

## Unity and Division in the Urban Night

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« Cohabiter les nuits urbaines. Entre des formes de régulations sociales nocturnes et des traces d'animations et de digressions urbaines ».

*Cohabiter les nuits urbaines* is an important contribution to one of the most interesting recent developments in social and cultural research: the emergence of the urban night as the interdisciplinary object *par excellence*. The night, of course, has always been with us, eliciting bodies of discourse which have ranged from literary reveries to the reports of judicial investigations. Nevertheless, the last few years have seen an unprecedented wave of scholarly treatments of the nights of cities<sup>1</sup>. A sampling of writings published since 2013, in French or English, shows the attention paid to the night by historians (Sagahon, 2014; Willemen, 2014; Yon, 2013; de Baecque, 2015), geographers (Edensor, 2013; Gwiazdzinski, 2013; Shaw, 2014); sociologists (Clerval, 2014; Ocejó, 2014, Nofre, 2013), specialists in media, art and culture (Bronfen, 2013; Kerlouégan, 2013; Sharma, 2014; Straw, 2015a); scholars of architecture and design (Armengaud, 2013; Tureli, 2014, 2015; Isenstadt et al, 2015); and specialists in urban culture (Colaboratorio, 2014). In the same period, conferences devoted to the urban night have been held in Sao Paulo, Montreal, Grenoble, Berlin, Mexico City and elsewhere.

If we may speak, now, of a field called “night studies,” that field is one whose disciplinary orientations extend from the social sciences through what, in English, we call the “humanities”. In this book, as in other treatments of the urban night, pragmatic questions of urban governance are examined alongside aesthetic analyses of the affective reverberations of the nocturne in literature and cinema. One of the strengths of “night studies” as a field is that, at this stage in its development, these concerns may sit alongside each other, within single volumes. This pluralism may simply express the openness characteristic of many fields in their early stages, before logics of academic specialization and fragmentation divide it into subfields which cease to interact. It is possible, though, that the contemporary character of the urban night encourages this expansive interdisciplinarity. Increasingly, cities imagine themselves in ludic or

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<sup>1</sup> While of limited scientific value, a Google Scholar count of scholarly texts in English using the term “urban night” shows significant growth by decade since 1990; a similar search of French sources using the phrase “nuit urbaine” reveals a similar pattern.

performative terms and mobilize their nights in the service of this imagination. This imagining will often provoke processes of social economic transformation (like gentrification), which, in turn, provoke conflicts that new instruments of governance must address. To study the culture of the urban night is to be led, necessarily, to perspectives which encompass these different phenomena, from a sense of the night as expressive terrain through the ways in which it has become a site of political conflict. In a recent debate over the widely-diagnosed “death of nightlife” in London, the British capital<sup>2</sup>, interventions moved smoothly between questions of avant-garde musical creation, night-time noise pollution, urban transportation and the racial composition of the city’s creative classes.

As I write these words, London has just appointed its first “Night Czar”, a salaried official who has been given responsibility for promoting and developing the city’s nocturnal culture and night-time economy. Amy Lamé, who was chosen for this position by the city’s elected mayor, Sadiq Khan, is an American-born entertainer, a self-identified lesbian with a strong interest in LBGTQ issues. In creating this position, London follows other cities, like Paris, Toulouse and Amsterdam, where “night mayors” have been named, elected or simply acknowledged by municipal governments. Toronto, the largest city in my own country, has flirted with the notion of a night mayor since the concept began to circulate in international news media in 2015<sup>3</sup>.

At one level, the perceived need of many cities for a “night mayor” signals little more than a present-day recognition of the economic importance of night-time entertainment. To be sure, the economy and culture of the night are now recognized as a “sector” requiring specialized forms of administration and governance. In the most minimal definition of their responsibilities, night mayors are seen as mediators who, in the words of English-language bureaucracy, “cut red tap,”

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<sup>2</sup> See, among many accounts, “Last call: What’s happened to London’s nightlife?”, BBC News, October 7, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-37546558> accessed 15 November 2016; and “Is The Closure Of Fabric Another Nail In The Coffin For London’s Creative Community?”, Huffington Post (UK Edition), September 19, 2016 <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/tom-roberts1/is-the-closure-of-fabric- b 12047072.html> Accessed 20 September 2016.

<sup>3</sup> For London’s announcement of a “Night Czar,” see “New night mayors could make cities’ dreams come true – here’s how.” *The Conversation*, November 15, 2016. <http://theconversation.com/new-night-mayors-could-make-cities-dreams-come-true-heres-how-68388> Accessed November 16, 2016. For the case of Toronto, see “Toronto council committee wants to study the appointment of a nightlife czar.” *Toronto Star*, May 19, 2016. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/toronto-council-committee-wants-to-study-the-appointment-of-a-nightlife-czar-1.3589477?cmp=rss> Accessed June 15, 2016.

-- that is, smooth over relations between the sector of nocturnal economic activity and the various regulatory forces against which this sector typically struggles.

It is clear, however, that “Night mayors” and “night czars” have appeared at a time in which the cohabitation of the urban night has come to seem particularly problematic. Conflicts over so-called “nuisances”, such as noise and lighting, have pitted cultural producers and entrepreneurs against the residents of neighbourhoods, with both sides invoking the “traditional character” of their neighbourhood to justify their positions. The status of the urban night has been inflected by a variety of contemporary phenomena, such as immigration, gentrification, the so-called “studentification” of urban nightlife, notions of the “creative city”, and the retooling of cities for a global tourist economy. Questions of diversity, tolerance, safety and inclusiveness in urban life often reveal themselves now with starkest clarity in relation to the night (e.g., Clerval, 2014; Talbot, 2007; Ocejó, 2014.)

A feeling that present-day mechanisms for governance of the urban night are inadequate to the changing character of cities has stimulated the emergence of new classes of actors and new policy instruments, such as the aforementioned “night mayor” or the “Charte de la vie nocturne”. In a consistent pattern, these instruments have been developed, for the most part, in France, the Netherlands and other nations of continental Europe, then adopted (or considered for adoption) in Great Britain and, later still, in the Americas. In Montreal, where I live, the municipality was finally, in 2016, granted authority over certain areas of governance hitherto guarded by a provincial government in which the values of small towns and regions often predominated. These newly devolved powers include the right to control the hours of operation of bars and restaurants; extension of such hours had been blocked by the province in 2014.

Conflicts over night-time activity may reveal political forces or attitudes hitherto unrecognized within cities. As city councillors in Montreal have noted, in private conversation, the willingness of citizens to complain about night-time noise, and to expect a governmental response, varies widely according to the country of origin of immigrants and their expectations concerning public accountability. (Those most likely to complain, I was told, were part of the recent wave of immigration from France.) Willemsen has shown how consultation mechanisms such as Paris’ *Etats généraux de la nuit* (first held in 2010), while intended to highlight the rights of night-time entrepreneurs and cultural actors, may, in fact, reveal the unexpected solidarities and political

strength of neighbourhood residents who contest the expansion or protection of the night-time entertainment sector (Willemen, 2014: 403).

It seems clear, then, that the urban night is emerging as a distinct political “territory”, a space/time (“espace-temps”) in the formulation used by the editors of this book. If the term “night mayor” relegates traditional, elected mayors to the diminished status of mayors of the day, it is tempting to diagnose a crisis of political representation. Indeed, a key claim of one of the first meetings designed to address the question of night-time governance in cities -- a conference held in Manchester in 1994 -, was that those who governed the city during the day knew nothing of its night (Lovatt, 1994). If this crisis of representation is real, then it is, necessarily, a crisis of co-habitation, one which brings us to the central themes of this book. Have the populations and cultural territories of the night become so estranged, from each other, and from those of the day, that new forms of political representation are required? If so, are the key conflicts those between the daytime and the nighttime city, or between the claims of different social groups to occupy and define the night?.

A sensory politics of the night?

Two of the themes central to this book point to the ways in which the politics of the night are, in a variety of ways, a sensory politics. Light and noise, the focus of several of the articles collected here, have each posed the question of night-time cohabitation in distinct ways. It is tempting, on first reflection, to suggest that light generates many of the positive dimensions of urban cohabitation, from simple conviviality through a more profound experience of democracy, while sound and noise act as forces through which the fundamental conflicts among urban populations are revealed. Certainly, since the 19th century, it has been common to see the illuminated spaces of the night-time city as spaces in which, as in David Nasaw’s account of New York’, lighting “afforded residents of a divided city the momentary experience of belonging to a social grouping that was totalizing rather than divisive . . . generous rather than snobbish, inclusive rather than exclusive” (1992: 284). Montandon’s examination of visual representations of the 19th century night suggests that nocturnal lighting encouraged the painting of people and their rituals, rather than architectural forms in their monumentality. In this shift, we might see a democratization of night-time urban space.

The articles on urban lighting in this volume trace the tension between two broad strategies of night-time illumination: one which highlights the prominent structures of urban *patrimony*, so that these do not lose their symbolic function with the coming of darkness; another which illuminates the places and itineraries of everyday ritual, so as to ensure access, security and tiny, localized sensations of conviviality (Narboni). Each of these strategies may claim for itself a democratizing force. If the lighting of monuments and buildings once served as a staging (a *mise-en-scène*) of aristocratic or bureaucratic power, it is now offered (cynically or not) as a gift to a city's inhabitants, an incitement to a sense of shared municipal pride. More small-scale, localized manifestations of a lighting policy, on the other hand, may be understood as producing what Narboni, in this volume, calls “ambiances lumineuses de proximité” through which the minor practices of everyday cohabitation are made easier. These initiatives may be understood both as a democratic response to citizen needs, elaborated through democratic processes, and as forms of an expanding governmentality aimed at intervening within the smallest interstices of interpersonal interaction.

Claims as to the democratizing potential of urban noise are less common. Montandon notes how, for the Romantics, the night was welcomed for its restful silence, in which the city might more fully be enjoyed. This sense that noise is an impediment to the enchantments of the night-time city persists, in the reviews of hotels on Trip Advisory or in public signage which (a *sin* Montreal) reminds people that “La nuit, le bruit nuit.” In contrast, Florian Guérin, in his study of Madrid and Paris in this volume, speaks of those social occasions when silence is forbidden, when a minimal “buzz” of conversation is expected as the sign of conviviality. This buzz, of course, is regulated by deeply entrenched and typically unstated norms. These norms are often taken to be violated when the conviviality of smokers standing outside bars or restaurant concentrates and magnifies the sound of human speech, eliciting a sense of nuisance in relation to which a variety of official and semi-official phenomenon have arisen: “Halte au bruit” signs on buildings, police intervention and fines, and organized groups of anti-noise activists such as Paris' *Pierrots de la nuit*. (See the articles by Defrance and others in this volume.)

Just as the city has been transformed by electrical infrastructures of illumination, the experience of the urban night has been altered by the development of powerful loudspeaker systems. The association of these technologies with music, and of music with youth, has defined the politics of

the urban night in the early 21st century to an extent unimaginable a century earlier. The phenomenon of the night-club bouncer, examined here by Christine Preiser, is partially a response to concerns over security and a means of enforcing social exclusivity, as her text shows. It is a symptom, as well, of the proliferation of heavily reinforced structures designed both to accommodate high levels of sound and to contain such sound within their walls. Bouncers mediate the passage between an inside and outside whose mixes of sensory experience are very different from each other.

It is in relation to such bounded spaces that claims about the utopian character of noise-filled rooms have been elaborated since the 1970s. In these claims, we find some of the only assertions about the positive qualities of urban noise. In an influential article, "In Defence of Disco," published almost forty years ago, British cultural theorist Richard Dyer spoke of the uplifting sense of community felt by gay men in spaces as they danced to music whose festive loudness seemed to be an empowering antidote to the injuries of everyday life. Similar claims have been made, ever since, about the house music clubs of Chicago, the spaces of 1990s rave, or the underground techno parties of contemporary cities. Noise, it is argued, magnifies solidarities which no longer require the sociability of speech. If the everyday cohabitation of the city is marked by prejudice and violence, in the experience of loud music in bounded spaces these may be both avoided and transcended. More generally, whether explicitly stated or not, the right to make and consume music at loud volumes has been key to the efforts of youth, racial minorities and sexual communities to mark the urban night with their collective presence.

If the gentrification of older neighbourhoods or manufacturing districts was once associated principally with the visual or literary arts, it is now more closely intertwined with the consumption of music in cities. In turn, spaces of music are spaces of a broader sociability in which the consumption of alcohol and drugs are common, and likely to take place among large numbers of people. It is difficult to see the cohabitation between such groups and the residents of urban neighbourhoods as being based on an enduring, consensual balance between the rights of both populations. Rather, it seems, noise is a key factor in the ongoing differentiation of neighbourhoods and ongoing dynamics of settlement. In Montreal, as in many cities, the drive to develop spaces of night-time musical consumption far from residential neighbourhoods is one of the key forces in extending gentrification into areas further and further from the centre.

## Identitarian nights and the right to the city

In her study of gentrification in Paris, Anne Clerval describes the ongoing expulsion, from cafés in gentrifying neighbourhoods, of men, typically of North African background, who traditionally occupy these places during mornings and early afternoons (Clerval, 2014: 220). Once tolerated, even when they did not purchase alcohol or food, such men are now seen as unprofitable occupiers of space better taken by youthful tourists and other city residents, who more likely to consume alcoholic drinks from early afternoon onwards. The exclusion of those drinking coffee and tea is formalized as the refusal to serve hot drinks, but its practical effects are a sharp divide between populations whose basis is racial. If mid-day had once been a time of cohabitation of these spaces by different groups, the colonization of the day by the economic logics of the night works to eliminate this cohabitation.

Catherine Deschamps, in her contribution to this volume, suggests that we move from the longstanding question of the “right to the city” (*droit à la ville*) to consideration of the “right to the night” (*droit à la nuit*). If both categories of rights are unequally distributed along identitarian lines, the clearest example of such inequality is the status of women within the urban night. As both Joachim Schlor (1998: 178) and Simone Delattre (2003 : 483) noted, in their comprehensive histories of the European night, individuals move through the night with a intensified sense of their gendered (and sexual) identities. While this intensification has nourished innumerable accounts (both erudite and sensational) of the night as romantic or erotic, it has also made the hours of darkness those in which fractures in the cohabitation of cities are revealed most starkly. The women whom Deschamps has studied, whose style of walking becomes quicker and more determined as night advances, carry within themselves a very different sense of the *espace-temps* of night than the predominantly male subjects of leisurely nighttime walks, avant-garde promenades and exploratory adventures examined in a number of recent books (e.g., Montandon, 2009; Beaumont, 2015; Dunn, 2016).

Both of these examples reveal, starkly, the “discontinuous citizenship” (Gwiazdzinski, 2005: 197) of the twenty-four cycle within cities, of the passage from day to night. In the ongoing transformation of the urban night, with its perpetual tensions between transgression and conviviality, communal solidarity and individualist self-realization, the right to a continuous urban citizenship must find firm ground.



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