

Constructing Small Venues in Montréal: Theoretical Explorations in an Ongoing Project

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Abstract: In this paper we critically reflect upon the research process underlying an investigation of small venues in Montreal which has brought to the surface the particular ways in which parts of the live music business in Montréal are constituted, organized, and represented. Structured around two anecdotes (Morris, 2006), and inspired by the Foucauldian concepts of population and propinquity (voisinage), the discussion sheds light on an actor whose importance and effectivity in the cultural economy of the city's live music has yet to be acknowledged: PLAS (Petits lieux d'arts et de spectacles).

Over the last decade or so, the music industries in Canada, as in other places in the world, have experienced significant changes. Along with increased reliance on digital technologies for music production, distribution, and consumption, one of the most striking developments has been the renewed importance of live performances (Sutherland and Straw 2007). In what some critics have identified as a newly emerging musical economy (Koster 2008) festivals have multiplied and diversified (Frith 2007) and participation in musicals, cover and tribute bands (Homan 2006), as well as concerts in corporate settings (Grenier and Lussier 2009) has become key to the financial survival of many experienced musicians and novices alike. As the average price and number of sold concert tickets has risen (Fortier 2008) live music has tended to replace record sales as the main source of revenue for many artists and producers (Bloomberg 2009; Ehmer and Porsch 2008). Whether these developments will bring about significant and lasting challenges to the hegemony of the recording industry over other sectors of the music business (Williamson and Cloonan 2007) has yet to be determined. Nonetheless, their prominence encourages popular music scholars to further explore the com-

plex and shifting assemblage of forces at work, and to consider what is at stake in the reconfiguring of those interconnections among the industrial, political and artistic agencies involved.

In this context, the study of small venues and show bars seems timely. Previous research has demonstrated the importance of these venues in producing and maintaining distinct local scenes (Cohen 1991; Johnson and Homan 2003; O’Conner 2002; Straw 2005) and sounds (Becker 2004; McLeay 1994). It has also demonstrated their significance as sites of training or apprenticeship for artists and cultural workers (Finnegan 1989; Frith 1996, 2007), as well as being key interfaces between the communal romanticism often associated with live performance and the “art worlds” that sustain it (Becker 1988, 2004). Moreover, shedding light on the active role played by such venues in municipal politics (Homan 2003), other studies have made clear how their involvement in various conflicts with different local authorities is indicative of the power relations and hierarchies around which the cultural field is organized. However, in the province of Québec, and in the city of Montréal in particular, even where these cultural intermediaries have become increasingly visible, they remain largely understudied. Researchers tend to pay more attention to recorded rather than live music. Moreover, most small venues and show bars fly under the radar of those public institutions responsible for documenting, by means of various statistics and monitoring activities.¹

What are the small venues and show bars that exist in Montréal today? Which ones are the most active? Where are they located? Which ones are considered to be emblematic of Montréal’s music scenes today? What practices and strategies do their owners and managers adopt? How does the emerging live music-driven economy shape their development in cultural and financial terms? How do the city’s cultural policies affect and inform the relations between these venues and “bigger” and perhaps more influential players in both the music and performing arts business? These are some of the questions that motivated us to undertake an empirical study in the fall of 2009 aimed at providing the first portrait of small venues, show bars and concert halls in Montréal. With the financial support of the *Ville de Montréal* (City of Montréal), as well as the provincial *ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine* (Department of Cultural Affairs, Communications and Status of Women), the study was commissioned by the *Association des petits lieux d’arts et de spectacles* (Association of small venues for artistic productions)—a Montréal-based non-profit organization founded in 2006 to promote and defend the interests of small music venues, their owners and workers, as well as the artists who perform in them. The study consists of a survey of about forty establishments that have a capacity of three-hundred and fifty people or

less, and which regularly feature live music as part of their planned activities. Administered online and combining multiple-choice with open-ended questions, it investigates the financial resources, infrastructures, jobs and employment structure, as well as programming within these venues. The results of this study are not, however, the focus here. Rather, our focus here is on the issues on that were raised in this part of the study.

Indeed, as we set up the study a new series of questions arose, both through our own interactions with agents of the commissioning organization (APLAS), and through their exchanges with their own partners (especially the City of Montréal) concerning the objectives and the design of the survey: What is a small venue and/or show bar in Montréal today? Who gets to decide which show bars and concert halls qualify as such? Does being recognized as a small venue matter, why, and to whom? How do the concerns of the owners, managers, and users of these halls come to be in the public eye? These questions were the main impetus of this article, which aims at critically reflecting upon “the making of” an investigation that we are still completing. We focus on the research process because it raised largely unforeseen methodological and ethical issues but also, most importantly, because it brought to the surface some of the ways in which at least parts of the live music business in Montréal are constituted, organized, and represented. Putting aside the portrait we will eventually draw based on the results of the survey, the following discussion examines how the study itself has come to function as a key mediation in the articulation, publicizing, and public acknowledgement of a particular grouping of “small venues” in Montréal, and the role they play in the cultural and political economy of live music in the city.

The study discussed here echoes in some ways Anthony Seeger’s (2008) discussion of how, in the context of what he calls public projects, theories are “forged in the crucible of action.” In their introductory remarks to *Shadows in the Field* in which Seeger’s essay is published, editors Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley explain: “Engaging public projects, he [Seeger] suggests, is not only a legitimate form of ethnomusicology, but the accompanying field research documentation can very well serve important functions for both the communities engaged and for the discipline of ethnomusicology” (Barz and Cooley 2008:18). As we hope to illustrate, before its results are gathered, analyzed and published, before it can ever pretend to make any contribution to any discipline, the survey that we have designed and conducted will have already served important functions for the commissioning organization, APLAS, its members and its partners. Making an argument similar to the one made by Bruce Curtis (2002) concerning the use by public institutions of scientific methods of knowledge production in general, and statistics in particular, it

has contributed to constitute the population it analyzes. In our capacity as principal investigators whose location in academia and use of social scientific based methods were the very foundations of our authority as researchers, we have been instrumental in the process of officializing and legitimating the very existence of the grouping of small venues that the survey we are conducting is meant to document and characterize.

We discuss “the making of” the study and the theoretical issues it raises by means of anecdotes. Following Meaghan Morris, we consider them to be “narratives of particular incidents” that produce “that ‘effect of the real’” (Morris 2006:21) and “the occurrence of contingency” (ibid.:20). Anecdotes are primarily referential: “They are oriented futuristically towards the construction of a precise, local, and social discursive context, of which the anecdote then functions as a *mise en abyme*” (Morris 1990:15). From this perspective, they do not act as expressions of personal experience and need not be true stories. Rather, they constitute “allegorical expositions of a model of the way the world can be said to work” (ibid). Relying methodologically on anecdotes allows us to take stock of our own as well as the study’s effectivity³ and agency. It also enables us, as Melissa Gregg argues with respect to Morris’ use of “idiosyncratic techniques,” to adopt a speaking position “aware of its own partiality and limitations” (Gregg 2004:363), while reminding ourselves of our “[critics’] own place in the culture under investigation” and challenging “still prevalent assumptions which extol detached intellectual discourse” (ibid.:364).

The article is organized around two anecdotes discussed and interpreted through conceptual lenses inspired by Michel Foucault. The first one relates an incident which concerns the object of the research (what is surveyed) and the effect the research has on its definition (what is produced by the survey). In revealing how only a limited number of sites qualify as “small venues” according to our interlocutors, this anecdote brings to light that what matters is not simply a series of discrete show bars and concert halls, but rather a particular population of venues and the milieu in which it partakes. Drawing from Foucault, we use the notion of “population” to refer to a “general system of living beings” that “may offer a purchase for concerted interventions” (Foucault 2009:366), not merely to a group of items that share one or more characteristics. In a similar vein, by “milieu” we mean neither the environment, nor the physical or social setting in which venues exist or develop, as the vernacular use of the term suggests. Given that a milieu is “what is needed to account for action at a distance of one body on another,” (Foucault 2009:21) we use the notion to designate the “the field of intervention in which [...] one tries to affect, precisely, a population” (ibid.) In the second anecdote, the narrated incident deals with the commissioning organisation’s involvement in

“the making of” as both the voice of the study and that of the participating venues deemed the subjects under investigation. It illustrates how, through its representational practices, and as it interacts and negotiates with various stakeholders on an equal footing in its capacity of “expert of its own milieu,” APLAS manages to connect specific issues relevant to show bars and concert halls with much broader issues by introducing them (and the survey through which they are produced as a population) in a *voisinage* or propinquity. Again, we borrow from Foucault’s particular usage of this concept⁴ to refer to a plane or site in which distinct, heterogeneous entities can co-exist without losing their singularity or specificity.

Anecdote #1 – N = n = 45

March 2009. In my [Line] capacity as elected member of the University Research Advisory Committee of the Observatoire de la culture et des communications,⁵ I attended the annual meeting of the Sound Recording and Performing Arts Committee. Chaired by the Vice-President of Public Affairs and General Director of ADISQ,⁶ the committee is composed of a dozen private and public organizations such as RIDEAU⁷ and SODEC.⁸ This is where I met the General Manager of APLAS, a small and relatively young non-profit organization I had only vaguely heard of at the time. At the end of the meeting, he introduced himself and said: “I would appreciate your feedback on a project we want to undertake. The project consists of a survey of small venues in Montréal.” I agreed to act as methodological consultant on APLAS’s project.

June 2009. The General Manager of APLAS, with whom I had stayed in contact, told me that there had been some misunderstanding between his organization and the City of Montréal concerning who was to design and administer the survey. “Given that the study has to meet scientific standards,” he explained, APLAS cannot be in charge. “Would you be interested?” he asked. I agreed to take it on only after I had secured Martin’s collaboration as co-researcher. A few days later, Martin and I met with the General Manager and board members of APLAS to further discuss the objectives and scope of the survey, particularly in light of the small budget at their disposal and the tight deadlines set by the City of Montréal, which provided the grant with which APLAS would finance the survey. We convinced them to include fewer questions, as 247 were included in the original questionnaire designed by APLAS. We also insisted on selecting a relatively

modest number of respondents, a strategy we deemed appropriate given the exploratory and highly descriptive nature of the qualitative analysis that we were to provide. Knowing that more than 200 small venues had been identified in a 2007 preliminary enquiry,⁹ we asked how many should be included in the survey. Forty-five was the number that came up during the meeting and it seemed a reasonable enough target given the study's budget and timetable. However, in the course of the discussions that led up to the signing of the research contract later that summer, we came to realize that the 45 venues selected to participate in the study were not considered by APLAS to be a fragment of a much larger ensemble of small venues and concert halls; in APLAS's view, they constituted the ensemble in its entirety. In standard methodological terms, what we considered a sample ("n") turned out to be the domain or "universe" of objects about which information was to be sought ("N").

This anecdote points to APLAS's dual role as both a contractual and funding agent of the research project, and a grassroots organisation working for and with a group of people whose artistic and business practices it aims to protect and further develop. The incident described above and the context in which it occurred suggest that the study matters to APLAS's board of directors not only because it will provide much needed information about a certain number of small venues that it considers to be potential members; more importantly, it matters because the study produces positive knowledge about the singular multiplicity that these venues form and its conditions of existence.

Perhaps the most important actor to emerge through "the making of" the study is "PLAS," an acronym that stands for "*petit[s] lieu[x] d'arts et de spectacles*" or "small venue(s) for artistic productions."¹⁰ As the map (see figure 1) produced by APLAS at the time we started our collaboration illustrates, PLAS designates a number of music venues located for the most part in the downtown Montréal area and in those neighbourhoods known as the Plateau and Mile-End.¹¹ These venues correspond to the 45 potential respondents that constitute the scope of the survey.

PLAS is also what individual members of APLAS are called. As can be read on its web site, the organisation's definition of a PLAS is "a physical site that regularly hosts events related to the arts, mainly to the field of music, and that, regardless of the legal form of the company that runs it, has the following distinctive features:

1. it has a capacity of fewer than 350 ;
2. it gives priority to new artists [*relève*], innovation and original crea-

tion, and plays an active role in their development, promotion and support ;

3. it has a significant and recognized involvement in the community ;
4. it operates predominantly in the field of music ;
5. it has the appropriate licences delivered by the city or municipality ;
6. it programs cultural activities on a regular basis ;
7. it owns basic equipment (stage, sound system, lighting, etc) that render music or artistic performance possible.” our translation)

<http://www.aplas.ca/tiki-index.php?page=Definition%20d'un%20PLAS> (9 September 2009)

Through the process of making the study and the study itself, however, PLAS has also become something different. It has become a more abstract and larger scale entity which, to draw an analogy to a living being, adopts particular behaviours and develops in certain ways under the particular conditions that affect its existence. In Foucauldian terms, the study (and its principal investigators) can thus be said to be instrumental in the production of PLAS as a particular population. This notion was introduced in Foucault’s initial discussions of biopower (Foucault 1978), a concept designed to “embrace all the historical processes that have brought human life and its mechanisms into the

Figure 1. Map of PLAS (reproduced with the permission of APLAS)



realm of knowledge-power, and hence, amenable to calculated transformation” (Rabinow and Rose 2003:xxix). Discipline constitutes the “individualizing pole” of this distinct regime of power while population (and more specifically the politics of population) stands as its “collectivising pole” (ibid.). It refers to a system of living beings, a wide spectrum of large-scale processes involving “everything that extends from biological rootedness through the species up to the surface that gives one a hold provided by the public,” that is, “the population seen under the aspect of its opinions, ways of doing things, forms of behaviour, customs, fears, prejudices, and requirements; it is what one gets a hold on through education, campaigns, and convictions” (Foucault 2009:75). From this perspective, the survey can be understood as a way to identify and gain access to PLAS as a population. It is a means to document, beyond the shared characteristics of its individual members (as defined *a priori* through APLAS’s filtering action), the opinions, ideas, and aspirations about itself and the living conditions (for instance, financial, legal, cultural, material or technical) of PLAS as a population.

The study we are conducting not only produces PLAS as a population, but it also acts on it by providing knowledge about its milieu. According to Foucault, a milieu is a “field of intervention” in which one tries to affect a population or, more precisely, “a multiplicity of individuals who are, and fundamentally and essentially only exist (...) bound to the materiality within which they live” (ibid.:21). It is also, he contends, “a certain number of combined, overall effects bearing on all who live in it. It is an element in which a circular link is produced between effects and causes, since an effect from one point of view will be a cause from another” (ibid.). As a population, PLAS can be said to be affected by, and in turn attempt to affect materialities related to urban planning guidelines (that influence their geographical location or their size), for example, or provincial health and safety regulations (that impact on opening hours as much as on employees’ schedule)—aspects of the reality of PLAS addressed by the questionnaire.

One of the circular links of causes and effects that surfaced during the making of the study concerns public postering. Since its founding, APLAS has made what it refers to as “postering on urban furniture” a priority. In March 2010, it published a report (APLAS 2010) that presents an historical overview of the problem of postering on urban furniture (which dates back to the early 1980s), the various legislations involved, as well as the different pilot projects and joint initiatives put forward by various actors within the city’s cultural scene to solve this problem, though to no avail. A few months later, APLAS joined *Collé Montréal* (Coalition for Free Expression Stick Montréal), “a coalition of independent venue owners, producers, festivals, artists and concerned

citizens,” to denounce the City of Montréal’s ban on postering:

Montréal’s internationally renowned independent arts and cultural scene accounts for over 6,000 shows annually, and revenues reaching 15 million dollars. This community relies on postering as its primary means of communication, yielding approximately 300,000 posters annually. Montréal’s current anti-postering by-law and subsequent fines have a suffocating effect, prohibiting the very mechanisms through which this community survives and thrives. (<http://collemontreal.org>, accessed on 4 June 2010)

Collé Montréal called for a city-wide amnesty on postering fines, which had recently rocketed thanks to what it perceived to be a zealous reinforcement of the “cleanliness” bylaw (RRVM c. P-12.2) on the part of the municipal administration.

We have thus come to understand the study we are conducting not only as the intervention of a specific population. After all, once completed, the survey will provide an empirical description of PLAS that will produce and legitimize its very existence. We also see it as an intervention emanating from the milieu: even before producing any results, the survey has become a negotiating instrument used by APLAS and others to defend projects and engage in struggles on both artistic and political fronts.

Anecdote 2: A newcomer to the neighbourhood

It was the end of January 2010. Line and I were concerned. The deadline for our final report was approaching and we had yet to start gathering the necessary “data.” In fact, we were still waiting for a final list of the 45 potential respondents, and we had not heard from APLAS in weeks. “Perhaps we should contact them,” I asked Line. She suggested that we write the General Manager. So we sent yet another email on January 29th. During the ensuing weeks, we were almost at a standstill. Not that we had lost contact with the organization; we kept receiving copies of email messages addressed to the members of APLAS board of directors. But these messages - often entitled “Code 24” or “Code 72” in reference to the number of hours members had to respond - created a sense of urgency that contrasted with the slowness of the process, at least from our perspective. These messages were about the survey, though more specifically they were about APLAS’s relations with the City of Montréal – how it was slow

getting back to APLAS concerning the wording of some of the questions, and how it required the inclusion of questions we felt were inappropriate because, for example, they would have forced respondents to confess to ethically questionable or illegal activities. Other messages dealt with APLAS's discussions with provincial government agencies, including the ministère du Développement économique et de l'Innovation (Department of Economic Development and Innovation) and the ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine, (Department of Cultural Affairs, Communications, and Status of Women) regarding the funding of the association and the survey itself.

The "Code 24" and "Code 72" messages also dealt with APLAS's report on public postering and questioned the best way to publicise it in the context of the organisation's ongoing discussions with and involvement in Collé Montréal. The emails evoked yet another "joint venture," this one in connection with what people referred to as the "problematic of noise." It involved negotiations with municipal authorities over the increase in fines levied against PLAS for exceeding legal noise limits. Line and I realized that "there's more in these emails than the politics of the survey... APLAS is everywhere, talking with a variety of agents, operating simultaneously on different fronts." The study may not have been moving forward, but APLAS, its GM, board of directors, and members were!

This anecdote renders visible APLAS's ongoing interactions with various stakeholders, be they financial or political partners. Through these interactions, APLAS can be seen acting and positioning itself as spokesperson for its members or potential members. It is speaking in the name of its members regarding issues that the organization deems important, and which are largely shared by all PLAS. By doing so in front of state authorities, it is also speaking in the name of other show bars and small concert venues that do not have an analogous representative. In talking to the City of Montréal and other levels of government about the survey, APLAS is producing a metonymic relationship in which the eventual needs, problems or difficulties that the survey will help reveal become representative of those of all Montréal music venues considered a relatively homogeneous multiplicity. In its capacity as spokesperson, APLAS not only walks in its members' shoes and those of other small venues in Montréal—"speaking for [their] needs and desires," to use Gayatri Spivak's (1988) expression—but it also portrays or situates the population they form and the milieu that shapes it. The organization is acting as spokesperson for the survey as well, giving a voice to the survey and defending its relevance in front

of municipal and provincial authorities. In discussing with local authorities the survey's needs in terms of deadlines, budget or methodological issues, APLAS integrated it into its own voice. The survey, we argued, is used by the organization not only to strengthen the position of actual and potential members in discussions relating to their needs, but it is also cast in the debate as something unavoidable for the city, as an obligatory point of passage (Latour 1988) to depict PLAS. Through the "scientific" aura of a survey produced and administered by academics, the organization projects an authoritative representation of a particular population.

By way of its representational practices, APLAS presents itself in front of other stakeholders as a legitimate spokesperson with a certain amount of expertise about its own milieu. It presents itself as a legitimate and important actor who provides "forms of knowledge deemed 'local' or 'traditional' which professional expertise are not considered capable of providing" (Gagnon 2006:172). This citizen is assumed to possess a form of knowledge that is legitimate because it is understood as situated, built through direct experience. For Gagnon, even though any citizen could potentially be an expert, qualifying oneself as such requires the use of techniques that express this situated knowledge efficiently. The survey we are conducting might be understood in this way; it is a tool that employs "the language" of authorities, permitting APLAS to become a recognized agent in its discussions with the City of Montréal and the provincial government.

One of APLAS's most publicized interventions as "expert of its own milieu" to take place while the study was being conducted concerned an incident journalists have dubbed "the noise problem." Following the complaint of a private citizen who was not happy with the level of noise during an event held in March 2010, the Montréal city police raided the multimedia performance and experimentation hall known simply as "SAT" (*Société des arts technologiques/ Technical Arts Society*). Together with a large and diverse group of DJs, concert producers, managers and venue owners, APLAS joined SAT in its efforts to alert the local media about what they understood to be an especially paradoxical situation given that the event took place in the center of the *Quartier des Spectacles*, an entertainment district developed by the City's authorities where such establishments are encouraged to operate. Six months later, the owners of venues located in another Montréal "cultural" district—the Plateau—learned that the district's administration had decided to significantly increase minimum fines for noise complaints from a "few hundred dollars to thousands—topping out at \$12,000" (Lejtenyi 2010:10). Again, APLAS joined with other important actors—including festival producers and musicians—in order to alert the local press to the threat this new decision posed for their

“living environment.” Using its expertise of the milieu as a way to legitimate its intervention in the debate, APLAS argued that the city’s administration did not consult with “the right people” before adopting the new bylaw. In doing so, the organization positioned itself as a cultural agent with whom local authorities should discuss the repercussions of such decisions, the implication being that its situated experience of the Montréal music scene and its expert knowledge of the precarious financial situation of small bars and concert halls were lacking on the city’s side. In this way, APLAS positioned itself an important actor, capable of intervening in a debate about noise and the realities of local venues with other stakeholders, be they municipal authorities, festival organizers, musicians, citizens of the borough, or the police.

In this context, “noise” can be said to have created a common ground where the APLAS, in working alongside other individual and collective spokespersons, came to stand on an equal footing with other cultural agents, even those otherwise recognized as more powerful or influential. Drawing on Foucault’s use of the notion, we would like to propose that noise served to embed the milieu that APLAS represents along with the organization itself in propinquity. For Foucault, this notion refers to the cohabitation of heterogeneous elements. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault quotes of a passage of Jorge Luis Borgès’s *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins* where a method for categorizing the world was described. The narrator of this novel explained that in a certain Chinese dictionary,

[...] animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.” (Borgès in Foucault 1973:xv)

Foucault used this as a starting point for a discussion of language and representation as the only plane on which this taxonomy could be possible. For him, it is not the impossibility of fantastic animals that is “monstrous” in this enumeration, but the narrowness of the distance separating them from “real” ones, and their juxtaposition on the same “operating table.” Foucault argued that what renders this possible is language itself, as the place where the distance between types of animals allows them to exist in discrete entities near one another.

The monstrous quality that runs through Borgès’s enumeration consists [...] in the fact that the common ground on which such

meetings are possible has itself been destroyed. What is impossible is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible. (Foucault 1973:xvi)

According to Bruno Cornellier's (2009) interpretation of Foucault's use of "propinquity," the notion points to a "juxtaposition of differences," a site that creates the common ground which makes possible for singular things to coexist near one another while maintaining their identity and differences.

If "language" is the common ground for Borgès's enumeration, singular "problem spaces" (Scott, 2004), we argue, create the planes on which APLAS is able to intervene side by side with different stakeholders. According to David Scott, "problem spaces" are historically-constituted discursive spaces where questions, answers and arguments are debated, and where interventions are made. For example, politicians and public servants alike look up to, and seek advice from, APLAS on a wide range of issues in the same way they do from ADISQ and other well-established organizations. These issues have not been limited to those already mentioned—noise or public postering—but have also included larger issues arising from plans to revitalize the downtown area of Montréal, and from the revision of provincial and municipal training programs for cultural workers and other "creative labour." These "problem spaces" put APLAS, and the PLAS it represents and renders visible, in propinquity with other important spokespersons, and on the same plane. This propinquity is not stable and cannot be taken for granted. Rather it is the conjunctural result of a series of actions, discourses and practices, and is therefore the product of an ongoing effort.

The survey in which we are involved may be understood, in a way, as a strategy that helps APLAS—a relatively obscure, new and quite small organization—to be placed and to remain in the propinquity of important and diversified agents in Montréal's cultural world. In a recent interview, we asked the General Manager of APLAS to reflect on the role of the organization and the genealogy of the survey. He explained how the survey contributes to what he believes to be his and other actors' necessary engagement with the common issues that, in their domain of activity, have to be addressed, describing this engagement as a learning process akin to "doing homework".

And that's what the milieu is all about. The people that are there and that do their homework... And to do homework means to work 70 hours a week, to read all the reports and to be everywhere in order to know what's going on and to be able to understand the issues. To acquire a broader conception of these things,

you need to have both a general and a specific knowledge that renders the analysis of the issues possible. (Research interview, 4/20/2010)

To do one's homework means that a monitoring of the possible "problem spaces" is needed in order to develop a sense of which issues could represent a "common ground." Identifying the "problem spaces" to which APLAS, the population of PLAS and its milieu are related, can be said to constitute one of the purposes of the study. APLAS is using the expertise it possesses of its own milieu as a way to connect show bars and concert halls with these larger issues, inserting them in the "problem spaces" it helps monitor and introducing them in propinquity. The investigation as a whole can also be said to bring to the surface the propinquity or space of juxtaposition to which the milieu we are helping produce belongs.

Conclusion

By means of two anecdotes we have critically reflected on the "making of" a study which has shed light on an actor whose importance and effectivity in the cultural economy of live music in Montréal had yet to be acknowledged: PLAS. The survey we are conducting, in conjunction with APLAS's practices of representation, is but one locus where PLAS is gaining public recognition. The recent increasing visibility of PLAS in local media suggests that its very existence is not entirely dependent upon the actions of APLAS and its partners. For example, the popular daily newspaper *La Presse* recently published a special report on concert halls in the Montréal area which focused on the increasingly influential role played by suburban cities in the geographical distribution of different types of venues (de Repentigny and Blais 2010). In an article entitled "The importance of PLAS," one of the founding member of APLAS is interviewed with the view to supporting the idea that there now exists in Montréal a distinct group of small yet highly influential show bars and concert halls that do things differently, and that the members in these sites have opinions and values of their own. The article argued that this is a force to be reckoned with by more established members of the local live music and performing arts milieu and their partners (Côté 2010). What has yet to be seen, though, is the extent to which the emergence of PLAS challenges the predominance of a unique mode of existence for music venues within the live music economy in Montréal. ❀

Notes

1. This is particularly the case with *Observatoire de la culture et des communications* (Cultural and Communications Observatory) a branch of the *Institut de la statistique du Québec* (Quebec Bureau of Statistics) which provides statistics on sound recordings but also on a wide range of paying performing arts (e.g., theatre, dance, music, song and variety shows) with respect to attendance, occupancy rate, ticket sales revenue by administrative region, target audience, origin of show and hall size. See http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/observatoire/default_an.htm.

2. As it is often the case in the academic milieu, the notion, which could be translated as mirror text, appears in French in the original.

3. According to Lawrence Grossberg, “every practice transforms the world in some way (...) [E]ffectivity describes the particular domains and range of the effects of any practice” (1992:398).

4. The notion has been around in the social sciences since the early 1950s. In the wake of sociologist Chombart de Lauwe’s (1966) approach to social space, socio-psychological studies often use the term “propinquity” to refer to a variable that measures the degree of physical proximity or closeness. See, for example, Nahemow and Lawton’s (1975) study of the similarity of race, age and sex and the propinquity of residence in friendship formation. In a similar way, countering the tendency of American sociologists to exaggerate the loss of community, and to oppose community to other more complex forms of impersonal structures of association, Melvin Webber (1963 in Calhoun, 1998) wrote about “community without propinquity” and friendship at a distance. In ways that echo our understanding of the concept, other scholars have recently used the term to challenge traditional theories of presence (absence) and materiality (immateriality). In his analysis of digital techniques of rapid manufacturing (2009), anthropologist Victor Buchli labels “propinquity” an analogous relation of spatial and temporal proximity that, albeit inscribed materially, cannot be reduced to mere physical and visual co-presence.

5. The *Observatoire de la culture et des communications* is mandated to “meet the real needs and real sector stakeholders of culture and communications as well as those dealing with these sectors in terms of statistics, support for research and monitoring.” http://www.formulaire.gouv.qc.ca/cgi/affiche_doc.cgi?dossier=7383&table=0#15 (consulted on 1 October 2010 - our translation)

6. The *Association québécoise du disque, du spectacle et de la vidéo* (ADISQ), the trade organisation of record, concert and video producers, “represents independent record and entertainment producers in Québec, defending their interests and promoting their songs, recordings, live performances and videos.” http://www.socan.ca/jsp/en/pub/music_creators/REIndList.jsp (consulted on October 1st 2010). Since its creation in 1978, it organises the annual ADISQ/Felix awards and has become an influential lobby group.

7. Founded in 1984, the *Réseau indépendant des diffuseurs d'événements artistiques unis* (RIDEAU) is an independent national network of presenters of artistic events.

Representing arts presenters and venues across Québec and French-speaking Canada, its “mission is to promote the performing arts by supporting its members productions.” <http://www.rideau-inc.qc.ca> (accessed on 1 October 2010).

8. Since 1995, the *Société de développement des entreprises culturelles* (SODEC, the Society for the Development of Cultural Enterprises) a governmental organization accountable to the Quebec Department of Culture Affaires and Communication, “pursues its mandate to promote and support the implementation and development of cultural enterprises, including the media, in all regions of Québec.” (Our translation) <http://www.sodec.gouv.qc.ca/fr/page/route/-1/15> (consulted 1 October 2010).

9. According to the “Study of small venues and show bars on the City of Montréal territory” prepared for APLAS by Jean-Robert Bisailon in 2007, 211 small venues were itemized. 130 corresponded to the definition of small venues and show bars (discussed later) and 70 of them were considered especially active. (Bisailon, 2007)

10. The acronym PLAS being a homonym of *place* (place), it has a wider range of connotations (location, environment, locale, etc.) than the word *salle* [de spectacle] (venue) has in French.

11. This map is not meant to provide an exhaustive portrait of all of the small venues within Montréal. It does bring attention to a limited set of venues the vast majority of which not only occupy roughly the same geopolitical space but share similar linguistic, ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics - something that would be worth further investigation in another paper.

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