

Cronaca Noir:

The Circulation and Production of Italian Crime Films in Québec in the 1970s

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by

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of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Spécial Magnum and *La Dernière Chance* are two seventies Italian crime films made in Québec that complicate estimations of their genre. Critical interpretations of the prolific Italian *poliziesco* of the 1970s have consistently remained framed in the Italian national context. This thesis contends that the singular national narrative is insufficient in understanding the cycle and incongruent with the international orientation of the Italian film industry established by this era. Replanting the discussion within a transnational history, this thesis examines the design and thematic characteristics of the Italian crime films of the 1970s by considering the practices of export and co-production within an international socio-political context of concurrent urbanization, political unrest and violent crime. To fully elaborate and demonstrate these claims, I investigate the contexts, circulation and production of *polizieschi* in Québec as a case study that emphasizes the transnational quest, appeal and significance of this popular, political, and vehemently hostile series.

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In conducting the research, I would lastly like to acknowledge the facilities and staff at the Cinémathèque Québécoise in Montreal and Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa. Making the past present, entering inside LAC at 395 Wellington provided a bridge to the unconsidered history of these films, while – in what is probably unique in film archival research – exiting outside brought me into the immediate shooting location of my object of study, unchanged in 35 years.

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INTRODUCTION “Son of a bitch... No wonder they think we’re a bunch of assholes”: Appropriation, Localization and the Italian *Poliziesco* of the 1970s

“My method is called violent diplomacy!” – *Milano rovente*

Between 1967 and 1981, the Italian film industry produced over 300 crime films.¹ Known in Italy as *il cinema poliziesco*, these popular and profitable action films were informed by and addressed political terrorism, organized mafia violence, bandit gangs, and rogue cops. Following the production strategies and narrative impulses of the Italian western, the crime film boom – accordingly dubbed by the press the “gangster-spaghetti”² – traded the Almerian landscape, hoof-thumping, and six-shooter twang for the iconography of bell-bottoms and balaclavas, compact Fiats and *carabinieri*, mustaches, motorbikes and machineguns amped to the sounds of roaring grooves. Sensational and explicit, the *poliziesco* has been characterized as the national populist genre that spoke specifically about and to the contemporary Italian socio-political situation in the volatile and violent 1970s. Bombings, assassinations, kidnappings, robberies, street crime, referendums, strikes, protests, and political crisis defined the decade and the established interpretation of its separate and troubled history. Historian Martin Clark makes the case:

In May 1968, France experienced a totally unexpected social upheaval. Students rioted, factories were occupied, workers went on general strike. DeGaulle’s regime seemed on the point of collapse. Yet within a month it was all over. The Gaullists were confirmed in power with a huge parliamentary majority, and the economy soon recovered. In Italy events went very differently. There, too, workers joined a huge protest movement of strikes and occupations, culminating in the “Hot Autumn” (*autunno caldo*) of 1969. But the

¹ For examples: see Filmography. Given the quantity, I have only provided a list of titles mentioned in this thesis.

² For example: E.G., “*La banda Vallanzasca*,” *Il Giorno*, June 2 1978.

struggle continued for years. Student riots became an everyday occurrence scarcely noticed by the media. Industrial militancy also became routine. The economy staggered from recession to stagflation. Protest spread to the schools, to the welfare services, to the police and army, to all the political parties, to the Church, even to the family. Most startling of all was the outbreak of terrorism in 1969. Italy had been fairly free of political violence for two decades except in Sicily and the South Tyrol; but in the next few years she reverted to her earlier traditions. Bombings and assassinations became a normal part of the Italian drama. The crisis obviously had deep social and cultural causes, absent elsewhere – the legacy of rapid industrial growth, of migration into the cities, of inadequate schools and public services, of “secularization” and of excessive expectations. These issues could not easily be tackled by the existing political system, constructed as it was for weak government and constant compromises.³

The situation is articulated in many *polizieschi*. In *La polizia è sconfitta* (Dominico Paolletta, 1977), set in Bologna, Commissario Grifi (Marcel Bozzuffi) briefs the recruits for his new “stunt squad,” while in the background the corresponding press and forensic slides are projected:

Trains derailed, phones exploded, factories blown-up, supermarkets – innocent victims, exactly like a war. In other words, a state of emergency exists in our cities today. Robbery with violence is on the increase. Since the beginning of the year it shot up over 30 percent. Cases of kidnapping have doubled, murder is commonplace. 40 members of the police force killed since Christmas, either in gun battles with recorded criminals, picked off by snipers in the streets or blown to bits in cars. They tell us we need more men. I don't agree. In France, there is one policeman to every 1,300 people. In England, one to every 1,500. Here the ratio is one to every 250. Most of them bound and gagged with red tape and office blocks...

Clark and Grifi's comments present Italy in the seventies as aberrant and lawless, caught in an historical moment isolated from its European counterparts; a political warzone whose systems of law and government are untrustworthy or, at least, undependable. The *poliziesco* films themselves made specific reference to these events, such as the botched and deadly 1967 Banda Cavallero robbery of the Bank of

³ Martin Clark, "The Great Cultural Revolution: Italy in the 1970s," in *Modern Italy, 1871 to the Present* (Harlow, U.K and New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), 448.

Naples in Milan replayed in *Banditi a Milano* (Carlo Lizzani, 1968). In addition, as one series of titles alone may suggest, the cycle represented Italy's burgeoning urban centres as increasingly afflicted and hazardous: *Roma violenta* (Marino Girolami, 1975), *Napoli violenta* (Umberto Lenzi, 1976), *Milano violenta* (Mario Caiano, 1976) and *Torino violenta* (Carlo Ausino, 1977). As a reaction to the troubled 1970s, the *poliziesco* emerged as the regional cinematic cycle *for* and *about* Italy.

But is this actually a fact? The chronicle of the seventies *poliziesco* has hallmarks of classic storytelling: clean and contained, born of a fixed land and a conflict. Like any biography, it is also as much mythical as it is faithful. It obscures a tale, I fear, that has many buried scrolls. If the Italian crime films of the 1970s represent an insular, national, popular culture dialogue, than how do you account for *Spécial Magnum* (Alberto De Martino, 1976)⁴ – a shot-in-Montreal co-production confronting a parallel moment of urban crisis in Québec? What do we make of the many *poliziesco* shot elsewhere or the 124 that were co-produced? Developing from my interest in *Spécial Magnum*, these are the questions that initiated this project.

Considering the circulation and production of Italian crime films outside of Italy, this thesis contends that not only is the narrative of Italy's unique national history and the rise of the seventies *poliziesco* misleading but also utterly insufficient in accounting for the commercial and transcultural quest of the cycle. The emphasis on the *poliziesco*'s root connection to the Italian situation and Italian audiences in the 1970s has neglected the extra-national circulation and, in many

⁴ Released in Italy as *Una magnum special per Tony Saitta*, but for the purposes of this paper will be referred by its French-language release title.

cases, production of these films. In effect, it denies the important questions a broader inquiry demands: Why were so many *polizieschi* made in the seventies? Were they designed exclusively for the Italian market? Or, as a renewal of the Italian action formula, were there international ambitions to the genre? In this case, was Italy only one factor in influencing and preparing a popular *transnational* crime film cycle whose prolificacy was tied to an *international* moment of concurrent unrest, urbanization and violent crime in the 1970s, marked by commonly shared political disturbances, criminal practices, and public concerns? In place of exclusively offering in-roads to some form of Italian cultural imagination, then, how did the seventies *poliziesco* demonstrate affinities between Italy and its export regions? By replanting the discussion as a transnational question it is not my intention to reject or disavow the Italian national emphasis, but to reshape and broaden the claim of these films and suggest the larger multi-national relevance and historical communion they possessed.

I take cinematic transnationalism as a multiple phenomenon whose overlapping forms – distribution practices, sources of funding, casting decisions, thematic concerns – cover the limits of the seventies *poliziesco*. Mette Hjort has forwarded the concern that the ascendancy of the transnational in film studies has assumed a referential scope that is often too broad, assumptive and homogenizing to be conceptually clear and context-specific.⁵ In response, Hjort summons the term “transnational” as a plural and scalar concept defined by a typology of “strong or

⁵ Mette Hjort, “On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalism,” in *World Cinema, Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Natasa Durovicova and Kathleen Newman (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 12-23.

weak forms of transnationality” linked to different models of cinematic production. While Hjort’s types are historically bound and developed from specific recent film examples, I aim to extend (and repurpose) two types over the Italian crime films of the 1970s. First, I contend what should be self-evident: that many seventies *polizieschi* developed from a production model of commercial transnationalism (what Hjort critically terms “opportunistic transnationalism”⁶), where funding, distribution, locations and casting decisions evolved from financial and commercial imperatives. And second, whether in combination or regardless of production circumstances, *all* of these crime films were invested with varying intensities of “affinitive transnationalism,” where the thematic concerns of the films emphasized common practices, comparable institutions, and shared preoccupations functioning with the effect to, as Hjort puts it, “communicate with those similar to us.”⁷

To demonstrate this thesis, I look to Québec as a case study. Québec offers a fertile testing ground for several reasons: (1) Québec is not a European state, or a region that is proximate or maintains any ties with Italy, though it shares a border with the largest exporter of commercial films, the United States; (2) the province is in distinct ways a manageably contained culture and market, and like Italy, Québec maintained a high-level of cinema-going and a large number of major and independent film distributors through the 1970s; (3) the bilingualism of Montreal, where the bulk of film attendance was condensed, offered additional needs for film importing; (4) despite geography or language, a majority of the seventies Italian crime films were released in Québec; (5) and, most importantly, two *poliziesco* films

⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁷ Ibid., 17.

were shot and co-produced in the province: *La Dernière Chance* (Maurizio Lucidi, 1973) and *Spécial Magnum*. Above all, as in Italy, (6) these films arrived to screens or were filmed as the 1970s proved a decisive and difficult episode in Québec's history.

“Un produit de série Z”

Recent years have seen a return of interest in Italy's violent past. As I write this, *Romanzo di una strage* (Marco Tullio Giordana, 2012), a film that restages the 1969 Piazza Fontana bombing and subsequent murders, is in theatrical distribution across Europe. Titled *Piazza Fontana* outside of Italy, the film follows a current run of seventies-set true crime films: *Romanzo criminale* (Michele Placido, 2005), *Romanzo criminale: La serie* (Stefano Sollima, 2008-2010), and *Vallanzasca: gli angeli del male* (Michele Placido, 2010). While these films are bestowed gala festival premieres in Berlin and Venice, presumptions about the seriousness of their historical take, and the requisite media chin-stroking on their form and content, this was not the case with the majority of *polizieschi* during the 1970s.

Very little was written about the *poliziesco* during its heyday and, outside of the coverage of the films of esteemed directors like Elio Petri and Francesco Rosi, the few articles and reviews remained typically dismissive. Following the successive releases of *La polizia incrimina, la legge assolve* (Enzo G. Castellari, 1973), *Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia* (Sergio Martino, 1973), *Il poliziotto è marcio* (Fernandi Di Leo, 1973), and *La polizia è al servizio del cittadino?* (Romolo Guerrieri, 1973), Sandro Scandolara announced in the Italian film periodical *Cineforum*, “A series of police action films, fed on references to political events of these years, are

the subject of a film genre that is flooding the halls of the new film season.”⁸ Despite the allure of the genre’s urgency, Scandolaro rejected the new “*filone poliziesco*” on the basis of its “recklessness” in referring to recent criminal-political events and its ideological incoherence, matching leftist criticism with fascist solutions and thereby preventing a “clear political colouring.”⁹ Many reviews echoed similar criticisms, writing-off the cycle as a mess of false facts, extreme violence and pseudo-fascism. Targeting *Roma violenta*, the reviewer in *Paese Sera* protested, “The crime is too serious for the foolish arguments of [the] director.”¹⁰ Outside of Italy, Québec’s L’Office des Communications Sociales bemoaned the repetitive wash of cheap headline-grabbing *policiers* in their synopsis of *I violenti di Roma bene* (Sergio Grieco, 1976): “C’est l’un des nombreux films exploitant la vague de crimes qui sevit en Italie depuis quelques années.”¹¹ In France, Jean A. Gili wrote a short history on “le film policier Italien” for *Cahiers de la Cinémathèque*, dismissing the 1970s transformation of the Italian crime film as “un produit de série Z” – a genre “sans invention reproduit à satiété des modèles à l’efficacité assurée.”¹² In the following years, major histories of Italian cinema simply ignored the seventies *poliziesco*, obliterating hundreds of films like an injudicious execution squad.¹³

⁸ Sandro Scandolaro, “Il filone poliziesco con la regia di rumor,” *Cineforum* XIII, no. 127 (1973): 744. My translation, the original reads: “Una serie di intrighi polizieschi, intrecciati a nutriti riferimenti della cronaca politica di questi anni, sono l’argomento di un genere di film che sta inondando le sale della nuova stagione cinematografica.”

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Aurora Santuari, “*Roma violenta*,” *Paese Sera*, August 22 1975.

¹¹ *Recueil Des Films de 1979*, (Montréal: Office des Communications Sociales, 1980). 223.

¹² Jean A. Gili, “Films noirs, films jaunes: Le film policier Italien,” *Cahiers de la Cinémathèque*, no. 25 (1978): 150.

¹³ For example: Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano dal 1945 agli anni ottanta* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1982); Mira Liehm, *Passion and Defiance: Film in Italy from 1942 to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism*

The welcome trend in film studies toward popular European cinemas has brought a concerted effort to recover and revive these celluloid corpses from the graveyard of cinematic memory. For Italian film history, the call for the popular is nothing new. In *The Italian Cinema*, written in the late 1960s, Pierre Leprohon justified his attention to the erotic burlesque and sadism in Italian Amazon women and musclemen films stating, "The history of cinema cannot be written in terms of "intellectual" works alone. [...] The great popular currents are of prime importance in the evolution of the art."¹⁴ Taking "popular" as polite euphemism for more exaggerated, formulaic, and crass commercial cinematic forms (particularly in Italy), these lines of inquiry have sought to define the thematic content and cultural history of cheaper, cruder and often more prolific popular strands. Specific studies on the spaghetti western and *peplum*¹⁵ and volumes on "European popular cinemas,"¹⁶ have culminated in numerous projects tackling the Italian industry's most marginalized forms¹⁷ and, what I consider the exemplary act of these changes, Peter

to the Present, 3rd ed. (New York: Continuum, 2001); Pierre Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema, 1896-1996* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁴ Pierre Leprohon, *The Italian Cinema*, trans. Roger Greaves and Oliver Stallybrass (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972). 175.

¹⁵ For example: Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (London and New York: Routledge, 1981); Kim Newman, "Thirty Years in Another Town: The History of Italian Exploitation II," *Monthly Film Bulletin* LIII, no. 625 (1986); Ignacio Ramonet, "Italian Westerns as Political Parables," *Cineaste* XV, no. 1 (1986); Richard Dyer, "The White Man's Muscles," in *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁶ For example: Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau, ed. *Popular European Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Steven Ricci, ed. *Hollywood and Europe: Economics, Culture, National Identity, 1945-95* (London: BFI Publishing, 1998); Dimitris Eleftheriotis, *Popular Cinemas of Europe: Studies of Texts, Contexts and Frameworks* (London & New York: Continuum, 2001).

¹⁷ For example: Leon Hunt, "A (Sadistic) Night at the Opera: Notes on the Italian Horror Film," *Velvet Light Trap*, no. 30 (1992): 65-75; Mikita Brottman, "Neo-Mondo: Recarnavalizing the Taboo," in *Offensive Films: Toward an Anthropology of Cinema Vomitif* (London and Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 147-74; Johannes Schonherr, "Ten Zan: Fernando Baldi's *The Ultimate Mission*, The Story of an Italian/North Korean Action Movie Joint Venture," *Film International* 6, no. 18 (2005): 36-43.

Bondanella's decision to forego a fourth edition of his *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* in favour of an account of Italian film history heavily weighted towards "popular" genres and trends – including the seventies *poliziesco* – in *A History of Italian Cinema* (2009).

Invariably, academic attention on the seventies *polizieschi* has followed its slow shuffle behind fan appraisals and primers in video store magazines (*Suspect Culture* from Toronto's Suspect Video), fanzines (*ETC: European Trash Cinema*) and album liner notes (*Beretta 70: Roaring Themes from Thrilling Italian Police Films, 1971-80*).¹⁸ But since the first installment of the multi-year *Storia Segreta del Cinema Italiano* (The Secret History of Italian Cinema) program at the 61st Venice Film Festival in 2004, dedicated to what *Variety* termed "vintage Italo genre pics,"¹⁹ there has been a noted turn towards the reconsideration of what festival director Marco Muller called Italian "lowbrow movies," more specifically in its inaugural year: the *polizieschi* of the seventies. Along with Bondanella's recent chapter, "The *Poliziesco*," an essay titled "Violent Justice: Italian Crime/Cop Films of the 1970s" was published by Christopher Barry in the compendium *Alternative Europe* in 2004, as well as two review collections in English and German: *Blazing Magnums: Italian Crime Thrillers* (2006) by Paul J. Brown and Tristan Thompson and *Der Terror Führt Regie: Der Italienische Gangster Und Polizeifilm, 1968 – 1982* (2009) by Michael Cholewa and Karsten Thureau. In Italy, three books have been produced: journalist Roberto Curti's

¹⁸ See: Steve Fentone, "Crimeslime Cinema - Italian Style!," *Suspect Culture* 1, no. 1 (1994): 32-36; Petra Blumenrock, "Men Before Their Time," in *Beretta 70: Roaring Themes from Thrilling Italian Police Films, 1971-80 (CD Booklet)* (Berlin: Crippled Dick Hot Wax!, 1998); Craig Ledbetter, *European Trash Cinema*, no. 11 (1993).

¹⁹ Nick Vivarelli, "Tarantino, Dante buzz Venice B's," *Variety*, July 26 2004.

Italia odia: il cinema poliziesco Italiano (2006) and the reference guides *Cinici, infami e violenti: guida ai film polizieschi Italiani anni '70* (2005) compiled and published by the Bloodbuster video store in Milan and *Italia a mano armata: Guida al cinema poliziesco Italiano* from Dario Argento's Profondo Rosso store in Rome.²⁰

Come the times, cometh the films

Without exception the existing writing produced on the seventies *poliziesco* not only emphasizes, but fences the discussion within the Italian socio-political context. The Italian crime film of the 1970s is defined by its ability to reference and speak about an Italy in crisis. Petra Blumenrock introduces the genre: "The end titles roll... the audience was leaving the cinema for a reality on the streets that was as paranoid, violent and politically absurd as the events they just witnessed in one of the numerous "*poliziotteschi*."²¹ These "Mediterranean bullet storms," according to Christopher Barry, "provided psychological twists and sociological turns with even higher stakes alluding to and incorporating real political events occurring in Italy at the time."²² Echoing Barry, Peter Bondanello elaborates,

the Italian police film represents a completely contemporary popular genre in the sense that, not unlike the content of the American *Law & Order* television series, many of its plots and its most popular themes easily have been lifted from the pages of the *cronaca nera* (crime news) of any urban newspaper from

²⁰ Peter Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2009); Christopher Barry, "Violent Justice: Italian Crime/Cop Films of the 1970s," in *Alternative Europe: Eurotrash and Exploitation Cinema Since 1945*, ed. Xavier Mendik and Ernest Mathijs (London: Wallflower Press, 2004); Tristan Thompson & Paul J. Brown, *Blazing Magnums: Italian Crime Thrillers* (Northants, UK: Midnight Media, 2006); Michael Cholewa and Karsten Thureau, *Der Terror Führt Regie: Der Italienische Gangster und Polizeifilm, 1968 - 1982* (Hille, Germany: Medien Publikations, 2009); Roberto Curti, *Italia odia: il cinema poliziesco italiano* (Turin: Lindau, 2006); Daniele Magni and Silvio Giobbio, *Cinici, infami e violenti: guida ai film polizieschi italiani anni '70* (Milan: Bloodbuster, 2005); Antonio Bruschini and Antonio Tentori, *Italia a mano armata: Guida al cinema poliziesco Italiano* (Rome: Profondo Rosso, 2011).

²¹ Blumenrock, "Men Before Their Time," 1.

²² Barry, "Violent Justice: Italian Crime/Cop Films of the 1970s," 89.

the 1960s to the early 1980s, a period of great social, economic and political unrest in Italy.²³

Thus, Richard Harland Smith argues, "As Italians grew to fear their metropolises, their anxiety was reflected in the crime thrillers of the mid-70s."²⁴ For critical histories and introductory appreciations, the regional-reflectionist take functions as a means to recouperate and validate an often outwardly brutish and politically incorrect genre. But the framing is understandable, if not inevitable.

Beyond *Banditi a Milano*, the seventies *polizieschi* recurrently restaged, directly referenced, or sourced their inspiration from Italian events. *Svegliati e uccidi* (1966), also directed by Carlo Lizzani, offers the criminal biography of Luciano Lutring, notorious Milanese bandit arrested in 1965. Gaspare Pisciotta, Sicilian gangster and right hand man to Salvatore Giuliano in the 1950s, is the subject of *Il caso Pisciotta* (Eriprando Visconti, 1972). Capitalizing on the massive media coverage of Italy's most wanted bandit Renato Vallanzasca's manhunt and arrest, *La banda Vallanzasca* (Mario Bianchi, 1977) was released the same year, though faced criticism for its loose appropriation of the story. On the other end of the law, *La polizia incrimina, la legge assolve* was originally developed around controversial Milan commissioner Luigi Calebresi, played in the film by Franco Nero. Assassinated in 1972, Calebresi's above-the-law reputation and abrupt demise also prefigures Maurizio Merli in the popular Commissario Betti series (*Roma violenta*, *Napoli Violenta*, and *Italia a Mano Armata* [Marino Girolami, 1976]). Even the action stunts could be lifted from the *cronaca nera*, as Merli would go on to play a variation

²³ Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema*: 454.

²⁴ Richard Harland Smith, "See Italy and Die: A Tourist's Guide to the *Poliziotteschi*," in *A Man Called Magnum DVD Booklet* (No Shame Films, 2006).

of celebrity Roman cop Armando Spatafora in *Poliziotto sprint* (Stelvio Massi, 1977). A member of Rome's *Squadra mobile*, Spatafora, nicknamed "*il poliziotto con la Ferrari*," was provided a black Ferrari 250GTE to highway race and apprehend smugglers and bandits that hoped to escape through the city's outskirts.

More generally, the seventies *poliziesco* uses multiple strategies to position itself within a discourse of authenticity and true crime. First, many of the films rely on an exposé or confessional rhetoric, as suggested by the title *Confessione di un commissario di polizia al procuratore della repubblica* (Damiano Damiani, 1971) and reinforced in a trailer of *Commissario Bonavia* (Martin Balsam) frantically typing his "confessions" over images of gunfire, political assassination and the corridors of Rome's city hall. But most *polizieschi* announce themselves as "based on fact" through opening or closing title cards that either directly claim truthfulness ("The events of this film are based on actual facts which recently occurred...") or facetiously deny their referents with the standard legal disclaimer ("Any reference to actual events or real persons [...] is purely coincidental"). (Fig. 1.1)

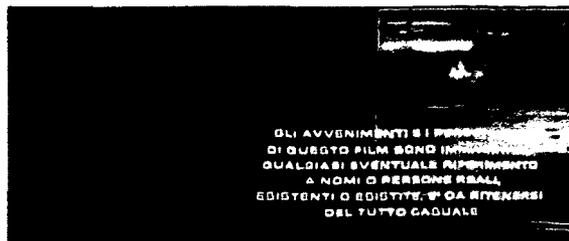
Second, exterior locations are fundamental in situating the events of each *poliziesco* within the (often titular) lived city. More recently, Pollanet Squad, a Milan-based website devoted to "*il poliziesco all'Italiana*," has developed a location database identifying and re-photographing the recognizable *piazze* and *vie* featured in dozens of crime films in the seventies and confirming, for example, that the

Skorpion club in *Milano rovente* (Umberto Lenzi, 1973) still stands on Largo Corsia dei Servi.²⁵

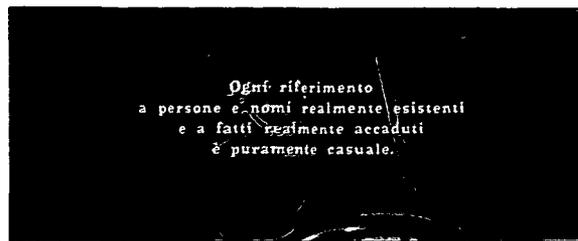
Third, a central visual symbol and thematic device is the newspaper and the practice of reporting. Newspapers are displayed in stands, sold on streets, picked up, handed over, thrown down, inked in presses, examined in close-up, brandished about and bled upon. (Fig. 1.2) The daily paper is the subject of endless dialogue (“The papers are on our backs!” “I’d love to know what the papers will call it.” “This is really going to make an incredible front page story.” “Don’t you read the papers?” “No, especially yours.”) and the graphic backdrop for a series of the films’ posters. (Fig. 1.4) And as the criminal action weaves between private and public, the process of reporting, recording and reproducing the events is repeatedly interjected into crowded *mise-en-scenes* and ghostly television screens. (Fig. 1.3)

Fourth, and most soberly, there is the incorporation of archival material – predominantly still photographs, though not exclusively. For tone and tenor, the opening credits of *Imputazione di omicidio per uno studente* (Mauro Bolognini, 1972) and *Milano...difendersi o morire* (Gianni Martucci, 1978) build on a musical montage of protest, riot and street homicide slides. (Fig. 1.5) In *La polizia chiede aiuto* (Massimo Dallamano, 1974), documentary artifacts are coupled with cinematic reflexivity: the discrete capabilities of the modern camera are shown early on to inform the subsequent police screening of a surveillance newsreel replaying recent clashes with protestors.

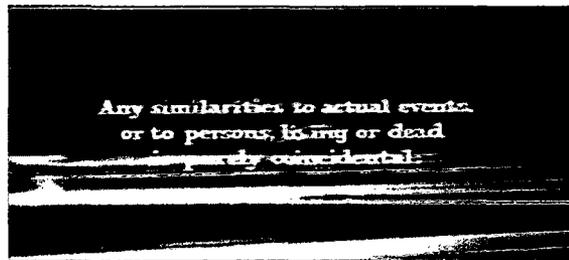
²⁵ “Pollanet Squad: *Milano rovente*,” <http://www.pollanetsquad.it/film.asp?PollNum=57>. (accessed December 12, 2011).



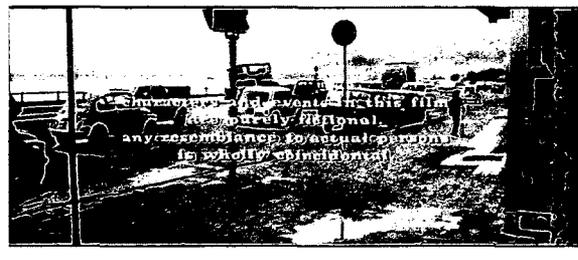
La mano spietata della legge (1973)



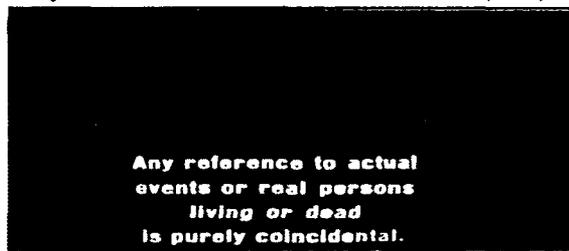
Morte sospetta di una minore (1975)



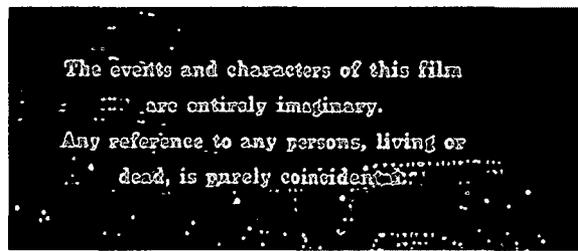
I familiari delle vittime non saranno avvertiti (1972)



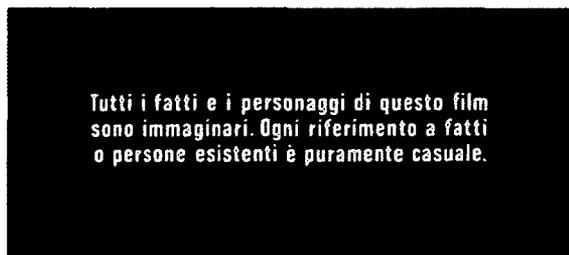
Napoli violenta (1976)



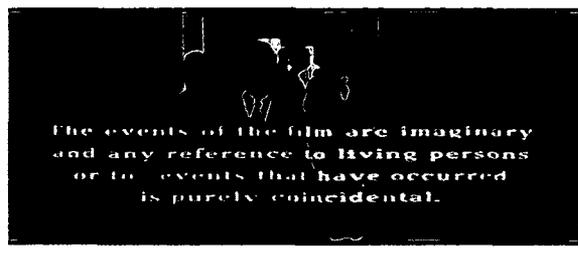
Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia (1973)



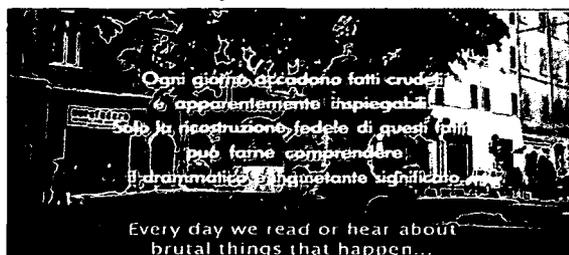
Milano rovente (1973)



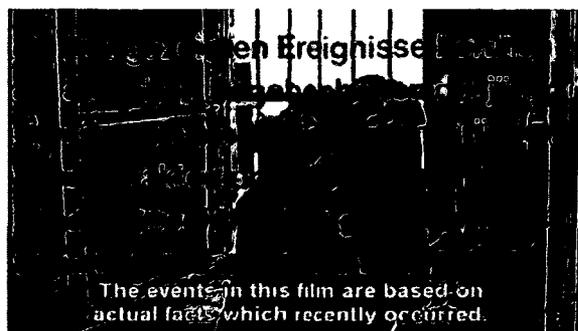
Mark il poliziotto (1975)



Confessione di un commissario di polizia... (1971)



La polizia chiede aiuto (1974)



Blutiger Freitag (1972)

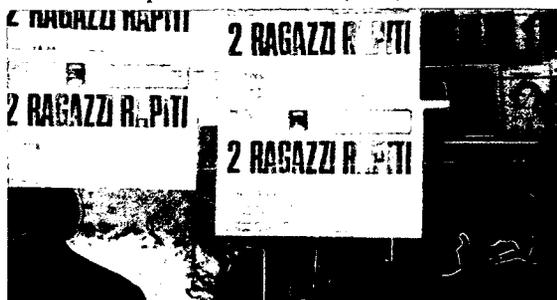
Fig. 1.1 Opening and closing title cards that announce the Italian crime cycle's connection to its referents. (Source: DVD)



La polizia chiede aiuto (1974)



La polizia ringrazia (1973)



La città sconvolta: caccia spietata ai rapitori (1975)



Milano rovente (1973)



La polizia incrimina, la legge assolve (1973)



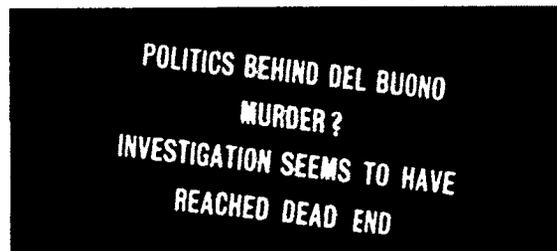
Milano violenta (1976)



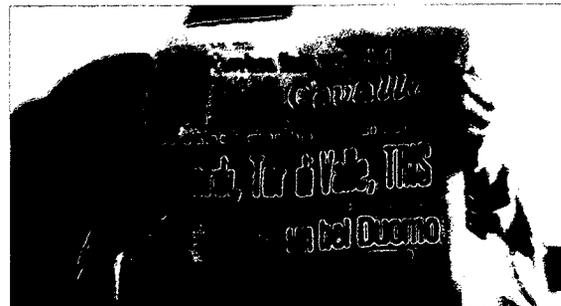
La banda Vallanzasca (1977)



Italia a mano armata (1976)



Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia (1973)



Il commissario Verrazzano (1978)

Fig. 1.2 Thematized visually and narratively, the newspaper is omnipresent across the *poliziesco* genre. (Source: DVD)



Fig. 1.3 The act, practice, and technologies of media reporting also figure largely in the Italian crime film of the 1970s. (Source: DVD)



Fig. 1.4 Newspaper-themed one sheet posters for *Banditi a Milano* (1968), *Italia a mano armata* (1976), and *Il cittadino si ribella* (1974).



Fig. 1.5 Documentary photographs incorporated in the opening credits of *Milano ...difendersi o morire* (1978) (top) and *Imputazione di omicidio per uno student* (1972) (bottom) (Source: DVD).

Clearly, it is not my aim to deny the interplay between current events, media representation and the seventies *poliziesco*, or discount nationalist interpretations of the genre, as limited and incomplete as they may be. Quite the opposite, my argument builds on these assumptions to open up the Italian crime films of the 1970s beyond the national and elaborate on the extra-national circulation and transnational design (and production) central to the cycle. To contextualize the industrial history of Italian film export, I draw on the work of Christopher Wagstaff and, to a lesser extent, Dimitris Eleftheriotis on the “international orientation” of Italian genre films through the era, since like the western, the seventies *poliziesco* was developed within a strategy of “new genres for new markets.”²⁶

Despite the “transnational turn” in film studies, there is a lack of work on the life of popular national genres in export territories, particularly those outside the United States. Assessments of the Italian crime film boom restrict the audience to the Mediterranean boot and appear to follow the false assumption that, as the introduction in *Popular European Cinema* suggests, “highly popular European films seldom travel well beyond their national boundaries; when they do [...] they are generally repackaged for art cinemas.”²⁷ Looking at Québec, this project aims to contextualize the province’s parallel moment of instability, unrest and violent crime and sketch the history of the distribution and production of Italian crime films in the Québec of the 1970s. These are some of the questions raised in this thesis: How many of the *polizieschi* were released in Québec? How were they distributed? To

²⁶ In the words of Eleftheriotis, *Popular Cinemas of Europe: Studies of Texts, Contexts and Frameworks*.

²⁷ Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau, “Introduction,” in *Popular European Cinema*, ed. Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), 1.

what degree did their thematic content evoke political and criminal events or capitalize on public preoccupations in Québec? Were they covered or reviewed in the Québec print media? How were they advertised? Why did the Italian producers seek to shoot *polizieschi* in Québec? Were the films shot in Québec more tailored for the Québec market? How is Québec represented in these films? How do the themes of these films compare with the *polizieschi* shot in Italy? How might the circulation and production of these films demonstrate affinities between Italy and Québec in the 1970s? And what can these Québec instances of the *poliziesco* tell us about their larger generic corpus?

The aim, and what I hope is the value of this project is, to document the phenomenon of the seventies *poliziesco* in Québec from primary research conducted at Library and Archives Canada and the Cinémathèque Québécoise. For historical context and media publicity, I have scrutinized *La Presse* and the *Montreal Gazette*, while for regional crime reporting I also have relied heavily on the crime tabloid *Allô Police*, as well as *Police-Police* and *Le Journal de Montréal*. At the Cinémathèque Québécoise, I consulted original press releases, entertainment publications, and the shooting script for *Spécial Magnum*. The distribution information and release statistics are culled from *Inter* and the annual *Recueil des Films* maintained and published by L'Office des communications sociales in Montreal. Publications I also use to situate the seventies *poliziesco* within the larger context of film in Québec, along with the 1981 report *Le Cinéma au Québec: Essai de Statistique Historique*. Finally, the films are examined in detail to demonstrate how the generalities of political and criminal representations provide a gateway for “reading into” the

genre the social realities and violent events of Québec, associations international audiences could have similarly made considering comparable regional renditions of the ubiquitous currents of the 1970s.

The groundwork to establish the transnational design of the seventies *poliziesco* will be laid in Chapter One with a contextual history of the international orientation of Italian genre films in the 1960s and 70s. Counter the narrative of national cinema, I argue that at a time when Italy was vying for the international market against a contracting Hollywood, the seventies *poliziesco* renewed the flagship for foreign export – the Italian action formula – by, first, continuing its emphasis on spectacle, international stars and, often still, foreign locations and, second, by updating the setting to exploit and speak to an international moment of concurrent unrest outstretching the horizons of Italy. This chapter will conclude by highlighting that, in addition to the practices of dubbing, pseudonyms and market tailoring, the Italian crime film relied on referencing and restaging foreign crimes.

Chapter Two elaborates on the transnationality of the thematic concerns of the cycle through a case study of the circulation of the seventies *poliziesco* in Québec. Detailing the historical moment that occasioned a confluence of screen depictions and social realities, I argue that at a time when political tension and violent crime were on the rise and cinema-going maintained a recognized cultural centrality, the penetration of Italian crime films into Montreal movie houses was substantial. Beyond detailing the distribution and marketing of the cycle in Québec, this chapter elaborates on a select number of circulated *polizieschi*, arranged by theme, to

contend that, as in Italy, the films addressed historical continuities and capitalized on public preoccupations parallel in Québec.

Connecting the Italian industry's outward look with the circulation history and thematic resonance of the Italian crime films in Québec, Chapter Three provides a focused account of the regional production and Montreal releases of *La Dernière Chance* and *Spécial Magnum*. Between Expo 67 and the 1976 Olympics, the elevated profile of Montreal on the world stage made the city an attractive location for international action films as much as, in managing soaring crime, debt and political rupture, a site of crisis and controversy. I argue that despite an outward appearance of hackneyed action and crime-plot contrivances, *La Dernière Chance* and *Spécial Magnum* also overtly call attention to the criminal issues of mid-seventies Québec – recidivism, banditry, the “settling of accounts,” policing, and capital punishment among others – to speak to the times in the presciently prudent manner of a *dépanneur* tabloid. The films survive as social documents that bridge affinities between Italy and Québec through the era, demonstrate the geographic stretch and correlative elasticity of the seventies *poliziesco*, and ultimately, against the regional narrative of *Québécois cinéma*, provide example of the open flows of *cinéma au Québec*.

CHAPTER ONE “Heisters, counterfeiters, pushers, buyers, killers, con artists, embezzlers... You name ‘em, we got ‘em”: Italian Crime Films in the World Market

Introduction: Exhibit *Revolver*

“The battle between crime and the law in every major city in the world.”
 – tagline for *Revolver* (1973, released as *Blood in the Streets* in the U.S.)

Revolver, directed by Sergio Sollima in 1973, was a shot in the arm (as much as the back) to the new Italian crime film of the seventies. Announcing itself in the dark of night, *Revolver* opens with the sound of panicked footsteps and distant sirens – a Milanese soundtrack to confer the genre. The film pits a warden against a convict whom the former must breakout and deliver as trade in exchange for his kidnapped wife. But as the plan unravels, like in the ambivalent spaghetti westerns, an unlikely partnership is formed. As a film invested in restaging the extortion kidnappings of the era,²⁸ *Revolver* is paradigmatic of the seventies *poliziesco* – though not exclusively for its regional-topical hold. *Revolver* was an Italian-French-West German co-production between Mega Film S.p.A., Rome, Société nouvelle de cinématographie, Paris and Dieter Geissler Filmproduktion, Munich. The film paired Italian Fabio Testi with British star Oliver Reed off the international success of *Oliver!* (Carol Reed, 1968), *Women in Love* (Ken Russell, 1969), and *The Devils* (Ken Russell, 1971). The shooting was divided evenly between Italy and France; and the export dubbing was supervised by regulars Horst Sommer (German) and Frank von Kuegelgen (English) with the recurrent voices of Michael Forest and Edward Mannix. In Italy and Spain, Testi and Reed were co-billed in all promotions but elsewhere,

²⁸ One Italian poster variation included the title “*Revolver*” ripping through torn headlines that partially read: “*Ancora senza volto i rapitori...*” (“Still faceless kidnappers...”).

Bondanella or Petra Blumenrock fail to mention, but I would suspect, is that since a number of these films have suffered haphazard international circulation on home video, and have still not been preserved or reissued²⁹, the video reference copies of many of the films these scholars and writers would have accessed, as is still largely the case, were bootlegged VHS and television broadcast releases of dubbed English prints with “burned-in” Swedish subtitles or in French with Greek, Finnish, Dutch, Turkish, Japanese, Danish, Spanish or Chinese subtitles.³⁰ Within an industry hell-bent on erecting “new genres for new markets,” the seventies *poliziesco* was built with the bricks of co-production and foreign export far from the grounds of a strictly Italian-fenced industry and regional relevance. Against a nationalist reading, I will elaborate on the international expansionism of the Italian film industry towards an understanding of the transnational place and design of the Italian crime films of the 1970s, locating their primary characteristics and potential shared appeal for Italy’s export regions in a moment of popular consumption and concurrent extremes.

Post-War History

With the end of war, came the secondary invasion of allied films. Since 1938, the American studios had withdrawn and been barred from Italy and its fascist controlled film industry. The state’s defeat and the American military occupation brought with it a renewed access to the Italian cinema market and the ability to

²⁹ Of course, this has been changing in recent years with restored releases through Raro Video (IT/USA), No Shame (IT/USA), Federal Video (IT), Dania Film (IT) Cecchi Gori (IT), CineKult (IT), Shameless (UK), Blue Underground (USA), EMS GmbH (DE), Alfa Digital (BR), and Wild East (USA).

³⁰ For example: reviewing versions regularly circulated in the English bootleg market, variations include *I violenti di Roma bene* (Sergio Grieco, 1977) in English with Swedish subtitles, *Camorra* (Pasquale Squitieri, 1972) in English with Greek Subtitles, *Baciamo le mani* (Vittorio Schiraldi, 1973) in English with Japanese subtitles, *Avvolto sulla città* (Gianni Siragua, 1980) in Spanish with English subtitles, *Milano: il clan dei Calabresi* (Girogio Stegani 1974) in English with Finnish subtitles, and so on.

released as *La poursuite implacable* in France and Québec or *Blood in the Streets* in the U.S., Oliver Reed (“star of *Women in Love*”) was singularly sold as the film’s star, “in a performance that makes Charles Bronson’s *Death Wish* look like wishful thinking.” And while Milo Ruiz (Testi) is brought in for a heist in Milan, to which vice-governor of lockup Vito Cipriani (Reed) is sure Sicilians are behind along with the kidnapping of his wife, Ruiz is actually French and the hierarchy of crime leads not to the southern Trinacria of Italy but over the Alpine border to the corrupt core of Paris. Representative of the seventies *poliziesco*, *Revolver* is at once regionally bound as it is transnationally themed and internationally driven to stage, as the film’s U.S. tagline promises, “[t]he battle between crime and the law in every major city in the world.”

The recurring emphasis to distinguish Italy in this period as exceptional in the global historical context and catalogue the seventies *poliziesco* singularly within the Italian social and film-going situation is oddly divorced from the internationalist history of its precursor – the spaghetti western. A product of the expansionist mandate of the Roman industry, the contracting Hollywood presence on global screens, and the opportunism of Italian producers, the spaghetti westerns represented the apex of production volume, international agreements, and Italy’s power to produce and market films for a worldwide audience. Revisiting the work of Christopher Wagstaff, Christopher Frayling, and Dimitris Eleftheriotis in situating the Italian western, this chapter will establish the film industrial context in Italy in the decades after World War II, which since 1947 through the 1970s was principled on an outward look to the international market. What Christopher Barry, Peter

monopolistically flood it with years of withheld Hollywood films. By 1946, 87 percent of all box-office receipts in Italy were from foreign (mainly American) films.³¹ The results of the U.S. Supreme Court's anti-trust rulings ending the monopolistic vertical integration of the major studios, the declining American film attendance, and Italy's remarkable growth in admissions beyond all European nations³² only intensified the important battleground of the Italian cinema market.

As the U.S. did everything to secure control and prevent Italian competition, the damage (or "leakage") that American film imports were wreaking on the Italian balance of payments forced the Italian government to enact tax rebates, screen quotas and state support for film finance with the express goal of preventing monopoly by ensuring competition through the encouragement of production and export. These measures raised the question of the 'nationality' of films and the requirements in defining them for screen quotas and tax subsidies. This nationalist impulse, however, only invited an erosion of discrete nationality, as American film producers sought beneficial treatment by Italianizing their films, just as Italian films would do the same to capitalize on French screen quotas and subsidies. So, paradoxically, Christopher Wagstaff argues in "Italy in the Post-War International Cinema Market,"

the internationalization of the cinema market which would so corrode the Italian-ness of the Italian cinema was not so much the result of abandoning nationalist attitudes as, on the contrary, a coherent commercial reaction to the intensification of nationalism within the industries of the various countries.

³¹ Christopher Wagstaff, "Italy in the Post-War International Cinema Market," in *Italy in the Cold War: Politics, Culture and Society, 1948-58*, ed. Christopher Duggan and Christopher Wagstaff (Oxford and Washington: Berg, 1995), 98.

³² Italy went from 411 million tickets sold in 1946 to 819 million in 1955, at the same time as the U.S. market declined from 4400 million to 2340 million – a 47% drop. See: *Ibid.*

Not only that but once Italy [...] had defined the nationality of its own films and had created legislation to protect those films on the domestic market, it became in the interest of foreign producers and distributors to sign agreements with the Italians in which two countries undertook to exchange a certain number of each other's films. In this way it could be said that the protectionist measures actually worked to open up export markets for Italian films.³³

This exchange was initiated between Italy and France in the late-1940s as it followed with the UK and Germany by 1950.

While Italy produced a number of inexpensive 'neo-realist' films that gathered international attention, these films did little to attract domestic audiences and offset the American hold of the Italian market. More, the system of rising tax refunds (8% in 1947, 10% in 1949, 16% by 1956) was levied from gross box-office receipts, economically encouraging producers to fashion films with the greatest commercial potential. As Wagstaff details in his follow-up study, "Italian Genre Films in the World Market," notions of 'quality' gradually changed, from the 'cultural' quality of the neo-realist films to an inferred quality of production values (international stars, locations and spectacle), and defined by historical value (filmed adaptations of novels, historical pictures) or popular genres (melodramas, Neapolitan musicals, adventures). The Roman studios were rebuilt, a star system was created, productions expanded and because of the Hollywood recession and its "policy of runaway production in Italy," American stars were readily available to work in Rome. But as the Italian production model duplicated the American paradigm, the accounting similarly reiterated the necessity of adopting an international perspective:

³³ Wagstaff, "Italy in the Post-War International Cinema Market," 98.

The basic problem afflicting the Italian production sector was that its home market was not large enough to provide box-office receipts to an Italian film that could cover the costs of production. The obvious solution was to follow the American lead and enlarge the market. Two devices were available, co-production and export.³⁴

Co-Production

In 1949, Italy and France became the first European countries to formally sign a co-production agreement. To boost production, balance-off American imports and double the size of the 'protected' market, Italo-French cooperation had provisionally started as early as 1946. Out of the post-war period and escalating in the 1950s and 60s, the Italian film industry, along with its partnering European film industries, relied heavily on bilateral and multinational co-productions. For the UNESCO report on film statistics 1955-77, the melding of European production defined the challenge of aggregating films: "The film output of Western Europe amounts to about one quarter of the world total. But when one studies trends in European film production, one phenomenon has to be kept in mind [...] namely international co-production."³⁵ Between 1950 and 1965, Wagstaff catalogues, Italy "made 1,149 co-productions, 764 of them with France, 190 with Spain, 46 with Germany, 141 films with two countries and 8 with other countries."³⁶ Despite the alignment of co-production with defence strategies against American imports, cooperative production with the U.S. developed as well. Even though the U.S. did not formally recognize co-productions, these joint ventures (labeled *compartecipazione*)

³⁴ Ibid., 100.

³⁵ "Statistics on Film and Cinema, 1955-1977," (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 10.

³⁶ Wagstaff, "Italy in the Post-War International Cinema Market," 100.

benefited Italian companies in other ways. As Italian producer Carlo Ponti explained in the early seventies:

The American film industry produces less films and needs more than ever before the co-operation of internationally minded producers, in order to fill the gaps in their home and international markets. We in Italy can no longer produce films for the Italian markets. The costs are too high, and we can't get our money back at the Italian box-office alone. We need American capital, we need the American market, and we need American companies to distribute our films globally.³⁷

For the Italian film industry, co-production opened up inter-European and cross-Atlantic exchange and access to partner and third country markets and distributors, provided access to foreign government incentives and private capital, to partner-initiated projects and attractive foreign stars and locations. By the 1960s, up to 70 percent of Italian films were co-produced, predominantly genre vehicles "no longer simply destined for the international art house but rather for a popular European market and for the Middle East and South American markets."³⁸

The key factor for the viability of Italian co-productions, Tim Bergfelder argues in his essay "The Nation Vanishes," was to find generic formulae with the widest appeal domestically and across national borders. While in the early 1950s, France and Italy provided the most successful co-production ventures in costume melodramas and comedies boasting French and Italian stars, from the late 1950s onwards "action became indeed the dominant generic mode of European co-productions, particularly where more than two countries were involved."³⁹ Roman

³⁷ As quoted in Tim Bergfelder, "The Nation Vanishes: European Co-Productions and Popular Genre Formulae in the 1950s and 1960s," in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 139.

³⁸ Wagstaff, "Italy in the Post-War International Cinema Market," 102-03.

³⁹ Bergfelder, "The Nation Vanishes: European Co-Productions and Popular Genre Formulae in the 1950s and 1960s," 146.

peplums, Viking films, horror, westerns and, importantly, crime films provided variations of the singular production category of 'adventure film,' whose narrative malleability could conform to the ebbing popularity and cosmetic changes of shifting genres. The 'adventure film' emerged to many, like German film distributor Manfred Barthel, as the peerless model for cooperative success: "coproductions only worked on the level of the adventure genre. Action was international. The perfect karate punch counted more than a subtle gesture, an exploding motorboat had a greater international appeal than the talents of a particular star."⁴⁰

By the time the *poliziesco* began to replace the western in the early 1970s, Barthel's prescription had become mantra to the Italian production sector. In 1970, 135 of the 240 films made in Italy were co-productions – predominantly westerns, thrillers and war films, but included as well *polizieschi* like *Città violenta* (Sergio Sollima, 1970), an Italo-French release. Co-production represented roughly fifty percent of production for another two years, before contracting slowly towards the end of the seventies as the Italian film industry collapsed in on itself. Still, the two films credited for igniting the crime cycle in earnest, *La polizia ringrazia* (Stefano Vanzina, 1972) and *La polizia incrimina, la legge assolve*, set precedence for pan-European production as Italo-French-West German and Italo-Spanish co-productions. Others followed through the decade, from *L'uomo che sfidò l'organizzazzione* (Sergio Grieco, 1975), made cooperatively between Italy, France and Spain, to the Italo-Spanish-Mexican co-production *Avvoltoi sulla città* (Gianni Siragusa, 1980). Of 313 *polizieschi* produced between 1967-81, 124 were co-

⁴⁰ As quoted in *ibid.*

productions.⁴¹ While these agreements boosted budgets and spurred production for *polizieschi*, their existence was as much a preliminary step in the real key to expanding the Italian market – foreign export.

Export Markets

In his twin essays “Italy in the Post-War International Cinema Market” and “Italian Genre Films in the World Market,” Christopher Wagstaff reconstructs the genesis and acceleration of the Italian film industry’s expansionist international orientation: “in 1945 there was no export market for Italian films, but by the mid-1950s it was possible to calculate that an Italian film would get 40 percent of its receipts from the export market.”⁴² The initial distribution of post-war Italian films opened up export to the USA and UK, gathered international awards, and ensured that “in South American countries, in Egypt, Turkey, Syria and elsewhere, Italian films were in demand. In 1946, Italy issued 121 film export licenses; in 1955 the figure was 2,239, and in 1961 nearly 4000.”⁴³ The expansionist strategy coincided with the contracting U.S. presence on international (including Italian) screens and the opportunistic vacancy to displace Hollywood as the world’s most prolific producer of popular genre films. Citing the 1981 UNESCO report “on film and cinema,” Dimitris Eleftheriotis emphasizes the point: “In that period, Italy produced more films, attracted more spectators in more cinemas than any other European country. In terms of number of films produced, in the 1960s and early 1970s Italy consistently outnumbered the USA: 242 to 174 in 1962, 241 to 155 in 1963, 270 to

⁴¹ Savvy fans, collectors and grey-market vendors have long acknowledged the pan-European production contexts by applying and exercising the more inclusive term “eurocrime.”

⁴² Wagstaff, “Italy in the Post-War International Cinema Market,” 103.

⁴³ Ibid.

181 in 1964, 245 to 168 in 1966, 258 to 215 in 1967, 237 to 156 in 1974.”⁴⁴ And with the rising number of export permits granted around the world, Italian (or Italian co-part) films further outnumbered other European films and, in many territories, even Hollywood. Eleftheriotis notes, for example, Iraq, Algeria, Spain, Turkey, Greece and Portugal, but also included Brazil (1977), Thailand (1971), San Marino (1975), Czechoslovakia (1977), USSR (1976), Sudan (1972), Chad (1977), Gabon (1971), Ivory Coast (1972), and Somalia, where by 1970 Italian imports accounted for 50% of all films released.⁴⁵

The proliferation of Italian film exporting rested on a Roman production sector politely described as “characterized by its faith in formulas”⁴⁶; or what director Pier Paolo Pasolini less tepidly derided as “the belching stomach of Italy.”⁴⁷ “The pattern of Italian commercial cinema reveals an overlapping succession of generic cycles,” Kim Newman began his three-part history of Italian exploitation for *Monthly Film Bulletin*.⁴⁸ In Italy, these formulae or generic cycles exist under the label of *filone*, “to follow the tradition” or “be in the vein of.”⁴⁹ From the late 1950s, these were predominantly Roman musclemen pictures, Biblical epics, pirate films, westerns, spy thrillers, *fumetti* and crime films, which by the end of the sixties were all simultaneously being produced, distributed and exhibited within the larger *filone*

¹⁷ Eleftheriotis, *Popular Cinemas of Europe: Studies of Texts, Contexts and Frameworks*: 105.

⁴⁵ “Statistics on Film and Cinema, 1955-1977,” 36-57. The UNESCO report is not complete and only includes select years from the seventies as example.

⁴⁶ Christopher Wagstaff, “A Forkful of Westerns: Industry, Audiences and the Italian Western,” in *Popular European Cinema*, ed. Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), 251.

⁴⁷ As quoted in Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*: 68.

⁴⁸ Kim Newman, “Thirty Years in Another Town: The History of Italian Exploitation,” *Monthly Film Bulletin* LIII, no. 624 (1986): 20.

⁴⁹ For an extended review, see: Mikel J. Koven, *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film* (Lanham, Md & Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2006). 5.

for which foreign export was a safe bet – the adventure film. Assessing the spaghetti western in “A Forkful of Westerns,” Christopher Wagstaff argues that despite rotating surfaces, “[t]he narrative units of these formulas and subcategories are interchangeable: villains threatening, heroes rescuing, changing of alliances, pursuits of quests, etc. It can sometimes be hard to tell from the credits of a film and its synopsis whether a particular film is a spaghetti western or an example of another formula such as bandit, gangster, Mafia, thriller or political suspense.”⁵⁰

Away from the narrative of a turn toward national reflection, on a film industrial level, the *poliziesco* was a continuation of the Italian action formula and should be considered within this internationally oriented tradition. As such, the ‘crimeslime’ films often aimed to reproduce the holy-trinity of production values revered in spectacle, global stars and foreign settings.

Spectacle

Manfred Barthel’s wisdom that “action was international” – with its non-dependence on language, disconnect from causality, and broad spectacle – might seem self-evident and banal, but it is also central to the conceptions of ‘serialization’ and ‘vernacular cinema’ developed around Italian action *filoni*, whether acknowledged or not. Christopher Frayling first paired the spaghetti western with the serial demands of comic books to demonstrate how the commercial imperative of production volume shaped the repetitive, unprogressive, and often closure-free disposition of Italian formula cinema.⁵¹ The need for a constant flow of product, particularly where movie houses remained dominant over television, ensured that

⁵⁰ Wagstaff, “A Forkful of Westerns: Industry, Audiences and the Italian Western,” 252.

⁵¹ Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*: 75-102.

“seriality was the most important mechanism available to the Italian production sector, given the way it was organized, for meeting the particular requirements of the exhibition sector.”⁵² In hand, Christopher Wagstaff likened the *terza visione* (third run) formula films and the viewing practices associated with them to television, where audiences would come and go and talk over the film, except during the “action” bits that jolted their attention. The associated film style was developed by Mikel J. Koven into what he confusingly termed Italian “vernacular cinema.” While this implies a localized practice, Koven uses the word “vernacular” to highlight a disinterest in the hegemonic norms of narrative filmmaking in favour of the punctuating action set-pieces that command a divided attention.⁵³

Of the three scholars, Wagstaff is the only one to acknowledge the importance of the serial-“vernacular” quality for Italian exporters. The commitment to familiarity, the use of English pop “theme” songs (for example, in *Napoli violenta*, *La cittadino si ribella* [Enzo G. Castellari, 1974])⁵⁴, the acceptance of repetition with slight variation, the ability to recycle (the music queues for *Milano Calibro 9* [Fernando Di Leo, 1972] return in Di Leo’s *La città sconvolta: caccia spietata ai rapitori* [1975]), the open ended expectation for further “chapters,” and the exploitation of action set-pieces to supersede removable narrative exposition, all worked to control costs and broaden domestic and foreign distribution. More than that, Italian crime films were not only serial-like but many of the most successful

⁵² Wagstaff, “A Forkful of Westerns: Industry, Audiences and the Italian Western,” 255.

⁵³ See Koven, *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film*: 28-41.

⁵⁴ Using these examples, 45rpm singles were released for both Bulldog’s “Men Before Your Time” and Guido & Maurizio De Angelis’ “Goodbye My Friend” to circulate in advance of the films in Italy, as well as being repressed or redistributed by RCA and Blue Jean in Germany, Brazil, Japan, etc. To this day, many of the songs and soundtracks have endured internationally above and beyond the films.

were series, typically cop sequels following Commissario Mark Terzi (3 films), Nico Giraldi (11 films), or Commissario Betti (3 films). The Betti films in particular exemplify the “vernacular” commitment towards a parade of grandiose action and gory shocks, as one review emphasizes: “*Violent Naples* is breathless stuff. It flies along with protection rackets, rape, armed robberies, murdered informants, and breakneck chases on a motorbike and even on top of a tram.”⁵⁵ Of a sampling of 20 *polizieschi*, 19 boasted extended car chases.⁵⁶ The odd one out, *Il grande racket* (Enzo G. Castellari, 1976), merely replaced the chases with excessive shootouts and still managed to include large car stunts. For international distribution, the “vernacular” form was only concentrated through a process of cutting down films by removing expendable chunks of narrative and dialogue. Wagstaff points out the UK practice of tailoring Italian *peplums* and westerns into compressed B-programmers for double billing.⁵⁷ The international versions of many *polizieschi* underwent a similar treatment. Looking at the original US runtimes, for example: *Città violenta* was cut from 109 minutes to 93 minutes, *Gli esecutori* lost 13 minutes, *I padroni della città* (Fernando Di Leo, 1976) was released as *Mr. Scarface* minus 11 minutes,

⁵⁵ “*Violent Naples* (Review),” <http://10kbullets.com/reviews/violent-naples/>. (accessed March 8, 2012)

⁵⁶ These include: *La polizia incrimina, la legge assolve*, *La polizia ringrazia*, *Torino violenta*, *Banditi a Milano*, *Roma violenta*, *Napoli violenta*, *La polizia è sconfitta*, *Milano violenta*, *La città sconvolta: caccia spietata ai rapitori*, *Italia a mano armata*, *La polizia chiede aiuto*, *Morte sospetta di una minorenne* (Sergio Martino, 1975), *La via della droga* (Enzo G. Castellari, 1977), *Uomini si nasce, poliziotti si muore* (Ruggero Deodato, 1976), *Mark il poliziotto* (Stelvio Massi, 1975), *Quelli della calibro 38* (Selvio Massi, 1976), *Lo mano spietata della legge* (Mario Gariazzo, 1973), *Milano odia: la polizia non può sparare* (Umberto Lenzi, 1974), and *Blutiger Freitag* (Rolf Olsen, 1972)

⁵⁷ Christopher Wagstaff, “Italian Genre Films in the World Market,” in *Hollywood and Europe: Economics, Culture and National Identity 1945-1995*, ed. Geoffrey and Steven Ricci Nowell-Smith (London: BFI, 1998), 81-85.

Italian Title	Italian runtime	US runtime
<i>Città violenta</i>	109mins	93mins
<i>Dio, sei proprio un padreterno!</i>	97mins	85mins
<i>Gli esecutori</i>	105mins	92mins
<i>Gli intoccabili</i>	116mins	96mins
<i>I bastardi</i>	102mins	93mins
<i>I padroni della città</i>	96mins	85mins
<i>Il consigliere</i>	104mins	99mins
<i>Luca il contrabbandiere</i>	97mins	91mins
<i>Milano odia: la polizia non può sparare</i>	99mins	90mins
<i>Poliziotti violenti</i>	94mins	87mins
<i>Quelli che contano</i>	97mins	83mins
<i>Un uomo dalla pelle dura</i>	87mins	83mins

Fig. 2.1 Italian and U.S. runtimes for twelve 1970s *polizieschi*

and 9 minutes were excised from *Milano odia: la polizia non può sparare* (Umberto Lenzi, 1974) (see Fig. 2.1). Within a regime of “the same but not the same” formula filmmaking, the final irony is that this paring only highlighted that in a number of cases the action was *the same*: the central car chase in *Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia* is recycled in *Milano odia: la polizia non può sparare* and *Roma a mano armata*, as the chase in *Italia a mano armata* is reused for *La tua vita per mio figlio* (Alfonso Brescia, 1980), and so on. Even as producers cut corners, action was central to the exportability of the cycle and created a production value almost as attractive as international stars.

Actors

While the *poliziesco* cycle made use of Italian stars, like Franco Nero (11 films), Maurizio Merli (16 films), Fabio Testi (10 films) and Mario Morelo (9 films) – and relied heavily on Italian supporting players like Ricardo Petrazzi (22 films),

Francesco D'Adda (26 films), Nello Pazzafini (32 films), Salvatore Billa (33 films) and Omero Capanna (38 films) (faces whose recurrence reinforced the serial quality of the cycle) – the internationalization of the films required a concomitant outward orientation in casting internationally established actors, such as Mel Ferrer (*Morte sospetta di una minorenne*). As director Sergio Martino explains the casting for *Morte sospetta di una minorenne*: “Well, Mel Ferrer... back in those days... in order to be able to sell the Italian *poliziesco* to foreign countries more easily, American actors were cast for cameos, small supporting roles.”⁵⁸ Aging Hollywood screen stars provided a bankable presence and familiarity to a crime film cycle aimed for the international circuit. The flood of venerable American thespians included Richard Conte (*Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia*), Joseph Cotton (*Il giustiziere sfida la città* [Umberto Lenzi, 1975]), Farley Granger (*La polizia chiede aiuto*), Jack Palance (*I padroni della città* [Fernando Di Leo, 1976]), James Whitmore (*La polizia incrimina, la legge assolve*), Rita Hayworth (*I bastardi* [Duccio Tessari, 1968]), Martin Balsam (*Diamanti sporchi di sangue* [Fernando Di Leo, 1977]), Kirk Douglas (*Un uomo di rispettare* [Michele Lupo, 1972]), Woody Strode (*La mala ordina* [Fernando Di Leo, 1972]), Joan Collins (*Poliziotto senza paura* [Stelvio Massi, 1978]), Lee J. Cobb (*Mark il poliziotto*), Arthur Kennedy (*Roma a mano armata*) and Yul Brynner (*Con la rabbia agli occhi* [Antonio Margheriti, 1976]). To director Fernando Di Leo, “Italy had become an elephant graveyard.”⁵⁹ And if the lumbering celebrity was out of reach, there was always the resembling son, as Chris Mitchum befitted

⁵⁸ Sergio Martino interviewed in Niki Wurster, “Crime Scene Milan,” in *Morte sospetta di una minorenne DVD* (2007).

⁵⁹ Fernando Di Leo interviewed in Marco Giusti, “Il poliziottesco,” in *Stracult (Television Series)*.

the tough and shrewd persona of his father in *Un verano para matar* (Antonio Isai-Isasmendi, 1972) and *Un tipo con la faccia strana ti cerca per ucciderti* (Tulio Demicheli, 1973).

From bit player to top billed, Mitchum also represented the American that made it big in Europe. Following the Italo-western, the *poliziesco* banked on a stable of trans-Atlantic stars: Lee Van Cleef (*Dio, sei proprio un padreterno!* [Michele Lupo, 1973]), Charles Bronson (*Cittá violenta*), Jean Seberg (*Camorra*), and Henry Silva (*Napoli spara!* [Mario Caiano, 1977]), along with a swarm of newer American names like John Cassavetes (*Gli intoccabili* [Giuliano Montaldo, 1969]), Telly Savalas (*I familiari delle vittime non saranno avvertiti* [Alberto De Martino, 1972]), John Saxon (*Napoli violenta*), Ben Gazzara (*Afyon oppio* [Fernando Baldi, 1972]), Barbara Bach (*Il cittadino si ribella*), Stacy Keach (*Gli esecutori* [Maurizio Lucidi, 1976]), Robert Blake (*Un uomo dalla pelle dura* [Franco Prospero, 1972]), Peter Boyle (*Crazy Joe* [Carlo Lizzani, 1974]), Joe Dallesandro (*L'ambizioso* [Pasquale Squitieri, 1975]), and Fred Williamson (*Uomini duri* [Duccio Tessari, 1974]).

Not limited to recognizable American stars, the process of stocking the cycle with international draws involved securing British and continental favourites, often a benefit of co-production that assisted foreign export. In this case, lead roles were stuffed with French leading men such as Jean-Louis Trintignant (*Un homme est mort* [Jacques Deray, 1972]), Alain Delon (*Tony Arzenta* [Duccio Tessari, 1973]), Jean-Paul Belmondo (*Il poliziotto della brigata criminale* [Henri Verneuil, 1975]), and Luc Merenda (*Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia*); as well as Britons like James Mason (*La città sconvolta: caccia spietata ai rapitori*), Roger Moore (*Gli esecutori*),

David Hemmings (*La via della droga*), and Oliver Reed (*Revolver*); German stars Klaus Kinski (*La mano spietata della legge*), Helmet Berger (*La belva col mitra* [Sergio Grieco, 1977]), Elke Sommer (*Pronto ad uccidere* [Franco Prosperi, 1976]), and Raimund Harmstorf (*Blutiger Freitag*); or other well-established Euro-stars, like Swedes Max Von Sydow (*Cadaveri eccellenti* [Francesco Rosi, 1976]) and Ursula Andress (*Colpo in canna* [Fernando Di Leo, 1975]). The multinational star-system gave flexibility to export. Frayling quotes *Saturday Evening Post* reporter William Price Fox's interview with director Maurizio Lucidi on the set of his latest film, "Between takes, I asked him who would be starred. 'We have three stars', he said. 'In Germany, Walter Barnes gets the top billing. He has a big following up there. If the film goes to Spain, [Uruguayan] George Hilton becomes the star. If America, Hunt Powers. It's really up to the distributors; they decide who will bring the public in."⁶⁰

American Appropriation

The casting of classic studio stars, trans-Atlantic breakouts of the sixties, and many contemporary American and European popular actors was a strategic practice to secure capital from lenders in promising a pedigree of personas with broad appeal to all territories historically monopolized by American, and to some degree European, films. An extension of the model established by the *peplum* and consolidated through the Euro-western, casting for export had two criteria: first, casting by recognition (discussed above), and, second, casting by association. During the western craze, for example, Lee Van Cleef was brought to Italy not initially as a draw in himself, but for his iconographic association as a supporting Hollywood

⁶⁰ As quoted in Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*: 69.

cowboy in such films as *High Noon* (Fred Zinneman, 1952). Following international stardom through the Sergio Leone westerns, Van Cleef's casting in the *poliziesco* era became double – one of star recognition, but still one indebted to the maintenance of his association and continuity with an American antecedent. In the context of displacing the American domination of international screens, for Italian crime films in the seventies, to export was to sustain, stabilize and compete with the established mold.

Spanish actor Fernando Rey was cast in *La polizia incrimina, la legge assolve* as a European star, but also because of the associative presence in recalling *The French Connection* (William Friedkin, 1971)⁶¹ – a direct inspiration for this drug smuggling *poliziesco*. In the UK, to exploit and serialize the American hit, *La polizia incrimina* was retitled *The Marseilles Connection*. At the same time, *Afyon oppio* and *La mala ordina* were released in North America as *The Sicilian Connection* and *The Italian Connection*. While the narratives often borrowed from the tradition of gangster and cop films, the commercial exploitation of the American antecedents was reserved foremost for export. As Mikel J. Koven says of the early seventies, “Not only were these Italian exploitation films derivatives of American cinema in the first instance, but also the vast majority of these films were actually produced with a global market in mind, Italian exploitation producers were often highly successful at *remarketing* these films back to the United States.”⁶²

⁶¹ Similarly, French actor Marcel Bozzuffi (who played Pierre Nicoli in *The French Connection* – the criminal on the train and the film's original U.S. poster) was cast in 10 subsequent *polizieschi*.

⁶² Koven, *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film*: 15.

Since, as all narrative accounts of the cycle like to repeat⁶³, the global success of *The French Connection*, *Dirty Harry* (Don Siegel, 1971) and *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972) detonated the *poliziesco* boom as much as the Hot Autumn, Italian producers and foreign distributors were savvy to exploit and shamelessly serialize these transnational hits. For example, following *Dirty Harry* and its sequel *Magnum Force* (Ted Post, 1973), knock-off titles were ordered into the international market: *A Man Called Magnum*, *Magnum Cop*, *Blazing Magnum*, *Police Magnum*, *The .44 Specialist*, and *Destruction Force*.⁶⁴ Marketing campaigns similarly connected and competed with these predecessors: the American trailer for *Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia* (as *The Violent Professionals*) exclaimed in voice-over “*The Godfather* gave you an offer, he gave you no alternative!”; ad-copies to promote *Tony Arzenta* in Québec stated the film was “De loin supérieur au “*Parrain*” à tous points de vue”; and New York ads for *Revolver* were slapped with a simple “this is a better movie than *Godfather II*.” Kim Newman called these imitative practices the “Rip-off/Spin-off” mode of Italian *filoni*, a safety net Stephen Thrower more facetiously termed “premature emulation.”⁶⁵

But what was important is that the titles and marketing equate these Italian follow-ups with the American product and to a certain degree efface their origins in the Hollywood-centric international market. This is hilariously evident when producer Edmonto Amati announced to the world the production of *Spécial*

⁶³ See: Barry, “Violent Justice: Italian Crime/Cop Films of the 1970s,” 78-79; Brown, *Blazing Magnums: Italian Crime Thrillers*: 3-4; Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema*: 459.

⁶⁴ Respectively, *Napoli si ribella* (Michele Massimo Tarantini, 1977), *Poliziotto senza paura* (Stelvio Massi, 1978), *Una magnum special per Tony Saitta* (aka *Spécial Magnum*), *Kill!* (Romain Gary, 1971), *Mark colpisce ancora* (Stelvio Massi, 1976), and *La banda del trucidato* (Stelvio Massi, 1977).

⁶⁵ Newman, “Thirty Years in Another Town: The History of Italian Exploitation II,” 54; Stephen Thrower, *Beyond Terror: The Films of Lucio Fulci* (Goldaming, UK: FAB Press, 1999). 193.

Magnum as “A 100% American action picture” through a full-page ad in *Variety*.⁶⁶

The real art of hucksterism was of course in pseudonyms. Referring to the production of westerns, Christopher Frayling quotes a reluctant American film producer: “Check the names on the marquees and the bill-boards. Lot of them are look-alikes. Damn promoters think some sap will read Warrren Beatton and pay his money thinking it’s Warren Beatty. I heard one was trying out Clark Grant.”⁶⁷

Directors followed, and from the beginning of the *poliziesco* cycle the practice had legs: Emilio Miraglia was “Hal Brady” for *Quella carogna dell’ispettore sturlingh* (1969), Lorenzo Sabatini wore “Warren Kieffer” for *Scacco alla mafia* (1970), Ignacio Iquiro became “Steve McHoy” for *Tre per uccidere* (1970), Marino Girolami took “Fred Wilson” for *Le Manipulateur* (1972), and so on.

Finally, to wholly succeed in this duplicitous ruse, the Roman film industry relied on dubbing for export, an aspect of production that had become such a basic imperative by the 1970s that *polizieschi* were dominantly mouthed in English. When the Italian studios expanded through the fifties and sixties, the industry employed 100, 000 people – the second largest in Rome after construction.⁶⁸ Of those, many were foreigners working in dubbing studios like Fono-Roma under the direction of expatriate English dubbing directors like John Gayford, Christopher Cruise, Frank von Kuegelgen or Nick Alexander, who explains,

In those days, American buyers were coming to Italy and picking up 50 films at a time because American production was not yet geared to meet TV’s voracious appetite. They had the channels but not the product. American International (AIP) set up a dubbing factory in Rome to produce English

⁶⁶ “In Production: A Special *Magnum* for Tony Saitta,” *Variety*, 22 October 1975.

⁶⁷ Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone*: 68.

⁶⁸ Wagstaff, “Italy in the Post-War International Cinema Market,” 97.

versions of the Italian movies they had bought. [...] Between the 60s and 80s, an Italian film was dubbed and you got yourself a foreign sale almost immediately. In the 60s we had the western and the 70s the James Bond rip-offs. By that time, almost all were shot with translated English dialogue.⁶⁹

The Italian industry employed so many dubbing technicians and actors that by the sixties, English dubbers had formed their own organization – the English Language Dubbing Association of Rome. Unknowingly preparing to make later-year stars of the voices of Michael Forest and Edward Mannix, the Dubbing Associations readied piles of *polizieschi* for bids in the ever-important world market. To highlight the fundamental transnational importance of his work for the genre, Nick Alexander offers an anecdote: “years ago, I dubbed a film called *Gangster Eddie* (1968), directed by Alfio Caltabiano, about prohibition in Chicago during the 20s. It was well shot and directed and it didn’t do any business in Italy. Later, the director received an award from the lab because they struck more prints of the export version than any other film that year.”⁷⁰ Implicit in Alexander’s statement is that in combination with the dubbing swipe, *Comandamenti per un gangster*, as it was called in Italy, travelled well because of its mythical American crime setting.

Foreign Settings

The general portrait of Italian bandit and mafia films of the seventies is that of being temporally and geographically bound to the contemporary Italian urban situation. But the reality is less constrict. Despite the swerving tours through the Neapolitan streets, the requisite verbal queues (“The drug scene in Milan is controlled by Benzi!”) and the titling trend of combining aggressive language

⁶⁹ Jason J. Slater, “Voice of Terror: The Man Who Made Zombies Talk,” *Dark Side Magazine* no. 76 1999.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

(armed, violent, hate) with the name of major metropolitan areas in Italy (at least, for the domestic release), the seventies *polizieschi* are replete with foreign settings and criminal milieus. Just as *Revolver* moves from Milan to Paris, *La polizia incrimina, la legge assolve* follows the smuggling lead from Genoa to Marseilles, *Tony Arzenta* takes the title hitman up the ranks of organized crime through Milan, Paris and Copenhagen, and *Afyon oppio* triangulates the heroin trade between Italy, New York and Turkey. Since international screens were accustomed to American-set crime worlds as the standard reference, a large number of *polizieschi* were filmed and set in the United States, including New York (*Contrarapina* [Antonia Margheriti, 1978], *Da Corleone a Brooklyn* [Umberto Lenzi, 1979]), Philadelphia (*Sangue di sbirro* [Alfonso Brescia, 1976]), Chicago (*Uomini duri*), San Francisco (*Gli esecutori, Il consigliere* [Alberto De Martino, 1973]), New Orleans (*Città violenta*), Las Vegas (*Gli intocabili*), Los Angeles (*Un homme est mort*), and New Mexico (*I bastardi, Un uomo dalla pelle dura*).

As Carlo Ponti stated, some of these films were made under mutual cooperation between Italian and U.S. producers, just as many *polizieschi* maintained an outward look to the urban centers of foreign co-production partners. This was particularly the case with France, where Italy shared resources, incentives and personnel on bilateral crime films that troubled unitary national designation, such as *Il poliziotto della brigata criminale* set in Paris, and the Nice bound *L'uomo dalle due ombre* (Terence Young, 1970) – a tri-partite co-production with Belgium. Then there are the German-set *polizieschi* like *Il re della mala* (Jürgen Roland, 1973) concerning a mafia showdown in Hamburg and the Munich bandit film *Blutiger*

Freitag, as well as co-productions with the UK, like *Si puo essere piu bastardi dell'ispettore Cliffi* (Massimo Dallamano, 1973) set in the London underworld, the Spain-based Maurizio Merli revenge film *Avvoltoi sulla città*, and the Italo-Canadian *Spécial Magnum* pitting an Ottawa cop in criminal Montreal (see Chapter 3). But as a film like *Sette ore di violenza per una soluzione imprevista* (Michele Massimo Tarantini, 1973) replanted the crime action in Greece, even Italian majority co-productions were unrestricted in their outward look, producing wildly multinational brews, such as *Senza via d'uscita* (Piero Sciumè, 1970), an Italo-Spanish-French co-production set in Stockholm, and *Kill!* (Romain Gary, 1971), an Italo-Spanish-French-West German euro-mulch turned in Pakistan. Finally, the cycle waned with the *Piedone* series starring Bud Spencer as Naples's Inspector Rizzo, who in three sequels takes his slapdash crimebusting to Hong Kong, Johannesburg and Cairo.⁷¹ Of 313 seventies *polizieschi*, 125 are in whole or part set outside of Italy. At the conclusion of his mini-essay "See Italy and Die: A Tourist's Guide to the *Poliziotteschi*" for the NoShame DVD company, Richard Harland Smith acknowledges the move toward foreign settings, but only as a delayed answer to a dubious picture of Italian political recovery, "Toward the end of the decade, the action moved on to France, to Canada, even to the United States as things stabilized within in the peninsula."⁷² Smith's account is misleading on two levels: foreign settings were in use from the outset and the late-1970s offered little relief for Italy. But it at least implies a continuity between the films, their subject matter and the

⁷¹ The films, all directed by Stefano Vanzina aka "Steno," were *Piedone lo sbirro* (1973), *Piedone a Hong Kong* (1975), *Piedone l'Africano* (1978), and *Piedone d'Egitto* (1980).

⁷² Smith, "See Italy and Die: A Tourist's Guide to the *Poliziotteschi*."

mobility of the two in an era of multi-national unrest – that while the Italian crime films of the seventies maintained an outward look at an economic and film industrial level, this was not divorced from a more generalized concern with the phenomenon of violence and crime on an international scale.

An International Theme

As crime was transnational, so was the seventies *poliziesco*. The effects and business of organized crime were beyond borders, banditry had taken the catwalk in Milan to global seasonal style, and political ire was machined and assembled worldwide. The *poliziesco* emerged in a moment where to speak about mass urbanization, terrorism and social crisis was to speak topically to the preoccupations of export markets near and far. Italy was not unique. Inversely, the fear was that Italy would resemble its troubled foreign markets in the Middle East, North Africa and South America. This is clear in the final crime scene exchange between two police detectives in *La banda Vallanzasca*:

“What’s your hypothesis, commissioner?”

“We’ll need to see the autopsy report to determine if it was murder, suicide or an execution. I’m going with the second hypothesis; I’m practically convinced of it.”

“Crime by an innocent will exasperate public opinion more than it already is...”

“Sure... It’s more like South America. Our country is moving further and further away from Europe. Always more.”

“The same situation as Uruguay in ’73. A corrupt party. A strong left. More and more clandestine organizations. Public opinion shocked by crimes and kidnappings like this. Life is getting more dangerous. First, they’ll introduce special laws, then the army will get involved in keeping public order... In the end, people will revolt.”

Christopher Barry, Peter Bondanella, Paul J. Brown and Tristan Thompson link the *poliziesco* to an urban anxiety over the emergence of Italian resistance groups,

particularly the *Brigate Rosse* who perpetrated heists, bombings, kidnappings and assassinations. While this is not unreasonable, in an era of violence with political aims, the Red Brigades were only the domestic players in an international league of right and left-wing guerrilla fronts, including the *Tupamaros* in Uruguay, Red Army Faction in Germany, Revolutionary Organization 17 November in Greece, the IRA in Northern Ireland and around the UK, Popular Forces April 25 in Portugal, Palestinian Liberation Front in Israel and Jordan, the *Sandinistas* in Nicaragua, *Ação Libertadora Nacional* in Brazil, the ETA in Spain and France, *Front de libération du Québec* in Canada, the Red Army in Japan, the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* in Chile, and the Weather Underground in the United States. Political violence was rampant: Moluccan gunmen perpetrated successive hostage sieges of trains and consulates in the Netherlands; Argentinian rightist rebels captured air bases and launched reconnaissance planes and helicopters over Buenos Aires; LaGuardia airport in New York City was bombed and a TWA jet was hijacked taking 50 hostages and showering "propaganda leaflets" over New York, Montreal, London and Paris; the 1972 Munich Olympics were marred with the hostage crisis and execution of 11 Israeli athletes; Mexico was plagued with kidnappings and bombings in San Luis Potosí, Mexico City, Guadalajara and Oaxaca in opposition to President Echeverría, and most notoriously terrorists in Vienna shot their way into the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and kidnapped senior officials, boarded Austrian Airlines and flew to Libya. All while civil wars seethed in Lebanon, Israel and Vietnam.

As large-scale migration to major cities enflamed crime rates in Italy, similar

processes escalated offences internationally where, for example, in the U.S. violent crime doubled from 1965 to 1971 and only rose another 100% through the seventies.⁷³ There was also a renewed sense of the international status of Italian criminality. The pages of Italy's *cronaca nera* passed through the wire services of the world, thus the *polizieschi* followed the global circulation of tabloid crime reporting. The Banda Cavallero, Renato Vallanzasca, Rome's elite Flying Squad, all were well covered internationally in advance of their exploitation on film. More, the "long arm" of the Calabrian and Sicilian syndicates was explicitly named in the title of Alfonso Brescia's *Napoli, Palermo, New York: il triangolo della camorra* (1981). The ternary phrase was appropriately available for any number of local variations, as in Québec the mafia headlines read "Montreal – New York – Sicily."⁷⁴

But most importantly, the films themselves recognized the breadth of crime. As much as the *poliziesco* was involved in a process of "incorporating real political events occurring in Italy at the time" with lawless action "lifted from the pages of the *cronaca nera*,"⁷⁵ a number of the Italian-produced crime films directly referenced and restaged foreign crimes. *L'Affaire Dominici* (Claude Bernard-Aubert, 1973), made with and in France, recreates the triple-murder of British tourists in the provincial south and the subsequent investigation that gripped the region. *Regolamenti di conti* (Daniel Vigne, 1973), also known as *Les Hommes*, was another co-production with France described as a "quasi-documentary" about the annals of

⁷³ "Crime in the US, 1960-2004," (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004).

⁷⁴ "Montréal - New York - Sicile: La CECA perce enfin le mystère de la mafia," *Allô Police*, December 14 1975, 8.

⁷⁵ Barry, "Violent Justice: Italian Crime/Cop Films of the 1970s," 89; Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema*: 454.

the Marseillaise criminal underbelly. After the back-to-back deaths of mob testifier Joseph Valachi and gangland instigator Crazy Joe Gallo in 1971-72, Italy also looked to the U.S. to capitalize on the notorious New York mafia: big-time producer Dino De Laurentiis funded *Carteggio Valachi* (Terence Young, 1972) and director Carlo Lizzani followed his Italo-bandit biopics of Luciano Lutring and Pietro Cavallero with *Crazy Joe* (1974), starring American Peter Boyle as the tough-guy enforcer. Finally, even Cineproduzioni Daunia 70, the company behind Fernando Di Leo's more regarded *polizieschi*, backed the German-set and Italian-looking *Blutiger Freitag*, a gut-spraying retelling of the Bavarian police hunt for Austrian bandit and kidnapper Kurt Vicenik and his gang only months earlier.

Conclusion

That this assortment of bullet-perforated celluloid are anything but uni-national should attest to the multifaceted historical character of the seventies *poliziesco*. From the end of the Second World War, the Italian film industry was rebuilt and expanded through a complex series of maneuvers that endeavored to strengthen a production sector that could compete with the inundation of Hollywood moviemaking in the domestic market. Paradoxically, the necessities of change resulted in the establishment of co-production agreements, an opening up of exchange with foreign partners, a commitment towards popular 'adventure' formulas, and a reliance on action spectacle, international stars, and diverse locations to appeal to an increasingly globalized market. As one of the last major *filone*, the *poliziesco* erupted into production when the insuppressible cultural moment of the 1970s shot its way into the fortress of global cinematic interest.

Whether as concerned commentary or cheap exploitation, Italian crime films demonstrated the transnationality of criminal practices, the shared history of political distress, and the affinitive preoccupations with violence, corruption, and law and order through the decade. The end of *Blutiger Freitag* freezes on a quote from Napoleon Bonaparte: "Crime is as contagious as the plague." This takes on a secondary reading in consideration of the proliferation and transnational circulation of 1970s *polizieschi* and the process of exchange, bringing to question what is the more interesting historical characteristic of the cycle: the different means and meanings that carried this "plague" into the cultural fray of export dumping grounds worldwide. This is what I now take up through a case study of Québec.

**CHAPTER TWO "All at once, all over the world": The Contexts and
Circulation of Italian *Polizieschi* in Québec, 1970-81**

"I fear that we're on the edge of a wave of violence in this country
that has no precedence." – *La polizia ringrazia*

Introduction: Massacre at the Gargantua

At 12:24am, January 21st, 1975, the Montreal fire department responded to a call at 1369 Rue Beaubien Est. Battling the routine blaze in the vacant second-floor tavern, firefighters pursued flames along the ceiling. In smoke and murk, they moved a large jukebox that had been pushed against the access door to the beer storeroom and broke the secured padlock. Extinguishing the blaze and letting the haze clear, it took many minutes for firefighters to grasp the grisly nature of the scene. No bigger than a passenger elevator, the scorched interior of the storage closet was stuffed with corpses – shot, burnt, asphyxiated and "piled three feet high."⁷⁶ Lieut. Maurice Labarre of the fire department made the discovery: "We just kept on counting the bodies. We couldn't believe it when we reached six. The more we took out, the more we found. I thought it would never end."⁷⁷ In total, the dead counted thirteen.

A gangland hit of depraved cruelty, Rejean Fortin, 43-year-old manager of the Gargantua Bar-Salon (and ex-cop), was shot point blank in the heart with a .22 caliber revolver while patron Pierre Lamarche was shot in the stomach, but died of asphyxiation. The two men, along with the remaining 11 victims were herded into

⁷⁶ Steve and Albert Noel Kowch, "Saw Vendetta Killings, 11 Witnesses Murdered," *Montreal Gazette*, January 22 1975, 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

the storeroom, the padlock was set, the jukebox forced against the door, and the room torched – a smoke oven to extinguish all witnesses.

Less than 3 months earlier, on October 30th, the same bar played host to the double murder of Roger Levesque and Raymond Laurin, shot down as they sat drinking at a table. Montreal police determined it was a vendetta killing perpetrated by Richard Blass, a convict sentenced for armed robbery, who escaped with four others earlier that week from Laval Maximum Security Penitentiary. After alluding police from the scene of several armed robberies, in a letter he signed "*Le Chat*," Blass "vowed" to go on a killing spree if reporters did not inspect the conditions of his former prison, which was consequently arranged. Following information acquired through wiretaps, in the dark wintry morning hours of January 24th, municipal and Québec provincial police trudged up the snowy hills and raided the Laurentian Mountains chalet *Le Chat* was hiding out in, north of Montreal. Startled and half naked, Blass was machine-gunned down while reaching for a .357 magnum beside his bed. In the room, police found a sawed-off shotgun, .45 and .22 caliber handguns, three .357 magnums, an M1 rifle, ammunition, gas masks and a saw – the material to support the threats. Detective Albert Lisacek was credited with heading the raid. Six weeks earlier, Blass had sent the press a portrait of himself armed with rifles in each hand and the caption: "Say hello to my old friend Albert Lisacek – the French poodle."⁷⁸ Though none ever stood trial, a coroner's investigation ruled that Blass, accomplice Fernand Beaudet, and likely others, were criminally responsible

⁷⁸ "Police Kill Suspect in Canada Slayings," *New York Times*, January 25 1975, 5.

for the Gargantua mass-murder⁷⁹ – a crime *The Gazette* emphasized “outstrip[ped] by far the most notorious gangland execution of all”: the St. Valentine’s Day massacre of seven members of Al Capone’s rival Bugs Moran gang in Chicago, 1929.⁸⁰

This is the context of a region that welcomed the Italian *poliziesco* of the 1970s as a *persona grata* – a crassly entertaining confidant trading in the displaced traumas, curiosities and desires of all willing. Taking Québec as a case study, this chapter will elaborate on the specific historical circumstances that engendered the successful transcultural circulation of this profuse body of popular and anarchic Italian-built crime films. Making use of my own research on the distribution and marketing of the *poliziesco* in Québec during the seventies, I will present statistics and detailed accounts by theme of the basic correspondences between Italian films and Québec crime. I argue that at a time in the province where filmgoing enjoyed a certain undiminishing cultural centrality, the penetration of *polizieschi* onto the province’s screens was substantial and provided independent distributors, particularly French-language operators, a steady flow of first and second-run titles to exploit. Despite arguments detailing the nationally-rooted germaneness of the boom, as in Italy, by chance and contiguity – like some generic Rorschach – the *poliziesco* as surely depicted, engaged with and capitalized on the true crimes, public scandals and savage headlines of an export territory experiencing concurrent unrest.

⁷⁹ Evidence supporting this ruling was largely a collection of telephone surveillance in which Beaudet not only told his sister of his involvement in the murders but, in doing so, “chuckled several times.” See Steve and Albert Noel Kowch, “Richard Blass linked to slayings,” *The Montreal Gazette*, February 6 1975, 1, 3.

⁸⁰ Kowch, “Saw Vendetta Killings, 11 Witnesses Murdered,” 3; “Plus horrible que le massacre de la Saint-Valentin,” *La Presse*, January 22 1975, A14.

Montreal: Crime Capital

Commis de sang froid, the Gargantua massacre confronted the beguiling pretense of a civil and familial Québec. "This is the kind of thing that we think happens in Detroit or Chicago, not Canada," a bystander told the press.⁸¹ Whether a public relations plant by the municipality or the worst briefed urbanite, this Montrealer's current affairs portfolio was bankrupt. In the ten days surrounding the nightclub slayings, a "bullet punctuated" chase between armed bandits and police tore up the streets of Laval leaving a 21 year old with a severe gut shot; gunmen held up Lucien Melancon clothing store and BP Service Station at Pie IX Blvd. while the Bank of Montreal was smashed and robbed by a sledgehammer wielding bandit; Clement L'Ecuyer was found dead in a ditch after being shot five times, while on the same night Edward Miller was axe-murdered in his own apartment; after being shot in the shoulder while at work, the coroner's inquest cleared grocery clerk Donald Bockus of the shooting death of Jean-Guy St. Pierre who had come armed to collect a \$220 debt; Montreal convict David Philip Norman Cabana was stabbed 30 times in prison; arsons ravaged structures and killed 4 in three separate incidents; and seven year old Paula Teixeira was struck, dragged and paralyzed while six year old Andrea Lacey was crushed and killed in two fleeing hit and runs.

Other incidents of labour unrest continued as 15,000 homes had their heat cut off in freezing temperatures when workers for Gaz Métropolitain Inc. sabotaged connections to the south-west of L'Ile de Montréal in protest of employee exploitation; Labour Minister Jean Curnoyeur feared "near anarchy" while 1,200

⁸¹ William Borders, "13 Killed in Montreal Bar, Apparently Gang Victims," *New York Times*, January 22 1975, 2.

striking iron workers, on the eighth week of a walkout which stalled construction at Olympic stadium and 35 other sites, threatened more trouble over an ordered settlement to unresolved negotiations; and Jean-Paul “Johnny” Lévesque was charged with the murder of union member Léo Migneault, found in a Longeuil shopping centre with his head cracked and lips wired shut.

Inquiries and investigations pressed forward as the Cliche Commission entered the second phase of public testimony on corruption in Québec’s construction industry linking Paul Desrochers, former top advisor to Premier Bourassa, to bribery, kickbacks, intimidation and corruption in union contracting, particularly the blemished James Bay power project. More, the ongoing trial of Santos “Frank” Cotroni and Frank D’Asti for conspiracy to traffic cocaine yielded testimonies of the breadth and pettiness of the smuggling racket, while the conclusion of a cooperative three month investigation into the exploitation of Montreal’s illegal aliens determined that, in the words of *Gazette* reporter Jacques Hamilton, “fraud, corruption, bribery, forgery, slave labor, prostitution, rape, extortion, blackmail, and murder” mark the illegals problem, “cutting across the grain of social and business activity in Montreal – travel agencies, airlines, employment agencies, schools, hundreds of employers, loan sharks, prostitution rings, lawyers [...] with organized crime interests apparently at the controls.”⁸²

That same week, regional news media reported that Montreal’s housing prices soared 30.6 per cent over one year; Agriculture Minister Normand Toupin announced that despite food bills soaring, Québec farmers’ incomes continue to

⁸² Jacques Hamilton, “Web of crime, exploitation traps city’s illegal aliens,” *Montreal Gazette*, January 18 1975, 1.

plummet to “disastrously” low levels; Montreal Mayor Jean Drapeau concedes that the deficit mounted by the Olympics makes a tax raise likely, while at the same time Drapeau is faced with a municipal court challenge for four charges of illegal council voting; Montreal Urban Community (MUC) police deputy director André Guay is put on leave after an inquiry is opened into the illegal bugging of public officials; and municipal debate was sparked by chairman Laurence Hanigan favouring a ceding of control and bankrolling of the MUC police to the province. These are the stories compassing the Gargantua massacre. Usher in 1975: when an ashen excavation of human remains, in a burned-out topless tavern, conferred the Montreal region with a year-to-date of 33 homicides - in just 21 days.

Presented in the *Toronto Star* as a city “tortured” by gangs and strikes, Montreal, once the “Paris of North America,” was now the “crime capital.”⁸³ Fulfilling these claims, 1975 would conclude as the most murderous year in Montreal (and Québec) history with 101 in the metropolitan urban core and 226 province-wide (Fig. 3.1); and a record year for armed robberies with the MUC representing 5,531 of the 7,974 registered in Québec, a concentration in the Montreal core of 44.4% of all the robberies in Canada.⁸⁴ More, the brazen attitude of gangsters had created wild-west conditions, as gunmen stormed the police station at Sainte-Foy, the city

⁸³ Ronald Lebel, “Montreal: Crime, strikes torture a great city” *Toronto Star*, January 25 1975, 1.

⁸⁴ The total in Canada for 1975 was 12, 455. See: Daniel Élie, “La criminalité au Québec,” *Criminologie* 14, no. 1 (1981): 85-104.

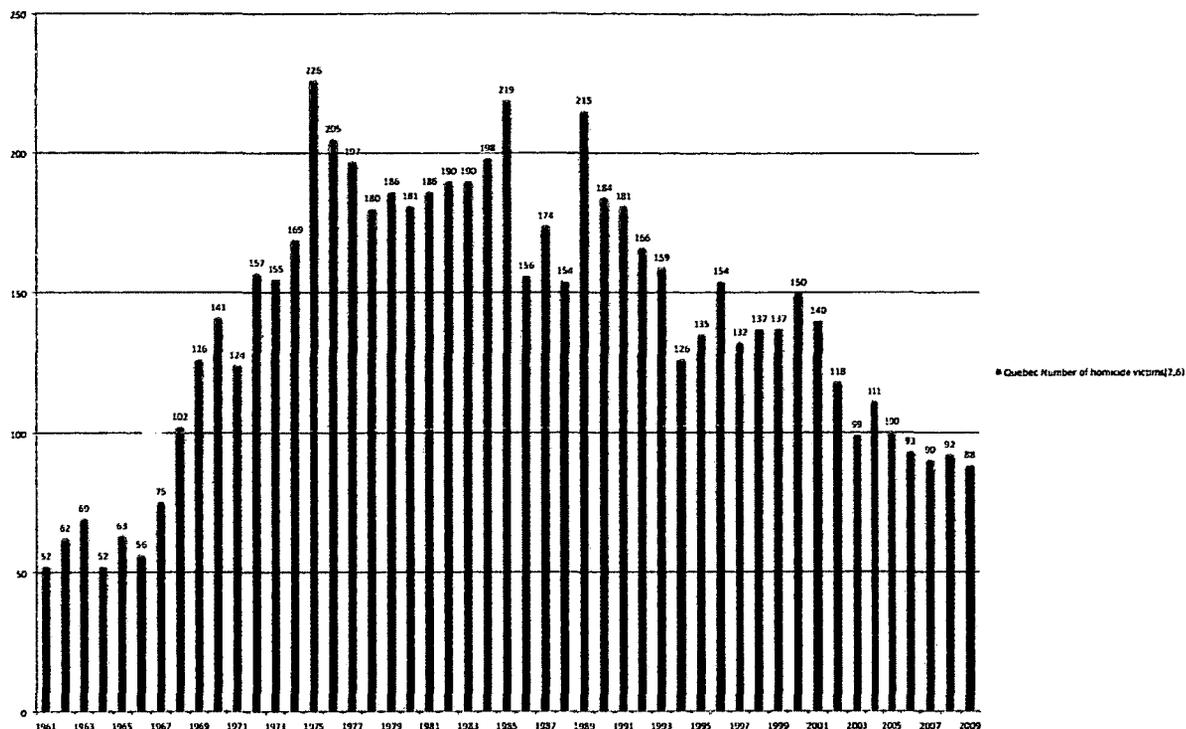


Fig. 3.1 Québec: Number of Homicides, 1961-2005. Source: Statistics Canada Table 253-0001, CANSIM (database).

newsroom at *Le Devoir*, and raided the police armory at a Montreal station.⁸⁵ In just a few years, the escalation of crime had rapidly doubled the number of violent offences⁸⁶, transformed the pages of *La Presse*, *The Gazette*, *Le Devoir* and *Le Journal de Montréal* into a *cronaca nera* north and propelled Montreal's crime tabloid *Allô Police* to sell 100,000 rags a month.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ "Il tente de tuer un policier en plein poste de police," *Allô Police*, October 3 1976, 6-7; Leon Levinson, "Mucci admits shooting newsman," *Montreal Gazette*, September 25 1974, 4; "Police guns stolen," *Ottawa Citizen*, April 9 1977, 1.

⁸⁶ Looking at the early 1970s: violent crimes known to police in Montreal mount steadily year-on-year (1972 = 8,465, 1973 = 9,361, 1974 = 11,320, 1975 = 13,911). Source: Élie, "La criminalité au Québec."

⁸⁷ "Quebec crime tabloid to sleep with the fishes,"

http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2004/07/13/AlloPolice_040713.html, accessed December 04 2011.

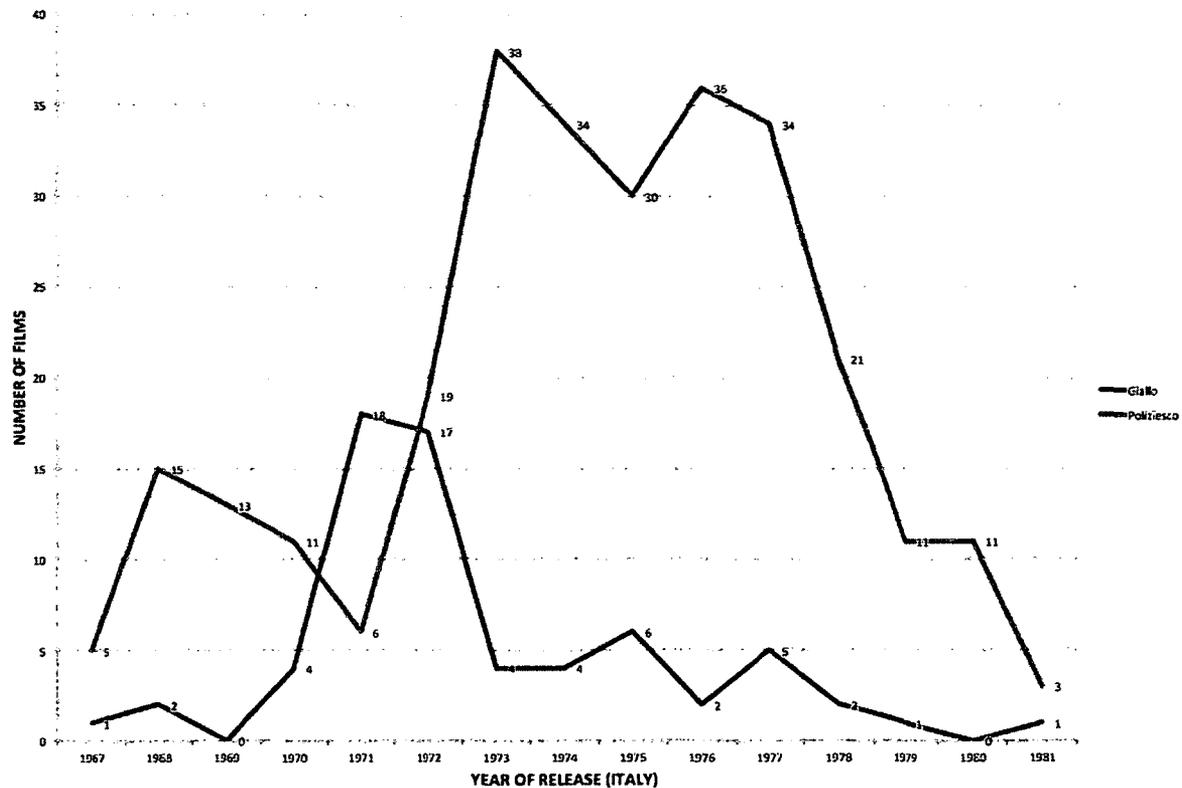


Fig. 3.2 Number of Italian *polizieschi* produced (vs. *gialli*), 1967-1981 (based on the Pollanet Squad database).

As it was in Italy, it was in Québec. Not only did a corresponding ballooning of corruption and violence reshape both states, but the trend line of crime in Québec paralleled the intensifying rise in production of the *poliziesco* – both peaking through the middle seventies (Figs. 3.1-3.2). More than that, the connection was made palpable in print. Like *Il Messaggero* or *Il Giorno*, Montreal’s increasingly overstuffed true crime pages juxtaposed the scandals and body counts with the evening’s entertainment listings. *La Presse*, in particular, devoted considerable space to advertising new movies, often bleeding directly from the headlines and filling the latter half of the A section.

Films are not only born of worlds, they are delivered in worlds. The depths of association have an unknown bottom. On the Friday following the Tuesday killings

at the Gargantua Bar-Salon, January 24th, the same day Richard Blass was raided and perforated with 27 bullets, *Le boss (Il boss, Fernando Di Leo, 1973)*, distributed by International, opened at L'Arlequin on Ste. Catherine and the Ritz, at 1313 Rue Belanger Est, three blocks from the Gargantua. The third in Fernando Di Leo's milieu trilogy on mafia warfare in Italy, *Il boss* explodes in its opening prologue with a gangland massacre and arson, punching the main titles over bombastic music, the echo of sirens, and images of collapsed bodies ablaze. Characters mark the death toll at ten instead of thirteen, the venue is a private porn theatre instead of a topless nightclub, but the scenes of the assault, a roomful of burning victims, and the process of identifying the charred cadavers at the morgue could play as the week's news. Even the gangsters who planned the hit in the film communicate over the telephone in a codified surveillance speak, attempting to evade the incriminations and consequences wire tapping proved for Richard Blass. The print ad for *Il boss* appeared only a few pages after the coverage of the fatal raid in Val David. The graphics featured three men, armed with rifles and severe expressions in front of a bull's eye. In the right corner, text stuffed an oversized bullet hole and promised what the press failed to access: "l'envers de la mafia!"⁸⁸

City Under Siege: Italian Crime Films in Québec

In terms of film-going in the 1970s, Québec was to Canada what Italy was to Europe. In 1930 (the first year of a systematic census on cinema in Canada), Ontario boasted 219% more commercial movie screens than Québec. By 1962, Québec – sustaining theatre counts better than Ontario – had eclipsed its more populated

⁸⁸ "Le Boss (Print Ad)," *La Presse*, January 24 1975, B11.

provincial neighbor in number of commercial screens and widened the margin through the seventies.⁸⁹ Like Italy, which saw film exhibition move towards concentration in the city, while the number of communities without any cinema more than doubled⁹⁰, the number of cinemas in Québec remained generally consistent through the 1970s, but their “make-up” changed. Importantly, theatres vanished in rural and small town communities while Montreal expanded, adding 23 more screens between 1967 and 1975.⁹¹ Although Québec as a provincial whole did not represent the highest per-capita ticket sales of the provinces and territories in the seventies⁹², exhibition was concentrated in Montreal. By 1976, Montreal had the highest number of tickets sold of any metropolitan centre in Canada, surpassing Toronto, more than doubling Vancouver, and nearly six times more than Québec City.⁹³ At this time, the MUC represented 48.5% of entrance receipts in Québec while the Montreal “region” accounted for 65.7% of the provincial total.⁹⁴ Similar to the Italian film exhibition industry, which in 1972 (year one of the real *poliziesco* boom in Italy) experienced an increase in ticket sales for the first time since 1955⁹⁵, Québec exhibitors, after a history of decline then relative stability, experienced a

⁸⁹ The margin was 15 in 1962, but rose to 50 by 1975. See Graphic 3, Table 19 in Yvan and Pierre-François Hébert Lamond, *Le cinéma au Québec: Essai de Statistique Historique (1896 à nos jours)* (Québec: Institut Québécois de Recherche sur La Culture, 1981).

⁹⁰ Wagstaff, “A Forkful of Westerns: Industry, Audiences and the Italian Western.” p251

⁹¹ See Tables Recap 1 and Recap 2 (first part) in Lamond, *Le cinéma au Québec: Essai de Statistique Historique (1896 à nos jours)*.

⁹² That would be the Yukon and North West Territories. See Table 178 in *ibid*.

⁹³ See Table 39 in *ibid*.

⁹⁴ See Table 59, Recap II in *ibid.*, 73.

⁹⁵ The increase was from 536 million tickets for a gross of 207 billion lire, in 1971, to 554 million tickets and 237 billion lire in 1972, a rise – however slight – that the industry looked at optimistically. See Edoardo Vergara Caffarelli, “Italy,” in *International Motion Picture Almanac 1974* (New York: Quigley Publications, 1974), 587.

comparable rise in attendance (4.1%) from 1974 to 1975.⁹⁶ A rise maintained through the mid-seventies when the staggered distribution of Italian crime films collided with screens along the St. Lawrence. Considering this history, the cultural centrality of film is readily defensible. Sure enough, in the mid-seventies, studies on social and leisure activities by the government of Québec declared that for *québécois* over 18, film-going was the principal “activité culturelle et sociale.”⁹⁷

While these studies are wonderfully validating for any film and cultural history research project, again, like in Italy, the resulting accounts are often fixated on regional production and steeped in the cultural and identity politics of “national” cinema. Much has been made of the 1960s and 70s golden age of Québecois cinema – the influence of the Quiet Revolution, the creation of the Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC), the self-determination of production, and the critical and commercial milestones of the early seventies⁹⁸ – but, *unlike* in Italy, with less grounds to the cultural prominence of these cinematic products. By the end of the 1960s, not only did Italy maintain an annual attendance of 557 million admissions, but, more importantly, domestic films ruled the market with a majority share, forcing even the American presence to under 30%.⁹⁹

Conversely, it needs to be stated clearly: between 1969 and 1978, Québecois feature films released *en première vision* (first run) in Montreal theatres accounted

⁹⁶ Lamond, *Le cinéma au Québec: Essai de Statistique Historique (1896 à nos jours)*: 55.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153-54.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Yves Lever, *Histoire Générale du Cinéma Québec* (Montreal: Boreal, 1995); Janis L. Pallister, *The Cinema of Québec: Masters in Their Own House* (London: Associated University Presses, 1995).

⁹⁹ Eleftheriotis, *Popular Cinemas of Europe: Studies of Texts, Contexts and Frameworks*: 104. That’s not to suggest that market share is the sole determinant, that the movie-going process is not more complex, or that there are not very valid (and potentially more interesting) questions to be asked about the American films that penetrated Italy at the time.

for a total of 2.2%.¹⁰⁰ In comparison, Italian films made up 11.5% of releases in Québec with a total of 601 films.¹⁰¹ For films presented in French, dubbed Italian imports constituted an even larger share: for example, in 1979, 17% of all French language release prints distributed in Québec were Italian films, exactly one quarter (25%) of all dubbed releases.¹⁰² Film-by-film records in the annual *Recueil Des Films* publications distinctly detail the Italian production reach: for example, *Le Clan Des Siciliens* (Henri Verneuil, 1969) is labeled “Franco-italien” or *Hold-Up* (Germán Lorente, 1977) is detailed as “Italo-hispano-français.”¹⁰³ Notwithstanding, the statistics maintained by *L’Office des communications sociales* fail to acknowledge that many of the films singularly categorized as French or Spanish, are in fact Italian co-productions – financed and creatively driven in part by the continent’s most prolific popular film industry.

And favored at that time was the crime film – in Québec as much as Italy. The urgency, action, low risk, quick turnaround, and steady flow of titles crossing the Atlantic proved appealing to independent distributors and populist programmers. In total, 180 Italian-produced crime films spilled onto Québec screens through the 1970s (Fig. 3.3).¹⁰⁴ In these years, more Italian crime thrillers were

¹⁰⁰ Table 127 in Lamond, *Le cinéma au Québec: Essai de Statistique Historique (1896 à nos jours)*. Though this should not discount the instances of certain Québec films becoming overwhelming popular successes.

¹⁰¹ Table 129 in *ibid*.

¹⁰² That is, if you are excluding “films tournés en français” from Québec and France. “Statistiques sur les films présentés en première vision, à Montréal, en 1979,” *Inter XIV*, no. 2 (1980): 5.

¹⁰³ See *Recueil Des Films de 1970*, (Montréal: Office des communications sociales, 1971); *Recueil Des Films de 1978*, (Montréal: Office des communications sociales, 1979). 111.

¹⁰⁴ This is my own data, acquired through the process of systematically reviewing, record-by-record, all five thousand plus films released “*en première vision*” in Québec between 1970-1981. This information is published by *L’Office des communications sociales* in the annual *Recueil des Films* available for consultation at Cinémathèque Québécoise in Montreal and Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa.

	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	Total
Italian Crime Films released <i>en première vision</i> in Québec	14	11	17	13	24	13	19	29	16	15	4	5	180

Fig. 3.1 Italian crime films release *en première vision* in Quebec, 1970-81

commercially released in Montreal than Québec-made films. Though still a fraction of the wealth of films vying for attention, these *dramas policiers* maintained a consistent presence. In 1977, the peak year for the *poliziesco* in Québec (though only by five films), they represented 5.7% of all titles released. Comprising 1 out of every 20 films, Italian crime actioners were being opened at a rate of 2 to 3 a month, ensuring that there was virtually no period where they were not playing in theatres and not advertised on a consistent basis. In addition, strong opening runs, double bill cycling, and back-to-back dual language releases would often extend the theatrical life of many *polizieschi* over months. For example, *Tony Arzenta* was released in January 1976, cycled through both as *Tony le Sicilien* in French and *No Way Out* in English, was subsequently packaged into a double program and was still playing as a second feature at Ciné-Parc Laval and Ciné-Parc Boucherville in summer 1977.

After initial release, dozens of Italian crime films reemerged and re-circulated through 16mm rental exchanges. Accruing titles through the seventies, by 1978, the Canadian Federation of Film Societies 16mm rental catalogue promoted the availability of titles such as *Cité de la violence* (*Città violenta*), *La police demande de l'aide* (*La polizia chiede aiuto*), *La fureur d'un flic* (*La mano spietata della legge*) and *La ville demande justice* (*La città gioca d'azzardo*, Sergio Martino, 1975) in French, as well as English prints for *Confessions of a Police Captain* (*Confessione di un*

commissario di polizia al procuratore della repubblica), *Crime Boss (I familiari delle vittime non saranno avvertiti)*, *Mean Frank and Crazy Tony (Dio, sei proprio un pradreterno!)* and *Tony Saitta (Una magnum special per Tony Saitta aka Spécial Magnum)*.¹⁰⁵

Distributor	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	TOTAL
Ambassador				1			1	2					4
Astral	2	4	3	1	3	1		2	1	2			19
Bellevue			3										3
Cine-Agence						1		1					2
Cine-Art	1					1	2	5					9
Cinemarc								1					1
Cinepix	1	2	2	2	6	3	2	3	2	3	1		27
Columbia	2	1	2		2								7
Criterion									1				1
Faroun					2								2
Films Mutuels			2	2	1	3	2		2		1	1	14
Films Progressifs				1									1
Fox	2												2
France-Film	2		1		4	1	2	10	6	4	1		31
Frontier							2						2
International		1		1	3	1	2	1	1	1			11
Intra		1				1	1						3
K-Tel					1	1							2
Karim									1			1	2
MGM			1										1
National General		1											1
Paramount	1		2	1	1			1		1			7
Prima				1						1		1	3
Prospec							3	2	2	1			8
Telemonde											1	2	3
Unipro										2			2
United Artists	1	1		3			1						6
Warner Bros.	2							1					3
Zodiak							1						1
(Unknown)			1		1			1					3
Total	14	11	17	13	24	13	19	29	16	15	4	5	180

Fig. 3.4 Distribution of Italian crime films in Québec, 1970-81, by company.

Through the seventies, the distribution of Italian crime films in Québec was dominated by independent operators (Fig. 3.4). The American major studios accounted for 14.5% of releases with 26 films (Warner Bros.: 3, United Artists: 6, Paramount: 7, Columbia: 7, 20th Century Fox: 2, MGM: 1), but these were heavily

¹⁰⁵ *Index of 16mm and 35mm Feature Length Films Available in Canada*, vol. 15 (Canadian Federation of Film Societies 1978). 571-73.

weighted toward the first part of the decade (22 of them were distributed between 1970-74) and were limited more to films that featured French stars like Jean-Paul Belmondo in Columbia's *Le casse* (Henri Verneuil, 1971), boasted classier productions from esteemed directors, such as Francesco Rosi's *Cadavres exquis* (*Cadavari eccellenti*) through United Artists, or, in one case, an Academy Award winner for Best Foreign Film: *Enquête sur un citoyen au-dessus de tout soupçon* (*Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto*, Elio Petri, 1970), also Columbia. Collectively, 23 other independent distributors imported, marketed and managed the Québec releases of Italian crime films through the seventies; with Astral, Films Mutuels, Cinepix and France-Film leading the pack. Selling to the francophone market, 174 of all films were distributed in either French or dual language campaigns, with a mere 5 English-only releases.

Naked Violence: The Crime Tabloid on the Big Screen

Under the guidance of independent distributors, the Italian *poliziesco* actively penetrated the Québec film market. Detailing the when and where, however, is always much more straightforward than the why. But the popular argument for the *filone's* squealing-tires success in Italy is threefold: the *poliziesco* was adventure formula cinema that capitalized simultaneously on the established structure and tradition of the *western all'italiana*, the recent box office boom for imported American crime dramas (again, *The French Connection*, *Dirty Harry*, *The Godfather*), and, importantly, the urgent public imagination fertilized by the everyday news of a region in turmoil.

All, for their part, intuitive explanations that serve as openings rather than closed answers. And, more egregiously, given the fluid life of the *poliziesco* cycle, explanations that need to be mobilized and shaped not only to respond to intranational questions but to elaborate on the international appeal of the Italian crime boom in the seventies. If a large part of the interest and ascendancy of the *poliziesco* is attributable to its depiction of regional, contemporaneous unrest specific to Italy, how did these films export with comparable success? Following the unrest argument, I will respond by sketching a few of the crime themes and key films to demonstrate that the same can be said elsewhere: in the case of Québec, the cultural climate, incidents of crime, and political tension equally formed, in the words of Petra Blumenrock, “a reality as violent and politically absurd as the events on the screen.”¹⁰⁶

Manhunt

“They call him... The Cat.” – *Milano violenta*

Milano violenta, literally “Violent Milan,” ports a title that announces the locality and its reputation, but the story also echoes the Richard Blass case. Distributed in Québec by France-Film with the title *Commando terreur, Milano violenta* tells the two-pronged story of the bandit Raul Montalbani (Claudio Cassinelli), “otherwise known as The Cat,” and the cop on his trail, Commissario Foschi (Elio Zamuto) – an on-screen surrogate for Detective-Sergeant Albert Lisacek,

¹⁰⁶ Blumenrock, “Men Before Their Time.”

much publicized nemesis to Blass.¹⁰⁷ Montalbani's gang commits a brutal robbery that leaves four dead and a trail for vendettas to be squared and the Commissario's pursuit to narrow.¹⁰⁸ Like Blass, who was "allegedly spotted on the scene of various



Fig. 3.5 The two "Cats" run out of lives: Richard Blass (left) in Val David and Raul Montalbani (right) in *Milano violenta* (1976). (Source: *Allô Police* and DVD)

bank robberies but always managed to elude police,"¹⁰⁹ Montalbani acquired the nickname "The Cat" for his evasiveness. As Gavino (Massimo Mirani) – the car supplier – says after the heist, "The Cat, however, just disappeared. That guy. No one's going to nail him." A vicious and ruthless sort, Montalbani and his gang execute at the slightest suspicion of a double cross. Gavino is tied up and torched. Walter (Vittorio Mezzogiorno) is shot point blank. As the October 1974 and January 1975 Gargantua Bar attacks were testament to the fate of those who crossed Richard Blass, in *Milano violenta* it is understood that if you betray Montalbani, "you'll be found with a knife in your back or burned to a crisp." In the end, Commissario Foschi and his squad track Montalbani to the Italian equivalent of a Val

¹⁰⁷ See "Blass 'The Cat' runs out of lives in showdown with 'Kojak' the cop," *Toronto Star*, January 25 1975, A13; "Police Kill Suspect in Canada Slayings.," "Blass planned denial in mass murder," *Montreal Gazette*, January 27 1975, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Blass, himself, was convicted for killing one police officer in a 1969 robbery gone wrong, before he escaped, sought and murdered his former accomplices Ray Laurin and Roger Levesque in October of 1974.

¹⁰⁹ Albert Noel, "Tried for gun, Blass killed by police force," *Montreal Gazette*, January 25 1975, 3.

David chalet: a country villa on the outskirts of Milan, where in the surprise raid The Cat is shot down. The final freeze-frame is of Montalbani's breathless corpse. A barbarous image, but no more than a reproduction of the infamous coroner's photo of a perforated Blass published on the cover of *Allô Police* and in *La Presse* (Fig. 3.5).¹¹⁰

Montreal Armed to the Teeth

"Shit, things got a little bit out of hand last night."
- *Milano odia: la polizia non può sparare*

The character of Giulio Sacchi (Thomas Milian) in *Milano odia: la polizia non può sparare* – released as *La rançon de la peur* by Cine-Art – is another gangster who recalls Blass – executing any and all witnesses to his crimes, including his accomplices. "A pig full of drugs," Sacchi incarnates the level of excess, cruelty, and sadism that marks many *polizieschi*. He kidnaps, tortures, rapes and kills with drug-addled nerves. Sacchi's crimes are sadistic and outrageous, belonging, one might think, to the inflated inventions of this brand of crime film. For a title that is regularly cited as one of the most vicious of *polizieschi*, with "particularly unpleasant violence"¹¹¹ and "stunningly amoral sequences,"¹¹² the exemplary scene in *Milano odia* is the assault on a villa that leaves three generations of a family strewn around the house and stuffed with bullets.

¹¹⁰ See *Allo Police* Jan 1975; Michel Auger, "Blass relié au massacre du Gargantua," *La Presse*, January 25 1975, C1.

¹¹¹ Howard Hughes, *Cinema Italiano: The Complete Guide from Classics to Cult* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2011). 183.

¹¹² Brown, *Blazing Magnums: Italian Crime Thrillers*: 5.

As extreme a depiction the assault may be, Sacchi and his two cronies, Vittorio (Gino Santercole) and Carmine (Ray Lovelock), storming the country house and ultimately murdering five inhabitants in a messy attempt to gain riches depicts something quite similar to the 1974 mass shooting of a family of five in their St. Joseph Du Lac farmhouse northwest of Montreal the Sunday before Christmas; reported the next day as “one of the most vicious crimes in Québec’s history.”¹¹³ As the *Gazette* luridly described the scene, “instead of gifts under the Christmas tree, large pools of blood gathered”¹¹⁴ where Valentine Dumoulin, her son Roger, daughters Yvonne and Lucille and son-in-law Guy Miron were found dead in the living room and kitchen. Speculation was that the ransacking killers must have been known to their victims, who were executed point blank as insurance. As Sacchi reasons his actions to his pleading victims in *Milano odia*, “But now you know me, farmer.” Though the investigation finally indicted an ex-convict and a prison inmate, Jacques Tourigny, 33, and Denis Caron, 43, the motive was the same and the actuality much closer to its likeness in *Milano odia*.

Even the most gruesomely cartoonish violence filling some of the *polizieschi* imported into Québec served a patchwork of local criminal incidents and iconography. A black-clad, motorcycle-driving maniac scurrying around the city, lopping hands and splitting heads with a meat cleaver seems an absurd aspect to *La polizia chiede aiuto*, but in the rising homicides of 1975 meat cleavers were identified as murder weapons in use (along with hatchets, handsaws, axes) and

¹¹³ Steve Kowch, “Death amid the Christmas gifts,” *Montreal Gazette*, December 19 1974, 3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

motorcycles were synonymous with gang warfare (*les motards*) in the province.¹¹⁵ The mid-seventies were a period which produced after-weekend headlines like “Eleven die in three days, woman, 44, daughter axe murder victims,” and in the same story reported that in an unrelated incident, “the Québec police force are investigating another axe murder.”¹¹⁶ By March 1977, the peak year for the Italian crime cycle in Québec, a similarly violent weekend prompted the *Montreal Star* to publish a “MUC Murders” bar-chart with the title, “Murder toll spiral baffles experts.”¹¹⁷ While the causations of bloodshed remained multiformed, the Italian films were much more interested in depicting the desanitized effects of violence and potential responses – both horrifying and cathartic.

Kidnapping

“Just pay, asshole!” – *La città sconvolta: caccia spietata ai rapitori*

Kidnapping manifested another form of violence. In Italy, an epidemic of political and profit-based kidnapping peaked in mid-seventies when more than 170 men, women and children were held for ransom. Most infamously, former Prime Minister Aldo Moro was kidnapped by the Red Brigades on March 16, 1978 and executed 55 days later after negotiations failed. The *poliziesco* took up the phenomenon early on where it remained as prominent as a bottle of J&B scotch. On film, kidnapping took three forms: political bartering, hostages for insurance, and

¹¹⁵ For two in one, see: “Cleaver killing, double death raise murder toll to 212,” *Montreal Gazette*, December 22 1975, 5.

¹¹⁶ “Eleven Die in Three Days, Woman, 44, daughter axe murder victims,” *Montreal Gazette*, March 2 1976, 3. Also of special mention, the weekend of February 29th 1976 and March 12th, 1977: Bill Kokesch, “Double Killings head toll of 7 weekend violent deaths,” *Montreal Gazette*, March 1 1976, 1; “10 die on violent weekend,” *Montreal Star*, March 14 1977, A1.

¹¹⁷ Trevor Bowe, “Murder Toll Spiral Baffles Experts,” *Montreal Star*, March 14 1977, A2.

extortion. As noted earlier, in *Revolver* – released in Québec as *La poursuite implacable* by Ciné-Art in 1976 - the wife of a prison director Vito Cipriani (Oliver Reed) is kidnapped and offered in exchange for the release of a prisoner, Milo Ruiz (Fabio Testi). *Italia a mano armata* – retitled *Brigade speciale en action* by France-Film in Québec - finds Commissario Betti (Maurizio Merli) in his third appearance, hunting bandits in Turin who have abducted a school bus of *bambini* as security for a run of bank heists. Fernando Di Leo's *La città sconvolta: caccia spietata ai rapitori* – which came out in Italy at the peak of the extortion kidnappings and only two weeks after the abduction of Count Jean Franco Cotin – delivers a revenge drama after the son of a blue-collar mechanic, Mario Coiella (Luc Merenda), is incidentally kidnapped with a rich classmate and executed as a warning for the other boy's industrialist father (James Mason) to pay the ransom. The film was distributed in Québec as *Kidnap Syndicate* in 1979, coinciding with the Charles Marion kidnap trial, the most publicized Québec kidnapping of late seventies.

A credit manager in Sherbrooke, Marion was taken at gunpoint on August 6th, 1977, from his summer home in the Eastern Townships village of Stoke. Confined to a lumber-reinforced, dark hole in the ground in the area of Gould, near Sherbrooke, Marion remained captive for 82 days, victim of Canada's longest kidnapping – surpassing the previous record of 59 days from the 1970 abduction of British Trade Commissioner James Cross. Taken together, these abductions rang in and rang out a decade of kidnappings in Québec that, like in Italy, produced a context familiar with the conditions of political and extortionist kidnapping depicted in so many *polizieschi*.



Fig. 3.6 Ransom photograph of Charles Marion, August 1977. (Source: *Allô Police*)

Political terrorism was not exclusive to Italy. The October Crisis in Québec in 1970 was the culmination of years of antagonism from the *Front de libération du Québec* (FLQ). The kidnappings of James Cross on October 5th and Québec Labour Minister Pierre Laporte on October 10th brought about the invocation of the War Measures Act and military deployment in the streets of Montreal. Like Aldo Moro, Laporte was executed, dumped in the trunk of a car, and abandoned. And similar to the premise in *Revolver*, the FLQ used James Cross to negotiate terms of release for its prisoners and safe passage out of Québec.

But more often, even with many political actions, kidnapping remained tied to money. Taking contingent hostages as getaway insurance from bank heists was standard in actual and filmed Italian crime. Hostage-taking was such a widespread

and reckless practice that the bandits in *Italia a mano armata* move to planting their own kidnap “victims” to pose their escape. Endemic to armed robbery everywhere, kidnapping in Québec was commonplace with both comedic and tragic results. In February 1976, for example, bandits armed with revolvers commandeered a Pinto crossing the Jacques-Cartier bridge, ejecting the driver but taking his brother, Réel Pelletier, hostage. Pelletier was found hours later walking completely naked on Route 3 in Longueuil.¹¹⁸ Other kidnappings ended in disaster. Rui Sa, a six-year-old boy, was shot and killed when his school minibus was hijacked by “recidivist” Denis Martel following a robbery at the Banque Canadienne Nationale. In total, 13 children were kidnapped by Martel and used as a shield from police, only to ultimately witness Martel’s suicide.¹¹⁹ The kidnapping of a school minibus by bandits is preserved in *Italia a mano armata*, as is the single death of a child passenger. The film, released in Québec well after the Rui Sa incident, lingers on the grief-stricken mother, Luisa (Mirella D’Angelo), just as the Montreal media had with Lucia Sa.

La città sconvolta: caccia spietata ai rapitori is also constructed from the perspective of kidnap victims and their families, in this case targets for ransom and extortion. Commonly pinned to Italy in the seventies (with foreign headlines like “Italy: home of pasta, pizza – and kidnapping”¹²⁰), for-profit kidnapping and extortion transcended borders. In Switzerland, France, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, West Germany, the Italian business model spawned the abduction of company heads,

¹¹⁸ “Kidnappé sur le pont Jacques-Cartier, on le retrouve nu sur le 3!,” *La Presse*, February 14 1976, A3.

¹¹⁹ “Libéré de prison par erreur; Il tue un des 13 écoliers qui’il a terrorisés et kidnappés en se suicidant sous leurs yeux,” *Allô Police*, October 12 1975, 3-5.

¹²⁰ Frey Barker, “Italy: home of pasta, pizza - and kidnapping,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 11 1977, 4.

industrialists, magnates, jewelers, and fringe royalty and their families.¹²¹

"Kidnapping, Inc.," as it was dubbed by the media, opened a Québec office as well – though one set on more modest marks. Between September 1974 and July 1975, 64 extortion cases were reported in the MUC.¹²² Bank managers became principal targets based not on personal wealth but on the assumption that they maintained relative access to vaulted funds. Josée Beaulieu was kidnapped in February 1976 to force her father Raymond to withdraw \$500,000 from the bank he managed in Montreal.¹²³ Only weeks later, Gaetan Cormier, manager of the Banque Canadienne Nationale on rue Lajeunesse, had his wife Yolande and 19-year-old daughter abducted from their Laval home and put up for ransom.¹²⁴ That same day, Sally Schecter, a 56-year-old mother, was kidnapped from her apartment and ransomed to her son for \$5,000. The Schecter case incited crime reporter Michel Auger in *La Presse* to conclude, "Après les enlèvements de familles de gérants de banque qui rapportent des sommes fabuleuses lorsque la police s'en mêle pas, voilà maintenant que les bandits s'attaquent au 'monde ordinaire.'"¹²⁵

In this sense, extortion in Québec was more aligned with the plight of Mario Coiella, the empathetic mechanic in *La città sconvolta*. The industrialist and the mechanic embody the duality between organized and contingent kidnapping, the wealthy mark and petty ransom, and one could say, extortion in Italy and Québec. In

¹²¹ For a detailed report, see for example: "Spectre of kidnapping always hanging over rich in Europe," *The Leader-Post*, November 10 1977, 24.

¹²² "Les extorsions avec séquestration ont rapporté plus de \$6 millions à leurs auteurs," *Allô Police*, August 10 1975, 10.

¹²³ Michel Auger, "Fait prisonnier, un de ses ravisseurs choisit le suicide," *La Presse*, February 4 1976, A3.

¹²⁴ Michel Auger, "Le gérant de banque a payé avant d'aviser les policiers " *La Presse*, March 16 1976.

¹²⁵ Michel Auger, "Trois arrestations à la suite d'une extorsion " *La Presse*, March 16 1976.

the Italian context of targeted dukes and barons, *La città sconvolta* devises a narrative ploy (a by-product kidnapping) to involve its audience in identifying with the victim-terrors of a “common citizen.” But, in Québec, these cases were well covered. Eight-year-old Jo-Ann Semeley was taken from outside her home and ransomed to her parents for \$10,000.¹²⁶ Baker Jean-Paul Leblanc’s son Gilles was kidnapped on his way home from school, ransomed for \$3,000 and left for dead after being stabbed and bludgeoned with a 55-pound rock.¹²⁷ Guy Lachance, whose two-year-old daughter Alexandra was forced from their Greenfield home and used for blackmail¹²⁸, may have been a branch manager at the Banque Canadienne Nationale and a determined target, but that no less disqualifies him as *monde ordinaire*.

Bombing

“We just got a bomb shoved up our ass.” – *La polizia incrimina, la legge assolve*

Even more sensational a threat to “ordinary citizens” was the randomness of bombing. Between the Piazza Fontana attack in 1969 and the train bombs in Bologna and near Florence in the early 1980s, bombing terrors were depicted in Italian crime films, like *Quelli della calibro .38* and *La polizia ha le mani legate* (Luciano Ercoli, 1975). Released in Québec as *Section de choc* by Karim and *La police a les mains liées* by France-Film, both films evoke cities under the threat of suitcase bombings – one an act of vengeful terrorism and diversion, the other of political violence. Throughout the *poliziesco* era, Québec endured similar public incidents,

¹²⁶ “Deux autres kidnappings à Montréal,” *Allô Police*, May 8 1977, 10-11.

¹²⁷ “Les assassins du petit Gilles Leblanc sont démasqués,” *Allô Police*, December 7 1975, 3-5.

¹²⁸ “Bambine Kidnappée,” *Allô Police*, September 4 1977, 26.

from mailbox bombs to waves of *incendies criminels*. On the 30th anniversary of the October Crisis, newspaper columnist John Gray wrote, "In retrospect, it seems impossible, but one bomb was planted in Québec every 10 days."¹²⁹ During the peak of FLQ activity in 1968-70, 95 bombs were detonated. And like the perpetrators of a central station blast in *Quelli della calibro .38*, the FLQ followed the February 1969 bombing of the Montreal stock exchange with a phone call to state that the threat would be ongoing.

Even after 1970, from the 1972 bombing of the Rolling Stones equipment truck to the deadly explosion in Montreal's central station in 1984, bombing remained a live means of terror in Québec. The images of bombed-out devastation and trauma in *Quelli della calibro .38* could conjure any incendiary assault, whether political or simply vengeful, like the Blue Bird Café fire bombing that killed 37 in September 1972. In all cases, these attacks represented a public crime whose victims were contingent and relatively random. In 1975, 14-year-old Jean-François Lamarre was "terribly mutilated" when he trampled an unmarked packet left by the side of the road in Limoilou. Though he survived the bomb blast, Lamarre symbolized the senseless and chaotic victimization in these crimes.¹³⁰

Devised within action-thriller narratives, *Quelli della calibro .38* and *La polizia ha le mani legate* are invested in questioning the characterization that excretes such callousness to life. In this sense, their thematic concerns were equally applicatory to the contexts that informed Québec audiences. More, in the case of *La polizia ha le mani legate*, the terrorism is ultimately attached to a higher political

¹²⁹ John Gray, "How Trudeau halted the reign of terror," *Globe and Mail*, September 30 2000, A16.

¹³⁰ "Il échappe à la mort par miracle, déchiété par une bombe!" *Allô Police*, April 27 1975, 3.

power. Arriving in conjunction with the publicized Robert Samson trial in Montreal, in which the RCMP officer was charged with setting off a bomb at the home of Melvyn Dobrin, president of Steinberg's Inc., the film proposes a suspicious sentiment not wholly lost in Québec.

Corruption

"Your word has about as much weight as a wet fart."
- *La mano spietata della legge*

Corruption and misconduct were cockroaches repeatedly caught in public light. On trial, Robert Samson refused to say why or for whom he set the bomb, though famously stated he did "plenty worse things" while on the force.¹³¹ Eventually admitting the involvement of the RCMP in the Agence de Presse Libre du Québec (APLQ) break-in to illegally gather intelligence on the left-wing news agency, Samson's testimony led to a public inquiry with director-general of the provincial police Maurice St. Pierre and Québec justice minister Jérôme Choquette exchanging accusations of perjury.

While incidents of collusion between the mafia, political power and the police in Italy received international coverage, in many seventies *polizieschi* the demarcation line between cinematic virtue and villainy are muddled at all levels of public trust and power. This ethical concern could also speak to Québec at a time when price-gouging in oil heating exposed the major suppliers as profiteering from fraud, controversy erupted over the meat industry as reports confirmed a ring with underworld connections had been supplying putrid meat to Montreal firms, and

¹³¹ "Samson continues testimony about press agency break-in," *The Leader-Post*, March 2 1978, 16.

charges of bribery and patronage were laid against senior officials of the Québec Liquor Corporation (QLC) and members of Premier Robert Bourassa's government.

During a period of urbanization and rapid development, however, the singular issue above all others was the same in Italian crime films as Québec: construction. *Confessione di un commissario di polizia al procuratore della repubblica*, for example, released by Bellevue two-years before Denys Arcand's thematically equivalent *Rejeanne Padovani* (1973), follows a police detective and district attorney as they come to understand the futility in challenging the collusion between the mayor's office, government officials, judicial appointments, and "private business" in controlling land deals and building commissions. In Québec, the Cliche Commission's investigation and public hearings amassed major press coverage into corruption involving the sale of jobs, physical violence, control of job sites, kickbacks, payoffs and bribes between construction unions, workers, employers and government. But despite any legal reform in the construction industry, *Confessione di un commissario* suggests that the system of abuse is ongoing, and, like *Rejeanne Padovani*, is incarnated symbolically by entombing the misdeeds of the industry in its own cement.

Teenage Prostitution Racket

"There's hardly any honest folks around here: just thieves and hookers!"
 - *Morte sospetta di una minorenne*

At the lower end of the seesaw, prostitutes populate the seventies *poliziesco*: the junkie trollop, the squawking hussy, the crime boss's mistress – archetypes to confirm the milieu of vice and villainy, still propelling the original cash-only

capitalism. But when made a central concern, prostitution is treated as a serious and severe crisis. Far from independent streetwalkers, the women are indentured and endangered through systematic organized exploitation of their sexual goods. The criminal power structure, forced labour and methods of intimidation figure largely in *Milano rovente* – released as *La guerre des gangs* by International. As bargaining pawns between warring factions, the working girls are beaten, slashed, sprayed with toxins, drowned in fish tanks and appointed as pushers. But it is the underage recruitment (“women over 16 are grannies”) and white slavery (“my boss wants fresh meat”) that define *Morte sospetta di una minorenne*, *Un uomo, un città* (Romolo Guerrieri, 1974), *...a tutte le auto della polizia* (Mario Caiano, 1975) and *La polizia chiede aiuto* as issue films as much as crass actioners. For *La polizia chiede aiuto*, released in Québec as *La police demande de l'aide*, if the Italian and French titles (“The Police Need Help”) fail to suggest the precise concern embedded in the English release title (*What Have They Done to Your Daughters?*), the closing credits – laid over shots of high school girls exiting class for the day - directly address the issue:

Ottomila minori fuggono da casa ogni anno in Italia, una minima percentuale fa ritorno alle proprie famiglie, altri vengono ritrovati intossicati o morti ma della maggior parte si perde ogni traccia. (In Italy, 8000 teenagers disappear from their homes every year. Only a small percentage ever return to their families. Others are found dead or under the influence of drugs. But the majority disappear without a trace.)

Italy was not alone in establishing a problem. In Québec, *La polizia chiete aiuto* was released by France-Film in 1977 on the heels of a much publicized organized crime inquiry into the “Dubois clan,” the French Canadian crime gang of 9 brothers who, among many interests, operated a “wide-scale” stripper and

prostitution ring that preyed on young girls. The Dubois inquiry was covered daily from December 1975 through 1976 and was published in “true crime” book form as *Le clan des Dubois* courtesy of *Allô Police* editor Richard Desmarais.¹³² It detailed how Claude Dubois used the Paul Calce Agency as a front for a prostitution ring made in large part of minors, some as young as 13 years old. Following the statements of a missing 17-year-old Dubois girl who had been traced by police to Sherbrooke, Cst. Mario Quevillon of the MUC Youth Aid Squad testified that of 65 girls reported missing in Montreal that year, “51 one of them were found to be working for the Calce agency, including some who had escaped legal custody.”¹³³

The prostitution *polizieschi* ultimately are designed as inquiries themselves, investigative thrillers (“Who are they? Where are they? The bastards!”) that eventually rely on the confessions and testimony of the young girls (“He told us he ran an agency, and that we could make some money.”). In place of the protected identities of the minors in the Dubois case, a film like *La polizia chiede aiuto* introduces names and faces to the victims: Patrizia Valenti, Giuliana Bigi, Laura Bellena – each a tangible doorway into the hidden ring. Presented as true crime exposés on the recently reported, both *La polizia chiede aiuto* and *Le clan des Dubois* are involved in selling “what the newspapers couldn’t print.” If we are to accept the opening title statement, the purported goal of *La polizia chiede aiuto* and in many ways the *poliziesco* as whole is the cinematic equivalent to Desmarais’ book. As the film states: “Everyday we read or hear about brutal things that happen which

¹³² See Richard Desmarais, *Le clan des Dubois* (Montréal: Distributions Éclair, 1976).

¹³³ Eddie Collister, “Dubois Clan Ran Prostitution Ring of Strippers and Dancers; Teenagers Hired as Prostitutes,” *Montreal Gazette*, December 18 1975, 1, 5.

appear to have no logical explanation. Only faithful reconstruction of such incidents can bring to light the dramatic and disturbing truth behind them.”

Conclusion: The Circle of Exploitation

Through record violence and unrest in 1970s Québec, the success of the lurid tabloid journalism in *Allô Police* and *Le Journal de Montréal* demonstrated a popular interest in true crime. To capitalize on the preoccupation, *Allô Police* expanded into publishing a series of books “sans précédent” presented as exclusive *Police dossiers*. The first, published in February 1975 and titled *Blass: sa vie, sa mort*, profited from the Richard Blass drama, advertising a “document inédit,” full of revelation, unseen images, and an exclusive interview with Blass’ mother. The *Police Dossiers* series continued with volumes on the Québec organized crime commission (*Le juge Dutil decapite les charognards*), cases of murdered children (*Les enfants martyrs au Québec*), the “complete narrative” of assassinated police in Québec (*40 policiers abbatus comme des chiens*), and Premier René Lévesque’s automotive manslaughter of Edgar Trottier (*Le dossier officiel de l’accident Lévesque*). At this time, Stanke published *Le clan des Dubois* by Richard Desmarais, a *dépanneur* paperback detailing the personnel and operations of the Dubois gang. Roch Dandenault, an ex-detective with the Sûreté provinciale du Québec, wrote *Memoires d’un flic*, an illustrated casebook advertising Dandenault as the first Québec detective to offer his investigative files to the public. Monthly periodical *Police – Police* began in June 1977 as a colour-jacketed print magazine covering true crime in and out of Québec. And convicted armed robber Claude Jodoin had his autobiographic accounts published by Editions de l’Homme in a mass-market book titled *Le voleur*.

A certain public preoccupation with true crime created a market that invited independent film distributors in Québec to cheaply import and release the enormous number of foreign crime films proliferating out of real events - particularly in Italy. But as the movies capitalized on crime reports, crime reports capitalized on the cinematic presentation and popularity of the movies. In a system of circular exploitation, the crime film infiltrated the news. They came as headlines: "Liquidé comme dans 'Le parrain'"¹³⁴; as introductory leads: "On serait cru hier soir en plain film western sur le pont Jacques-Cartier..."¹³⁵; and as epithets for the primary players: "The nemesis is Detective-Sergeant Albert Lisacek [...] known as Kojak to his colleagues."¹³⁶ Not only the star of the episodic small screen, Telly Savalas toplined the Italian crime feature *Cité de la violence*, in release from Les Films Mutuals at the time of this coverage. Further, the "cinematization" of the news in *Allô Police* was equipped through illustration. Failing access to the moment of consequence, the tabloid mobilized drawings that appeared as frame enlargements, storyboards or compilation posters. The raid on Richard Blass was illustrated in a still of three armed officers charging his room. Never shying from macabre luridness, the tabloid produced a half-page drawing of Leonard Townsend decapitating his wife with a handsaw, complete with animation lines. Detailed storyboards were drafted for the payoff in the Marion kidnapping, convict Jean-Paul Mercier's escape

¹³⁴ "Liquidé comme dans 'Le parrain'," *Allô Police*, November 27 1977, 10-11.

¹³⁵ "Kidnappé sur le pont Jacques-Cartier, on le retrouve nu sur le 3!," A3.

¹³⁶ "Blass 'The Cat' runs out of lives in showdown with 'Kojak' the cop," A13.



Fig. 3.7 *Allô Police* illustration: organized crime in Québec, published Feb. 1973.

from L'Unité spéciale de correction and Mercier's fatal shootout with police during a botched heist.¹³⁷ For their special report on organized crime in Montreal, *Allô Police* designed their own scrapbook montage in the vein of an illustrated movie poster, displaying gunmen, gambling, bundled money, shootouts, police raids, and an eyepatch-donning boss-like figure barking orders over the phone – an iconographic visualization of the crime genre.¹³⁸ (Fig. 3.7)

A cinematic interest in crime films was also integrated into the pages of Québec's crime periodicals. Within the crime news, *Allô Police* occasionally covered and promoted films purporting to stage true crimes. While this included *Le Massacre*

¹³⁷ "Voici comment est mort Blass dans le chalet Val David," *Allô Police*, February 23 1975, 20-21; "Il décapite sa femme avec une hache et une égoïne!," *Allô Police*, June 30 1974, 6-7; "L'évasion de Mercier & Cie," *Allô Police*, May 27 1973, 9; "Violente fusillade entre policiers et voleurs: Jean-Paul Mercier en meurt!," *Allô Police*, November 10 1974, 6-7.

¹³⁸ "Le crime organisé," *Allô Police*, February 25 1973, 25.

a la scie (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Tobe Hooper, 1974) – advertised with the warning, “C’est faits on réellement eu lieu. Ce film vous les révèle,” it also extended to films like the Italian-French co-production *L’affaire Dominici* – “l’histoire vrai du massacre.” The tabloid promoted the film as a correlating means of accessing the truth: “Pour en savoir davantage sur cette affaire qui a passionné l’opinion publique française, il faut voir ce film, “L’affaire Dominici,” actuellement à l’affiche du Cinéma du Vieux Montréal mais qui sera projeté bientôt dans tout le Québec.”¹³⁹ *Police* – *Police* followed by including a dedicated *Cinéma* section reviewing the flood of European, American and Québec crime (and, occasionally, sex) films in each monthly issue: “Ce ne sont pas les films d’horreur qui manquent, dans nos cinémas. Et sur tous les écrans de Montréal, à toute heure du jour ou de la soirée, des hommes sont “tués” de toutes les façons imaginables, à la centaine.”¹⁴⁰

Québec, like Italy, maintained a strong cinema attendance through the 1970s. But the limits of local production and the declining output of American films spurred Montreal-based distributors to look to Italy, among others, for popular film products. With scores of crime films that incorporated violence and crisis no less timely for Montreal audiences, the *poliziesco* provided extended depictions of criminal concerns through a period of urban intensification and, coupled with action spectacle, became a regular part of the cinematic interest in 1970s Québec.

But the transfer was not unidirectional. This is clear in the opening scene of Alfonso Brescia’s 1978 film *Napoli serenata calibro 9*. A speedboat races toward the shore crosscut with a group of Neapolitans waiting impatiently at a clandestine

¹³⁹ “L’affaire Dominici,” *Allô Police*, April 7 1974, 20-21.

¹⁴⁰ “La Machine,” *Police-Police*, December 1977, 36.

embankment. As the boat approaches and docks, the toque of its lead passenger comes into view: a white, red and blue garment with the 1976 Olympics logo embroidered on its face. Later, another character disrobes to unveil a collared t-shirt emblazoned from shoulder to shoulder with the eight-letter text, MONTREAL. A reminder that Italy also looked to Québec – not solely as a lucrative export territory but also as an internationally relevant region and potential film production partner. As Montreal was ascending in global consciousness, having hosted the '67 World's Fair and been granted the 1976 Olympics, the metropolis was well suited for the interests of a transnational film cycle bent on preserving and exploiting an association with contemporary currents, just as the province's bedlam and bloodshed was congruous to the fixed concerns of social and political degeneration that marked the *poliziesco*.

CHAPTER THREE "Filmed in Montreal, where it happened!": *La Dernière Chance*, *Spécial Magnum*, and the Production of Italo-Québec *Polizieschi*

Introduction: Northern Wasteland

The Canadian film industry has endured many low points, but few were as despairing as the summer of 1975. Despite the first rise in theatre attendance in over a decade and the international attention brought on by the impending '76 Olympic Games in Montreal, the middle-mark of the seventies was defined by crisis and controversy. Distributors were weary of domestic films, producers struggled to develop projects and, after a two-year downturn, the continued existence of the Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFDC) – the federal government's film culture agency, formed in 1968 – "seemed in doubt."¹⁴¹ Only ten films, with a total investment of \$2 million, were made in the first eight months of 1975.¹⁴²

Throughout the seventies, the resuscitation of Canadian feature film production was defibrillated by corresponding initiatives: capital cost allowance, voluntary quotas, and co-production. "Grasp[ing] the outstretched hands of foreign partners," *Cinema Canada* bemoaned in the production news section, "it's apparent that government favors and influence are in foreign co-productions."¹⁴³ From decade's start, Canada signed co-production treaties in an effort to develop projects, mitigate risk and capitalize on foreign industries through cooperative financing, shared personnel and facilities, and international distribution deals. By early 1977,

¹⁴¹ John Turner, "Financial Trends in Theatrical Production, 1975," *Cinema Canada* 3, no. 26 (1976): 41.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Stephen Chesley, "Shooting: Co-productions," *Cinema Canada* 3, no. 34-35 (1977): 9.

the CFDC was involved in 16 different co-productions over the year at a mean budget of 1.2 million – as was noted at the time, “considerably rais[ing] the average cost of Canadian feature film production, in relation to previous years.”¹⁴⁴ In those months, Canada ratified an agreement with West Germany, following treaties with Great Britain (17 September 1975), France (8 May 1974), and the first with Italy (16 June 1970).

As Italy represented the largest most productive industry and cinema-going public, this initial agreement provided a potential bridge towards reproducing the successful paradigm established in Rome as well as serving as template for further international treaties. The signing produced a naïve optimism made tangible in headlines such as “Italian-Can axis planned for movies” in short-lived Canadian entertainment trade magazine *That's Showbusiness* (itself naively optimistic of its enduring use).¹⁴⁵ Through the seventies, however, Italy produced only a small number of feature films with Canada. While some European-shot films benefitted from Canadian incentives (*Une journée particulière / Una giornata particolare* [Ettore Scola, 1977]) or personnel (*Né pour l'enfer / E la notte si tinse di sangue* [Denis Héroux, 1976]), to the Italian films produced in Canada – *Cormac of the Mounties / Giubbe rosse* (Joe D'Amato, 1975), *Yeti: Giant of the 20th Century / Yeti – il gigante del 20. Secolo* (Gianfranco Parolini, 1977), or *La Dernière Chance* and *Spécial Magnum* – the region offered a bizarre amalgam of narrative worlds: Mounties, Yetis and, relevant here, violent crime.

¹⁴⁴ “Canada and Co-Productions,” *Nouveau Cinema Canadien* 8, no. 5 (1977): 27.

¹⁴⁵ “Italian-Can axis planned for movies,” *That's Showbusiness*, January 6 1972, 5.

Political unrest and rampant criminality in Québec, and the ascending international awareness of Montreal with Expo 67 and the coming Olympics, convinced Italian producers of *polizieschi* to transform their outward look to the province beyond the limits of distribution. Within the context of newly ratified co-productions accords, producers Francesco Giorgi and Edmondo Amati both looked to Québec to transplant this urgent and prolific genre through entries that would capitalize on the film infrastructures, evolving landscapes, and criminal conditions, as much as the health of the provincial cinema-going market. Through a detailed account of the production, regional release and the films themselves, this chapter confirms that the two seventies Italo-Québec crime films produced, *La Dernière Chance* and *Spécial Magnum*, demonstrate the stretch of the *poliziesco* well beyond the Mediterranean metropolises of Italy and the elasticity of the cycle's films to speak to the realities that surround them. And if the transgressions and violence situated in Italy and forged in the *poliziesco* serve to represent the common experiences for a transnational audience, *La Dernière Chance* and *Spécial Magnum* drive the same paradigm in the inverse direction. Displacing Italy, the specifics of Québec are required to enact the ubiquities of the world.

La Dernière Chance

“Filmed in Montreal, where it happened.”
– English print ad

Adapted from a novel by Franco Enna, *La Dernière Chance* was an early entry into the *poliziesco* boom. As a result, while the central worldview of human greed

and indecency had installed itself from the birth of the cycle¹⁴⁶, the film revels less in the action excesses that define the peak years of the mid-seventies. Trading on the vestiges of the sixties French *policier* at its last stop toward Italian Armageddon, *La Dernière Chance*, one retrospective reviewer wrote, “certainly feels closer to a trashy Melville than a Lenzi or Castellari.”¹⁴⁷ The film also marked a transition for its director, Maurizio Lucidi. Like most Italian filmmakers of his generation brought up and trained to make European westerns in the sixties, he would move with the tide and go on to direct *Gli esecutori* (1976) – the only Italian crime film to star Roger Moore. After *Cammora*, *La Dernière Chance* was also the second in a long string of *polizieschi*¹⁴⁸ that made star Fabio Testi synonymous with the seventies crime *filone*.

Testi plays Floyd Gambino, a thief just out of jail who hooks up with his old prison-mate Joe (Eli Wallach) to rob a Montreal jewelry store and slip out over the border. When the robbery turns violent and the two narrowly escape, they split up and arrange to meet in Newport, VT. Of course, while they never make it to the States, things do go south. The pulp plotting of Franco Enna’s paperback source, *L’ultima chance*, survives in the film with one major change. Despite being the son of a Sicilian police sergeant and having just written his first screenplay for *Milano rovente*, Enna’s crime novels were often set in foreign locations and away from metropolitan areas. *L’ultima chance*, the book, is set along the Great Plains of middle-America: the initial robbery is in Dodge City, Kansas with a rendezvous

¹⁴⁶ In its review of the film, *L’office des communications sociales* – Quebec’s Catholic review organization – provided a content warning that the film “*ne met guère en scène que les personnages malhonnêtes*.” See: “*La Dernière Chance*,” in *Recueil des Films 1976* (L’office des communications sociales 1977), 59.

¹⁴⁷ “Stateline Motel,” *The Wild Eye*, <http://www.thewildeye.co.uk/blog/reviews/stateline-motel/>.

¹⁴⁸ Such as *Revolver*, *Il grande racket*, *La via della droga*, *Vai Gorilla* (Tonino Valerii, 1975), and *Speed Cross* (Stelvio Massi, 1980).

planned in Council Bluffs, Iowa but as plans derail, the end of the line is at a motel in Omaha on the Nebraska-Iowa border.¹⁴⁹

The film transplants the action to Montreal and Knowlton, QC, in the eastern townships – though the provincial locations were actually filmed to the north in and around Saint-Donat, QC. Shooting at the base of the Laurentians provided the occasional mountainous backdrop and, because of the larger tourist infrastructure in the region, more comfortable temporary lodging for the production crew. But the move to shoot in Saint-Donat during the window of March 27-April 21, 1973 would have also been motivated by weather: specifically, the snow.¹⁵⁰ Since in the film the key contingency that unravels the best laid plans is a chance skid into a snowbank, the setting and narrative are interlinked. The icy and snowbound terrain defines the world of the film: by the dimness and colorlessness, the contrast between interiors and exteriors, the limits of mobility, and the fridity and precarious existence of the characters. Despite the 1970 cooperative accord between Canada and Italy, *La Dernière Chance* never qualified as an official co-production or received any of the associated incentives (hence the film's annihilation from all Canadian film texts and catalogues). Instead, it seems, the motivation to replant the film in Québec is attributable to location. Basing the film in Québec benefitted the production on three levels. First, as opposed to Nebraska, Montreal offered the practicalities of lab facilities and local crews during production (though the major technician jobs were

¹⁴⁹ The Omaha setting in Enna's original novel may explain the curious U.S. English title for the film, *Stateline Motel*, which more accurately describes the border-cross in the book. See: Franco Enna, *L'Ultima Chance* (Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1987).

¹⁵⁰ The production's need for snow was covered in the local press: "tout va bien mais pour la neige on devra attendre la dernière grosse tempête avant le début du printemps." See: "Céline Lomez dans un Film Avec Ursula Andress et James Coburn," *Tele-Cinéma*, March 31 1973.

filled by Italians). Second, as in *Cormac of the Mounties* (also starring Testi), which used the Canadian wild to illustrate the cruelty of the natural world and exploited the Iroquois wars as historical backdrop, the Québec setting allowed the wintery landscape to visually externalize the themes of distrust and death while the film could situate and capitalize on the criminal currents in and around Montreal. And third, shooting in Québec strengthened the opportunity to subsequently market the film in the province.

Shuttling in the stars, the first week of production was well covered in local media – *Le Grand Journal de Montréal*, *Cinéma Au Québec*, *Télé-Cinéma*, *La Presse*, *The Gazette* – as *Le Courier de Montcalm* reported, “les grands journaux et magazines étaient sur les lieux du tournage [...] afin de chaser des images des vedettes du long métrage.”¹⁵¹ *La Dernière Chance* boasted an international cast typical of Italian genre films: along with Fabio Testi the film brought Ursula Andress, Eli Wallach, Barbara Bach, and Massimo Girotti to Québec. Along with the casting, the internationalist aim of the genre was present – the American pulp tradition (“un policier réalisé à l’Américaine par des Italiens”¹⁵²), the requisite car chase, the inclusion of two Ann Collin pop songs (“Let Me Be” and “Last Chance (Love Song)”¹⁵³), but so too was the

¹⁵¹ Gilles Monette, “Premier tour de manivelle du film *“The Last Chance”* à Saint-Donat,” *L’Horizon*, *Le Courier de Berthier*, *Le Courier de Montcalm*, April 4 1973, 3. Not limited to the start of production, coverage of the shoot and the stars continued right to the end, when actor Ryan O’Neal – visiting his friend Ursula Andress in St. Donat – met the media to announce his participation in Stanley Kubrick’s *Barry Lyndon* and discuss his first visit to Québec. See: Dane Lancken, “Directors sought for films,” *Montreal Gazette*, May 3 1973, 34.

¹⁵² As phrased by Céline Lomez in “Cinéma Au Québec: Rome et le Cinéma Italien N’ont Pas Impressionné du tout Céline Lomez,” *Le Journal de Montréal* 1973.

¹⁵³ Ann Collin provided theme songs for a number of Italian westerns that, in the best cases, enabled producers to market the films through anticipatory 7” singles. Her credits during this period included: “A Man Called King” in *His Name Was King / Lo chiamavano King* (Giancarlo Romitelli, 1971), “I’m Not Your Pony” in *Shoot the Living and Pray for the Dead / Prega il morto e ammazza il vivo* (Giusseppe Vari, 1971), “A Man is Made of Love” in *Death Played the Flute / Lo ammazzo come un*

consideration of the Québec market. Having become a popular sex symbol and drawing power after appearing in Denis Héroux's *L'Initiation* and releasing the Francophone hit album *Ce Que Tu Veux Je L'Ai* (both 1970), Montreal actress Céline Lomez was cast in a strategic move to add regional value to the film. For Québec, Lomez was poised to draw an added layer of media attention, marketability and promotional opportunities upon release. The actor dominated the coverage of the film in local media and gave numerous interviews to discuss her involvement. In an interview for *La Journal de Montréal*, she was frank about the motivational logic of the Italian producers, F.R.A.L. Cinematografica, to manage the multi-national selling value of the film through the stable of recognizable – though costly¹⁵⁴ – players. As Ursula Andress and Fabio Testi were brought on because they are “tellement populaire en Italie,” Lomez explains that she was engaged (and well provided for) in view of the distribution potential the film was targeting in Québec.¹⁵⁵ The informed casting of Céline Lomez demonstrated that the producers expressly considered Québec an important market for the film. As *La Dernière Chance* would be for Québec, it would be *about* Québec. No exteriors would be shot outside the province, they would film on the streets, use actual locations, engage prison guards to portray themselves, reproduce regional news, and in doing so, create a crime film that is at

cane... ma lui rideva ancora (Angelo Pannaciò, 1972), “Even if You’re Not the First One” in *Deaf Smith and Johnny Ears / Los Amigos* (Paolo Cavara, 1972), “That Man” in *First Hand is Still My Name / Mi chiamavano Requiescat... ma avevano sbagliato* (Mario Bianchi, 1973), and “My Love” in *Savage Man Savage Beast / Ultime grida dalla savanna* (Antonio Climati and Mario Morra, 1975).

¹⁵⁴ Céline Lomez claims that “500,000 dollars” – a large portion of the overall budget – was earmarked for the major players. See: “Cinéma Au Québec: Rome et le Cinéma Italien N’ont Pas Impressionné du tout Céline Lomez.”

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

once general as it is fortuitously direct in depicting a criminal trajectory of violence, murder and malfeasance extending from Montreal into the townships.

“A little over 6-feet tall, 180 pounds, dark hair and he’s heading for the border!”

La Dernière Chance is a film about recidivism. The finality of failure is in the title: *L’Ultima Chance*, *La Dernière Chance*, or *Last Chance for a Born Loser*.¹⁵⁶ As a measure of crime, the petty deed is weighed in units of contingent aggravation. Malefaction is communicable, legal reprimand is not only temporary, but the police are foolish, if not indistinguishably corrupt. The world of the prison extends to the provincialism of the townships: a colorless existence that breeds loneliness, apprehension, and betrayal; captors whose escape is necessarily lawless.

From the first shot, the stakes are materialized in the introductory object: a key – more specifically, a skeleton key. The face of death mounted on a lever for liberty, it serves as a discrete symbol of criminal law and conditional punishment. Inserted in a lock, the key-ring jangles, two consecutive bolts announce their dislodgement and - as the camera pans to reveal a caged inhabitant – the heavy slide of an opening door signals the unobstructed introduction of an inmate, followed outward into the prison atrium. In mundane silence, the man is buzzed through two additional sets of barred doors, his name card removed from an occupancy grid, and an envelope handed to him before he is directly addressed: “Floyd Gambino; six-foot-one; one hundred and eighty nine pounds; American citizen. Six months,

¹⁵⁶ Before being rebranded *Stateline Motel* for the U.S. and English Canada, and *Motel of Fear* in the UK, the English-language production title was regularly reported as either *The Last Chance* or *Last Chance for a Born Loser*. See, for example: Monette, “Premier tour de manivelle du film “*The Last Chance*” à Saint-Donat,” 3; Lancken, “Directors sought for films,” 34.

automobile theft. You have forty-eight hours to get out of Canada." Cue the music and reveal the exterior: Bordeaux prison, L'Île de Montréal, Québec.

An emblematic edifice of the multi-leveled tensions choking legal reform, rehabilitation and labour in the seventies, Bordeaux prison could stand as any penal house abroad but not in Québec. Bordeaux was the short-stay prison; a century-old institution to house convicts sentenced to less than two years, within the urban throw of Québec's largest municipality. Floyd Gambino is introduced as a typical tenant: "six months, automobile theft." With a constant turnover conducive to the transitory name-card system shown in the film, Bordeaux was a symbol of the recidivist problem. The inmates with the most visits were housed in their own block – "repeater" wing. Criticized by criminologists, the rehabilitative programs were said to be failures in the face of the prison's tumultuous environment. In the sixties, Bordeaux's reputation suffered repeated riots, clashes with armed police, the high-profile escape of Lucien Rivard, and the violent escape of 9 prisoners in 1969 (including a young Richard Blass).¹⁵⁷ Little would change in the seventies: prisoners protesting poor conditions would turn to vandalism, hunger strikes and riots, while the guards – playing themselves in the film – revolted over lack of contracts or wage parity with federal prison employees, in one instance driving a prison truck into the entrance and shutting down all traffic in and out.¹⁵⁸ The provincial penitentiary system Bordeaux represented was a point of contention. On one end, with numerous

¹⁵⁷ See, for example: "Prison Riot Crushed," *Ottawa Citizen*, December 13 1960, 1; Joe Dupuis, "More Rioting at Bordeaux," *Ottawa Citizen*, January 2 1962, 1; Paul Dubois, "Lucien Rivard Breaks Out of Prison," *Montreal Gazette*, March 3 1965, 1-2; "Montreal Police in Hunt for Seven Escapees," *The Phoenix*, October 16 1969, 1.

¹⁵⁸ Again, see: "Hunger Protest Strikes Bordeaux," *Montreal Gazette*, February 7 1976, 5; "115 Prisoners back in cells after riot at Bordeaux jail," *Ottawa Citizen*, November 29 1979, 12; Gordon Barthos, "Jail guards back to work after seizure of prisons," *Montreal Gazette*, January 31 1972, 3.

murders within institutional walls, the provincial prisons suffered an appearance of being poorly managed and maintained. Notorious gangster and self-declared “plus grand tueur que Montréal ait jamais connu”¹⁵⁹ Richard Blass’ famous threats of violence unless reporters were secured a tour of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul penitentiary in Laval brought attention to the issue. In response, however, it also provided the opportunity for sources such as *Police Dossiers* and *Allô Police* to publish a collection of Blass’ personal “unedited” photos from within Saint-Vincent-de-Paul (sunbathing, boxing, eating, posing with his hockey team) to illustrate the argument that, on the other end, with free time, food, recreational sports, cultural activities, library and educational resources, essential medical services, correspondence and visiting rights, and unrestricted personal appearances (long hair, beards) the provincial prison system provided “certains côtés agréables.”¹⁶⁰

Whether the penitentiaries were marred by poor inmate conditions or a tendency toward the permissive, jail time at the provincial level was figured as unfavorable for reform. The frequent breakouts at Bordeaux and Saint-Vincent-de-Paul were tantamount to proof. After escaping from Bordeaux and having been convicted for 23 crimes, Richard Blass was brought to trial in 1973 to face a life condemnation as a *criminel d'habitude*.¹⁶¹ In the spring of 1973, Blass’ notoriety could only be eclipsed by the manhunt for Jean-Paul Mercier. Along with French gangster Jacques Mesrine, Mercier escaped at Saint-Vincent-de-Paul in August

¹⁵⁹ At the time of his death, Blass was convicted and suspected of 20 murders, including the Gargantua massacre.

¹⁶⁰ “Pourquoi les prisonniers font la grève!,” *Allô Police*, February 8 1976, 14.

¹⁶¹ “Richard Blass: Criminel d'habitude?,” *Allô Police*, July 15 1973, 23.

1972.¹⁶² On September 3rd, Mesrine and Mercier returned with an armory to breakout the remaining prisoners only to retreat in a shootout with the increased security. One week later, while drawing attention to themselves by target shooting, the pair murdered park rangers Médéric Coté and Ernest Saint-Pierre in the woods around Saint-Louis-de-Blanford. Mercier was caught and sentenced back to Saint-Vincent-de-Paul for 200 years, announcing at his sentencing he would breakout soon after his incarceration: "C'est pas grave, de toutes façons, dans trois semaines, je vais être dehors."¹⁶³ He escaped seven days later, but was returned to prison soon after, adding to his sentence five armed-robbery and two assault convictions. In a continuing defiance of the legal process, on October 23rd, 1974, Mercier, along with four others including Richard Blass, charged out of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul fully armed. One week later Mercier died in a shootout with police following a bank robbery at the Boulevard Shopping Centre.¹⁶⁴ Blass spent the night before murdering two past accomplices at the Gargantua Bar in the start of a three-month tear that would conclude with his return to the same bar, the incineration of thirteen people and his own bullet-ridden death in a police raid on his hideout (see Chapter 2). While Mercier and Blass would go on to publicly embody an inherent criminality – a total disregard for the institution of law let alone the sanctity of life –

¹⁶² The life of Mesrine, including this breakout and his criminal relationship with Mercier, became the subject of a recent and very successful two-part biopic, *L'instinct de mort* and *L'ennemi public n°1* (Jean-François Richet, 2008), co-produced in France and Canada.

¹⁶³ "Jean-Paul Mercier avait écopé 173 ans, huit mois et trois jours de prison!," *Allô Police*, November 10 1974, 5.

¹⁶⁴ For coverage, see for example: Albert Noel, "Mercier's last escape ends with fatal bullet," *Montreal Gazette*, November 2 1974, 3; "Cinq criminels qui voulaient respirer un peu d'air frais," *Allô Police*, November 3 1974, 23.

the emphasis on recidivism was broadly installed in the Québec press by 1973 and was in no way reserved solely for escapees.

In *La Dernière Chance*, Floyd has served his sentence and earned his goodwill. Much different than the violent and murderous breakout that initiates *Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia*, Floyd is politely escorted off the Bordeaux property. But stepping through the gate he eyes suspiciously at a passing police wagon and hurries to greet his designated ride. Inside the car, Floyd finally speaks: "Gates and Renzi send their regards." "Who needs them. I'm not going back to that place," Joe (Eli Wallach) quips, adding "You all set?" From the first exchange it is clear that 1) Joe is also a graduate of Bordeaux, 2) that as a thief he only values interpersonal connections in relation to utilitarian partnership, 3) will refuse to accept accountability for his criminal actions, and 4) has concocted an immediate plan of dubious legality. Moments from his release, Floyd is partnered, armed and sliding down Boulevard Gouin to criminal action – the convenience of Bordeaux's urbanism nowhere more apparent.

Floyd Gambino is a character loved by the Québec crime news editors of the seventies; the recidivist who wastes no time, the criminal forever caught between crimes. He is an Italian, a confirmation of Mediterranean gangsterism, a prejudice as much as a fixture in Montreal.¹⁶⁵ More, he is a repeat offender whose very freedom is a cause of implicit criticism and tabloid value. When Jacques "Tex" Tourigny and Denis "Ti-cul" Caron were apprehended for the 1974 Christmas slaughter of the Dumoulin family in Saint-Joseph-du-Lac (see Chapter 2), their status as recent

¹⁶⁵ For example: "Montréal - New York - Sicile: La CECA perce enfin le mystère de la mafia," 8; "Par cette guerre, les Italiens prendront-ils le contrôle du shylock?," *Allô Police*, February 23 1975, 6-7.

parolees was simply paired with their actions: "Ce sont ces deux "libérés conditionnelles" qui ont abattu 5 innocents!"¹⁶⁶ The two-pronged emphasis on vivid crimes and the proximity of the players' release marked many of the headlines in *Allô Police*: "Assassiné un moi après sa sortie de prison," "Assassineé à 17 ans par un motard qui venait de sortir de prison," "Libéré de prison par erreur; Il tue un des 13 écoliers qui'il a terrorisés et kidnappés en se suicidant sous leurs yeux," or "Pourquoi le libère-t-il après les 2/3 de sa sentence? C'est lui qui aurait abattu une jeune mariée de 23 ans pour lui voler sa voiture."¹⁶⁷ The risk to the public of paroling convicts was itself a sensitive political issue. Just two weeks before principal photography on the film, representatives for the country's police chiefs spoke in Ottawa at Parliament to criticize the habitual problems associated with premature parole and prison leaves before a Senate legal and constitutional affairs investigative committee. To the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the issue was a question of recurrence before severity. "It happened as recently as yesterday," delegate head W.H. Kelly summated.¹⁶⁸ Against mass murder, crimes of passion, kidnapping or a settling of accounts, Floyd's crime represents the most typical and mundane of post-prison transgressions: the armed robbery.

Bandits in Montreal

¹⁶⁶ "Ce sont ces deux "libérés conditionnelles" qui ont abattu 5 innocents!," *Allô Police*, December 29 1974, 3.

¹⁶⁷ "Assassineé a 17 ans par un motard qui venait de sortir de prison," *Allô Police*, March 2 1975, 1; "Assassiné un moi après sa sortie de prison," *Allô Police*, February 4 1973, 7; "Libéré de prison par erreur; Il tue un des 13 écoliers qui'il a terrorisés et kidnappés en se suicidant sous leurs yeux," 3; "Pourquoi le libère-t-il après les 2/3 de sa sentence? C'est lui qui aurait abattu une jeune mariée de 23 ans pour lui voler sa voiture," *Allô Police*, August 14 1977, 8.

¹⁶⁸ "Convicts often freed too soon, chiefs tell MPs," *Montreal Gazette*, March 14 1973, 2.

The first – and to many critics’ derision, only – set-piece in *La Dernière Chance* is the causal chain of action encompassing Floyd and Joe’s muddled armed robbery of a jewelry store. A ternary sequence repeated so frequently to become iconic to the *poliziesco*, if not close to mandatory: a stick-up unexpectedly turns violent and a chase ensues. Producing guns, Floyd and Joe charge the jewelers donning bizarre masks and oily black slickers, tensions load and fire when an unanticipated customer is shot in the back running for help as the duo flee by Mustang, pursued with force by MUC police. As this same frenzied trichotomy reproduced historical tragedy in *Banditi a Milano*, it serves as much a composite dramatization of the plague of armed robberies that beset Montreal in the seventies.

Again, it can bear repetition: by 1975, Montreal registered over 5,500 armed robberies in an annual calendar representing just under 45% of all holdups in Canada. The trend was well installed even in the months leading up to the shoot of *La Dernière Chance*, as reports catalogued and consolidated daily heists. In *The Gazette*, consecutive updates would detail the day’s turfs, tools and takes; for example, the Dominion supermarket, Leclair butcher shop, Charlevoix grocer and St. Denis Church bingo hall netting sawed-off shotgun and revolver totting bandits \$5,500 on February 4th, 1973, followed by the \$14,000 cumulatively stolen with pistols and machineguns from Household Finance Co., Pauline Fruit Market, Sherbrooke St. Royal Bank, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce and Bank of Canada locations on Fleury St. and on Beaubien St. the next day.¹⁶⁹ The frequency of armed robberies was even discouraging for thieves, as near synchronous attacks on

¹⁶⁹ "Bandits' take tops \$5,500 in four robberies in city," *Montreal Gazette*, February 5 1973, 21; "Bandits net \$14,000 in six holdups," *Montreal Gazette*, February 6 1973, 3.

a single venue left lagging bandits facing high-risks and emptied tills.¹⁷⁰ As the problem never stilled, on January 31, 1977, a record 15 banks were robbed in the MUC, prompting all Montreal branches to issue a “locked-door policy” and permit only one customer at a time to enter.¹⁷¹

If sensationalizing and fear-mongering armed robbery in Montreal kept ink on the presses, aggregate reporting could always be outdone by deplorable assaults for trivial takes. Once again, *Allô Police* were grand artists of this tactic. Matching disproportionate violence with pitiful rewards, the emphasis lay in gratuitous stories of random brutality: “Vieillard de 75 ans abattu par des jeunes de 18 ans pour \$27,” “Battu à mort par un adolescent de 16 ans pour \$60,” “Ces quatre brutes auraient tué un homme d'affaires et un chauffeur de taxi pour \$64!,” “Ce vieillard est battu à mort pour un vol d'antigel,” or front-page leader, “Grand-mère de 92 ans assassinée pour \$16 à coups de bouteille de Coke.”¹⁷² Robbery is presented as a desperate, cretinous and insensate act, with butchery as a byproduct.

La Dernière Chance as a whole suggests the same, but the *vol avec violence* is first embodied in Joe. At the slightest concern over their plans, he orders, “Shoot! Shoot godammit!” and guns down a fleeing customer. When Floyd questions Joe's actions, Joe responds, “Grow up! Things happen.” Joe views his act of violence as inevitable and remorseless, confirming a nefarious amorality that even Floyd fears.

¹⁷⁰ For such an example: Leon Levison, “Bandits too late; bank already robbed,” *Montreal Gazette*, January 12 1973, 3.

¹⁷¹ Steve Kowch and Albert Noel, “15 holdups so banks lock doors,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 1 1977, 1.

¹⁷² “Vieillard de 75 ans abattu par dex jeunes de 18 ans pour \$27,” *Allô Police*, November 21 1976, 8; “Battu à mort par un adolescent de 16 ans pour \$60,” *Allô Police*, January 19 1975, 14-15; “Ces quatre brutes auraient tué un homme d'affaires et un chauffeur de taxi pour \$64!,” *Allô Police*, April 6 1975, 6-7; “Ce vieillard est battu à mort pour un vol d'antigel,” *Allô Police*, February 16 1975, 9; “Grand-mère de 92 ans assassinée pour \$16 à coups de bouteille de Coke,” *Allô Police*, May 25 1975, 1.

But the marriage of armed robbery with contingent violence, particularly on-site shootings and subsequent clashes with police, was a steadfast union on the streets of Québec in the seventies. As in Italy and in the crime films set in Milan, Rome or Naples, the shootings and car chases in *La Dernière Chance* involve depicting in “real-time” the tendencies of regional true crime that local newspapers could only describe. In December 1974, four bandits – all, it would turn out, profiting from conditional liberation - perpetrated an armed robbery of 73 fur coats from Fourures Bergeron on Rue Jean Talon Est in Montreal. Tipped off, MUC police surrounded the store as the confrontation, in the words of *Allô Police*, “s’est soldée par une spectaculaire chasse à l’homme ponctuée de plusieurs coups de feu.”¹⁷³ Balancing horror and excitement, the recurring tone had to sell stories like a poster sells a movie: “Spectaculaire chasse à l’homme entre Montréal et Longueuil: Des centaines de coups de feu – trois collisions – deux automobiles attaqués – cinq fusillades entre les policiers et les évadés.”¹⁷⁴ Despite being a dubiously designed action set-piece to propel a piece of low entertainment, the robbery and subsequent car chase trade on the same product as the evening news – a connection most *polizieschi* endeavor to exploit.

Shoot First, Die Later

La Dernière Chance works hard to position itself within a contemporary reality. Montreal news media figures several times as a reminder of the story’s own status as a report unfolding. After evading police, Joe and Floyd switch cars in the parking lot at 264 Rue Notre-Dame Nord. Having just shot a bystander and ripped

¹⁷³ “Les policiers attendaient les quatre ‘gunmen’,” *Allô Police*, December 22 1974.

¹⁷⁴ “Spectaculaire chasse à l’homme entre Montréal et Longueuil,” *Allô Police*, October 10 1976, 18-19.

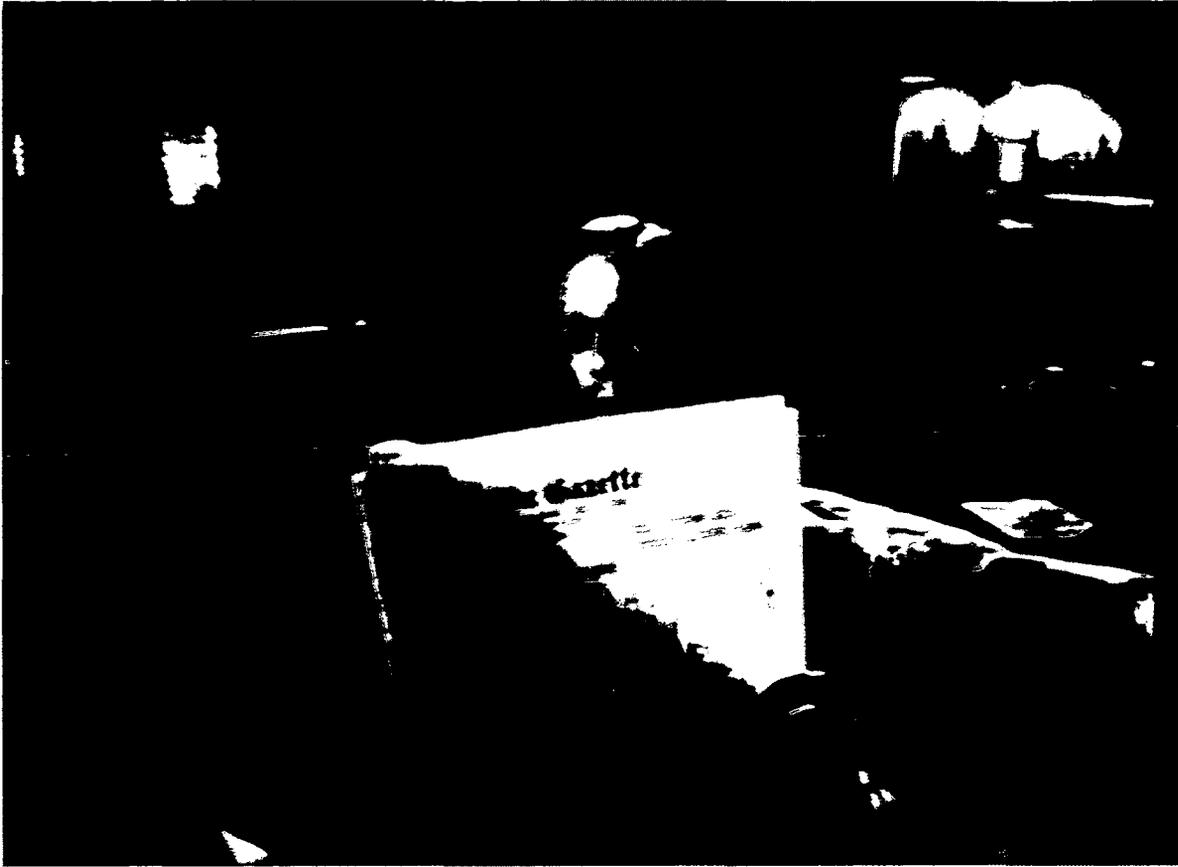


Fig. 4.1 *La Dernière Chance*: Floyd (Fabio Testi) reads *The Montreal Gazette* (Source: DVD).

up half the urban island fighting off two cruisers, this criminal pair is framed beneath a giant billboard for *The Montreal Star* exclaiming, “Saturday’s Star has it all!”¹⁷⁵ When Floyd crashes the new car (from joyously swerving and pantomiming to Ann Collin’s “Let Me Be”) and is forced to check-in to Motel Last Chance, his impatience is aggravated by the television news. The cultural primacy of the broadcast is vocalized by the Motel’s owner, Fred (Massimo Girotti), “Ahh, good, we’ll hear the news now. I always say it’s the only thing worth watching.” The content itself pairs coverage of Floyd’s “daring robbery” with the banalities of the

¹⁷⁵ Taken in context after a standard thrilling cinematic car chase, there is a wonderful sarcastic function to this visual cameo – an inter-media jab that highlights the fundamental difference between media, where Saturday’s *Star*, as has been demonstrated, definitely does *not* have it all.

winter weather and a story on Prime Minister Trudeau's involvement in the Paris Peace Accords to end the Vietnam War. The news serves to situate the action as much as the context, where, in what would be a hallmark of the *poliziesco*, the players' participate in its consumption as much as its creation. Floyd asks Joe on the phone, "Did you catch the early show?" That night, in the kind of scene that prompted critics to describe the film's second-half as "une histoire aussi banale,"¹⁷⁶ Floyd reads *The Montreal Gazette* (Fig. 4.1), as the surrounding Motel's inhabitants play solitaire, flip on the hockey game, leaf through other newspapers, guess the overnight temperature and repeat the day's news, "I read that local police officers can transfer to the Mounties." As routine as certain moments are in attempting to produce a *québécois* milieu, the centrality of the news to the characters' relation to their world, to the present-ness and immediacy of that world, bridges the film with the current events that inform it.

The television news within the film itself reproduces a specific timely trend. Reporting on Floyd's jewelry heist, the newscast switches to "an exceptional record of the actual robbery." In procedural manner, the reporter explains, "police have released a closed circuit TV tape which the store owner was able to make by pressing a concealed switch." The footage conflates dramatization with document, demonstrating the vanguard of visible evidence and technological crime deterrence in the seventies. By the time *La Dernière Chance* was released in Montreal and the armed robbery rate had doubled, stores and banks throughout the city were adopting close circuit monitoring systems. During the film's run, *La Presse*

¹⁷⁶ "La Dernière Chance," 59.

published a profile on the installation of electronic surveillance in Direct Film camera stores as a warning to bandits. Victim of 75 armed robberies in 1975, company head M. Adrien Castegnier proudly showed-off one of his new monitoring cameras as he testified to their effectiveness in assisting police to stop the perpetrators.¹⁷⁷ The article included still frames of two unidentified young men still at large, a customary tactic by the mid-seventies. *Allô Police* began by including available surveillance stills in stories on armed robberies¹⁷⁸ but, through working with the banks and police, created a half-sheet reward column (*Récompense \$500*) published in every issue and featured six closed circuit profiles with captions detailing the venue, date and discreet contact number to help apprehend those pictured.¹⁷⁹

Carbombs, Corpses and Crooked Cops

Beyond the format of the news, the narrative of the film directly reproduces many of the activities, imagery and thematic concerns that permeated the cultural imagination of crime in Québec at the time. Not to belabor the point, but I need to demonstrate explicitly that even as the film falls apart with “the same heavy-handed lack of conviction that the script brings,”¹⁸⁰ the whims of the plot are not divorced from actuality. The whole conceit of Floyd Gambino’s criminal trajectory reflected prominent cases well covered during the film’s production. In early 1973, Jean-Guy Gagné partnered with another paroled convict, Marcel Coursol, to ransack the Caisse

¹⁷⁷ Michel Auger, "Direct Film a maintenant l'oeil sur les voleurs," *La Presse*, February 7 1976, A3.

¹⁷⁸ See, for example: "Deux fois photographié en train de voler la même caissière à la même banque!," *Allô Police*, October 26 1975, 8; "Jeunes bandits recherchés," *Allô Police*, December 22 1975, 22.

¹⁷⁹ The *Récompense \$500* column began running in 1977 and continued through subsequent years. For an example, see: "Récompense \$500," *Allô Police*, December 18 1977, 16.

¹⁸⁰ Richard Combs, "L'Ultima Chance (Last Chance)" *Monthly Film Bulletin* XLII, no. 495 (1975): 89.

populaire on Rue Legendre in downtown Montreal. During the robbery, a security guard was shot and the duo fled the scene for the United States. Two months later, when Fabio Testi and Eli Wallach were required to act out a similar situation, Gagné was apprehended in Louisiana.¹⁸¹ That case was prefigured only a year earlier when three fugitives from Montreal, André Gelderblom, Irène Picard and Pierre Loyer – two of them sought in Québec – were apprehended in Maine for the murder of a mechanic, Edouard Deslauriers, following the hold-up of a dépanneur.¹⁸² The cases shared headlines, as the same week Gagné was brought in, Gelderblom escaped again.

Coverage of the first week of production in local press competed with reports of crimes the film itself invokes. Before being fatally crushed, Jack (Howard Ross) uses his mechanical skills to plant a bomb in Floyd's car. It fails as a weapon and a plot point, but as a practice represents an accepted ploy in the settling of accounts in Québec as much as in the typical *poliziesco*. The same weekend the cast were enjoying their welcoming parties, Robert Thibodeau and Normand Coulombe were shot multiple times by police after pulling revolvers while caught wiring seven sticks of dynamite to the ignition of an enemy's Oldsmobile.¹⁸³ Car bombs were in consistent use despite the danger to the perpetrators or potential bystanders. In South Drummondville, investigators reported that debris from a bomb in the car of Yvon Luneau travelled as far as 200 feet and caught on electric lines as high as 40

¹⁸¹ "Nos bandits voyagent," *Allô Police*, April 8 1973, 22.

¹⁸² "Gelderblom s'est encore évadé de prison," *Allô Police*, April 1 1973, 19.

¹⁸³ Frank Mackey, "Pair shot; dynamite found in car," *Montreal Gazette*, March 30 1973, 1; "Surpris en train de poser une bombe dans une voiture," *Allô Police*, April 8 1973, 5.

feet.¹⁸⁴ A failed operation outside the Voyageur terminal in Montreal – where Floyd and Joe split up in *La Dernière Chance* – killed Gilbert Groleau and Richard Bertrand when the pair accidentally exploded their own bomb.¹⁸⁵ Considering the recurring use by Montreal gangsters and township biker clubs, more than just a poorly conceived genre trapping, the involvement of the bomb sub-plot is a process of signaling the same reckless absurdity and cruelty that identified the particular brand of violence that was home in Québec at the time.

The connection is represented visually in the image of Joe's execution. Having degenerated to the point of raising revolvers, Floyd and Joe's partnership is ultimately severed with a shot to the chest. Joe falls limp in the bloody snow, left to rot. In a high-angle shot, the camera lingers on the corpse like a forensic photograph. Nothing pierced to the black heart of the provincial problem of criminal violence in the seventies more than the common and horrific imagery of cadavers in the snow. (Fig. 4.2). In a climate not conducive to impromptu burial, dozens of bodies were discovered every year beaten, shot, stabbed, hacked and tossed in a slovenly mess around the arborous pockets of the province. In Brossard, Saint-Émile, Roxton Falls, Saint-Basile-le-Grand, Pierreville, Lac Chevreuil, Delson, Longeuil, Saint-Hubert, Terrebonne, Clarenceville, L'Assomption, Sainte-Sophie, gulf de Caughnawaga, Shawinigan, Saint-Louis de Terrebonne, Valleyfield, Saint-Hyacinthe, Rivières-des-Prairies, grizzly discoveries were made by residents, local teens, automobilists, dogs, cats, CN rail passengers, and in one case, a 6-year-old girl from the window of her

¹⁸⁴ "Une bombe fait exploser sa voiture en marche," *Allô Police*, November 2 1975, 14-15. (6756-6757)

¹⁸⁵ "Deux fous veulent faire exploser le terminus Voyageur: tués par leur propre bombe," *Allô Police*, February 1 1976, 3. (6787)

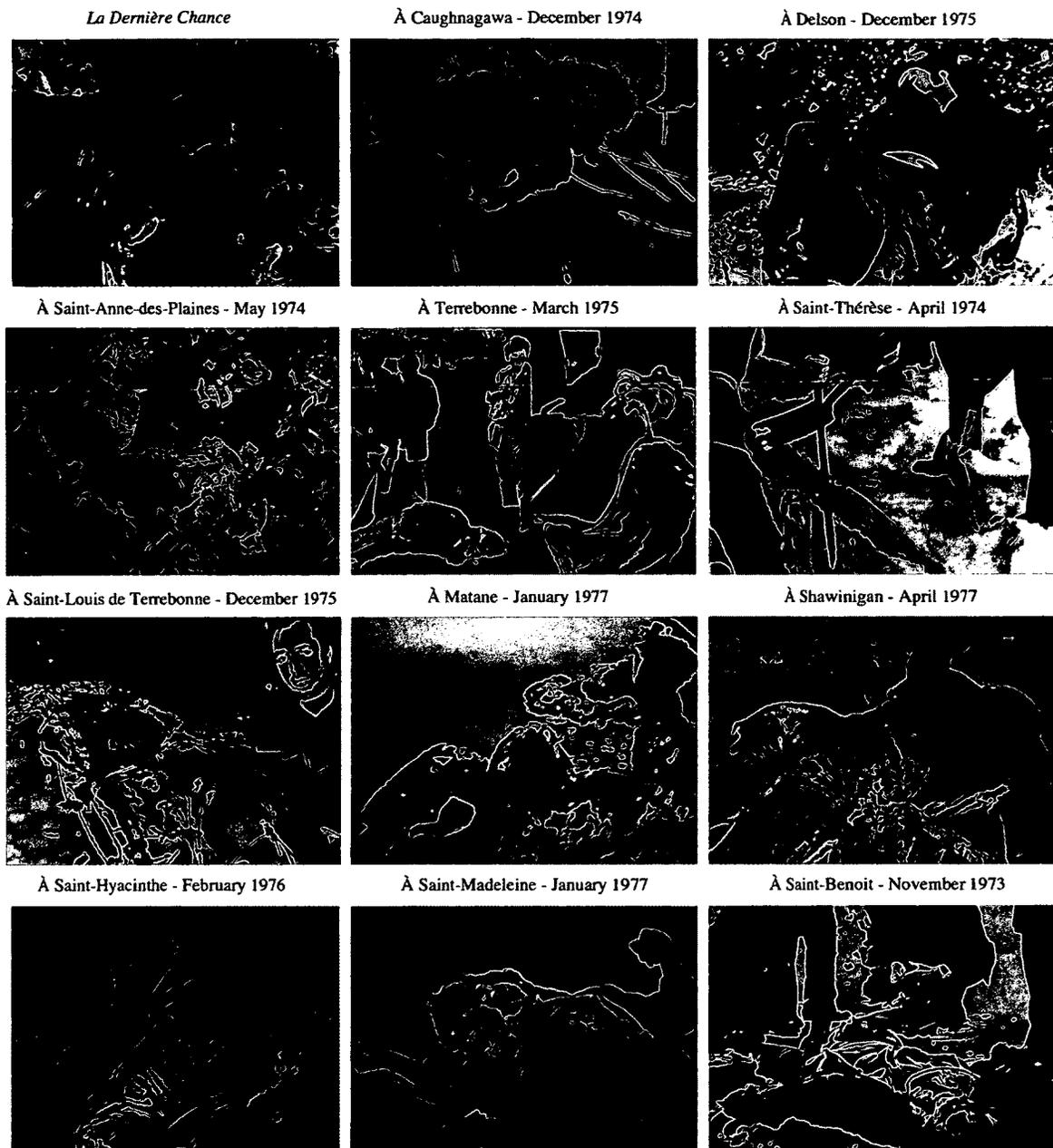


Fig. 4.2 *La Dernière Chance*: The image of Joe (Eli Wallach) shot dead in the snow (top left), along with forensic photographs for Québec homicides, 1973-77. (Source: *Allô Police* and DVD)

school bus.¹⁸⁶ The photographs of the bodies were regularly published in tabloid papers *Le Journal de Montréal* and *Allô Police*, the latter of which could of at times

¹⁸⁶ See: "Abattu de plusieurs balles après avoir été bâillonné et ligoté," *Allô Police*, March 23 1975, 6.

more appropriately have been called *Les Morts dans la Neige Weekly*. The principal method and motive determined in these cases remained gunfire in a “*règlement de comptes*” – often between recidivists known to police. In other words, the conditions staged in *La Dernière Chance*.

Finally, there is the weight of cynicism in the last beats of the film – the crucial moment in many *polizieschi*. Emptying the pouch of jewels, Floyd is left palming a handful of gravel pellets trickling from his hand as he realizes the stolen gems are missing. A cut to the motel reveals Emily (Barbara Bach) and her police officer partner Albert (Carlo De Mejo) replicating the motion in a graphic match with jewels in place of crushed rock. They laugh and the credits roll. Through the course of *La Dernière Chance* representatives of the law depreciate as custodians of order from the lenient (the guards dutifully releasing Floyd), to incapable (the patrol cars failing to apprehend Floyd and Joe in pursuit), to incompetent (dispatch announcing the jewel bandits are in custody), and, in Albert’s grin, to corrupt.¹⁸⁷ Embroiled in political strife and mafia collusion, Italy was a hotbed for crime films that dissolved the demarcation between police and organized (or disorganized) crime. But, of course, police corruption was unrestricted and Québec was not immune. The reputation of the MUC police suffered from the involvement of ex-police in well-publicized crimes – for example, Réjean Fortin, the owner and principal target at the Gargantua Bar was a former officer turned “entrepreneur.” In

¹⁸⁷ Addressing the former: failing to resolve one in four murders at the time and far from totally successful in securing the streets, police were criticized for their competency in the tabloids in particular, with faithless captions like, “une fois de plus, les ravisseurs on été plus rapides que les polices!” See: “Les ravisseurs on eu dans leurs mains les \$500,000 pendant... près de mille pieds!,” *Allô Police*, October 9 1977, 4-5.

1972, Gérard Cormier, a veteran of 30 years of distinct service with MUC police, murdered foreman André Lacasse with seven shots from his .32 caliber revolver.¹⁸⁸ In what was a provincial scandal, the public trust was challenged when six municipal employees were charged with fraud and embezzlement in Dolbeau including Chief of Police Charles-Edouard Lallemand, who was ultimately convicted for theft.¹⁸⁹ Though a cheap pulp gag, the closing punctuation of *La Dernière Chance* in which a police officer is the ultimate thief provides the same brand of pessimism that was imbued in these reports, not only about the capability of the Québec police force, but the tenuous ethical character of some of the protectors of the public good. In that way, like many of the Italian set crime films, *La Dernière Chance* concludes with a misanthropic turn that doubts the foundations of moral order and criminal law within a context of unprecedented violent crime and extortion, correspondingly afflicting Québec.

Projections of Death

After playing across much of Europe, *La Dernière Chance* opened in Montreal on Friday January 16, 1976. In its initial Montreal run, the film toured nine theatres (Chateau 2, Versailles, Greenfield Pk, Laval 5, National, Bonaventure, Côte-des-Neiges, Canadien and Jean Talon) in both English and French over the course of seven weeks. The distribution agreement split the two versions between Cinepix (French language) and Prima (English language). In what was not uncommon at the time (see Chapter 2), the release benefited from a three-wave promotion, first

¹⁸⁸ "L'ex-policier Cormier à son deuxième procès pour meurtre," *Allô Police*, March 17 1974, 18.

¹⁸⁹ "Un chef de police est accusé de fraude," *La Presse*, March 15 1976, B13; "Le chef de police de Dobeau condamné pour vol," *Allô Police*, June 19 1977, 3.



Fig. 4.3 *La Dernière Chance*: Newspaper advertising from *La Presse* and *The Montreal Gazette*, Jan. - Feb., 1976.

opening in French, then in English (as *Stateline Motel*), followed by a Montreal-themed double billing with Cinepix's *Frissons* (*Shivers*, David Cronenberg, 1975). (Fig.4.3)

As a result of scaling back her role and the two year delay in releasing the film, Céline Lomez was more interested in promoting her title role in *Gina* (Denys Arcand, 1976) and little of her was mentioned in the final of marketing the film. In place, Cinepix and Prima tailored the Québec campaign to emphasize the film's action and local setting. The print ad pictured a Mustang crashing out of Montreal's urban jail with the caption, "De la prison de Bordeaux à la frontière des États-Unis." The English ad reprinted the same; stamping on top, "Filmed in Montreal, where it happened." Local reviews were dismissive but remained intrigued by the Québec setting. The trend was typified in *The Gazette*: "Dreary tale of love and death and

bank robbery, shot by an Italian outfit near St. Jovite.”¹⁹⁰ Despite the issue of geographic continuity (“Le gros du film aurait été tourné dans la région de Sainte-Agathe qui est loin d’être la direction des frontières américaines”), what was central was the possibility that Québec could become a setting for popular international productions; world market genres engaged with the specifics of the region. As it was written in *La Presse*, “[r]ares sont les films internationaux qui situent leur intrigue à Montréal.”¹⁹¹ For producers of Italian crime films, *La Dernière Chance* did not exhaust the potential of replanting the genre in Montreal. Having already wrapped shooting, the possibility was being further tested with *Spécial Magnum* – a bigger, louder, standard action product.

Spécial Magnum

“Alberto De Martino’s [*Spécial Magnum*] proves that even in a Canadian setting away from the confined microcosmos of downtown Naples, Milan or Rome, the formula works.”
– Petra Blumenrock, “Men Before Their Time”¹⁹²

On August 21st, Paratel wire service of Montreal issued a press *communiqué* from publicist Robert-B. Lussier for immediate release: “Tony Saitta: Le Premier Grand Film D’Action Tourné a Montréal.” The press release announced that successful Italian producer Edmondo Amati – one the country’s “principal producers” – was bringing a “super-film d’action” to be filmed entirely in Québec. The formatting of the document literally underlined the points of emphasis: the film would be produced in English, French and Italian; be directed by veteran Italian

¹⁹⁰ “Montreal movie openings,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 14 1976, 46.

¹⁹¹ “En Primeur: *La Dernière Chance*,” *La Presse*, January 17 1976, D9.

¹⁹² Blumenrock, “Men Before Their Time,” 5.

Alberto De Martino; star internationals Stuart Whitman, John Saxon, Martin Landau, Gayle Hunnicutt, Carole Laure and Jean LeClerc; with an extended shooting period of “10 weeks” and high cost of “\$1,500,000.00 dollars” – a production budget nearly doubling all Canadian feature film investment year-to-date.¹⁹³

Spécial Magnum was a film that would do it all: an official co-production benefitting from the treaty between Italy and Canada that would stake on the popularity of the *poliziesco*, the participation of some of the cycle’s central creators, international and regional stars, the opportune relevance of the city of Montreal, the market potential in Québec as much as globally, and the conditions of crime and urban anxiety in the era straddling the 1976 Olympics that locate and legitimate the narrative and set-pieces of the film. Whereas *La Dernière Chance* was consigned to the bandit cycle, *Spécial Magnum* represents the other primary pillar of the seventies, the rampaging detective genre. In a way, *Spécial Magnum* operates as a response to the former, where the issue of crime anticipates the contentious questions of criminal law enforcement.

The Québec Connection

By 1975, the Italian crime film boom was fully matured, representing over thirty productions annually. Sustained by foreign distribution as much as domestic play, it was strategic for Italian producers to engage in cooperative production agreements when possible. Often the films would be shot in the partnering country, whose committing production company could invest in a film and provide production services in exchange for exclusive rights to the film in their home

¹⁹³ Robert-B. Lussier, “*Tony Saitta: Le Premier Grand Film D’Action Tourné a Montréal*,” (Paratel, 1975).

territory, while the Italians scored the world. Such was the model for *Spécial Magnum*.

An Italian-Canadian-Panamanian co-production, *Spécial Magnum* was produced through a partnership between Fida Cinematografica and Les Films Mutuels (Mutual Films), under a financing deal with Security Investment Trust S.A. Both Fida and Les Films Mutuelles were distributors that doubled as production companies and had recently begun releasing *polizieschi*; Fida landing a huge Italian hit with *Roma violenta* and Mutual, among others, distributing Alberto De Martino's prior film *Le Conseilleur / Il consiglieri* (1974). Expanding into production, Mutual were clear in aiming for international oriented projects with popular appeal, as Gordon Lightstone, Managing Representative of English Canadian production, stated,

[The aims of Les Films Mutuels are] the French Canadian market to remain as is, or develop and improve. The English Canadian market to improve. The English market is broader in growth potential. We hope to produce as many English Canadian pictures as we can lay our hands on. The idea is to co-produce with the States or some other country with a reliable star name to match up with one of our own Canadian stars.¹⁹⁴

To accomplish this mandate, Mutual looked to Cannes to buy films, sell films and, as company head Pierre David explained to *Cinéma Québec*, "de discuter de projets de co-production."¹⁹⁵ David announced the deal with Fida to shoot an action film "entièrement tourné à Montréal" after returning from the 1975 festival.¹⁹⁶ Later reports revealed that Fida president Edmondo Amati had visited Québec previously to discuss an association with Les Films Mutuels and as a consequence was

¹⁹⁴ S.M. Gregory, "A Mutual Affair," *Motion* (1973): 37.

¹⁹⁵ Jean-Pierre Tadros, "Des Distributeurs S'expliquent: Pierre David et Rock Demers," *Cinema Quebec*, no. 24 (1976): 16.

¹⁹⁶ "Production: Long Metrages," *Nouveau Cinema Canadien* 7, no. 2 (1975): 6.

“convinced [...] that Montreal would be a perfect backdrop for films”¹⁹⁷ – or more specifically, Amati’s actions would suggest, *polizieschi*.

Written by Vincenzo Mannini and Gianfranco Clerici, who that year alone would be credited on six other Italian crime thrillers,¹⁹⁸ *Spécial Magnum* represented the immediacy of Italian film production at the time. In the swift commissions deal-making instigated, co-productions were hurriedly tailored to the situation. Prolific writer Dardano Sacchetti described the typical phone call he might receive: “Dardano, we’ve sold ‘watchacallit’ – start writing now! You have six days, we’re giving them the finished copy in three months.”¹⁹⁹ The result is a quickly drawn script that parades Montreal to the world. The icons of the city pinned against the guttural basement. In the original script, for example, Tony Saitta (Stuart Whitman) meets an informant at the Forum while the Montreal Canadians strike goals against the Québec Nordiques (altered in the film to a McGill football game likely due to legalities or logistics).²⁰⁰ As a *poliziesco*, however, the locations aimed to capture the breadth of the city. From the first frame, Montreal is introduced in an aerial shot usually reserved for megalopolises, panning the downtown skyline to cross Places des Arts, the Complexe Desjardins construction²⁰¹ and ultimately the

¹⁹⁷ Patrick McGee, “A three-day tour of Montreal leads to action film set here,” *Montreal Gazette*, September 27 1975, 26.

¹⁹⁸ They were: *Roma violenta*, *Napoli violenta*, *Italia a mano armata*, *Il giustiziere sfida la città*, *Roma: l’altra faccia della violenza* (Marino Girolami), *Roma drogata: la polizia non può intervenire* (Lucio Marcaccini).

¹⁹⁹ As quoted in Thrower, *Beyond Terror: The Films of Lucio Fulci*: 150. Although best known for his horror scripts, Sacchetti wrote twelve *polizieschi* between 1974-77, including *Emergency Squad / Squadra Volante* (Stelvio Massi, 1974), *Assault with a Deadly Weapon / Roma a mano armata* (Umberto Lenzi, 1976) and the *Mark il poliziotto* series (Stelvio Massi, 1975).

²⁰⁰ Vincenzo Mannino & Gianfranco Clerici, *Tony Saitta (Shooting Script)* (Fida Cinematografica, 1975), Script. 70. Available for consultation at the Cinémathèque Québécoise.

²⁰¹ Another development structure rushing to be built by spring 1976, the Complexe Desjardins was the largest French-speaking private sector project at the time, opening on April 3, 1976.

McGill University gates. During the shoot, *Dimanche Matin* listed as many of the locations that followed as they could report: Côte-des-Neiges cemetery, two metro stations, one hospital, the McGill and Loyola campuses, some residential houses, the apartment of actress Danielle Ouimet (of *Valérie* [Denis Héroux, 1969] fame), a store on rue Bishop, the airport, the morgue, a police station and “surtout...” the streets of Montreal; combining to make the paper hopeful that “pour un fois, le visionnement dudit film prouvera que le film a été tourné dans la métropole.”²⁰²

Spécial Magnum was shot between August 25th and October 27th, 1975. Les Productions Mutuelles provided production services, the negative was processed at Montreal’s Bellevue Pathé, Cinévision’s studio was used, and the majority of the crew was *québécois* – though Aristide Massaccesi (aka Joe D’Amato) was brought on as cinematographer and French motocross champ Rémy Julienne, a *poliziesco* veteran, was hired as second-unit director for the car chases.²⁰³ The inverse of the crew, the main cast was mostly international with John Saxon providing the familiar face of the genre.²⁰⁴ Following the casting of Céline Lomez in *La Dernière Chance*, regional star Carole Laure was given the part of Saitta’s sister in a similar attempt to further impregnate the film with local appeal. The combination of shooting in Montreal and casting Carole Laure paid huge dividends in amassing press coverage, both French and English.

²⁰² “Parlant de *Tony Saitta*,” *Dimanche Matin*, September 7 1975.

²⁰³ Shooting details from John Turner, “Feature Film Production Guide, 1975,” *Cinema Canada* 3, no. 24 (1976); Turner, “Financial Trends in Theatrical Production, 1975.” Julienne had previously coordinated car chases for 70s eurocrime films like *La casse* (1971) and *Il poliziotto e marcio* (1974).

²⁰⁴ Saxon’s other *poliziesco* credits at that time included *Napoli violenta*, *Italia a mano armata*, *La legge violenta della squadra anticrime* (Stelvio Massi, 1976), *Mark colpisce ancora* (Stelvio Massi, 1976) and *Il cinico, l’infame, il violento* (Umberto Lenzi, 1977).

Local headlines exclaimed, "Carole Laure dans un grand film d'action," "Coproductio a gros budget entre l'Italie et le Québec" and "Vedettes Québécoises et Américaines dans le premier grand film d'action tourné à Montréal," while throughout the duration of the shoot coverage continued in *La Presse*, *The Gazette*, *Dimanche-Matin*, *Journal de Montréal*, *Montréal-Matin*, and trades like *Cinema Canada* and *That's Showbusiness*.²⁰⁵ Local updates on the production adopted a tone of familiarity, beginning articles with "If you haven't noticed yet..." or "Parlant de *Tony Saitta*..."²⁰⁶ The public consciousness the newspapers created was only reinforced by all the exterior and stunt shooting. According to the official press release (if it is to be believed), 3000 people came out to Lachine to watch the spectacle of two cars launching over a moving train.²⁰⁷

The city was less enthusiastic. From the set of the film, *The Gazette* reported that Montreal authorities were "extremely hesitant" about granting permissions to film 15 "stunts, car chases, crashes, shoot-outs and the like" because of potential threat to citizens and the municipality's reputation. As *Gazette* reporter Patrick McGee jabbed, "Although the city is used to these things in real life it doesn't quite know what to do when the action is staged."²⁰⁸ What was central to this part of McGee's story and a relevant concern for a city preparing for its moment on the

²⁰⁵ See: Nathalie Petrowski, "Une tour de babel où ...l'on s'entend bien!," *Le Journal de Montréal*, August 31 1975; "Les jeux de mains de Carole," *Montreal-Matin*, November 1 1975; "Coproductio a gros budget enter l'Italie et le Québec," *Le Journal de Montréal*, July 17 1975; "Vedettes Québécoises et Américaines dans grand film d'action tourne à Montréal," *La Patrie*, August 8 1975; "Promesse tenue...", *La Presse*, August 22 1975; "Carole Laure dans un grand film d'action," *Photo Journal*, August 31 1975; "Mutual and Fida make Mont. Movie," *That's Showbusiness*, 10 September 1975.

²⁰⁶ Jack Kapica, "Film crew battles traffic; Tremblay back in film," *Montreal Gazette*, September 24 1975, 45; "Parlant de *Tony Saitta*."

²⁰⁷ Lise Dandurand, "Le Premier Grand Film D'Action International Tourné à Montréal: *Spécial Magnum*," (Paratel, 1976), 1-2.

²⁰⁸ McGee, "A three-day tour of Montreal leads to action film set here," 26.

world stage was the question of how much a popular film is involved in staging a reality the municipality would rather suppress.

From Munich to Montreal

Far removed from the stunts on the streets, the key scene in *Spécial Magnum* summarizing the municipal context at that moment takes place in a police conference room. Capt. Saitta and Sgt. Matthews (John Saxon) are briefed on a fatal bludgeoning and the suspects they need off the streets while looming behind them is a large poster with the Olympic rings and the words, "Montreal 1976." (Fig. 4.4)

Awarded the Olympics in 1970, it was a coup for the city. But five years later, the Summer Games had warped into a site of crisis and controversy. By January 1975, a cost inflation of \$330 million and construction disasters pitted Montreal against the province of Québec and the federal government, and threatened to forfeit the Games. Bitter disputes continued throughout before being settled in January 1976: the Olympics were going to create a \$900 million dollar deficit to be absorbed by both the city and the province.²⁰⁹ Reports followed that suggested that to recoup part of these costs MUC taxes would likely double over the next four years.²¹⁰ Labour troubles delayed construction when 1,200 iron workers went on strike over wages only to be legislated back to work. Months later, four construction workers were killed in Olympic stadium in a catastrophe that brought to prominence and elicited an investigation into the roughly 500 *chantier* deaths in the province over two

²⁰⁹ bRhéal Bercier and Guy Pinard, "Un déficit de \$900 millions sur un coût de \$1.3 milliard," *La Presse*, March 19 1976, A1.

²¹⁰ Florian Bernard, "Les taxes à la CUM vont doubler en quatre ans," *La Presse*, March 2 1976, A3.



Fig. 4.4 *Spécial Magnum*: Sgt. Matthews (John Saxon) consoles Det. Saitta (Stuart Whitman) in the police briefing room, visually connected by a Montreal 1976 Olympics poster. (Source: DVD)

years.²¹¹ Fighting to avoid disaster on the world stage, and anxious about the memory of the 1972 Munich massacre, the MUC municipalities and police grappled with the escalating threat of violent crime.

At a time when Montreal needed to be at its most presentable, Québec was struggling. Director Alberto de Martino thought that the international familiarity Montreal would be gaining from the Olympics would benefit his film²¹², but obviously was not concerned if the film would benefit the goals of city hall. The world of *Spécial Magnum* is one of bandits, murderers, sex shops, prostitutes, informants, jewel fences, quarrelsome drag queens and mustached men quick to flee by foot or car at the mere sight of police. The chases themselves take place on

²¹¹ Gilles Normand, "500 morts sur les chantiers en deux ans," *La Presse*, March 12 1976, A3.

²¹² McGee, "A three-day tour of Montreal leads to action film set here," 26.

contentious sites: during filming the streets and metro both suffered from a transit commission strike and faced public outrage over the transit commission's reluctance to implement 74 recommendations to improve metro safety. According to Director of Metro Protection, M. Nicholas Benedetto's annual reports, the metro alone was the site of 2,760 arrests over 1975 and 1976.²¹³ Cornering known fence Ted Sullivan (Jérôme Tiberghien) in the Metro bathroom, Saitta enacts such an arrest. In standard tough movie cop practice, however, he kicks in a stall door and repeatedly drowns the suspect in the public sink.

We Still Kill the Old Way

Reviewers were quick to take note, calling *Spécial Magnum* an "especially repulsive type of exploitation film in which the police show a blatant disrespect for the law"; "a Canadian rerun of the *Dirty Harry* formula [...] Whitman [...] beats up any individual who either has a criminal record or exhibits any telltale signs of socially unacceptable behavior, and generally displays all the personality defects of an out of control steamroller."²¹⁴ The reactions, echoing Sandro Scandolara's to the first wave of Italian *polizieschi*, frame the film as another "neo-fascist" endorsement of tough law, where Saitta embodies what Joan Mellen called, "the dominant masculine myth of the seventies" – the vigilante male.²¹⁵

If *La Dernière Chance* is a film about recidivism, *Spécial Magnum* is a film haunted by the tension of capital punishment. In the film's first set-piece, a group of

²¹³ "Voici des chiffres que les autorités n'ont Jamais Révélés au Public," *Allô Police*, November 27 1977, 3-5.

²¹⁴ "Strange Shadows in an Empty Room," *Filmfacts* 20, no. 7 (1977): 159-60; Scott Meek, "Blazing Magnum" *Monthly Film Bulletin* 44, no. 518 (1977): 40.

²¹⁵ Joan Mellen, "The Seventies," in *Big Bad Wolves: Masculinity in American Film* (New York: Pantheon, 1977).

bandits flee from a bank robbery and gun down two pursuing officers – the last reserved crime for the death penalty, though on moratorium at the time. In a period with a dozen armed robberies daily in Québec, the scene reenacts the exchange of fire that threatened first responders. Police officers were commonly shot: in the first six months of 1973, 21 officers were gunned down on duty in Québec.²¹⁶ In the months preceding the ultimate abolition of the death penalty on July 14, 1976, *Sergent Guy Bernier, Agent Robert Lamarre, Agent Aimé Pelletier, and Agent Michel Bédard* were all killed pursuing armed robbers. Michel Bédard’s funeral became a mass rally when 2,000 police officers from around the province attended to pay respects and voice their opposition through the common chant: “L’abolition de la peine de mort, jamais!”

In *Spécial Magnum*, the anti-abolitionist view is ventriloquized through the character of Sgt. Adams (Dave Nichols). In the briefing room sequence, Adams concludes his summary of a murder case by adding, “How about those kids? Real animals, ay. They oughta bring back the death penalty.” Here, Adams serves as a surrogate for Paul Emile L’Ecuyer, the public security chairman of the MUC. In the wake of the “malicious and wanton” violence in Montreal, L’Ecuyer called for the lifting of the death penalty moratorium, adding he wanted “the noose for habituals that kill.”²¹⁷ Though cut from the film, Adams analogously adds in the script, “send ‘em to the gallows!”

Saitta, however, represents the frontline of law enforcement. Besides calls for the return of capital punishment, the shooting of Michel Bédard instigated a review

²¹⁶ “Pourquoi la peine de mort?,” *Allô Police*, June 24 1973, 3.

²¹⁷ Albert Noel, “L’Ecuyer Wants noose for ‘habituals’ who kill,” *Montreal Gazette*, January 23 1975, 3.

of police armament that hinged on the question: if police were better armed could this have been avoided?²¹⁸ Providing a fantasy response, Tony Saitta brandishes a .44 magnum (the film was called *The .44 Specialist* in some territories) and liquidates three bandit copkillers in the opening sequence set in Ottawa. The Ottawa Police themselves made a publicized transition in this period from shooting at paper bull's eyes to new "shirtfront" targets, resembling a clothed human chest.²¹⁹ Despite these "pseudo-fascist" elements, the narrative ultimately complicates the film's political position. In the key briefing room scene, Sgt. Adams' call to "bring back the death penalty" is met with silence. Unknowingly to him, but clearly to Saitta and Sgt. Matthews, Saitta's revelation about his murderous sister has transitioned him (and audience empathy) from victim's family to perpetrator's family, and in this context, neither of the two men listening have any desire to concur. (Fig. 4.4)

"Scene 46. Int. Transvestites' Apartment"

Finally, while the 1970s controversies of enforcement and criminal punishment are manifested quite overtly (as in many Italian set *poliziesco*), it also needs to be stated that in the film's most exploitative moments *Spécial Magnum* gestures the sanguine and lurid Montreal media depiction of two brutal transvestite murders. In a film overloading with absurdities, a standout line of action is Tony Saitta's investigation of a drag queen slaying culminating in, what one synopsis called, "a penthouse punch-up with three leotard-clad, karate-kicking

²¹⁸ "Si les policiers étaient mieux armés, cet agent de la S.Q. aurait-il été assassiné?," *Allô Police*, June 6 1976, 11.

²¹⁹ Ralph Wilson, "Straight-Shooters," *Ottawa Citizen*, February 26 1977, 49.

transvestites.”²²⁰ Noted for its excess and gratuity (Saitta sodomizes one man with a curling iron), the sequence provides *Spécial Magnum* with an action set piece that serves to contrast straight-laced Saitta (“sounds like something we might find in a fruit market”) from the sexually liberated Montreal he is forced to confront. But more importantly the incident acknowledges Montreal’s transvestite cabaret scene and some of the violence that marred it in the mid-seventies. The alley clubbing of Gary/“Jean Harlow” (no actor credited), reenacts the murder in July 1973 of Lauréat Garceau (aka “Lolo d’Amour”), a transvestite cabaret performer who was bludgeoned in the parking area behind the rue Du Carmel General Bakery.²²¹ Not long after wrapping production, another two performers – both partially operative transsexuals – were victims in a double homicide. Just before midnight on New Year’s Eve 1975, Robert Morin (aka “Saria, Miss Québec Strip 1976”) and Claude “Claudia” Jean were stabbed to death, ticking in as the last two homicide victims in a record year.²²² In both cases, as in *Spécial Magnum*, investigators were forced to review their report when medical examinations revealed the victims’ actual sex.

The inclusion of the transvestite element in the script seems to be part of the Italian take on Montreal (hockey, public metro, drag queens)²²³, as the city’s strip clubs and cabarets were well established as international tourist attractions. Beyond that, the context of the film’s release charged *Spécial Magnum* with the power to harken tangible traumas and associations in local public memory, all of which are

²²⁰ Brown, *Blazing Magnums: Italian Crime Thrillers*: 6.

²²¹ “Un père de deux enfants aurait assassiné ce travesti,” *Allô Police*, July 29 1973, 16.

²²² See: “Poignardé(e)s en plein coeur,” *Allô Police*, January 11 1976, 3-4; “Deux transexuels on été poignardés à mort,” *La Presse*, January 2 1976, A3.

²²³ Though it is common to see transvestites, particularly streetwalkers, in Italian-set *polizieschi*. For example: *La polizia ringrazia* and *La banda del gobbo* (Umberto Lenzi, 1978).

given credibility through the casting of the city's most established drag queens. Looking to find out the identity of the transvestite corpse by interrogating other performers, Saitta crashes the apartment of three drag queens - Vicky Lane, Guilda and Jene Chandler. All three were headliners at Café Cleopatra and were at the time performing in large straight clubs (and even television) in *The Fantasy Follies*.²²⁴ Cast right off the stage, the trio provided a local authenticity and immediacy to the film (in fact, the review for the film in *La Patrie* was paired with an ad for transvestite dance show at Place des arts while *Le Petit Journal* devoted a quarter of their write-up of the film to promoting Guilda's upcoming revue "Tout feu, toute femme").²²⁵ When *Spécial Magnum* hit theatres, all three were working at the Théâtre des Variétés (now La Tulipe) directly across the street from the Papineau 1 (now Mont-Royale Bingo), one of the six screens playing it daily. In interview, Vicky Lane recalled, "I made a point of telling everyone I was working both sides of the street."²²⁶

Magnum Over the City

For the Québec release of *Spécial Magnum*, Pierre David and Les Films Mutuels mounted an aggressive campaign. The film, after all, arrived as a double representative of both the company's production and distribution. Though it was initially announced for a March or April 1976 arrival, Mutual delayed the release

²²⁴ In advance of the release of *Spécial Magnum*, the 1976 show was also given a feature story in Montreal arts publication *Magazine sur scène*, see: "Le Théâtre des variétés - Gilles Latulippe directeur - présente "Variétés 76": The Fantasy Follies, ou, L'art du travesti à son meilleur!," *Magazine sur scène*, September 1976, 9-10, 12, 15, 17, 19.

²²⁵ Richard Milo, "Spécial Magnum, un film a vous couper le souffle," *La Patrie*, November 21-27 1976, 6; "Spécial Magnum, un film à vous couper le souffle," *Le Petit Journal*, November 26-December 2 1976, 12.

²²⁶ Vicky Lane, "Interview by Nick Shaw (Email. Montreal, December 14)," (2010).

Il s'appelle Tony Saitta. Tireur d'élite, il est à lui seul un véritable commando d'exécution...
 L'ennemi n'est qu'une seule personne, sa soeur... On a su comment l'attendre, personne ne pouvait prévoir sa riposte. Elle sera impitoyable et l'immense poursuite deviendra un véritable enfer...

Spécial Magnum
 STUART WHITMAN JOHN SAXON MARTIN LANDAU TISA FARROW

November 20th, 1976
 La Presse

ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK...
 FOR THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A TRULY EMPTY ROOM!
 14 YEARS

SHADOWS IN AN EMPTY ROOM
 AN AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL RELEASE
 STUART WHITMAN · JOHN SAXON · MARTIN LANDAU
 In "SHADOWS IN AN EMPTY ROOM"
 Also starring TISA FARROW · CAROLE LAURE · JEAN LEClerc
 With GAYLE HUNNICUTT
 Music by ARMANDO TROVAIOLI · MARTIN HERBERT

STARTS TODAY! SNOWDON
 3775 DECALE 482 1327

March 11th, 1977
 Montreal Gazette

LE PROGRAMME DOUBLE DYNAMITE DE L'ETE
 Il s'appelle Tony Saitta. Tireur d'élite, il est à lui seul un véritable commando d'exécution...
 14 ANS

Spécial Magnum
 AU MÊME PROGRAMME
 Revoici PIERRE RICHARD plus drôle, plus irrésistible que jamais dans
on aura tout vu!
 Le grand film comique de l'année!

May 21, 1977
 La Presse

Fig. 4.5 *Spécial Magnum*: Newsprint advertising from *La Presse* and *The Montreal Gazette*, Nov. 1976 - May, 1977.

seven months to plot the film in the decisive late fall calendar. The move also distanced the release from the Italian campaign (which remained unchanged, opening on March 9th, 1976) and allowed Mutual to assess Fida Cinematografica's strategy. Unlike *La Dernière Chance*, the Québec advertising for *Spécial Magnum* reproduced the Italian poster art with only slight – though crucial – variation. Pairing text to the canted image of an illustrated Stuart Whitman blasting his titular hardware, the print ad twice acknowledges the film as a Pierre David and Mutual presentation; introduces the character of Tony Saitta (“un véritable commando d’exécution”); and underlines the tornado of action that the background canvas of flying cars and spinning helicopters would suggest (“l’immense poursuite deviendra un véritable enfer...”). (Fig. 4.4) Since during shooting much of the film’s regional

press remained fixated on the location stuntwork, Mutual sold *Spécial Magnum* as a series of action set-pieces – what they called in their press release, “les multiples cascades spectaculaires du film.”²²⁷ An explosion-like caption was splashed on the print ads, promising “une foule de scènes a vous en couper le souffle.” To generate renewed publicity and grant credibility to the stunts, Pierre David premiered the film at Le Parisien and arranged for female auto racer Monique Proulx to present the film to an auditorium of invited automotive specialists, auto racers, stunt drivers and stock car fans.²²⁸

Spécial Magnum opened on Friday November 19th, 1976 at 9 Montreal area theatres: Le Parisien 1, Chateau 1, Papineau 1, Laval, Versailles 1, and Greenfield Park 1, as well as at Galeries de Granby, Georges (St.-Hyacinthe) and Salaberry (St. Thérèse). Gambling on big support for the film, Mutual bought premium ad space in the major dailies: filling *La Presse* with a series of growing spots culminating in a full-page ad the morning after the premiere. The same day *Spécial Magnum* was advertised on page 2 of *Le Devoir*, uncommonly planted with the day’s top headlines (pending strikes, the PC-Quebec congress and the release of heiress-come-guerilla Patricia Hearst).²²⁹ Despite the risks of marketing and monopolizing so many screens during the prime pre-holiday season, treating the film as a major release paid off. Debting with 182 showings a week, including weekend midnight screenings, the initial run played seven weeks – exchanging venues at Christmas and adding a

²²⁷ Dandurand, “Le Premier Grand Film D’Action International Tourné à Montréal: *Spécial Magnum*,” 2.

²²⁸ See: “*Spécial Magnum*, un film à vous couper le souffle,” 12.

²²⁹ “*Spécial Magnum* (print ad),” *Le Devoir*, November 20 1976, 2.

screen in its last days.²³⁰ If the success of a film often rests in repeat attendance, *Spécial Magnum* was bait for Montrealers to see their streets, their surroundings, or, in some cases, themselves spectacularly preserved to a killer soundtrack, as performer Vicky Lane recalled, "I remember going many times with friends, it was really popular here in Québec; it was packed."²³¹

Contrary to any commercial success, like in Italy, critics were not wholly kind.²³² But misgivings were overwhelmed by the film's setting. From the beginning, Mutual prepared the conditions of reception: "Ce sera une véritable découverte pour les spectateurs, qui verront Montréal devenir la théâtre du film le plus spectaculaire de l'année."²³³ Or as rephrased in *The Gazette*, "Cops 'n' robbers action [...] made right here in Montreal!"²³⁴ The city is the site of hostile spectacle and civic interest, but one that resist mapping. To the foreign press, *Spécial Magnum* provided "a kind of tour of Montreal to many places tourist don't ordinarily see."²³⁵ As open access to the street-level view of Montreal, the reviewer in *La Presse* was less convinced, staking that these are contradictorily "[des] images d'un Montréal peu familier à la

²³⁰ On December 24th, prints moved to Arlequin, Cinema de Montréal, Carré St. Louis, Chomedey and Ritz, adding the Charlot in Longueuil on New Year's Eve.

²³¹ Lane, "Interview with Vicky Lane".

²³² Reviewers griped over the generic characterizations and plotting: in Italy, for example, Massimo Pepoli in *Il Messaggero* disparaged that "to give you some thrills, the film resorts to the usual blind, material witness in constant danger for her life, which gives an idea of the squalor of the whole"[my translation]; while *La Presse* was similarly critical, stating, "les personnages sont mis en situation de la façon la plus conventionnelle et leur psychologie est sommaire." See: Massimo Pepoli, "Una Magnum Special Per Tony Saitta," *Il Messaggero*, November 3 1976; S.D., "Carole de Panama," *La Presse*, 27 November 1976, E12.

²³³ Dandurand, "Le Premier Grand Film D'Action International Tourné à Montréal: *Spécial Magnum*," 2.

²³⁴ "New Movies: *Spécial Magnum*," *Montreal Gazette*, November 20 1976, 42.

²³⁵ "Strange Shadows in an Empty Room," *Motion Picture Product Digest*, March 16 1977, 78. In *The New York Times*, Vincent Canby quipped that notwithstanding the murky presentation, the film "might have been designed as a tourist brochure." See: Vincent Canby, "Strange Shadows in an Empty Room Sheds Little Light," *New York Times*, Feb 12 1977, 13.

plupart des gens (riches demeures de Westmount, campus de l'université de McGill) et prises avec des angles si particuliers qu'on se croirait à l'étranger."²³⁶ In either case, the tension remained between an international action product and the situated turf that acts as credible "theatre." Like many Italian popular films, the veracity was not in the packaging; as director Alberto De Martino became pseudonymously credited as Martin Herbert – a suspect francophonic appellation at times erroneously printed as Martin Hébert.²³⁷ But the hucksterism of this accrediting still burrowed its way into the local claim of the film, where despite omission in the ads the regional press hammered the municipal bias:

C'est un film à recommander aux amateurs de sensations et vous découvrirez également qu'il est possible, à Montréal, de faire des films de classe internationale. Pour interpréter *Spécial Magnum*, le réalisateur Martin Herbert a fait appel à plusieurs comédiens et comédiennes de chez nous dont Carole Laure, Jean LeClerc, Aubert Pallascio, Andrée St-Laurent et d'autres [...] Vous découvrirez également dans ce film, une Guilda qui se bat d'une façon magistrale et assez étonnante, même si c'est arrangé avec "le gars des vues."²³⁸

After completing its holiday run, the film exited theatres – if only temporarily.

Spécial Magnum was re-issued three more times in the first five months of 1977. First, coinciding with its U.S. release through American International, the film was distributed in English on March 11th, 1977, with the meaningless title *Shadows in an Empty Room*. (Fig. 4.4) Three weeks later, Mutual brought it back in French to Verdun (a theatre that missed the initial run) paired with a second feature, the Yves Montand thriller *Le sauvage* (Jean-Paul Rappeneau, 1975). Despite theatrical saturation, *Spécial Magnum* returned to open four drive-ins – Ciné-Parc Vaudreuil,

²³⁶ S.D., "Carole de Panama," E12.

²³⁷ For example: Milo, "*Spécial Magnum*, un film a vous couper le souffle," 6.

²³⁸ "*Spécial Magnum*, un film à vous couper le souffle," 12.

Ciné-Parc Saint-Eustache, Ciné-Parc Châteauguay, and Ciné-Parc Repentigny – for the summer season on May 21st, headlining what was advertised as “Le programme double dynamite de l’été.” (Fig. 4.4)

Throughout its runs, the film played opposite historic incidents of violence in Montreal. On the second day of English release, during the 9:30 show, a gunman walked into Bar Salon de la Gaieté on rue Belanger E., pulled an M-1 semi-automatic and opened fire, killing five. Witness accounts provided public horror, “[p]eople were howling in panic. Men and women falling. The corpses were covered with blood. Others were running off while bullets were flying in all directions.”²³⁹ The fourth mass-slaying in a Montreal nightclub in as many years, the headlines that followed unsubtly recalled the Gargantua massacre: “Bloodbath in Montreal,” “Gunman Kills five in North-End Bar” as “10 die on violent weekend.”²⁴⁰ While distinguishing the relations of coincidence, correlation and causation between criminality in Québec and the *poliziesco* cycle can be difficult to determine and should avoid being overstated, some connections signal design. On Wednesday March 30th, policeman Robert Brabant was shot and killed by three bandits. Suddenly, the weekend of the funeral procession of 2,000, *Spécial Magnum* was re-advertised and re-released without warning. A souvenir that the frivolity of this Italian-made, Montreal-shot and internationally oriented crime actioner remained, like its Mediterranean

²³⁹ Bill Kokesch, “Gunman Kills 5 in North-End Bar,” *Montreal Gazette*, March 14 1977, 1.

²⁴⁰ “Bloodbath in Montreal,” *Ottawa Citizen*, March 14 1977, 2; Kokesch, “Gunman Kills 5 in North-End Bar,” 1-2; “10 die on violent weekend,” A1-A2.

accomplices, trussed against a material reality to speak about, to exploit and to remain historically bound.

CONCLUSION

“The editor has allotted 26 lines for a review of [*Spécial Magnum*], which is at least 25 lines too many.”

– Judy Stone, *San Francisco Chronicle* (Feb 11, 1977)²⁴¹

In 2008, Fantasia Film Festival in Montreal programmed a retrospective screening of *Spécial Magnum*. The schedule summarized, “much like the director of *Spécial Magnum*, Detective Saitta prefers to shoot first and ask questions later.”²⁴² The remark served to describe Saitta’s brutish brand of policing while affectionately disparaging the narrative coils of the mystery plot. To that end, against the promotional intent, it echoed the dismissive synopses the film received during its original release.²⁴³ Outside the novelty of the Montreal setting in *Spécial Magnum*, coverage of the Italian crime cycle was disregarded in Québec’s top-end media. Like Judy Stone, critics (or editors) were cavalier in banishing the *poliziesco* from their self-important word-counts. In the case of *Le Devoir* critic André Leroux, producer and distributor Pierre David requested his abstention: the week *Spécial Magnum* was released, in place of a review from Leroux, *Le Devoir* published a letter from David to the newspaper’s director Claude Ryan appealing for a stop to Leroux’s critiques of Mutual’s films and “ses attaques mesquines et outrancières.”²⁴⁴

But more than recalling the cycle’s media reception, implicitly, and crucially, Fantasia’s pithy punch-line functioned as an accurate reminder of what defined the

²⁴¹ Reprinted in: “*Strange Shadows in an Empty Room*,” 160.

²⁴² Philippe Spurrell, “Fantasia Film Festival: *Spécial Magnum* ” http://www.fantasiafestival.com/2008/en/films/film_detail.php?id=243.

²⁴³ Even the quip was standard. In 1977, Ron Pennington in *The Hollywood Reporter* described *Spécial Magnum* as “a tasteless, violent action programmer about a cop who hits first, then asks questions later.” As quoted in “*Strange Shadows in an Empty Room*,” 160.

²⁴⁴ Pierre David, “Un critique outrancière?,” *Le Devoir*, 16 November 1976, 28.

bulk of seventies Italian crime films: the conditions of rapid production and the corresponding urgency that made the films at times incoherent or sites of contradiction, but alleged that they always spoke to – or capitalized on – the immediate world that bore them. The shoot'em and ship'em mode of production necessarily demanded an immediacy and vivacity, what documentary filmmaker Mike Malloy described as the "run and gun style" of "eurocrime."²⁴⁵ The crews took to the streets, commandeered locations, and "stole" shots – as the Fantasia promotions boasted of *Spécial Magnum* – "without permits!" Whether apocryphal or not (I only found evidence that *Spécial Magnum* began without permits), securing municipal approval was a peripheral priority in a shooting pace where the leading players performed their own stunts and integral characters were cast nights before, such as Vicky Lane, Guilda and Jean Harlow.

Within the swirling production of 300 ripped-from-the-headlines action films, the "shoot first, ask questions later" tag further highlights what many directors sought: to liken the *polizieschi* to conflict journalism, with the director as reporter. In an interview for Roman television, actress Lisa Gastoni, who played the Luciano Lutring's (Robert Hoffmann) wife Yvonne in *Svegliati e uccidi*, declared director Carlo Lizzani a pioneer: "Lizzani was the first to make a movie starting from crime news, he is a great reporter, in the cinematographic sense of this term."²⁴⁶ To distinguish his films from the standards of the American crime genre, Lizzani reflexively interrupts the narrative in *Crazy Joe* with the on-set production of a

²⁴⁵ Mike White, "Episode 39: The Italian Connection," <http://projection-booth.blogspot.ca/2011/11/episode-39-italian-connection.html>. (accessed May 15, 2012).

²⁴⁶ As quoted in Giusti, "Il poliziottesco."



Fig. 5.1 Director Enzo G. Castellari reporting on the scene in *La polizia incrimina, la legge assolve* (1973). (Source: DVD)

large-scale period-set crime film. Confused by the crowds, Joe (Peter Boyle) asks, “Who are all these people?” His sidekick Manny (Henry Winkler) quickly clarifies in manner appropriate to his character, “Ahhh...som’ little faggots from Hollywood making a movie about gangsters.” Mockingly, Lizzani, it appears, casts himself as the faux-film’s director, but opposed to the timeless portrayal of the American gangster, *Crazy Joe* takes up the present-day life of mafioso Joe Gallo to harken the generational conflict and protest events of 1968 – “but inside the underworld.”²⁴⁷ The journalistic duty of the director is a theme given direct form in *La polizia incrimina, la legge assolve*. Like Lizzani, director Enzo G. Castellari appears in a reflexive cameo: as a field reporter. Introducing the scene, Castellari addresses a visible camera: “Good evening. We’re speaking from Terrazza Martini in Genoa...”

²⁴⁷ Carlo Lizzani quoted in *ibid.*

(Fig. 5.1) The director is both story-chaser and presenter, necessarily located and actively involved.

In assessing the seventies *polizieschi* with the distance of decades, “shoot first, ask questions later” acquires an historical dimension, where the cycle’s cultural import is revised and its national narrative cemented. The debates of film and cultural history are now deferred to film festivals, fanzines, genre guides and academic essays that furnish a single narrative: “*polizieschi* were very much a reflection upon [Italy during the 1970s] and sought to capture the frustration, anguish and violence this era had fallen to.”²⁴⁸ As convincing as it is insufficient, the prevailing view of the seventies *poliziesco* could not conciliate to my satisfaction with the Québec instances of the genre.

This thesis developed from a simple question: if the Italian crime films of the 1970s represent an insular, national, popular culture dialogue, than how do you account for *Spécial Magnum* and the transplanting of the genre to Québec? The combined lack of any consideration of the life of the *poliziesco* outside of Italy and any historical account of the production of *La Dernière Chance* and *Spécial Magnum* within Québec compelled me to design a research project that would compound the two. Looking at primary sources, such as newspapers, tabloids, entertainment periodicals and official documents, allowed me to construct a narrative about the place of both these imported and co-produced films – how they circulated, what they addressed – in Québec in this particular time. Taking Québec as a case study,

²⁴⁸ Brown, *Blazing Magnums: Italian Crime Thrillers*: 5.

the objective of this thesis was to expand the transnational contexts and quest of the genre to begin to fully view the long arm of the *poliziesco*.

At the levels of production, distribution and thematic concerns, the seventies *poliziesco* was an international genre. To say that the proliferation of Italian crime films in the 1970s is attributable to Italian agitation alone is reductive and nearsighted. In Québec, as in export regions worldwide, urbanization, violence and political disturbances defined the decade. The form and content of the *poliziesco* supplied Roman producers with a genre strategically tailored to their campaign to displace the United States as the global nucleus of popular film exporting. Circumventing the major studios, *polizieschi* were auctioned to independent distributors eager to develop their offerings. In Québec, 23 regional operators and 6 majors released 180 Italian-produced crime films. Marketing the films to emphasize their orientation to action and authenticity proved a means to capitalize on a marriage of escapist forms and public preoccupations. The ubiquities of social unrest and violent crime and the generalities of the cycle's political and criminal representations corresponded with ease to the current events and regional concerns of the province, and ultimately contributed in the popular interest to see Montreal depicted in two commercial Italo-Québec action films.

Cinéma Québécois v. Cinéma Au Québec

The penetration and relevance of the seventies *poliziesco* in Québec is a compelling antidote to underestimations of the cosmopolitan interventions laced in the cycle's history. The aim here is not only to explode the tunnel-vision that has imprisoned evaluations of the Italian "crime-slime" boom of the 1970s within Italy,

but to bring pick-axe to the hardened suggestion that *le cinéma au Québec* is fixed to *le cinéma québécois*. Despite the relative success and sustainability of the modern Franco-Québec industry, film-going and filmmaking in the province are not a closed circuit. The overarching narrative in film historiography, however, collapses the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s with the emergence of an invigorated *Québécois* cinema, bound by coinciding political and artistic reform. With its emphasis on history and class, language and identity, this account privileges the self-contained nature of cinema in Québec and tends to fence the discussion around francophone filmmaking, *Québécois*-themed narratives, and the self-sufficing regional industry as both cultural resistance and family album – *notre cinéma*.

But the invitational question – “Connaissez-vous *Mon Oncle Antoine*?”²⁴⁹ – that initiates the trailer for Claude Jutra’s emblematic 1971 film remains an open one, concomitantly signaling the cleavage between local production and exhibition, and the continuum of competing for screen time and audiences. The fact is, *québécois* were most interested in meeting *The Godfather* amid the 510 feature films released *en première vision* the year *Mon Oncle Antoine* was initially distributed.²⁵⁰ Stated simply, *le cinéma québécois* does not exclusively represent the larger historical phenomenon and orientation of *le cinéma au Québec*.

This division is self-evident and dutifully acknowledged in the introductions to Bill Marshall’s *Québec National Cinema* and Janis Pallister’s *The Cinema of Québec*,

²⁴⁹ The question, of course, is twofold: asking about the character and the larger watershed film in which he inhabits. This is especially evident in the English version which chooses not to translate the titular phrasing from French.

²⁵⁰ “Statistiques sur les films présentés en première vision, à Montréal, en 1972,” *Inter VII*, no. 2 (1973): 1-7.

but only to paint a picture of inattention towards Québec's industry (particularly outside the province) as a means to substantiate their projects and bring focus to the regional contexts, challenges and dialogical forms of francophone film production.²⁵¹ For evidence, Pallister cites the commentary on the film industry in Québec from the 1970s forward in *Canada Today/Canada Aujourd'hui*, a publication of the Canadian Embassy:

The censorship that had afflicted the film industry for so long was lifted, and today there are fewer restrictions on films shown in Québec than anywhere else in North America... particularly in Montreal, Québec's urban heartland, with its cosmopolitan cluster of two million people and its important English-speaking minority, the cultural diversity is almost without parallel: American films are shown there at the same time they appear in New York... and French and European films at the same time they are shown in Paris.²⁵²

Despite the promotional tone and hyperbole, far from being an insulated regional industry, historically - even since the seventies - film exhibition in Québec has been stimulated and inundated by the incursion of foreign productions.

Yves Lever begins his large history of *Québécois* cinema, *Histoire Générale du Cinéma au Québec*, in a manner appropriate with his title: detailing the first public projection in Québec of the early Lumières actualities by French operators Louis Minier and Louis Pupier on Rue St. Laurent in Montreal on June 27th, 1896.²⁵³ Film exhibition's rapid diffusion into the far corners and makeshift movie houses of the province was fulfilled by the arrival of the French and American: Lumières, Méliès, Pathé and Edison. Ernest Ouimet established Québec's first fixed cinema by importing reels from New York and translating intertitles through his Ouimet Film

²⁵¹ Bill Marshall, *Québec National Cinema* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001). 1-18; Pallister, *The Cinema of Québec: Masters in Their Own House*: 1-12.

²⁵² Pallister, *The Cinema of Québec: Masters in Their Own House*: 4.

²⁵³ Lever, *Histoire Générale du Cinéma Québec*: 35-50.

Exchange, and by 1915 represented Pathé exclusively in Canada under his expanded Specialty Film Import Limited. After the war, the Hollywood studios progressively installed branches and overtook numerous theatre halls in Montreal in an effort to secure control of exhibition. The coming of sound, however, provided an opportunity for independent importers and distributors of francophone films. By 1932, two companies were established for bringing in, distributing and exploiting *les films parlant français*: France-Film, led by Robert Hurel, and Les films des éditions Édouard Garand – later Franco Canada Films – founded by Édouard Garand but ultimately managed by Joseph Alexandre DeSève. Recognizing the financial and competitive state of a quickly expanding, but still limited, market, the two companies were integrated in 1934 under the conserved name of France-Film. What is important to Yves Lever, is that the integrated distributor's new publicity strategy emphasized *la carte nationaliste* and the defence of the French language:

“FRANCE-FILM monte la garde... Le public, qui a encouragé avec un si bel enthousiasme les films français présentés dans la province de Québec par la FRANCE-FILM, nous confié une tâche aussi noble que glorieuse: DÉFENDRE LA LANGUE FRANÇAISE PAR LE FILM. À ce devoir, à cette tâche, nous ne voulons jamais faillir.”²⁵⁴

With this call to arms and DeSève's later endeavors into independent production, Lever uses the establishment of France-Film to transition into a tome on the history of film production in Québec – *le cinéma Québécois*.

But, despite any claims to cultural defence, France-Film continued, first and foremost, as a prominent importer and distributor of foreign, particularly European, films; and by the 1970s, releasing *Milano violenta*, *Roma a mano armata*, *La cittadino*

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 49.

si ribella, Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia and many others, would be the foremost player in delivering Italian *polizieschi* to Québec audiences. As much as any regional filmmaking, the seventies *poliziesco* represented a constituent part of the cinema and cinema-going in Québec. To what degree Québec's film audiences diverged or stratified or the Italian *polizieschi* compared to the few Québécois crime films in the 1970s might be the difficult task of further research. But such an investigation can start with acknowledging the transcultural quest of the Italian crime cycle and the genre's historical place in representing crime and law enforcement to *québécois* spectators through a difficult and decisive period, because as threatening to the full picture as dismissing the seventies *polizieschi* or cinematic practices in Québec, is reducing them to culturally closed phenomena.

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Banda Vallanzasca, La (Mario Bianchi, 1977)
Baciamo le mani (Vittorio Schiraldi, 1973)
Banditi a Milano (Carlo Lizzani, 1968)
Bastardi, I (Duccio Tessari, 1968)
Belva col mitra, La (Sergio Grieco, 1977)
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Boss, Il (Fernando Di Leo, 1973)
Cadaveri eccellenti (Francesco Rosi, 1976)
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Carteggio Valachi (Terence Young, 1972)
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Commissario Verrazzano, Il (Franco Prospero, 1978)
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