Thematic Section
Montréalology: An Introduction

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Montréal has always been a city of encounters with difference—and has long been imagined and studied as such. Canada's second largest metropolis not only has a highly diverse population, but also a unique sociopolitical and cultural context due to the complex dynamic of majority-minority relations between Canada and Quebec. Moreover, with four major universities and several smaller ones, Montréal generates a significant amount of social research, some of which is directed towards the city itself. This interdisciplinary thematic section brings into dialogue the work of several "Montréalologists"—scholars in various fields engaged in significant long-term research in and about Montréal. By focusing on one city from different angles, the thematic section offers a solid contribution to urban social research in Canada. But it also aims to stimulate epistemological reflections on how the object of study shapes research and vice versa. Specifically, the section reaches beyond Montréal to critically interrogate how the social reality of the city, images of the city and research on the city mutually influence each other. In this way, it carries on the conversation started in *Anthropologica* 50(2), when Alan Smart, guest editor of a thematic section on urban anthropology, "challenge[d] anthropology to revitalize its theoretical and substantive engagement with urban realities and prospects" (2008:207).

While Smart's thematic section focused on urban political economy, this section is concerned instead with the experience, representation and organization of urban social and cultural diversity. It originated in an executive session organized for the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association held in Montréal in 2011.[1] The opportunity to put together a showcase of long-term research projects in and about Montréal for the thousands of anthropologists flocking to the city was too good to pass up! The panelists were the five authors whose work appears here: sociologist Annick Germain, historian Steven High, sociolinguist Patricia Lamarre and

anthropologists Deirdre Meintel and Géraldine Mossière. Although they all knew of each other's work, it turned out to be the first time that they had shared a stage. Helen A. Regis, an anthropologist who works on race, place and the politics of representation in New Orleans was the panel's discussant at the AAA. Here, Pierre Filion, professor of planning at the University of Waterloo, provides a commentary, probing the kinds of Montréalology that the four articles represent.

Describing the City

Montréal's history of sociocultural diversity goes back a long way. Situated in the homelands of the Iroquois, the island of Montréal was also used by Hurons, Stadaconians, Algonquins and other Aboriginal peoples. A short-lived fur-trading post (1611), legacy of explorer Samuel Champlain, left traces on the island where a small group of French settlers would found the missionary colony of Ville-Marie in 1642. After Britain's conquest of New France (1759), immigrants from the British Isles settled alongside the French inhabitants, (though the latter always outnumbered the former except during the quarter-century from 1835-1860 (Linteau 1982)), and the city grew to become the industrial and commercial capital of Canada. From the 1880s and into the 20th century, Germans, Ukrainians, African-Americans, Chinese and Ashkenazi Jews immigrated to the city, followed by several waves of southern Europeans. Since the 1970s, the city has been shaped by the "new immigration" (Germain and Rose 2000) from countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Middle East—especially countries where French is a common first or second language, such as Haiti, Lebanon, Vietnam, and Algeria, and latterly European countries such as France and Romania. Meanwhile, Montréal's industrial fortunes declined as Canada's economic centre moved west, and the Quiet Revolution brought the French language and francophone Quebecers to centre stage in politics (Levine 1990). The new immigration has made the city ever more ethnically, culturally, linguistically and spiritually diverse. The immigration channels that newcomers take into the city, not to mention their fortunes once they settle, are also diverse, such that they end up in a broad range of socioeconomic circumstances. It is easy to argue that Montréal embodies a case of what Steven Vertovec has called "super-diversity," a term coined to capture the ways that language, religion, migration channels, immigration statuses, gender, age, residential dispersion or concentration and transnational attachments intersect to generate a "diversification of diversity" (2007:1025).

The significance of the contributions to Montréalology gathered here can be read at several levels. At one level, they describe and account for certain dimensions of Montréal's super-diversity, or, to use another term, the production of difference: in public spaces and neighbourhood life; in language practices; in the life stories woven into the urban fabric; and, in religion and spirituality. Drawing on many years of research with her colleagues at the Institut National De La Recherche Scientifique (INRS) Urbanisation Culture Société, sociologist Annick Germain draws our attention to the social mix of Montréal, and the relative lack of segregation among Montréalers from different socioeconomic and ethnocultural backgrounds at the scale of the neighbourhood. The mix can be measured by place of residence, but can also be observed in public spaces and provides a contrast to what is seen in the paradigmatic cities of interdisciplinary urban studies.

Montréal's social mix means it has a fascinating linguistic mix. As you can hear on any transit ride, conversations often change languages mid-sentence—and the languages are not only French and English. Patricia Lamarre, a sociolinguist, has been using reflexive, individual-centred ethnographic methods to study the linguistic lives of young multilingual Montréalers, tracking their everyday language use and eliciting accounts of their linguistic identities. She seeks to discover when and where they use each language, and why, and under what conditions they converse bilingually or multilingually, or just stick to one tongue. The research participants turn out to be very flexible in adapting to their interlocutors' linguistic competencies, as well as the norms for language use in particular settings—and they struggle with having to label themselves as *either* francophone *or* anglophone *or* speakers of another language.

Among the roughly 20 per cent of Montréalers who were born outside Canada are many who arrived following experiences of mass violence. Steven High, a historian, introduces us to the Montréal Life Stories Project (www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca), which has recorded over 400 life history interviews with Montréalers who were displaced by genocide, war and atrocities in Rwanda, Cambodia, the Congo, Latin America, Haiti and the Holocaust. Rather than just gathering testimony, the project members dedicated a great deal of time and resources to making these life stories accessible, drawing on them to create educational materials, theatrical performances, documentary films and digital media products. Here, High describes a self-guided audio walk created by members of the Rwandan community to commemorate the past in their new city, in which listener-walkers hear the stories of six Rwandan Montréalers as they trace the steps of an annual memorial procession route. High writes, "We wanted walkers to feel like they were being accompanied by the Rwandan community."

While High investigates a point of interaction between one community and its fellow Montréalers, anthropologists Deirdre Meintel and Géraldine Mossière describe the many religious and spiritual paths that Montréalers of all origins follow. Quebec's Catholic church fell rapidly out of popular favour in the 1960s, but many (ex-)Catholic Québécois still seek out "tools for transcendence" to connect with the sacred and cope with life's problems. While some convert to Islam or join evangelical churches, others dip or dive into more fluid spiritual currents. Meintel and Mossière compare Montréal's religious landscape with trends in other Canadian and US cities, suggesting that historical and social factors have led to a unique kind of "religious cosmopolitanism" developing in the city.

Imagining the City

The contributing scholars all work on Montréal's social diversity and the impact of that diversity on such things as policy, memory, imagination, or the everyday or extraordinary events of urban life. This brings us to another level of the papers' collective contribution: they ask what effect popular representations of Montréal as a relatively diverse place have on the production and performance of diversity. In other words, how do people's images and imaginings of the city feed into their engagement with it? High's paper, for instance, suggests that by literally following in the footsteps of specific social groups or individuals in the city—the residents of a neighbourhood-in-mutation, or the "temporary congregation" (Jensen 2010) brought together by a city bus route—Montréalers (and visitors) can recognize and engage with the many memoryscapes that overlay the city. New digital technologies can be used to mediate intercultural encounters in creative and surprisingly intimate ways. What is striking in the case of the Rwandan memorial route, *Une fleur dans le fleuve / A Flower in the River*, is that it commemorates events that happened halfway across the world, yet in spite of this transnational stretch, it is pinned to Montréal by particular objects one passes on the walk.

Lamarre's paper similarly demonstrates the intricate interdependence between space and speech, place and *parole*. Instead of depending solely on personal factors such as ethnicity or fluency, language choice is also greatly affected by the representations individuals have about the place where they are speaking and the people with whom they are speaking. So, for instance, French is the default, "safe" language to use in dépanneurs (convenience stores) unless one is certain that the neighbourhood has a significant number of anglophone residents. Linguistic choices in Montreal can be loaded with social and political stakes, and are strongly shaped by perceptions of place and space and the strategic recognition of what is appropriate, where. That said, Lamarre reminds us that they can be playful, too.

Meintel and Mossière show that the spiritual pluralism of Montréal is in some sense self-perpetuating: it is as if the city's diverse religious landscape simultaneously provides a spiritual map for its inhabitants. Both immigrant and Canadian-born research participants seem to have "high religious mobility," engaging in new or multiple spiritual practices, with or without conversion. The authors detect a certain openness to religious pluralism, not only at the individual level, but also at the collective level, and even find it inscribed in some urban spaces such as the Parc du Mont-Royal. The vast array of religious resources visible in the city gives people a lot to choose from.

Germain's work over the years has focused a great deal on the ways in which Montréalers' perceptions of ethnic difference play out in day-to-day life. One of the research projects she discusses in her article involved an exercise, in which community and youth workers took the time to reflect on their own work with young people and families living in *habitations à loyer modique* (HLM, or public social housing), who are for the most part immigrants or the children of recent immigrants. The workers described the tricky balance they have to achieve between, on the one hand, making bridges for youth to go beyond these tightly bounded spaces into the rest of the city, and on the other, being able to close the door on the outside in order to support place-based identities and solidarity within the HLMs. This highlights the way in which stigmatized groups have to manage other people's perceptions of their difference, that is, their marked identities, as they go about their everyday lives (see also Howarth 2002). Germain's article, like the others, thus investigates the relationship between the city's actual and imagined diversity.

Researching the City

Lastly, the papers offer critical reflections on the interaction between social-scientific representations of the city and the city itself. Which differences are marked, which go unremarked, and which are erased as social scientists map the city? Germain shows that social scientists can have a real impact on the city's social policies: in this case, a long-standing relationship between urban researchers and policymakers and practitioners means that a research-based, analytical approach to social mix is influencing housing policy and service provision in Montréal—which in turn shapes the social research agenda. This raises the question of what conditions enable

such a relationship to be sustained. Obviously, it depends on investing material and human resources in research, but equally important are social and intellectual affiliations, such as offering degree programs whose graduates, once employed in city institutions, are sympathetic to—even hungry for—academic input. The Montréal Life Stories project led by High is another exemplary collaboration between people inside and outside the university (or, professional and lay researchers). Funded by a seven-year Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), this project has always taken seriously its participatory, collaborative mandate. Breaking with the top-down design of most social research, its team has found ways to involve its diverse members in the planning, conduct, interpretation and dissemination of research—meeting the oft-repeated but rarely followed call to "share authority" in oral history.

Scholarly representations of the city can also be challenged. Lamarre, for example, counteracts the alarmism of some researchers' contributions to debates on language in Montréal. This is partly because she takes an entirely different methodological tack; while the "demolinguistic" perspective depends on constructing an immobile linguistic subject, who is counted at her place of residence and only for her mother tongue or the language that she uses most often, Lamarre actually follows what individuals do with language as they move around the city in their everyday lives. Meintel and Mossière reveal that behind the dominant image of Québécois society, and therefore Montréal, becoming ever more secular, many Montréalers of diverse origins are finding succour in their own and even each other's religious and spiritual practices. They further suggest that while there are some counter-examples (such as local Catholics rebuffing Tamil Catholics' offer to buy a church), those who are religiously "rooted"—whether in predominantly immigrant or Québécois-born congregations—seem to find it easier to be open to other religious practices than those who are not. Porous religiosity in Montréal seems to foster cosmopolitanism.

Yet, we should be wary of romanticizing Montréal as a cradle of cosmopolitanism, which suits contemporary calls for "living together with difference" almost too well. Representations of diversity can be put to all kinds of uses, not all of them salutary—such as competitive city-branding and city-boosting to attract the supposedly creative class and other more or less imaginary investors. An overly celebratory perspective can also stop us from clearly seeing areas of discrimination and racism (see LeBlanc this issue). One rather large blind spot of many Montréalologists is the legacy of colonialism in the Montréal region. To some extent, interethnic relations are softened and relaxed by the lack of identification between the Québécois state and British, then Canadian colonial projects, as well as the conviction strongly held by many white Franco-Québécois that they are a colonized people themselves. However, this occludes the ongoing coloniality in Aboriginal-settler relations. The original inhabitants of the island are rarely recognized (except in times of crisis, such as the Oka crisis in 1990), and Aboriginal people living in the city are very much marginalized (Jaccoud and Brassard 2003; Kishigami 2002; Kishigami 2008; Lévesque 2003). It seems that both Montréalers and Montréalologists could do more to engage in dialogue and reconciliation with those who were there before there was Montréal.[2]

Conclusion

"Montréalology" is therefore not just the study of one urban setting, but also the study of the relationship between social research and its urban context. It raises some final questions about how far the knowledge generated by research in one urban context is transposable to others. What can we learn about other cities from Montréal and Montréalology? Does the study of Montréal merely underscore the city's exceptionality, or does it leave social scientific legacies that can be transferred elsewhere? Filion's commentary explores these questions further, but to my mind, two major points arise from the papers gathered here.

First, the papers underscore the importance of paying attention to mobility in order to capture city life and lives. Rather than boxing people into their respective neighbourhoods, religions, mother tongues or "cultures," they all acknowledge that city-dwellers are geographically and socially mobile creatures—and mobility has been suggested by some (see Remy 1972) to be the defining feature of urbanity. This mobility is also scalar, because the salient place(s) in any given situation may be of smaller or larger scale. People easily move between, and engage or identify with, different levels of urban social relations—home and household, ethnic or religious communities, neighbourhood, city as a whole, state, continent, diaspora, and so on. The papers in this section all recognize that being a city-dweller means being connected to places at many levels, and being enmeshed in all kinds of networks. In emphasizing (as anthropology usually does) people's capacity to move from situation to situation, the papers remind us that all social practices—speaking, praying, getting on or not with the neighbours—are situated, not categorical.

That point could of course emerge from a set of articles about any city. However, my second point draws out a specific contribution of Montréalology to urban anthropology and urban studies in general. I suggest that the sheer multiplicity of Montréal makes apparent what is often concealed in other cities. To take Lamarre's work as an example, young people presumably mix, match and play with different linguistic codes in any setting, but usually do so by subtle changes of register or dialect, rather than shifting from one language to another. The exuberant multilingualism of Montréal draws our attention very obviously to the fact that linguistic practices are situationally specific. It is in this spirit that Germain (with tongue in cheek) proposes Montréal as an alternative paradigmatic city in urban research, after the Chicago and the LA Schools. Rather than claiming that Montréal represents a new prototype of urban form and function, she suggests that a putative Montréal School would help focus scholarly attention on the meso-scale of the neighbourhood and on cohabitation, that is, coexistence or living together, rather than polarisation and fragmentation, which have tended to be the more common themes in urban studies over the past few decades. In this sense, the strengths and specializations of Montréalology could refract the light shed on other urban places along unexpected lines.

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Notes

1 The panel was the opening executive session in the program, and was called "Montréalology: Traces, Tidemarks and Legacies of a Unique City of Differences." Thanks to Sarah Green, Executive Program Chair of that AAA meeting, for her encouragement and support, and to Lindsay DuBois for suggesting a New Orleanian discussant. This link was made not only in appreciation of the inspiring sessions about New Orleans held at the 2010 AAA meeting in that city, but also in recognition of what the two cities share—both being regarded as multiply-inflected, exceptional North American cities.

2 The lack of research into aboriginal issues in Montréal is due in part to the politics of disciplinary histories, as Deirdre Meintel has pointed out (personal communication). As ethnic studies began to boom in the 1970s, First Nations people and Inuit understandably did not want to be seen as an 'ethnic group' because they felt that it denied their status as founding peoples. Academically, this translated into a divide between specialists in the anthropology of indigenous peoples working with First Nations and Inuit, usually on their (rural) territories, and specialists in immigration and ethnic studies working on interethnic relations and multicultural issues, often in more urban settings. However, the increasing urbanization of First Nations and Inuit people in Canada is starting to be reflected in research (see for instance Proulx and Howard-Bobiwash 2011, although it has no chapter on Montréal).

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