there were POC in Saint-Henri but we weren't part of the mainstream or even punk narratives about who lived here. Ste Emilie wasn't a space that was created to talk back to those stories, but was created to make space for POC, indigenous and queer and trans folks in DIY spaces and activist spaces where it felt like we were underrepresented or lacking in leadership roles (Bran).

This feeling of being simultaneously invisibilized while being targeted for difference is the essence of marginalization. Bodies and identities that are marked with difference or deviance, are seen as problems, and at the same time never count towards meaningful inclusion. This is the process of marginalization, where bodies and communities are rendered minority in number, but also minority for how they are imagined into city planning and community development. Marginalized people have blighted bodies: they don't fit the order and productivity of urban life. Disabled bodies, Indigenous bodies,

queer bodies, trans bodies, Black bodies, these are bodies that don't fit a dominant narrative about leisure and consumption that the city is (re-)built on. Blighted bodies work in the kitchens, they do childcare work, they are criminalized. Of most importance to cities and developers: Blighted bodies bring down property value. They are predominantly seen as blight to remove or amend, because they don't fit the imaginary set out by capitalism and its proponents when it comes to creating prosperous urban space.

This idea of being blighted is also part of why Ste Emilie was structured the way it was. The collective did not seek to equate queer and/or trans struggles to those of BI-POC people, but to find ways to support those who are marginalized in an already marginalized community. The space was set up to understand and interrogate the intricacies of power, how it manifests in institutions, in social movements, and in the personal relationships of people working on a project or as part of an organization. At Ste Emilie, these terms defined the space, who it was for, and how it was meant to operate.

As attitudes towards queer people have shifted, so too have the possibilities and opportunities for acceptance, but these are largely reserved for white LGBT people (Duggan, 2003). This often looks like the acceptance and perpetuation of capitalist norms by LGBT people, by those who benefit from these norms. It is not that the work of Ste Emilie patrons and members was outside of being co-opted, but rather that they were not invested in valorizing their work through a capitalist framework. There is no doubt that the particular aesthetics of queer and subcultural worlds have been and are appropriated for capitalist ends. However, the sentiment I understood from many people connected to Ste Emilie is that they wanted “to keep queerness a threat. Maybe a threat to capitalism, to the straightworld?” (Disco). I would suggest, then, that the work of some queer and

trans artists seeks to amplify unseen or obscured interruptions in gentrification, specifically the radicalized people and organizations that are attempting to create space for marginalized people to exist despite the pressures of gentrification. The artists at Ste Emilie sought to build a culture of resistance in the neighbourhood, and beyond.

4.2 Evictions

In 2014, eight years after it had begun, Ste. Emilie sent out notice that it was being evicted. In a statement circulated to their email list, on the website, and through social media channels, the collective stated:

******Dear members, friends, allies******

After 8 years of rad community art, activism, and politics, the St-Émilie Skillshare is saying GOODBYE. We want to thank everyone who has been part of this adventure, who has come to our space, who has organized with us, who has shared their skills with us. Perhaps we will be reborn in the future, but in the meantime, we hope you kittens will keep being the movers and shakers that has made us adore all of you.

We are excited for all the new groups and projects that have been developing and that are doing the kind of work we love, especially the queer, trans, Indigenous and people of colour oriented ones that have mandates similar to ours. We want to keep supporting your work in any way we can!

3943 Ste. Emilie had received threats from the landlord before, and they had successfully fought them. After they had been operating for a couple of years there was an incident where the pipes burst while everyone who used the space was away in December for a couple of weeks. The burst pipe caused water damage that destroyed part of the floor and required extensive repairs. The landlord agreed to fix it, but took two months during which he didn't allow anyone to use the space. When the collective finally regained access, they realized that not only had the floor been repaired, but many of the

rooms had new closets constructed in them and the entire apartment had been painted a fresh coat of white. Within a week the collective received a bill for 17,000 dollars for the renovations. Dismayed, a few members went to talk to the people across the street who ran an auto garage, who informed them that they knew the landlord was trying to sell the place, but was asking way too much and was unlikely to get it. In the meantime, a few members sought advice at the Head and Hands Legal Clinic, who helped them draft a letter to send to the landlord asking for an itemized receipt and other proof of the renovations. After the letter was delivered, they didn't hear from him until the eviction notice was served, about five years later. As Finn said, "I guess at that point we knew he was on the lookout to sell, but it seemed really unlikely at the time. It was really scary for a minute." They continued, "As the neighbourhood shifted, the property value probably increased regardless of what shape the building was actually in, so that was that."

This time the threat of eviction seemed much more probable, and the fight didn't seem worth it. "No one was living in the space at the time, and we were advised by POPIR or some other comité lodgement people that we would need to move in to have a good case to fight the eviction" (Bran). This is because the lease for the space had remained a residential one, with one or two members keeping the lease in their name. In order to have a case against eviction, those people would have to be living there in order for it to be a housing issue and fall under tenants' rights. In addition to the problem of legal issues around there not being a resident in the space to fight a residential eviction, many of the interviewees who were on or close to the organizing collective suggested that they just felt that it was time to move on. This was somewhat connected to more organic migration of queer people to parts of the city like Mile End, Petite Patrie, Villeray, and

Parc-Ex. “Many of us had moved north.... We didn’t leave St-Henri because of rent increases, but it was more a cultural migration. A lot of queers had moved up there and our connections to St-Henri weren’t the same as when Ste Em started” (Finn). Since they weren’t connected to the neighbourhood in the same way, Ste Emilie members felt that they were more connected to cultural networks of queer and trans organizing, as well as other landscapes of art and activism that had a base in other neighbourhoods.

On the surface, this eviction seems tied to the established narrative that artists move into a neighbourhood and are eventually themselves displaced due to rising rent via gentrification. However, I don’t think Ste Emilie was “a victim of it’s own success” as a news headline about a café on Notre Dame (CBC News, 2015). I suggest that Ste Emilie didn’t fit this narrative of stage theory gentrification as described by Rose (1984), Clay (1979), and others because the space wasn’t a successful art studio or space that gave value to the building as per conventional gentrification accounts. The artists involved here also didn’t move here only because of cheap rent or to create a cheap studio to produce work. Instead, the space was used as an organizing hub to bring together queer and trans artists and provide resources for those marginalized people to make work. Additionally, as noted above, many of the people were not living in the neighbourhood anymore, and this shift was brought on from other queer migration in the city, not solely determined by raising rents. In fact, rents elsewhere in the city may have been higher or at least comparable to St-Henri when people moved.



Poster from a punk show held as a fundraiser for Ste Emilie the summer after is closed, 2014.

Another key part of how Ste Emilie doesn't follow other narratives about artists and gentrification was that there was no community rallying to save the space when it faced eviction. In other parts of the city there were campaigns to preserve space for artists during gentrification as studio space went up in value. This contrast is clearly demonstrated in the mobilizing of some artists in Mile End to preserve artist studio and gallery

space when a large developer bought a building mostly occupied by artist and proposed a rental increase. Artists in that neighbourhood organized through a group called Pied Carré, and lobbied their local councillor, Richard Ryan, to get to negotiate with Allied Properties, a large developer based in Toronto who had purchased the building (Woods, 2016). These Mile End artists successfully mobilized to secure a 30-year lease freeze in the building and work with city council to prevent the renting of more than 5,000 square feet by one company in an attempt to keep large chain pharmacies, restaurants, and banks from moving in (Woods, 2016). These measures were made to preserve artists in Mile End, with the city recognizing their cultural contributions to the neighbourhood, and promoting their work as part of revitalizing the neighbourhood, and therefore having value in the neighbourhood worth preserving. This example in Mile End suggests that some of these artists are not opposed to gentrification as a manifestation of capitalism, they just don't want to lose their space. The Pied Carré didn't organize for affordable housing or other issues that come from gentrification of an area, only to preserve the work of "the artists" of the Mile End neighbourhood. As Rantisi and Leslie noted "Rather than promoting gentrified cultural quarters, we argue that greater emphasis is needed on preserving affordable rents and accessible public spaces in the city, with particular care being taken to avoid the over surveillance of such space" (p.2839).

This is in stark contrast to the virtually no media attention given to the Ste Emilie eviction, no large concerted effort to rally to have the space secured as part of the cultural fabric of the St-Henri neighbourhood. Instead, as the space was shutting down, there continued to be grassroots support for it being able to relocate within the groups of people

that used the space. Instead of being sold as an important cultural piece of St-Henri, it instead was mourned a space for radical organizing, as a small piece of autonomous space of queer and trans people. The kinds of support for the space looked like an all ages show to raise funds for a potential new space in July 2014, and having a presence at the Anarchist Bookfair and at Queer Between the Covers that year, despite being without a physical location to connect people with.

Eventually, the sidetracks part of Ste Emilie found a new home in the basement of a shared house in Villeray. About one hour away by public transit from St-Henri, the space was down in a basement, and shared a familiar aesthetic to 4932 Ste Emilie. Although some people who had been involved with Ste Emilie were also involved at the Villeray space, it was a Sidetracks space that continued to print items for local groups, organizations, and campaigns, as well as providing space for screenprinting personal projects. The new sidetracks also attracted a different generation of queer artists and activists, some never having visited the original Ste Emilie location. “the Ste Emilie space sounded so dreamy but I was still in Halifax then,” said Olaf, who I spoke to at the initial meeting for new collective members. Sidetracks continued with slightly lower capacity than its original iteration in St-Henri at the space in Villeray for three years. The collective shifted but maintained the same political framework and did similar types of printing jobs for community organizations, activists, campaigns, and record and zine covers.

In 2018, Sidetracks made a significant move to become part of the Batiment 7 development in Pointe-St-Charles as one of several community workshops there. This iteration of the screenprinting studio at Ste Emilie is housed in a building that was part of an agreement between a developer and neighbourhood groups on the old CN Rail Shop land

that has been developed into multiple housing complexes. Pointe-St-Charles is a neighbourhood adjacent to St-Henri, and has its own extensive history of popular organizing. This neighbourhood has also been facing intense pressure of redevelopment in recent years, and working class residents are also being displaced (Kryzinsky, 2011). A unique feature of the neighbourhood, Pointe-Saint-Charles has over 40% social housing, and so resists certain kinds of gentrification because of this distinctive feature (High, 2015).



The logo of the Sidetracks collective, a screenprinting squeegee with wings.

Batiment 7 is a former industrial building that was part of the rail yards that have been remodeled into an accessible alternative meeting place, with several projects. As

well as the screenprinting studio it houses a Brew Pub, Bike Coop, Yoga Studio, Photography Darkroom, Ceramic Studio, Woodshop, Exhibition Space, metal shop, Arcade Coop, Collective Grocery Market and an Art School (7 A Nous Collective, 2018). The whole building appears to be informed by some of the same DIY institutions that Ste Emilie was a part of, as in European Social Centres and Infoshops. The overall project says it offers “experimental spaces to promote autonomy, interdependence, cooperation and sharing of resources” (7 A Nous Collective, 2018, p 2).



A Demonstration in the Pointe-St-Charles neighbourhood, know colloquially as “La Pointe”, or “The Point”.

This connection to autonomous zones reflects a similar path to Ste Emilie, however the Batiment 7 does not have the same intentional politics that the skillshare made explicit around queer, trans, and BIPOC leadership. While the Batiment 7 talks about inclusion and fighting for equity in the spirit of the neighbourhood’s popular history, there

is not the same emphasis on those whose bodies face barriers to accessing art and other spaces. The control of the screen printing studio itself is still under the Sidetrack Collective, and their write up as a part of the studios and workshops does mention working for social justice and with anti-oppression framework including anti-capitalism, anti-racism, pro-queer and trans, etc. It seems that the legacy of Ste Emilie Skillshare remains, if the control and centering of queer and trans people, specifically BIPOC folks has shifted. This is exactly what those who built Ste Emilie suggested they were concerned with if they didn't specifically have a BIPOC caucus, and an emphasis on leadership from BIPOC folks. Additionally, Ste-Emile was a grassroots project, with no permits, arrangements with developers, or the city. While this affected its longevity, it also had major impacts over having a very specific mandate of collective liberation.

Conclusion

This idea of being blighted is part of why Ste Emilie was structured the way it was. The collective did not seek to equate queer and/or trans struggles to those of BIPOC people, but to find ways to support those who are marginalized in an already marginalized community. The space was set up to understand and interrogate the intricacies of power, how it manifests in institutions, in social movements, in personal relationships of people working on a project or as part of an organization. At Ste Emilie, these terms defined the space, whom it was for, and how it was meant to operate.

This chapter outlined that queer and trans people are also deemed blighted when they do not fit the ideal of a normative urban imaginary that is part of gentrification.

These queer and trans people are not part of building the ordered, predictable, and productive conditions for prosperous urban lifestyles of consumption and leisure. For Ste Emilie, this is in the identities and experiences of those involved there, and also through their commitment to building a culture of resistance, rooted in a queered analysis of capitalism as it functions in queer circles and beyond.

Queer and trans artists who do not fit a normative urban imaginary, because of their blighted bodies, interrupt gentrification. These artists are not the shock troops of urban change that other scholars have asserted in the literature on gentrification. Instead, these artists present an alternative, one based on making autonomous space for collective liberation, and building a culture of resistance through creative projects and cultural production. The artists involved with Ste Emilie are an example of these artists, because their work, their organizing, and their identities and experiences resisted assimilation. They developed their own networks and coalitions outside of mainstream art and mainstream LGBT organizing, and in doing so attempted to make space against capitalism as manifested through gentrification and other acts of propelling consumer based leisure and culture. Ste Emilie and the artists there celebrated this deviance, and this resistance to capitalist conformity. Finally, this chapter provides a nuanced analysis of how bodily norms structure gentrifying neighbourhoods and how these norms are not only about loosing space for these marginalized people/artists, but are also forces of violence and displacement for marginalized people.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to demonstrate that queer and trans people, especially those most vulnerable within the LGBTQ2S+ communities including Black, Indigenous and People of Colour, present an interruption to the narrative that artists are necessarily a cause of gentrification. I demonstrated this through interviewing queer and trans artists who were part of or involved in some capacity with Ste Emilie Skillshare in Montréal's Saint-Henri neighbourhood, as well as examining and analyzing archives of the work made at the space. This thesis is not a definitive history of Ste Emilie, nor the final word on queer artists and their relationship to gentrification. Instead, it is meant to open up new potentials for discussion and discourse on queer and trans people in relationship to shifting urban landscapes subject to capitalist re-development.

In the first chapter, I set the context for the kinds of artists involved at Ste Emilie by creating some definitions of what the space was, how it was founded, and how it functioned. I was particularly interested in how it was characterized by those involved as a queer and activist space, and how that affected what kinds of events and programming happened there. In this chapter I also wanted to place Ste Emilie in the history of autonomous spaces, as related to anti-authoritarian organizing. I suggested that this skillshare brought together a tradition of DIY (Do-it-Yourself) and the movements to create queer and trans only spaces that draw on a history of autonomous zones for marginalized people. This applied not only to queer space, but also to Ste Emilie's hosting of POC-lucks and having a POC caucus to guide the structure and decision making at the space. I assert that this organizing also shaped the kinds of media created in the space, specifically print-making, zines, and other printed matter that has a long history of being used by radical

collectives and political campaigns from Mai 68 to the teacher's strikes in Oaxaca, Mexico.

The next chapter is titled "Rogue Unicorns" for the eponymous zine put together by Ste Emilie in 2010. This zine brought together "everything having to do with our mandate of anti-oppression, anti-racism, queer liberation, self-representation, self-expression, DIY, we are all artists, revolution..." This chapter challenged the concept of "the artist" as it appears in gentrification narratives. Rogue Unicorns also investigated the relationship of Ste Emilie to other LGBT organizations, and what distinctions there are between the queer and queered art and activism of the space vis a vis mainstream LGBT movement building. In order to characterize the kind of art and artists at Ste Emilie, I reviewed some of the materials made there, the partnerships the collective had with other organizations, and how their work was part of queer and trans organizing in the Southwest of Montréal and the city as a whole. These relationships revealed the core of Ste Emilie's work as radical, and attempting to counter narratives of colonial capitalism, while focused on queer liberation. Of significant importance was the connection of Ste Emilie to the alternative/radical Pride festival, Pervers/cité, and the week long programming of Radical Queer Semaine. These events centre the experiences of those marginalized within queer and trans communities, similar to the ways that Ste Emilie wanted to celebrate and lift up the work of Queer and Trans people and Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour who face marginalization even within subcultural spaces and movements. I also spoke to the failure of mainstream Pride events to consider other forms of marginalization in their work, and how this related to Ste Emilie's commitment to BIPOC centered organizing within a queer framework.

This chapter was also about interrogating the idea of “the artist” as represented in gentrification literature, and looked at how the queer artists of Saint-Henri, and Ste Emilie Skillshare presented other possibilities of how artists fit into the process of gentrification. I was specifically interested in how these artists related to both mainstream art and mainstream LGBT organizations and movement building, and found that this group of artists instead allied themselves with radical groups such as Pervers/cité, an alternative Pride festival, and other groups working to support marginalized people and ideas. These artists even disputed being called artists because of the dominant narratives that exist about who can or should claim this term. Instead, they saw themselves as activists or cultural workers, even though ostensibly what they were doing: making art, creating opportunities for others to produce work, holding workshops, etc, is what artists do.

Rogue Unicorns is a chapter that also explores the concept of queer art. I investigate what makes art queer. I sought to provide some context for the history of queer art and how Ste Emilie is connected to a legacy of queer art makers. Through examining and analyzing posters, flyers, art prints, and a variety of other materials, I sought to understand what could be understood as a queer aesthetics in relation to Ste Emilie and queer artists in Montréal. I also attempted to interrogate how art can be used for or against gentrification. I was particularly interested in how Ste Emilie and its collective members and other participants resisted parts of gentrification that can be characterized as a normalizing process by the state and other proponents of capitalism. I did this by rooting my analysis in the concept of the white spatial imaginary as developed by George Lipsitz. He

contends that “The white spatial imaginary promotes the quest for individual escape rather than encouraging democratic deliberations about the social problems and contradictory social relations that affect us all” (Lipsitz 2011).

Where Lipsitz had applied this imaginary to understanding how white supremacy operates to exclude, discriminate, and police Black communities, his assertions about whiteness can be applied to marginalized people of other identities and experiences. This is not to suggest that all marginalized people experience the same kinds of state violence and discrimination that Black people do, but rather, to understand a dominant culture that is based on whiteness is also deeply invested in colonialism, heteronormativity, able bodiedness, and other forms of idealized cultural norms that are predictable and productive to those in power. While understanding the evidence for the work of artists of diverse identities and experiences can be coopted for gentrification, I also found that many of these artists and their work disrupted the narratives of artists as “the shock troops of gentrification.” This is not to say that all queer artists are exempt from being a part of gentrification. On the contrary, having LGBTQ+ identity itself is not an opposition to capitalism, but through this work I wanted to show how a queered analysis does provide an opportunity to resist gentrification, and that queer communities are engaged in forms of opposition to capitalism through their art and other cultural organizing.

Finally, I investigated the idea that queer bodies are blighted bodies in the chapter titled “Blight and Queer Bodies.” I discussed the application of the white spatial imaginary to gentrification, examining how this applies to queer space and queer and trans people. I assert that queer and trans people can be part of interrupting a normative urban special imaginary because whiteness and heteronormativity are intertwined. As gentrification

is a force entrenched in European ideas about the use of space for capital exploitation, it enforces many bodily norms of colonial capitalism. This means that queer and trans people do not always satisfy the needs for bodies that support the conditions for gentrification to thrive. Those most vulnerable within LBGTQ2S+ communities are those with intersecting identities that are also at odds with a normative urban imaginary. Queer and trans people who are also Indigenous (Two-spirit), Black, People of Colour, disabled, and poor face compounded marginalization in relationship to capitalism and gentrification. When this particular form of whiteness is conflated with safety, productivity, order and respectability, those whose bodies that don't represent these values are targeted as part of blight removal and making neighbourhoods "safe" and "cleaned up."

In the chapter "Blighted Bodies," I also discussed ways that blight contravenes a normative urban imaginary as it is not controlled and it does not cooperate. Within this imaginary there is no way to handle blight other than to excise it. Drawing from the white spatial imaginary that is defined by Lipsitz (2011), I assert that this normative urban imaginary does not seek to solve social ills, but rather to hide or obscure them. When an area is blighted, this can mean removing the buildings, people, and conditions that are the perceived cause the blight. Instead of addressing the root causes of blight, such as disinvestment, economic marginalization, and other forces of capitalism, a normative urban imaginary enforces spaces of order and predicted use based on white middle class values (Lipsitz 2011). This can be the razing of entire neighbourhoods and the redevelopment of them, or the redevelopment of space building by building to transform a neighbourhood. Urban development as shaped by a normative urban imaginary therefore understands

queer and trans people, and specifically those with intersecting identities and experiences with queerness, as part of a barrier to productive urban space.

This conception of blighted queer body is part of my claim about a normative urban imaginary. As shown through the example of Ste Emilie, marginalized people who are not white, assimilated, and productive residents are not only the people who can no longer afford to pay rent or property taxes in gentrifying neighbourhoods. Their blighted bodies disrupt a normativity that is often necessary for successful gentrification. This queered analysis of gentrification exposes nuances of power and the cultural dimensions of a shifting urban landscape. Through this analysis this thesis also amplified the voices and stories of autonomous resistance to the pressures of urban redevelopment by artists of marginalized identities and experiences.

This thesis adds an important analysis to gentrification, not simply reducing issues of displacement to class exclusion, but rather, defining a normative urban imaginary and the blighted body as something that does not fit that imaginary. This means that queer and trans people who are politicized or whose identities and experiences are not an expression of what Duggan (2008) calls homonormativity, are deemed deviant in gentrification. This analysis has developed these concepts of the blighted body and a normative urban imaginary in order to understand how the cultural hegemony of the gentrification process seeks to exclude. Most importantly, this work asserts that not all artists are part of promoting gentrification as has been, until now, discussed in the literature. This thesis provides a nuanced analysis of how bodily norms structure gentrifying neighbourhoods and how these norms can be forces of violence and displacement for marginalized people.

This means that artists of marginalized identities and experiences can be part of disrupting the narratives that exist about gentrification, and provide new avenues to consider the complexity of how gentrification and urban redevelopment function.

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