

# 9. The Pastness of *Allô Police*

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When the Montreal-based weekly tabloid crime newspaper *Allô Police* ceased publication in 2004, press accounts of its demise treated it as a publication that had outlived its usefulness. The reasons given for its disappearance were those commonly offered for the death in recent years of periodicals specializing in true (rather than fictional) crime. Crime tabloids were the victims, it was argued, of a decline in importance of those social institutions, such as the corner convenience store (like the Quebec *dépanneur*), where people once bought lowbrow reading materials alongside cigarettes and beer. At the same time, press industry lore suggested, the violent cover imagery of the crime tabloid made it inappropriate for display at supermarket or pharmacy checkout counters, where other kinds of sensational periodicals had flourished since the early 1960s. And, it was claimed, even before the growth of the Internet, the role of crime periodicals as sources of information and entertainment had been usurped by television, where true crime had become a staple programming genre within the expanding universe of specialized cable channels.<sup>1</sup>

*Allô Police* had been co-founded in 1953 by lawyer Maurice Mercier and Raymond Daoust, a magazine publisher who would start and manage several titles in the wave of sensational tabloids published in Montreal in the 1950s and 1960s. Although it was launched as just one among many periodicals within this wave, *Allô Police* outlasted all the others. By 1957, it had reached a circulation of 145,000 copies per issue and, while neither its press run nor its newsstand sales were the object of official audits, circulation was estimated to have risen to a peak of 200,000 copies

in the 1960s, then fallen slowly to 50,000 copies per issue by the time publication stopped.<sup>2</sup> As with its counterparts in other national cultures – like American true crime magazines or Mexican *nota roja* – the period of *Allô Police*'s perceived decline and outmodedness was the longest in its history, reinforcing the sense that its residuality was one of its defining features.<sup>3</sup> Following its demise, in 2004, the absence of significant holdings of *Allô Police* in any of Quebec's patrimonial institutions was seen as emblematic of a broader failure to preserve the province's lively "lowbrow" culture.<sup>4</sup>

### ALLÔ POLICE AS PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

If *Allô Police* was an exceptionally long-lasting example of Quebec's sensational "lowbrow" periodical culture, it is of equal interest for the ways in which, over its fifty-one-year history, it contributed in specific ways to the photographic documentation of Montreal. In the 1970s, the decade examined in this chapter, *Allô Police* featured a loosely calculated average of seventy photographs per issue. Across the decade's 520 issues, then, we find a corpus of some 36,400 published photographs (and we may presume that many more were taken but not used). *Allô Police*'s coverage of crime was limited, with very few exceptions, to the province of Quebec, and from the very beginning the paper saw its mission as the coverage of every murder in the province.<sup>5</sup> Roughly half the photographs published in the 1970s were linked to events that transpired in Montreal or its suburbs, and most of these involved violent crimes, like homicides. During this decade, then, *Allô Police* published approximately fifteen thousand images to accompany journalistic reports on crime in the Montreal region.

I have chosen to focus here on photographs published in *Allô Police* during the period from 1974 to 1976. A key reason for the choice of this period is the frequency of the paper's focus on violent crime during these years, relative to other periods in its publishing history. In its first decade, *Allô Police* had set crime within broader contexts of moral transition and had published a wide variety of feature articles on hotly debated social issues, such as the physical punishment of children. The visuality of the paper in the 1950s and early 1960s was more heterogeneous than in later years, as sketches, stock photographs, and even comic strips appeared alongside photographs that themselves were typically of small dimension and usually of human faces. In the latter half of the 1960s, the paper's focus narrowed to deal almost exclusively with crime, though the range of criminal phenomena covered during this period was broad: it included corruption scandals linked to Expo 67 and the spectacular crimes committed by quasi-celebrity figures like the bank robber Monique le Mitrailleur (known in English as "Machine Gun Molly").

By the 1970s, the focus of *Allô Police* had become even more restricted, as Montreal came to seem like little more than a battleground, rife with massacres involving branches of the Montreal mafia and the province's ascendant biker gangs. As Mathieu-Olivier Côté has shown, in a master's thesis tracing *Allô Police*'s changes throughout its history, the period from 1970 to 1989 saw the paper's content centred almost exclusively on violent crime.<sup>6</sup> This emphasis on extreme violence reached its peak in 1975 with two horrific events in Montreal, which *Allô Police* covered in detail. One was the burning death of thirteen people on 21 January 1975, in the Gargantua Bar on Beaubien Street, by gang members who locked the victims in a storage room and then set fire to the establishment. The second was the shooting of four individuals at the Lapinière Hotel in the Montreal suburb of Brossard on 13 February 1975, a gangland execution quickly dubbed (because of its date) Montreal's St Valentine's Day Massacre.<sup>7</sup> These events sat alongside coverage of other crimes that offered their own distinctive forms of horror: an alarmingly lengthy series of reports on the death of children from murder or neglect, in 1975 and 1976, and the unending accounts of murdered spouses or lovers (almost all women), which had been a staple of the paper since its beginning. The exclusivity of its focus on these sorts of crimes was such that, even during the early 1970s wave of political violence emanating from (or in response to) Quebec's separatist movement, *Allô Police* paid little or no attention to this larger context.<sup>8</sup>

If *Allô Police* in the 1970s seemed more focused on violent crime than in previous decades, we may understand this as a response to the increased public consciousness and broader media coverage of organized criminality during this period. In 1972, Quebec premier Robert Bourassa established the Commission d'enquête sur le crime organisé (CECO), a public inquiry into organized crime in Quebec, the proceedings of which were televised in the province, heightening public interest in the phenomenon.<sup>9</sup> However, *Allô Police*'s emphasis on blood and violence during this decade is also a function of the publication's greater explicitness, as it competed with other sensational tabloids (like the daily newspaper *Journal de Montréal* and specialized competitors like *Photo Police*). In the 1970s, the number of photographs in each issue increased, and while *Allô Police* had employed staff photographers since its launch, the percentage of images attributable to these professionals was clearly higher during this decade. Throughout its history, the publication had relied heavily on official photographs (like "mug shots"), presumably provided by the police or courts, and on the sort of images (such as family portraits) that were acquired from victims' families, and so did not require the presence of a photographer. While all these visual forms carried over into the 1970s, they increasingly appeared alongside photographs of people, places, and situations more obviously taken by the paper's own staff.

## THE VISUALITY OF CRIME

What we know of the professional routines and aesthetic dispositions of crime photojournalism normally comes from studies or reminiscences of those few crime photographers who have been elevated out of anonymity and assimilated within the institutions of art. This is the case, in particular, for the American photojournalist Weegee (Arthur Fellig, 1899–1968) and the Mexican crime scene photographer Enrique Metinides (b. 1934).<sup>10</sup> The photographs in *Allô Police* were almost never credited, however, and there are only fragmentary accounts of the careers or routines of photographers working for the paper.<sup>11</sup> While *Allô Police*'s photographers occasionally showed signs of stylistic bravura, their work was largely anonymous, and the standardization of styles and genres in the publication makes it difficult to distinguish the work of individual photographers.

As I have argued elsewhere, the photography of the true crime periodical is shaped by a distinctive predicament. This is the fact that, while criminal actions (such as murders or holdups) constitute one of the most photogenic categories of image content, photojournalists are almost never present at the commission of a crime to take such images. The arrival of press photographers at a crime scene is almost always belated, typically following that of the police, coroner, or other agents of justice.<sup>12</sup> One effect of this belatedness is that, while fictional films and television programs may reconstruct crimes in the moments of their greatest drama, the true crime periodical is limited in its corpus of available images to people, places, and situations that have been photographed at moments other than those in which the criminal acts take place. True crime periodicals confront the gap between the dynamic singularity of criminal events (at which journalists are rarely present) and the predictable range of photographic genres through which the aftermath and peripheral features of crime are typically represented. These genres include portraits of people involved in various capacities in criminal events, pictures of the buildings and other sites in which crimes occurred, and representations of various kinds of activity undertaken in the aftermath of a crime (such as police searches for evidence at crime scenes.)

As Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini suggests, in her examination of *Détective* and other French crime magazines of the 1930, the widespread adoption of photographic illustration in news periodicals from the 1920s onwards radically transformed the terms under which criminal events were rendered visible in the press. While the lithographic cover drawings of fin-de-siècle news periodicals such as *L'Illustration* allowed for a totalizing image of crimes, such that their constituent actions and participants were all visible in tableaux of reconstructed action, the shift to photographic illustration in the 1920s made the human face the privileged token of

criminality. Unable to capture the criminal act itself, news photographers came to focus on the key figures in these acts, compensating for the inaccessibility of images of dramatic criminal action with a new emphasis on individual personality. “The crime scene gives way to the portrait,” Demartini writes, “with attention now focused on the protagonists in a drama . . . and, in particular, on criminal persona, who find in the image a privileged means of imprinting themselves on our consciousness.”<sup>13</sup>

The documentary or patrimonial value of the photographs published in *Allô Police* during its fifty years of publication is not, then, what might be expected. To be sure, these photographs often accompanied articles on momentous events, such as spectacular acts of criminal violence. However, the absence of the photographer at the moment these events occurred means that we are left with very few images of criminal activity itself. Rather, events came to be represented through images of the people and places associated with criminal events. Taken by *Allô Police*'s photographers, or borrowed from familial or judicial sources, these images, as we shall see, belonged to generic categories, whose conventions have stabilized over time.

We shall discuss two of these generic categories here. The first of these is the portrait or headshot. Like most periodicals in the second half of the twentieth century,<sup>14</sup> *Allô Police* favoured images of the human face on its covers, but these were the most common photographs on its interior pages as well. Across the dozens of issues studied here, *Allô Police* featured photographs of hundreds of individuals who were touched in some way by crime – as victims, perpetrators, agents of the law, or witnesses. The second category of common imagery is that of the buildings that figure within crime narratives, often as the scenes of crimes themselves. If these images were less numerous than pictures of people, they nevertheless constitute a photographic archive of Montreal locations and architectural structures. What these categories of image share is a lack of movement (of the posed head or the immobile building), which is at odds with the imagined dynamism of criminal action.

### PHOTOGRAPHIC GENRES IN ALLÔ POLICE: THE PORTRAIT

Figures 9.1, 9.2, and 9.3 represent different modalities of the portrait-dominated covers which were typical of *Allô Police* in the 1970s. In Figure 9.1, we see a collection of photographs featuring the multiple victims of a wave of murders which had occurred over a period of three days. These blocks of images of homicide victims were common in *Allô Police* in the mid-1970s, when the pervasiveness of murder in Montreal, and elsewhere in Quebec, was one of the paper's common themes. On this cover, we see nine victims; in other layouts in the interior, covering longer periods of time, there were as many as seventy-five.<sup>15</sup> While we might assume that a small number of these images were official police photographs (in the cases of



9.1 *Allô Police*, 12 January 1975. Cover.  
Collection of the author.

those victims who were themselves involved in criminal activity), the restriction of all of these images to headshots and the forward orientation of almost all the faces renders most of them official in character, even when they might have been cropped from family snapshots or other forms of vernacular photography. As a result, these portraits of victims are indistinguishable, in most cases, from the photographs of criminals appearing elsewhere in the paper.

The people represented in Figure 9.1 are humanized slightly, through the use of circular, rather than square, frames, and through the brief biographical descriptions that accompany each one. However, the ongoing effect of portrait layouts such as these, repeated across dozens of issues, is to fill the paper with thousands of small faces whose restricted expressivity reduces them to tokens of populations circulating through the worlds of Québécois crime. Indeed, throughout *Allô Police* during this period, innocent victims, slain gang members, and murderers themselves are rendered indistinguishable, appearing as they do in photographic galleries that



9.2 *Allô Police*, 13 January 1974. Cover.  
Collection of the author.

provide us with no clues with which to distinguish their roles. Much of the sordid character of *Allô Police* in the 1970s rests precisely on this generalization of the mug shot format, which gathers up and gives similar treatment to people of widely varying degrees of culpability and victimization. In these images of the human face we find, confirmed, Allan Sekula's thesis about the tensions in judicial photography between individuation and the production of statistical regularities.<sup>16</sup> Even as *Allô Police*'s reporting captured the distinct narratives of each individual's implication in a universe of criminal events, the periodical's mimicry of the poses and layouts of police photography reduced each subject to a symbol of an all-pervasive criminality.

The most obviously contrasting cover images in *Allô Police* during this period were the full-size photographs of smiling children or enamoured adults which featured on a number of covers and filled interior photographic spreads. The family portrait became increasingly common in *Allô Police* in the mid-1970s, in part because reports on the killings of children became a regular alternative to stories



9.3 *Allô Police*, 18 May 1975. Cover.  
Collection of the author.

of gangland executions. The innocent demeanour conveyed in photographs like that in Figure 9.2 confirms the origin of these images as family photographs, taken before the occurrence of the tragic events they are meant to illustrate. However, the difference between these images of innocence and the photographs of crime scenes or arrested suspects which appeared beside them extends beyond the temporal gap between moments before and after a crime. We are dealing, in fact, with two very different kinds of photographic heritage. The images of victims or perpetrators were taken by true crime journalists or agents of justice, who worked with the knowledge that their photographs bore a connection to criminality. In contrast, family photographs were produced within the normal routines of vernacular or professional family photography (and then borrowed or purchased by true crime periodicals).<sup>17</sup> The affective complexity of true crime periodicals has much to do with the fact that they contain large numbers of each of these kinds of photographs.



On the one hand, we see images of domestic happiness and innocence, intended as photographic demonstrations of these states and as yet untouched by the crimes that would prompt their publication. Conversely, we confront, alongside them, images of dead bodies, crime scenes, and people (victims or suspects) whose guilt or victimization is inscribed in the very activity of picture-taking.

Like so many images in *Allô Police*, Figure 9.2 belongs to a history of domestic Québécois photography. It captures the Québécois nuclear family in one moment of its historical instantiation. In the *Allô Police* of the 1970s, dozens of images like this give us access to the innocent poses and intimate rituals of lower- or middle-class Québécois families before they have become victims of violence. While the triadic composition of this photo, with all three individuals' heads turned away from the camera (and the baby's gaze returning that of the mother), is highly formulaic, in the context of *Allô Police*, where it is surrounded by lurid text and sensational lettering, its intimacy becomes more pronounced. The photograph offers us access to an otherwise inaccessible, private moment in lives which would soon be shattered through violence.

The portraits in Figure 9.1 offer a zero degree of human individuation, while Figure 9.2 is a highly clichéd tableau of condensed familial emotion. In contrast to both of these, the images in Figure 9.3 invite us to indulge in psychologizing speculation, to construct narratives that will bind together the three individuals represented. Of the two men accused of killing their shared lover's husband, one expresses the joyous relief of acquittal, his frontal view and smile suggesting the absence of culpability. In the conventions of such photographs, the turned head of the other man suggests a contemplative depth, just as his downcast eyes suggest his guilt. Both the exuberance of the first man's smile and the angle of the second's pose stand as guarantees that these are not official mug shots but, rather, candid revelations of interiority. The cover invites, as well, a judgment of the female character, whose moral state is already tainted by the text's reference to two lovers, but whose complicity in the murder of her husband is left unresolved by the directness of her look and the tightly controlled expression with which she faces the camera. All these photographs, of course, might have been taken long before the events, and acquired by the paper as part of its normal routines. When employed in layouts like these, however, they participate in the elaboration of those melodramatic stories, of small-town or suburban passion and betrayal, which *Allô Police* interspersed between its ongoing reports on metropolitan gangland slaughter.

With few of its stories set in the world of rich or powerful elites, *Allô Police* of the 1970s left as one of its legacies a record of violence and betrayal unfolding in the *petit Québec* of small towns and the suburbs and peripheral working-class neighbourhoods of Montreal. More significantly, for our purposes, *Allô Police's*



9.4 "Les policiers et les Dubois s'affrontent,"  
*Allô Police*, 16 November 1975, 4.

Collection of the author.

9.5 "Le gérant du 'P'tit Ritz': Il meurt avant  
d'être accusé du meurtre."

*Allô Police*, 23 May 1976, 23.

Collection of the author.

9.6 "'Libéré conditionnel' abbatu."

*Allô Police*, 23 March 1975, 23.

Collection of the author.

procedures involved the acquisition of hundreds of photographs taken by family members or by local professionals hired to document the milestones of familial histories, like marriages or the christening of children. These photographs, borrowed or purchased by *Allô Police*, constitute an archive of popular, domestic imagery with few parallels elsewhere in the media or patrimonial institutions of Quebec.

### PHOTOGRAPHIC GENRES IN *ALLÔ POLICE*: THE BAR AS CRIME SCENE

While portrait photographs are present on almost every one of *Allô Police*'s pages, the second category of *Allô Police*'s photographs to be discussed here involves a smaller corpus. This is the class of photographs showing the places in which crimes have been committed. Over the course of its fifty-year history, *Allô Police* published hundreds of images of places in Montreal. Few of these, however, show us locations identifiable as iconic landmarks or recognized destinations. Rather, almost all these photographs are of minor suburban streets, warehouses, unremarkable residences, hotels of dubious reputation, and empty spaces, such as parking lots. The majority of them are of places located outside Montreal's downtown – in the city's east end, or in neighbourhoods outside of the city's downtown, like Saint-Henri and Rosemont. Typically photographed at street level, from outside a building, these images provide little sense of a broader neighbourhood context or of the place of such sites within a larger urban geography.

In this body of images, one of the most common categories of place represented photographically is the bar. This reflects, in part, the extent to which bars were central hubs of underworld commerce or sociability and key sites of violence.<sup>18</sup> The six images discussed here (Figs 9.4–9.9) are all of bars in the Montreal region (and their variations, such as the cocktail lounge, strip club, and tavern or *brasserie*). While all these photographs show us places in which crimes have taken place, and while they were usually intended to supplement portraits of victims and alleged perpetrators, I have detached them from their contexts on the page in order to highlight their formal and aesthetic features.

Photographs of bars in *Allô Police* are striking for the consistency with which they avoid two of the historical and stylistic conventions by which bars are rendered photogenic. The first of these conventions emerged within the tradition of the urban nocturne, prominent in mid-twentieth-century street photography and in the cinematic styles of French poetic realism and the American film noir. Here, the bar, photographed or filmed from an exterior vantage point from which its interior may be glimpsed, evokes a world of stranger-sociability and erotic promise, suggested through the play of inside lighting and exterior darkness. A second set of conventions, common in tourist photography and journalistic coverage of urban

entertainment, represents the urban nightclub as a spectacular space, marked by architectural inventiveness and the gathering of large, glamorous crowds.

The dozens of images of bars published in *Allô Police* in the mid-1970s draw on neither of these traditions of representation. These pictures are striking for the consistency with which they convey a sense of these bars as uninviting spaces, suggesting danger or decrepitude. Typically photographed during the day, and reproduced with low resolution, these images convey a drab, unattractive greyness. The absence of people in almost all of these photographs adds to the sense of menace which hovers over them and discourages any understanding of these places as spaces of effervescent sociability. The architectural forms of these bars further enhance an impression of their tawdriness. Some of those photographed, like the Barina in the Saint-Henri neighbourhood (Fig. 9.4) and the P'Tit Ritz, on Préfontaine in the city's east end (Fig. 9.5), are squat and rectangular, barely distinguishable from the small offices or retail establishments nearby. The sign for Chez Tonton (Fig. 9.6), on Lacordaire Boulevard in Montreal's Saint-Léonard neighbourhood, suggests a strip architecture whose novelty was already waning, even as the exterior surfaces of the bar itself exemplify the undistinguished and peripheral small business building. Au Bo-Sexe, in the east of Montreal (Fig. 9.7), and the Taverne des Copains (Fig. 9.8), in the Saint-Henri neighbourhood, resemble, in their architectural form and the manner of their photographic representation, the vice establishments shown in articles that covered Montreal as a "capital of sin" and were published in cheap US periodicals of the 1950s, such as *Brief*.<sup>19</sup> Unremarkable as buildings, these bars employ the vertical signage which, in the conventions of nocturnal vice and its representations, expresses a discreet invitation to places of illicit pleasure.

These bars, like the dozens of others whose photographs appeared in *Allô Police* in the mid-1970s, represent an undistinguished architectural heritage, which that publication, alone among Quebec periodicals, documented week after week. In the context of the mid-1970s, few of these bars would ever be cherished as sites of vanishing working-class rituals or taken as useful evidence of emergent fashions in the design of nightlife venues. If we detach *Allô Police*'s photographs of bars and other spaces from the crimes they help to document, we are left with a counter-cartography of Montreal that leaves out both the landmarks (such as the mountain or port), which served as orientation points in the city, and those collectively cherished places (like La Fontaine Park), which sustained civic identity. Rather, *Allô Police*'s photographs of bars constitute an archive of minor architectural forms and obscure urban locations disconnected from their social or geographical contexts.

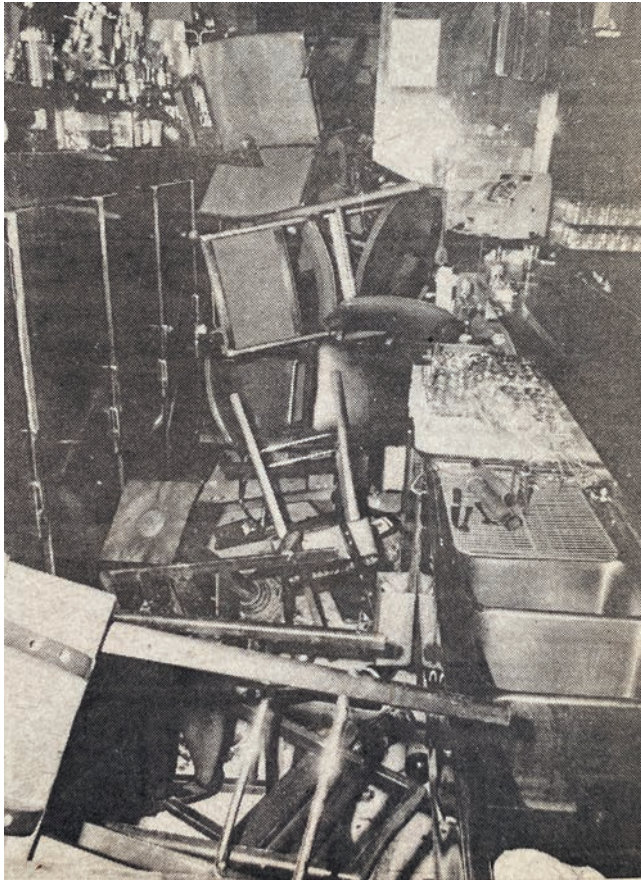
Together, the portrait picture and the bar photograph construct a distinct polarity within the visuality of *Allô Police*. The former is marked by the imperative of frontality, by the drive to fill the paper's covers and most of its interior pages



9.7 "Au 'Bo-Sexe': Innocente victime d'un fusillade de cabaret," *Allô Police*, 12 September 1976, 12. Collection of the author.

9.8 "Les Dubois de Saint-Henri: Un bâton de dynamite et huit coups de feu pour Normand," *Allô Police*, 4 April 1976, 7. Collection of the author.

9.9 "Avec la mort de Roland Giguère, un vide s'est créé dans le monde de la pègre de l'est." *Allô Police*, 22 August 1976, 9. Collection of the author.



9.10 “Le saccage de ce ‘Cocktail Lounge’ fait revivre ‘la belle époque’ de la protection à Montréal,” *Allô Police*, 16 November 1975, 4. Collection of the author.

with the images of faces looking out at the reader. If these faces offer themselves up for simple contemplation, they also nevertheless lead us to speculate about the moral status or emotional interiority of those individuals to whom they belong. *Allô Police*'s photographs of bars, in contrast, almost always block our access to any object of vision which might promise understanding. We are confronted, most of the time, with little more than the sordid banality of a degraded form to which, as readers, we are denied access. (See, for an additional example, the windows of the brasserie in Figure 9.9, located in the Montreal suburb of Iberville, which reveal nothing of the building's interior.) In one of the rare scenes of a bar's interior, in Figure 9.10, we see the Barina bar in the Saint-Henri neighbourhood subsequent to its being wrecked by gang members, but the piles of chairs produced by that wreckage deny us any sense of this as a social space.

The geography of crime conveyed in *Allô Police* in the mid-1970s was one of undistinguished bars, back alleys, and aging industrial structures that were typically unnoticed by a mainstream photojournalistic gaze. *Allô Police*, like other

compilations of crime narratives, was regularly uncovering ways of life and places seemingly left over from another era, or, at the very least, detached from any sense of ongoing modernization. In this, *Allô Police*'s treatment of crime was faithful to patterns observable elsewhere. Several scholars of the cultural representation of crime have noted the tendency for criminal narratives to reconstruct (or uncover) residual dimensions of city life not entirely eroded by modernity. Dominique Kalifa has traced the ways in which early-twentieth-century French fictional serials about super-criminals (like *Fantomas*) rewrote Paris as a space of medieval labyrinths that survived adjacent to the wide-open boulevards exemplifying the city's late-nineteenth-century modernity.<sup>20</sup> The version of Montreal that emerges in *Allô Police* in the 1970s is one of tawdry, working-class bars or industrial zones located in the peripheral and popular neighbourhoods of the city. These were the sites of the principal crimes covered by the paper, and while they were not always old or disappearing, they nevertheless seemed to linger uncomfortably in a city which laboured to promote an image of itself as modern and cosmopolitan.

### THE WHITENESS OF *ALLÔ POLICE*

The *Allô Police* of the 1970s has been rendered out of date most forcefully by changing frameworks for understanding crime and its relationship to social identities. The world covered and constructed by *Allô Police* throughout its history was one in which cases of sexual violence were treated as crimes of passion, and police brutality was little more than the expected symptom of a violent culture. The most striking sign of *Allô Police*'s *pastness* in the 1970s, however, is the racial and physiognomic homogeneity of the people and situations represented within its pages. With very few exceptions (representing less than 5 per cent of all images published in the paper in the 1970s), the people whose photographs were published in *Allô Police* were white.

The whiteness of the twentieth-century true crime periodical, in the United States and Canada, is one of its most consistent and perplexing features. As I have shown elsewhere, while the American pulp fiction magazines of the 1930s and 1940s were laden with imagery which set luridly racialized villains against innocent white victims, the US true crime magazine dealt almost exclusively with crimes whose perpetrators and victims were white. As early as the 1930s, the racial exclusivity of the American true crime magazine was codified in instructions to writers, which warned them (for reasons which remain imprecise) to avoid reports on crimes whose principal characters were not white.<sup>21</sup> This would change in the United States only in the 1970s, when the racialization of crime offered a quickly legible framework through which American true crime magazines fanned the flames of the social panic on which they increasingly based their appeal.

Whether or not the consistent whiteness of those photographed for *Allô Police* expresses in statistical terms the racialized character of crime in Montreal during this period is difficult to establish.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, in the *Allô Police* of the 1970s, reports on fatal love triangles, conjugal violence, drug deals turned violent, barroom murders, sexual assaults, and gangland massacres involved, with few exceptions, people who appeared on the basis of their photographs to be white. (Italians and other immigrant populations from southern Europe constituted the outer reaches of this whiteness.) Most strikingly, the dozens of portraits of murdered children or assaulted young women featured on the covers of *Allô Police* in the years 1974 to 1976 map a variety of versions of innocent whiteness. Large numbers of these images, as noted, originated as family photographs, which were taken in moments of domestic or personal celebration and then acquired by *Allô Police* for publication following a crime. Across these photographs, we see revealed, in their variety and conventionality, the domestic image-making practices of white Québécois of the working and lower-middle classes.

The headshot portraits of perpetrators or the accused show us a population which seems only slightly less racially homogeneous. Indeed, this category accounts for the largest number of photographs published in the paper throughout its history, and the force of these numbers offer the starkest confirmation of the racial exclusivity of *Allô Police* in the 1970s. This exclusivity would decline in the last two decades of the paper's existence, as, just behind its American counterparts, *Allô Police* increasingly framed crime through the prisms of race-based violence and racially organized criminality. In the mid-1970s, those touched by crime in every respect appeared to belong, almost without exception, to the family of white Québécois.

## CONCLUSION

The narratives of Montreal life produced and conveyed in *Allô Police*, from the 1960s onwards, registered few of the broader transformations of the city which fascinated other media. Montreal's building boom of the 1960s, which occurred against the backdrops of demographic explosion and euphoria over the city's new, chic cosmopolitanism, left few traces in the pages of *Allô Police*, whose coverage of the city, as noted, traced an unbroken series of tawdry crimes, occurring in unfashionable locales. Similarly, in its emphasis on the city's criminal underclasses, or on the domestic tragedies of suburban families, *Allô Police* barely acknowledged the urban professional bourgeoisie whose economic and political ascension was a key result of the Révolution tranquille (the so-called "Quiet Revolution," which saw Quebec become a highly secularized and urban society). The political tensions and victories of the 1970s, marked by an intensification of radical militancy across



several sectors of Montreal society, and the election, in 1976, of the nationalist Parti Québécois went unnoticed in a newspaper that treated this decade as a time of underworld carnage and endless personal tragedy. Rather than registering these upheavals, *Allô Police* may be seen as engaged in an endless trafficking of images and affects between metropolis and region. Week after week, it alarmed its small-town readers with coverage of violent urban criminality, even as it entertained its working-class, Montreal-based readership with sordid tales of fractured innocence and domestic horror in locales just beyond the city's borders.

#### NOTES

- 1 The claim that, as convenience store sales declined, more and more papers were sold in pharmacies and grocery stores, and that crime papers lent themselves poorly to these family-oriented environments, is common in accounts of the death of a crime-oriented press in North America. See, among many accounts which link these changes to the demise of *Allô Police*, Collard, "Allô Police's offre un remodelage," *La Presse*, 4; and Banerjee, "Adieu Police," *Montreal Gazette*, B1.
- 2 Estimates of *Allô Police*'s circulation, usually revealed in articles on the periodical in mainstream newspapers, are unreliable, but they show the broad curve of its rise and fall. See, for example, Untitled, *Vrai* (1957), 9; "Allô Police Is 'Must Reading'" (1979), *Montreal Star*, n.p.; Tu Thanh Ha, "Photo-Police Manager Buys Crime Tabloid" (1991), *Montreal Gazette*, A5; Vailles, "Allô Police s'inscrit en Bourse" (2003), *La Presse*, D3; and Perreault, "Disparitions convergentes" (2004), *La Presse*, 1.
- 3 The American true crime magazine and those Mexican tabloid newspapers devoted to true crime and known as *nota roja* (the best-known being *Alarma!*) have all disappeared over the last two decades.
- 4 For an account of public concern over the lack of library holdings of *Allô Police*, see Beal's review of Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834–1843*. Since 2004, the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec has made available a complete run of *Allô Police* on microfilm. The Google Newspapers project digitized several early issues before that project was discontinued, and bound volumes containing copies of the paper's first two years sit in the Rare Books Room of the McGill University library. At present, mystery surrounds the status and location of the paper's archive of original photographs and negatives, a resource of great interest to those who study popular photojournalism. Some claim to know of the continued existence of a photographic archive on the premises of Section Rouge Media, the last owners of the periodical, but this collection has been described by interested collectors as pilfered and neglected.
- 5 Banerjee, "Adieu Police."
- 6 Côté, "La représentation du crime dans la presse écrite québécoise: le cas d'*Allô Police*."
- 7 For an account of these events, see Kristian Gravenor, "The Faces of the Gargantua Victims," 13 October 2007, <http://coolopolis.blogspot.ca/2007/10/faces-of-gargantua-victims.html>, and "The Nastiest Crime Ever to Hit Brossard," 22 November 2012, <http://coolopolis.blogspot.ca/2012/11/the-nastiest-crime-ever-to-hit-brossard.html>.

- 8 *Allô Police's* references to the October Crisis of 1970, in which the Front de Libération du Québec kidnapped the British diplomat James Cross and Quebec's minister of labour, Pierre Laporte (eventually releasing the former, but killing the latter), were surprisingly brief and short-lived, given the violence of the crimes, the extent of police involvement in the whole affair, and widespread rumours (later confirmed) of Laporte's connections to the Montreal mafia. For a rare example of *Allô Police's* coverage, see "M. Cross raconte ses 60 jours au mains du FLQ," 5–8.
- 9 de Champlain, *Histoire du crime organisé à Montréal, de 1900 à 1980*.
- 10 See, for example, on Weegee, Pelizzon, and West, "'Good Stories' from the Mean Streets" and on the Mexican photojournalist Enrique Metinides, Metinides and Ziff, *101 tragedias de Enrique Metinides*.
- 11 Information on photographers working for *Allô Police* is scattered and ephemeral. One former freelancer for the paper, Dennis Morin, is listed on a website of people from the Haut-Saint-Laurent region, Centre de recherche et d'archives du Haut-Saint Laurent, "Recherchiste: Dennis Morin," accessed 1 May 2017, <http://www.auxorigines.com/110/default.asp>; another, Jean-Pierre Rancourt, was named in a complaint against *Allô Police* adjudicated by the Conseil de presse in 1979. See Conseil de presse du Québec, Decisions, D1979-03-014, 28 September 1979, <http://conseildepresse.qc.ca/decisions/d1979-03-014/>.
- Michel Tremblay, a photographer for the paper, sued the Southam newspaper chain for linking him to organized crime. See St Pierre, "La vérité coule la poursuite d'un photographe d'*Allô Police*," *La Presse*, A16. In 1988, the *Montreal Gazette* published a profile of photographer Carole Marois, who worked for the competing newspaper *Photo Police*. See Dunn, "Connoisseurs of Blood and Gore," F7.
- 12 I discuss this further in Straw, "After the Event," 139–44.
- 13 Demartini, *Violette Nozière, la fleur du mal*, 39. Author's translation.
- 14 For an extensive account of the emergence of the face as cover material, see Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover*.
- 15 The cover of the 14 March 1976 issue features the portraits of fourteen people killed in one week. A lengthy feature in the 7 September 1975 issue contained the images of 115 victims, spread over three pages of portrait photos.
- 16 Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," 22–37.
- 17 For one of the few discussions of this phenomenon, see Demartini, *Violette Nozière, la fleur du mal*, 93.
- 18 de Champlain, *Histoire du crime organisé à Montréal*, 297–8.
- 19 For a discussion of these treatments of Montreal in the US popular press, and examples of these photographs, see Straw, "Montreal Confidential," 58–64.
- 20 Kalifa, "Crime Scenes," 175–94.
- 21 See Straw, *Cyanide and Sin*.
- 22 Statistics on the percentage of "visible minorities" within the Montreal population in the mid-1970s are of limited availability and use. The Canadian census began including "visible minorities" as a category only in the 1980s, in response to a requirement imposed by the Employment Equity Act of 1986. While, prior to this, statistics were kept about the country of origin of immigrants, these are not reliable clues as to racial identity and do not include members of racial minorities born in Canada.