



Photo credit: Mélissa Moriceau, 2018



TO DO OR NOT TO DO? TRANSGRESSION AND REGULATION OF SUBVERSIVE BEHAVIOUR IN MONTREAL

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> This case study focuses on the interaction of various youth transgressive practices, and notably at the intersection between regulatory mechanisms and subversive initiatives.

Highlights

The approach is inductive; it aims to reflect the actual modalities of transgression and subversion in a city that “formally” claims to be transgressive and subversive. In the context of this reputation for Montreal, how do regulatory mechanisms and subversive initiatives interact? What are the spaces of expression accessible to young people and under what conditions?

In order to respond to this, two research axes have been developed. The first concerns graffiti and street art in Montreal, practices that oscillate between transgression and institutionalization, through forms of institutional recuperation, illustrated in particular by the Festival d'art urbain, created in 2012. Several issues then emerge: how are the connections or oppositions between the two poles of practice negotiated, displaced and materialized? How do professionalizing actors move from illegal to legal realms (and therefore from graffiti to street art)? Where does the State stand in and facing these practices?

The second axis concerns an informal group in the Hochelaga borough organizing evenings of humorous shows in squats. If the form of organization of these shows is already akin to a form of transgression—clandestine and without any legal framework—, the transgression is also operationalized in the type of humour offered. Indeed, in a city characterized by a major “official” comedy scene (symbolized by the “Just for Laughs” festival), these performances are an opportunity for participants to engage in politically oriented humorous practices.

Preliminary results

While the research work has not yet been completed and a meeting is scheduled for October 18, 2018, to bring together students and case study researchers, several preliminary empirical leads have been developed by the research assistants in their respective fields.

As part of the informal humourist group, Méliissa Moriceau spoke with the association managers, some of whom are neighbours and participants. They are young (under 30 years old), French-speaking and strongly committed to the left politically, especially in anarchist and queer movements. If in practice negotiation of this “subversive” space firstly took place in relation to the neighbourhood rather than with authorities (the grouping has not received any legal threats for the moment), interviews made it possible to highlight the ambivalent place occupied by these shows in the biographical trajectories of their participants. Indeed, despite their collectively transgressive and subversive nature, they nevertheless constitute, on an individual level, a professional investment for aspiring comedians, who can acquire skills to reinvest in other more official spaces.

With regard to graffiti and street art, Quentin Guatteri notes that the distinction between these two practices—produced by legal systems, police practices and forms of “recuperation”—is materialized by an explicit opposition between graffiti artists and street artists. To be understood, this opposition must be placed within the context of each actor’s trajectory. Also, the transition from graffiti to “street art” is, first of all, a process of professionalization: a “street artist” is a former “graffiti artist” who has decided to convert his or her activity into a profession. But far from being solely artistic, legal or local, this opposition is also endowed with a political sense by the actors themselves, engaging in particular a distinct relationship to the State and public spaces (several reinvest representations built during militant trajectories within anarchist movements).

What was done this year (between April 2017 and September 2018)

“Transgressive humour” axis, research activities conducted by Mélissa Moriceau:

- > 10 semi-structured interviews
- > Transcriptions of the interviews
- > Literary review on subversive practices and associations in Montreal

“Graffiti and street art” axis, research activities carried out by Quentin Guatieri:

- > Literary review on graffiti and street art
- > Semi-structured interviews (out of 10 planned)

What is planned of the next year

As part of the “graffiti and street-art” axis, it is planned to extend the survey to municipal services in charge of regulating this activity. More precisely, the team would interview employees of services in charge of removing graffiti in order to explain the logic of “sorting” between the street art/graffiti pieces that are erased, and those, on the contrary, that are selected by the city. Finally, on condition that they remain anonymous, some “graffiti artists” have granted Quentin Guatieri permission to follow them during a graffiti session in the perspective of a photo or video documentary.

Then it is planned to open a third axis of research on transgressive practices among young people from the middle or higher classes. This possibility will be further discussed at the meeting on October 18, 2018.

Type of products planned for next year



> Multimedia coproduction



> Scientific publication



> Conference in a meeting



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