

Constructed police knowledge of “marginal movements”: The SPVM’s GAMMA project

Des savoirs policiers sur les « mouvements marginaux ». Les constructions du projet GAMMA du SPVM

Los saberes policiales sobre los movimientos marginales. Las construcciones del proyecto GAMMA del SPVM

Pascal Dominique-Legault

Special Issue, 2022

Prize winning articles from *Criminologie*

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1092593ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1092593ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0316-0041 (print)

1492-1367 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Article abstract

This article contributes to the growing body of sociological and criminological research on the policing of protests and those on society's margins by analyzing the construction of police knowledge in the context of the implementation of the GAMMA project by the Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal (Montreal Police Service, or SPVM). Creation of this police project, initiated in 2010 but not made public until 2011, was announced as a means of tracking the activities of those seen as marginal or anarchist in the city of Montreal. However, following a two-year-long legal battle, documents obtained through provincial access to information legislation showed that, far from relying solely on criminalizable events, GAMMA's goals involved problematization of certain social groups on the political margins. Characteristics of marginal movements were implicitly operationalized into visible indicators of possible criminality, as were their specific political convictions. This article explores the subjective nature of the police knowledge underlying the institutionalization of an additional level of police response differentially targeting specific marginal movements. The results are discussed in the context of recent research on protest policing and marginality, particularly the concepts of “strategic incapacitation,” “intelligent control,” and “landscapes of exclusion.”

Cite this article

Dominique-Legault, P. (2022). Constructed police knowledge of “marginal movements”: The SPVM’s GAMMA project. *Criminologie*, 13–23.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1092593ar>

Constructed police knowledge of “marginal movements”: The SPVM’s GAMMA project

Pascal Dominique-Legault¹

Abstract: This article contributes to the growing body of sociological and criminological research on the policing of protests and those on society’s margins by analyzing the construction of police knowledge in the context of the implementation of the GAMMA project by the Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal (Montreal Police Service, or SPVM). Creation of this police project, initiated in 2010 but not made public until 2011, was announced as a means of tracking the activities of those seen as marginal or anarchist in the city of Montreal. However, following a two-year-long legal battle, documents obtained through provincial access to information legislation showed that, far from relying solely on criminalizable events, GAMMA’s goals involved problematization of certain social groups on the political margins. Characteristics of marginal movements were implicitly operationalized into visible indicators of possible criminality, as were their specific political convictions. This article explores the subjective nature of the police knowledge underlying the institutionalization of an additional level of police response differentially targeting specific marginal movements. The results are discussed in the context of recent research on protest policing and marginality, particularly the concepts of “strategic incapacitation,” “intelligent control,” and “landscapes of exclusion.”

Keywords: Protest policing, surveillance, social movements, marginality, Quebec.

¹ The author would like to thank André C. Drainville, Francis Dupuis-Déri, and the evaluation committee for their constructive comments on a preliminary version of this article, as well as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Social Sciences faculty of l’Université Laval for their financial support. Thanks also to Jeffrey Monaghan and Francis Dupuis-Déri for their support while the case in question was before the Commission d’accès à l’information (The Quebec Commission for Access to Information), and to Julian Cymbalista-Clapp, Joan McGilvray and the team of Criminologie for making this English translation possible.

Introduction: The GAMMA Project²

In July 2011, the existence of a new police squad that specifically targeted marginal movements was revealed. News of this squad emerged after arrests prompted by a protest organized by the Convergence des luttes anticapitalistes (Convergence of Anti-Capitalist Struggles or CLAC), timed to coincide with International Worker's Day on May 1, 2011. The police squad, known as GAMMA (Guet des activités et des mouvements marginaux et anarchistes / surveillance of activities of marginal and anarchist movements), was part of the Organized Crime Division of the Montreal Police Service (SPVM, Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal).

As justification for creating GAMMA, the police cited the need to deal with criminalizable events such as criminal mischief against patrol cars and increasingly frequent clashes between citizens and police officers (Cameron, 2011; Renaud, 2011a, 2011b). This article provides a new analysis of how police knowledge regarding the “marginal movements” associated with this controversial project was constructed and demonstrates that, far from relying solely on criminalizable events, GAMMA relied on a problematization of the marginality and political convictions of groups they defined as marginal. Although a number of previous studies have looked at the GAMMA project, without empirical data they were limited to analyzing it based on statements made to the media. GAMMA was generally discussed in the context of debates over social control and police repression of social movements in Quebec (Dupuis-Déri, 2013a, 2013b), legal and legislative repression during the 2012 Quebec student protests (Lemondé, Bourbeau, Fortin, Joly, and Poisson, 2014), or the notion of “political profiling” (Dupuis-Déri, 2014). This study breaks new ground by using internal SPVM documents obtained via the Act respecting Access to Documents held by Public Bodies and the Protection of Personal Information (Loi sur l'accès aux documents des organismes publics et sur la protection des renseignements personnels, hereafter, the Act respecting Access) and draws on della Porta and Reiter's concept of police knowledge, which posits that police knowledge involves perceptions, constructed either individually or collectively, of external reality and of the role of police, which

² Original article published in *Criminologie. Criminalité environnementale*, vol. 49, no 2, Fall 2016. Dominique-Legault, P. (2016). Des savoirs policiers sur les « mouvements marginaux ». Les constructions du projet GAMMA du SPVM. *Criminologie*, 49(2), 301-321. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1038426ar>

then shape their practices (della Porta and Reiter, 1998, p. 22)³.

Following this theoretical choice, marginality is understood here as the outcome of a subjective cognitive construction process. Objectively speaking, neither marginalized people nor marginal spaces exist (Vant, 1984). Far from wanting to reify marginality by employing language that reduces its definition to a single reality, thereby reinforcing the separation between insiders and excluded outsiders (Fassin, 1996), I argue instead that marginal people, practices, and spaces are constructed. These definitional acts, which are political actions linked to their mode of designation (Fassin 1996) and to categories of public action (Blanchard, 2013), nonetheless have real consequences (Merton, 1995). Certain ways of knowing and defining situations, for example, have the effect of forcing excluded outsiders to bear full responsibility for their status, while also guiding the attitudes, and legitimizing the policies, adopted with regard to them (Fassin, 1996). I will, therefore, make no attempt to define the marginalized, account for the socio-economic determinants that give rise to them, or report on their alleged novelty. Others have, and continue to do so, and while necessary, such undertakings are insufficient absent an understanding of the constructs that underlie local action (Fassin, 1996). Studies have shown that the marginality found in post-industrial cities stems from neoliberal, intercity, and international pressures that push cities to become as attractive and competitive as possible in order to attract foreign investment and the globalized middle- and upper-classes, thereby legitimizing initiatives focused on design and urban revitalization (Harvey, 1989; Rousseau, 2008; Sibley, 1995). Sibley (1995) refers to this process as “spatial purification” (p. 77). The ideals of consumption and family values, as well as urban dwellers’ expectations of mobility between relatively secure spaces, specifically between their homes and workplaces, act as normative reference points that also play a part in constructing marginality in various spaces within the city (Rousseau, 2008; Sibley, 1995).

What is important for this study is understanding police perception of what the SPVM labeled “marginal and anarchist movements.” I deconstruct these classifications following the work of both Fassin (1996), who focused on different modes of designation, such as *exclusion* (French), the underclass (American), and the *marginalidad* (Latin-American), and Blanchard

³ As conceptualized by Berger and Luckmann (1967), knowledge is understood as: “the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics,” (p. 1).

(2013) and his work on undesirables. This study also stems from Sibley's (1995) exploration of landscapes of exclusion, the many dynamics created between spaces and minorities that eventually come to exclude minorities.

In the following pages, I present my research methodology and the issues it involved, a literature review that seeks to understand both contemporary links between the police and marginal groups, and the SPVM's operational context. The study demonstrates that GAMMA's various forms of police knowledge implicitly operationalize marginal movements, not only rendering marginality visible and linking it to criminal potential but also associating it to spaces and specific characteristics that deviate from strictly criminal behaviour. I conclude by discussing the implications of the findings and suggesting research paths worth investigating.

Research methodology

In order to understand how marginality is defined, I undertook an inductive thematic analysis of two internal SPVM documents related to the GAMMA project, obtained via an access to information request made on February 26, 2013, under the Act regarding Access. The request targeted "general" information related to GAMMA's implementation, its internal policies, and the training of police officers to deal with "marginal and anarchist movements." Following the SPVM's initial refusal to grant access to the requested documents, an appeal was made to the Quebec Commission for Access to Information (the Commission d'accès à l'information du Québec or CAIQ), which rendered its decision (P.D. c. Montréal (Ville de) (SPVM) [2015], QCCAI 108) on May 14, 2015, leading to the partial release of three of the four documents presented to the CAIQ by the SPVM.

CAIQ describes the identified documents in their decision, providing an opportunity to contextualize the possibilities, and associated limits, of what might be inferred from their analysis. The oldest document (P.D. c. Montréal (Ville de) (SPVM) [2015], QCCAI 108, paragr. 68) of the three released, called here "Document A," is untitled, undated, and does not identify its author as the first page was not disclosed. Three successive sections were disclosed (historical background, issues, and objectives), as well as two that were completely redacted (proposed solutions and implementation timeline), (P.D. c. Montréal (Ville de) (SPVM) [2015], QCCAI 108, paragr. 64). According to CAIQ, this "document is a recommendations report ... [that]

contains the historical background of the situation referred to, an analysis, and recommendations⁴,” (P.D. c. Montréal (Ville de) (SPVM) [2015], QCCAI 108, paragr. 63). “It contains general information, presenting the historical background and issues that led the organization to propose the GAMMA project,” (P.D. c. Montréal (Ville de) (SPVM) [2015], QCCAI 108, paragr. 67).

The second document, here titled “Document B,” follows “Document A” chronologically “and is structured in the same way, while being far more detailed,” (P.D. c. Montréal (Ville de) (SPVM) [2015], QCCAI 108, paragr. 68). Titled Decision-Making: Project GAMMA (Surveillance of marginal and anarchist movements’ activities), Document B is dated April 6, 2010. It was prepared by the head of the Investigations, Tactical Intelligence, and Analysis – South section, for the assistant-director of Community Service for the South Region. This document contains five sequential sections (situational briefing, significant dates and incidents, levels of involvement, challenges for the SPVM, and issues at stake). It can be assumed that, as with Document A, there were recommendations and timeline sections that were not disclosed.

As my analysis is limited to documents related to GAMMA’s founding, prior to its first activities⁵, this study uses excerpts from the two recommendation-focused reports (Documents A and B), which are focused on decisionmaking. Together, they represent a form of strategic intelligence, “their intention being to guide managers in their choice of strategies for controlling crime and priority criminal phenomena,” (Lemieux, 2005, p. 71). More than simply an outline of GAMMA, the documents are requests to authorize a specific form for the project. Given this, the documents provide a considerable degree of legitimacy to the recommendations.

While the proposed recommendations, timeline, and investigative plan⁶ were not released, the disclosed excerpts provide a certain degree of cohesion to statements that specifically problematize that which is marginal, providing valuable information about how to understand the construction of police knowledge related to marginal movements. However, while the thematic

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations have been translated from French to English.

⁵ This methodological choice allows me to avoid a post hoc bias that would infer effects of police knowledge at the time of the protest from knowledge about the police that was produced or collected only after the protest occurred (Hoggett and Stott, 2010). Following this line of reasoning, the third disclosed document, a press release announcing arrests, was excluded from the study.

⁶ The fourth document identified by the SPVM, which was not released by the CAIQ.

analysis in this study makes possible a rich and complex exploration of the meanings employed in the specific context under discussion, as well as an exploration of what is implicit, we must recognize that it does not allow us to generalize the resulting conclusions to a larger sample (Quivy and Van Campendhoudt, 2006).

Differential policing of protestor categories

A variety of academics have detailed the historical evolution of crowd-related policing from an escalated-force model towards a negotiated-management model. The latter, more pacific, policing model has as its goal diminishing tensions while also guaranteeing protestors' rights. This is accomplished by detailed negotiations with protestors regarding their event and its planning, resulting in a form of routinized protest (della Porta and Reiter, 1998; Waddington, 2007; Waddington and King, 2005). This negotiation-oriented policing style is seen as better suited to contacts with more institutionalized and contained protestor groups, such as unions (De Lint and Hall, 2009; Noakes and Gillham, 2006). In such cases, police evaluate both organizers' sincerity and their ability to see that the commitments made during negotiations are respected. If the police's perception of organizers tends towards the negative, they may employ insurance tactics, such as reserve mobilization of often out-of-sight police officers equipped with protective gear (see Waddington, 2007).

Noakes and Gillham (2006) propose a different model to understand policing deployed particularly in response to so-called transgressive protests that reject contained and institutionalized forms of action in favour of direct, non-negotiated, unauthorized, and unannounced actions that aim to confront and disturb (Gillham and Noakes, 2007). Their policing model, which they call strategic incapacitation, prioritises the use of preventive and coercive interventions to neutralize transgressive protestors. Among these practices, researchers include the creation of no-protest areas; the use of barricades and fences; control of the spaces where protestors meet to eat, sleep, and share information; the use of less-deadly weapons to retake control of contested spaces; the use of electronic surveillance to obtain real-time intelligence regarding the protestors' activities; and, finally, the use of preventive detentions to disrupt and demobilize organizers and protestors (Wood, 2015).

De Lint and Hall (2009) suggest the term intelligent control to describe a similar type of

hybrid policing model in which police not only continue negotiation efforts but also continue to improve and deploy enforcement practices by intensifying their intelligence-gathering efforts and developing paramilitary techniques to control spaces. Self-regulation is taken as the norm, so whenever groups or individuals refuse to play the liaison or negotiation game, “intelligent” and selective forms of control are employed – as part of a gradually applied strategy using real-time information management – as counter measures. The police identify, isolate, and target the protestors they consider to be significant threats while the remainder are invited to cooperate and align themselves with the liaison officers (De Lint and Hall, 2009). Doing so enables the police to impose predictability and accountability on movements that are considered unstable (De Lint and Hall, 2009; Hall and De Lint, 2003; Worth, 2010).

The operational context of the Montreal Police Service

As far back as 1994, structural changes set in motion after the Malouf report on the 1993 Stanley Cup riots seemed to favour the institutionalization of the intelligent control and strategic incapacitation policing models in Montreal. Its first recommendation was that the SPVM develop its analytical and anticipatory capacities and, as such, was created, in 1994, the Operational Planning Division, which centralized the preparation and planning of law enforcement services by creating “[a] police intervention plan prepared in advance ... [which] is essentially broken up into two sections: circulation and police reserves,” (Bellerose, 1999, p. 55). While responsibility for preparing the police response rested with this new division, it was supported by the Strategic Intelligence Division, based on the belief that “the first step in planning a police response is to learn about the groups that will be present, as well as their intentions,” in order to better anticipate the level of force needed, different strategies and scenarios that may be encountered, and the resources required (Bellerose, 1999, p. 56). As soon as officers in the Strategic Intelligence Division determine that a protest is being planned, they intensify their research and adapt their resources “according to the importance and seriousness of the intended act,” (Bellerose, 1999, p. 108). They may opt to meet with organizers, prepare “a profile (historical, political, criminal, etc., per what is needed) of those invited to participate in the event,” study the reactions of these individuals during previous protests, communicate with sources who can inform them about the groups and individuals involved, and evaluate the potential threat posed by the group and by other groups that are openly opposed to them (Bellerose, 1999, p. 108-109).

During protests, intelligence scouts⁷ carry out similar activities on the ground, identifying recurrent organizers and demonstrators, assessing the level of threat, gathering evidence against individuals (who have broken laws, or breached their bail or probation conditions), and providing support to arrest operations (Bellerose, 1999).

In an analysis of interviews with 15 Montreal police officers, Bellerose (1999) found that the more publicly a group announced its intentions, the less likely police were to feel that data collection and intrusive monitoring methods (such as wiretaps, conversation recording, etc.) were required. “As long as a group notifies the police in advance, provides a copy of the planned route, and openly discusses the crowd’s expected actions and intentions, they will generally receive police cooperation in return ... By contrast, a group trying to secretly organize a protest, or one appearing highly politicized, will be placed under close surveillance,” (p. 108). Given this information about police practices, it seems reasonable to assume that the SPVM has had, at least since 1994, institutionalized centralized structures on a municipal scale, allowing it to exercise forms of strategic incapacitation or intelligent control before, during, and after protests.

In Quebec, not only are these preventive interventions increasingly documented but the academic literature has identified differential treatment of groups based on traits associated with their political identity. A qualitative analysis of police practices regarding social movements between 1990 and 2011 identified significant “political discrimination on the part of police officers against protestors labelled as ‘anarchists,’ ‘young people,’ or ‘radicals’” (Dupuis-Déri, 2013b, p. 143). The important role of protestors’ flags and dress codes in police profiling during preventive detentions was noted, as was the occurrence of mass arrests prior to the start of protests before any malfeasance or violence had been reported to the police (Dupuis-Déri, 2013b, 2014). During the 2012 student protests, practices similar to political profiling and selective repression (mass arrests, preventive detentions, inappropriate uses of force, offensive language) targeting students, including those holding posters or wearing a red square, were observed (Dupuis-Déri, 2013c; Wood, 2014).

Recent research has focused on no go orders imposed by police, prosecutors, and judges on marginal groups, such as protestors. These studies demonstrate the way such orders facilitate

⁷ Out-of-uniform police officers who infiltrate the protesting crowd.

police surveillance and neutralization by punishing the presence of the marginal via the imposition of zone restrictions in the form of bail and probation conditions, while also documenting how these tactics affect political activism and freedom of expression and association (Sylvestre, Bernier, and Bellot, 2015; Sylvestre, Damon, Blomley, and Bellot, 2015).

Given that in Quebec ideological and political considerations are important factors in both determining a protests' level of dangerousness and explaining whether a police intervention is more or less repressive (Berthomet, 2013 ; Dupuis-Déri, 2014), understanding the police knowledge on which the GAMMA project was based becomes increasingly important.

GAMMA's operationalization of the marginal into observable indicators

The released GAMMA project excerpts contain no explicit or formally established definition of what constitutes marginal and anarchist activities and movements. A definition of surveillance is included – the “act of spying, watching, and observing in order to avoid being surprised” (Document B, p. 1). However, despite the lack of an equally clear definition of marginality or anarchism, the information in the excerpts implicitly constructs marginality, thereby providing police with observable dimensions and indicators for operationalizing it.

While police commonly have an operational definition for what constitutes an anarchist, usually based on stereotypical indicators such as propensity for violence and wearing black clothing (Borum and Tilby, 2005; De Lint, 2004; Dupuis-Déri, 2014; Monaghan and Walby, 2012), in the GAMMA excerpts, dressing in black is established as observable marginal behaviour, as is wearing a balaclava or otherwise concealing one's face during a protest (see Document A, p. 2; Document B, p. 3). Such gestures are specifically associated with “perpetrators of acts of vandalism or violence,” thus denoting not only marginality but also criminality. While not every person who dresses in black or conceals their face is necessarily involved in acts of violence, these characteristics can still result in differential police treatment (Dupuis-Déri, 2013b, 2014).

Groups or individuals unwilling to collaborate with police protest planning or identified as connected with the promotion or undertaking of “more radical direct actions” (Document B, p. 3), or even transgressive actions, are also delineated as marginal in the documents. Such actions can

result in strategic incapacitation (Noakes and Gillham, 2006) or intelligent control (De Lint and Hall, 2009). While not explicitly defined, “radical actions” acquires a particular meaning when, for example, the SPVM cites as examples sending suspicious parcels to luxury condominium construction and sales sites, protesting in front of the homes of targeted individuals, or “the distribution of flyers in their neighbourhoods, and repeated phone call to their homes,” (Document A, p. 2). While transgressive, such actions also carry the idea of a border erected around family spaces, reinforcing a normativity that seeks to protect these spaces from, and purify them of, marginality, while simultaneously ensuring the comfort and security of the home and its surrounding environment (Sibley, 1995). Linking these means of protest, which target both spaces associated with family values (Sibley, 1995) and high-end locations established by the city to attract the globalized classes (Rousseau, 2008), contributes to defining them marginal.

These documents also pursue their informal operationalization of marginality by identifying key groups and events associated with them. Among those considered marginal are the Collective Opposed to Police Brutality (Collectif opposé à la brutalité policière or COBP), groups participating in COBP activities, and those present at gatherings on International Workers’ Day on May 1. Also referenced are the 2004 actions claimed by the Anti-Gentrification Committee, as well as those of Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC), which took place over a period of several years (see Document B, p. 2)

An additional level of operationalization can be observed in the effort to describe the marginal groups present at the COBP’s annual march. “During this [annual] protest, all the anarchist, communist, revolutionary, alter-globalist, anti-capitalist, radical militant, and even student groups join together to condemn symbols of authority, capitalism, and globalism, etc.,” (Document A, p. 2). This generalization and enumeration, which is repeated in various sections of the documents, demonstrates that the construction of marginality is not limited to acts of vandalism and violence but is applied more widely to broad group categories associated with (and restricted to) a political ideology of the left. From this viewpoint, anyone who can possibly be associated with these types of groups also becomes marginal.

In terms of operationalization, the documents also list “various social principles” defended by these groups. These include freedom, social equality, anti-authoritarian practices, a rejection of consumer society, protection of the environment, and public housing (see Document

A, p. 3; Document B, p. 3). Things that certain groups denounce are also listed, for instance for the COBP symbols of authority (including the police) and the class struggle embodied in International Workers' Day (see Document A, p. 2; Document B, p. 2). The lack of public housing and luxury home construction as well as the unethical treatment of laboratory animals – condemned by, respectively, the Anti-Gentrification Committee and SHAC – are among the enumerated grievances held to reveal deep-seated social and political convictions (see Document B, p. 2). These “social principles” act as specific indicators and are used to construct marginality and render it visible to police officers in GAMMA. Members of identified and labelled groups, people participating in their activities, or even anyone defending or openly expressing the same principles, which are almost exclusively associated with the political ideology of those on the left, are condemned to marginality in the police imagination.

Underlying criminalizable events: a problematized political marginality

While marginality is essentially constructed through left-wing referents, the released documents also partially sketch out a background framework that legitimizes GAMMA on the basis of criminalizable events. For example, they provide a narrative construction of the history of the COBP's annual marches. “These protests are marked by clashes between SPVM officers and protestors,” and on various occasions since 1997 have forced the SPVM, “[to] undertake mass arrests as a result of acts of vandalism, mischief, and other crimes, all of which were more or less organized” (Document A, p. 2). Two events that occurred on the nights prior to the annual COBP protest – the burning of six SPVM vehicles in 2008 and the vandalization of 11 cars in 2009 – are presented as a “culmination point”. Issues such as the SPVM's credibility, the safety of police officers and citizens and their sense of security are also marshalled in support of the project (see Document A, p. 2; Document B, p. 4).

A more systematic analysis of the documents, however, reveals that the construction of marginality and the foundations of GAMMA go beyond the strict framework of criminalizable events actually permeating the daily lives and identities of those in these perceived-as-marginal groups. For example, the construction of marginality involves the public positions taken by groups after a protest: in its discussion of the COBP's annual march, the SPVM states that all these groups, in addition to not “denouncing or condemning the acts of violence and vandalism committed during the protests, also completely, and de facto, dissociate themselves from them.

These reprehensible acts never carry an official signature, and are never claimed,” (Document B, p. 2). This behaviour, which complicates efforts to identify who is responsible for the crimes, becomes both an indicator of marginality and a snare: groups formally taking responsibility for an act of vandalism or violence are viewed with suspicion but so are those who disassociate themselves from these acts or fail to condemn violence.

Other characteristics, far removed from criminal behaviour but which nonetheless construct marginality, are included in a discussion that highlights two challenges that “confront” SPVM interventions. Being associated with a more unstable social movement, one whose nucleus is perceived as “soft,” is considered problematic. The figure of the roaming activist (my term, a translation of *militant gambadant*) is informally created and refers to “members of the hard nucleus of certain groups [who] quit to form other groups ... [or who] remain active in several groups,” (Document B, p. 4) and who are more difficult to monitor: “frequent movements, unstructured organizations, as well as a constantly evolving soft nucleus render knowing the milieu and the links between all those involved more difficult” (Document B, p. 4). Here, marginality is constructed and characterized by reference to the roaming behaviour of some members, which contrasts with the behaviour of members who are loyal, consistently involved in, and well-known to their group, complicating the police’s knowledge-building project. While post-industrial cities have reinforced the idea that a good city is one that provides mobility, oftentimes having taking aim at immobile bodies in the city (Rousseau, 2008), here, the mobility of the marginalized is identified as a public order issue, producing a differentiated mobility regime (Pellerin, 2011). A negative form of mobility is associated to the roaming activist and groups with soft nuclei, giving rise to a security response that attempts to subject them to a tracking regime, while the mobility of other categories of urban dwellers is encouraged. This negative mobility is also constructed when the police problematize the fact that COBP has no street address, no official meeting venue, and no formal hierarchy (Document A, p. 2), suggesting that the decentralized and rhizomic identity of such groups are not only indicative of marginality but also problematic.

The construction of marginality reaches its pinnacle when a political conviction is directly problematized, specifically the “antiauthoritarian positioning” associated with the “very nature” of marginal movements. It is argued that this positioning “sets the stage for conflicting

relationships with police services. This results in very difficult or non-existent communications, that fail to supply the police with information about the events being organized” (Document B, p. 4). This “antiauthoritarian position” is literally a belief about the organization and exercise of power in society between individuals, the state, and one of the state’s primary institutions (the police) which underlies a legitimate political system (anarchy) and the operating philosophies of many Montreal-based social groups. Anarchy can be considered “a fourth type of pure political regime in which all citizens together directly govern themselves through consensual deliberations, without resorting to an authority endowed with coercive apparatuses” and as “a form of political organization in which: (1) all members can directly participate in the deliberative and collective decision-making process, and in which (2) reached consensus will be sought” (Dupuis-Déri, 2007, p. 8, 10).

The misguided approach revealed in the documents being considered, which in lieu of criminal indicators, is based on the problematization of anti-authoritarian positioning, of forms of mobility defined as negative and of the public positioning of certain groups. Hence, the police knowledge constructed ends up locating marginality close to the everyday forms of political and civic involvement of some groups, as well as the core of their political identity. With the addition of the designation of the orbiting activist (my term, a translation of *militant gravitant*), a further distancing from actual indicators of criminality occurs.

From marginal movement to orbiting activists... all the way to the student?

Extending marginality to “associations/persons orbiting around these movements,” (Document B, p. 3) leads to police interest in another indicator of marginality: “members of political action committees and student associations, among others, who directly or indirectly support and participate in the activities of libertarian groups,” (Document B, p. 3). These constructed figures, the orbiting activist and the orbiting association (my expressions), result in marginality being operationalized in its most profound sense: anyone with links to that which is suspicious also become suspicious. The creators of the documents go so far as to formally link certain libertarian and marginal movements to associations at the Cégep du Vieux-Montréal and the Université du Québec à Montréal, two legitimate learning institutions. The documents state that “the student population constitutes a recruitment pool for these groups” (Document B, p. 3). Given its failure to address the intricacies of recruitment, such an assertion could have the effect of expanding the

police gaze to encompass various political action committees, student associations, and even the entire student population. Such a position supports the hypothesis that GAMMA may have been targeting the student movement even before the 2012 student protests, with the effect of “limiting [its] political action in anticipation of an unlimited general strike movement” (Ligue des droits et libertés et al., 2013, p. 3).

Discussion

While creating the GAMMA project was partially justified by reference to criminalizable events, my analysis shows that the project was based on a problematization of the political positioning of left-leaning groups in Montreal. It is worth noting, however, that the SPVM explicitly attempted, through formal warnings on three occasions, to delineate what constitute legitimate actions for the GAMMA project.

The social principles promoted by marginal and anarchist movements can be commendable and their supporters pacifist. Although their positioning is not always consistent with police priorities, *it is important that the SPVM's interventions to address this issue properly target the actors planning, or responsible for, acts of vandalism and violence, and not the movements as a whole* (Document B, p. 2, italicization in the original).

This discursive attempt at institutional delineation, while highly commendable, is drowned in a sea of knowledge focused on problematizing marginal and anarchist movements while failing to limit the construction of marginality to the individuals committing or planning acts of vandalism or violence. On several occasions, suspicious and problematic characteristics of individuals (such as an anti-authoritarian nature, “increasingly radical direct actions,” or the failure to publicly condemn violence) are attributed directly to the movements themselves, thus blurring the identification of specific surveillance targets. The blurring also occurs when these groups are said to be “known to our services” and by referring to the notion of a “hard nucleus” in groups defined as marginal. This hard nucleus is referred to, without further clarification, as “often composed of [a group's] founders and long-standing activists and protestors who have taken part in the activities of various groups” (Document B, p. 3). This opens the door to seeing members of a group's executive as important suspects, thereby legitimizing the collection of intelligence about

them and facilitating its use to demobilize, disrupt, or even neutralize protestors and their leadership (Wood, 2015). The surveillance target thus moves from the individual criminal to the executive structure of the group, to its political identity, and finally to roaming and orbiting activists as well as orbiting associations. The iteration of reminders to target only individuals within these movements who commit crimes simultaneously calls attention to the potential criminality of the marginals within their ranks, thereby having the contradictory effect of encouraging a generalized suspicion that amalgamates crime and marginality.

One may wonder whether the integrity of the SPVM warnings collapses under the weight of the further discussion problematizing marginal movements, as in the end it is the marginal individuals themselves who are constructed as the true problem. Their anti-authoritarian nature, left-wing political identity, transgressive tactics, instability, negative mobility, and targeting of the family and luxury spaces are used as justification of the differential treatment embodied by the GAMMA project.

Without being able to address specific recommendations, GAMMA's actual practices, or the processes by which this police knowledge circulated, I am unable to measure the full in-field scope of the effects of this knowledge production. Pertinent future studies could study this circulation, focussing particularly on front-line police officers and senior management at the time the project took shape in 2010.

Despite its limits, the analysis in this study allows for a better understanding of how police knowledge related to the GAMMA project constructs the marginal, combines it with criminal potential, and operationalizes it by providing an operational police protocol made up of indicators that render the marginal to be surveilled visible (Monaghan and Walby, 2012). Within a strictly municipal context, this study explores the foundations of a project, sanctioned by the SPVM's senior management, that seeks to (temporarily?) institutionalize additional strategic incapacitation— and intelligence control—based coercive and preventive practices that differentially target the marginalized.

Gillham and Noakes (2007) recognized the challenges that the decentralized, informal, and non-hierarchical structure of certain groups, as well as their consensual decision-making, pose for police liaisons. However, the municipal police service discussed here is itself explicitly

problematizing the anti-authoritarian positioning of groups in order to legitimize differential police treatment. These findings raise fundamental questions about discrimination based on political convictions, which is prohibited by both the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and the Code of Ethics of Quebec Police Officers.

With the arrival of GAMMA, the rules of the game seem to have changed for all those wishing not to be the target of surveillance. They must now follow a new standard of predictability expected by the police. The new rules encourage normativity based on disclosing details related to upcoming events, the practice of more traditional and contained actions, and elimination of clothing or symbols identified as subversive (De Lint and Hall, 2009; Hall and De Lint, 2003). However, they also affect political activism and the definition of marginality by including among expected behaviours restricted and traceable movements, the post-facto public condemnation of violence, and loyalty to a stable, hierarchical, and reachable group. The delineated borders around family and luxury spaces form the contours of a landscape of exclusion that standardizes the targets and spaces from which popular action is excluded. With GAMMA, “playing the game”, assuming responsibility or self-regulating increasingly requires abandoning both specific goals as well as one’s anti-authoritarian and left-wing political convictions within the public sphere.

The danger posed by this constructed police knowledge is real: generalized surveillance of the marginalized, defined both in a broad scope (ranging from criminal to student) and in the narrowness of the political-ideological references (of the left) that are associated with them). This knowledge raises the question of the real need for GAMMA, with regard to the centralized model and structures already in place since 1994, but also poses the question of the checks and balances in place to control the preventive surveillance practices used by the SPVM to support their insurance tactics (Waddington, 2007). Should problematization of specific political convictions, even in small doses, be tolerated? As early as 1983, Brodeur pointed out, in his study of high policing, that no legal framework could prevent the amalgamation of legal and illegal dissidents (Brodeur, 1983). Thirty years later, the analysis presented here confirms Brodeur’s initial intuition by demonstrating that institutional frameworks, specifically the framework of the GAMMA project, still struggle to prevent such an amalgamation.

References

Bellerose, M. (1999). Description de l'évolution opérationnelle des pratiques policières en maintien de l'ordre à Montréal depuis 1986 (Mémoire de maîtrise inédit, Université de Montréal). Montréal, Québec, Canada.

Google Scholar

Berger, P. L. et Luckmann, T. (1967). *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York, NY : Anchor Books.

Google Scholar

Berthomet, S. (2013). *Enquête sur la police*. Montréal, Québec : VLB Éditeur.

Google Scholar

Blanchard, E. (2013). Les « indésirables ». Passé et présent d'une catégorie d'action publique. *GISTI. Figures de l'étranger. Quelles représentations pour quelles politiques ?*, 16-26.

Google Scholar

Borum, R. et Tilby, C. (2005). Anarchist Direct Actions : A Challenge for Law Enforcement. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 28(3), 201–223.

Google Scholar [10.1080/10576100590928106](https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100590928106)

Brodeur, J.-P. (1983). High Policing and Low Policing : Remarks about the Policing of Political Activities. *Social Problems*, 30(5), 507-520.

Google Scholar [10.2307/800268](https://doi.org/10.2307/800268)

Cameron, D. (2011, 14 juillet). Une escouade surveillera les mouvements anarchistes. *La Presse*. Repéré à <http://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/justice-et-affaires-criminelles/201107/14/01-4417741-une-escouade-surveillera-les-mouvements-anarchistes.php>

Google Scholar

De Lint, W. (2004). *Public Order Policing in Canada : An Analysis of Operations in Recent High Stakes Events*. Rapport de recherche. Ottawa, Ontario : Ministère de la Justice. Repéré à https://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/inquiries/ipperwash/policy_part/research/pdf/deLint.pdf

Google Scholar

De Lint, W. et Hall, A. (2009). *Intelligent Control. Developments in Public Order Policing in Canada*. Toronto, Ontario : University of Toronto Press.

Google Scholar [10.3138/9781442689831](https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442689831)

della Porta, D. et Reiter, H. (1998). *Policing Protest. The Control of Mass Demonstrations in Western Democracies*. Minneapolis, MN : University of Minnesota Press.

Google Scholar

Document A. (s.d.). Document caviardé (sans date, sans titre) présentant le contenu de trois sections (Historique, Enjeux et Objectifs). Montréal, Québec : Service de police de la Ville de Montréal.

Google Scholar

Document B. (2010). *Prise de décision. Projet GAMMA (Guet des activités des mouvements marginaux et anarchistes)*. Document caviardé présentant un « Exposé de la situation » et le contenu de 4 sous-sections (Quelques dates et incidents significatifs, Les niveaux d'implication, Défis pour le SPVM, Enjeux). 6 avril 2010. Montréal, Québec : Service de police de la Ville de Montréal.

Google Scholar

Dupuis-Déri, F. (2007). L'anarchie dans la philosophie politique. Réflexions anarchistes sur la typologie traditionnelle des régimes politiques. *Les ateliers de l'éthique, La revue du CREUM*, 2(1), 6-17.

Google Scholar

Dupuis-Déri, F. (2013a). Introduction. Répression policière et mouvements sociaux. Dans F. Dupuis-Déri (dir.), *À qui la rue ? Répression policière et mouvements sociaux* (p. 9-39). Montréal, Québec : Les Éditions Écosociété.

Google Scholar

Dupuis-Déri, F. (2013b). Broyer du noir. La répression policière de la « déviance politique » au Québec. Dans F. Dupuis-Déri (dir.), *À qui la rue ? Répression policière et mouvements sociaux* (p. 122- 158). Montréal, Québec : Les Éditions Écosociété.

Google Scholar

Dupuis-Déri, F. (2013c). Printemps érable ou Printemps de la matraque ? Profilage politique et répression sélective pendant la grève étudiante de 2012. Dans F. Dupuis-Déri (dir.), *À qui la rue ? Répression policière et mouvements sociaux* (p. 198-241). Montréal, Québec : Les Éditions Écosociété.

Google Scholar

Dupuis-Déri, F. (2014). Émergence de la notion de « profilage politique » : répression policière et mouvements sociaux au Québec. *Politique et Sociétés*, 33(3), 31-56.

Google Scholar 10.7202/1027939ar

Fassin, D. (1996). Exclusion, underclass, marginilidad. Figures contemporaines de la pauvreté urbaine en France, aux États-Unis et en Amérique Latine. *Revue Française de Sociologie*, 37(1), 37-75.

Google Scholar [10.2307/3321945](#)

Gillham, P. F. et Noakes, J. A. (2007). "More than a March in a Circle" : Transgressive Protests and the Limits of Negotiated Management. *Mobilization : An International Quarterly*, 12(4), 341-357.

Google Scholar

Hall, A. et De Lint, W. (2003). Policing Labour in Canada. *Policing and Society*, 13(3), 219-234.

Google Scholar [10.1080/10439460308035](#)

Harvey, D. (1989). From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism : The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism. *Geografiska Annaler*, 71(1), 3-17.

Google Scholar [10.2307/490503](#)

Hoggett, J. et Stott, C. (2010). The Role of Crowd Theory in Determining the Use of Force in Public Order Policing. *Policing and Society : An International Journal of Research and Policy*, 20(2), 223-236.

Google Scholar [10.1080/10439461003668468](#)

Lemieux, F. (2005). De la police guidée par le renseignement à la complexité des appareils policiers : les limites de l'usage des renseignements dans la conduite des affaires policières. *Criminologie*, 38(2), 65-89.

Google Scholar [10.7202/012662ar](#)

Lemonde, L., Bourbeau, A., Fortin, F., Joly, E. et Poisson, J. (2014). La répression judiciaire et législative durant la grève. Dans M. Ancelovici et F. Dupuis-Déri (dir.), *Un printemps rouge et noir : Regards croisés sur la grève étudiante de 2012* (p. 295-326). Montréal, Québec : Les Éditions Écosociété.

Google Scholar

Ligue des droits et libertés, Association des juristes progressistes et Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante. (2013). *Répression, discrimination et grève étudiante*. Rapport. Avril 2013. Repéré à <http://liguedesdroits.ca/wp-content/fichiers/rapport-2013-repression-discrimination-et-greve-etudiante.pdf>

Google Scholar

Merton, R. K. (1995). The Thomas Theorem and the Matthew Effect. *Social Forces*, 74(2), 379-424.

Google Scholar [10.2307/2580486](#)

Monaghan, J. et Walby, K. (2012). "They Attacked the City" : Security Intelligence, the Sociology of Protest Policing and the Anarchist Threat at the 2010 Toronto G20 Summit. *Current Sociology*, 60(5), 653-671.

Google Scholar [10.1177/0011392112448470](https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=fr&user=0011392112448470)

Noakes, J. et Gillham, P. F. (2006). Aspects of the "New Penology" in the Police Response to Major Political Protests in the United States, 1999-2000. Dans D. della Porta, A. Peterson et H. Reiter (dir.), *The Policing of Transnational Protest* (p. 97-115). Londres, Royaume-Uni : Ashgate.

Google Scholar

Pellerin, H. (2011). De la migration à la mobilité : changement de paradigme dans la gestion migratoire. Le cas du Canada. *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, 27(2), 57-75.

Google Scholar [10.4000/remi.5435](https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=fr&user=10.4000/remi.5435)

Quivy, R. et Van Campenhoudt, L. (2006). *Manuel de recherche en sciences sociales*. Paris, France : Dunod.

Google Scholar

Renaud, D. (2011a, 8 juillet). Policiers blessés : Quatre manifestants du 1er mai arrêtés. *Journal de Montréal*. Repéré à <http://fr.canoe.ca/cgi-bin/imprimer.cgi?id=962078>.

Google Scholar

Renaud, D. (2011b, 14 juillet). Manifestants : La police veut serrer la vis : quatre militants anticapitalistes accusés d'avoir frappé des agents de la paix. *Journal de Montréal*.

Google Scholar

Rousseau, M. (2008). La ville comme machine à mobilité. Capitalisme, urbanisme et gouvernement des corps. *Métropoles*, 3, 181-206.

Google Scholar

Sibley, D. (1995). *Geographies of Exclusion : Society and Difference in the West*. Londres, Royaume-Uni/New York, NY : Routledge.

Google Scholar [10.4324/9780203430545](https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=fr&user=10.4324/9780203430545)

Sylvestre, M., Bernier, D. et Bellot, C. (2015). Zone Restrictions Orders in Canadian Courts and the Reproduction of Socio-Economic Inequality. *Onati Socio-Legal Series*, 5(1), 280-297.

Google Scholar

Sylvestre, M., Damon, W., Blomley, N. et Bellot, C. (2015). Spatial Tactics in Criminal Courts and the Politics of Legal Technicalities. *Antipode – A Radical Journal of Geography*, 47(5), 1-21.

Google Scholar

Vant, A. (1984). Géographie sociale et marginalité. Dans *Marginalité sociale, marginalité spatiale* (p. 13-26). Paris, France : CNRS.

[Google Scholar](#)

Waddington, D. (2007). *Policing Public Disorder. Theory and Practice*. Portland, OR : Willan Publishing.

[Google Scholar](#)

Waddington, D. et King, M. (2005). The Disorderly Crowd : From Classical Psychological Reductionism to Socio-Contextual Theory – The Impact on Public Order Policing Strategies. *Howard Journal*, 44(5), 490-503.

[Google Scholar 10.1111/j.1468-2311.2005.00393.x](#)

Wood, L. J. (2014). *Crisis and Control. The Militarization of Protest Policing*. Londres, Royaume-Uni : Pluto Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

Wood, L. J. (2015). Reorganizing Repression : Policing Protest, 1995-2012. Dans M. E. Beare, N. Des Rosiers et A. C. Deshman (dir.), *Putting the State on Trial : The Policing of Protest during the G20 Summit* (p. 44-63). Vancouver, Colombie-Britannique : UBC Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

Worth, S. R. (2010). Intelligent Control : Developments in Public Order Policing in Canada (review). *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, 25(1), 108-110.

[Google Scholar 10.1017/S0829320100010255](#)

Des savoirs policiers sur les « mouvements marginaux ». Les constructions du projet GAMMA du SPVM

Résumé

Contribuant à la littérature sociologique et criminologique sur la police en contexte de foule et sur la marginalité, cet article présente une analyse de la construction des savoirs policiers relatifs à l'implantation, en 2010, du controversé projet GAMMA (Guet des activités et des mouvements marginaux et anarchistes) du Service de police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM). Des documents obtenus, au terme d'un épisode juridique de plus de deux ans, montrent que loin de reposer uniquement sur des événements criminalisables, la mise en place de GAMMA puise plus fondamentalement dans une problématisation de la marginalité politique de groupes sociaux. Nous présentons comment les mouvements marginaux sont implicitement opérationnalisés en

indicateurs visibles et comment la problématisation de convictions politiques spécifiques et de caractéristiques, loin de constituer des indicateurs de criminalité, amalgame ces mouvements à un potentiel criminel, enjoignant les policiers de GAMMA à adopter des attitudes de suspicion généralisée à leur égard. L'article explore la subjectivité des savoirs policiers sur lesquels repose l'institutionnalisation, à l'échelle municipale, d'une réponse policière supplémentaire ciblant de façon différentielle ces mouvements marginaux. Nous inscrivons nos résultats de recherche au sein de la littérature scientifique, notamment au regard des thèses de la « neutralisation stratégique », du « contrôle intelligent » et des « paysages d'exclusion ».

Mots-clés

Police, surveillance, mouvements sociaux, marginalité, Québec.

Los saberes policiales sobre los movimientos marginales. Las construcciones del proyecto GAMMA del SPVM

Resumen

Contribuyendo a la literatura sociológica y criminológica sobre la policía en contexto de masas y sobre la marginalidad, el artículo presenta un análisis de la construcción de los saberes policiales relativos a la implantación, en 2010, del controversial proyecto GAMMA (vigilancia de las actividades y de los movimientos anarquistas) del Servicio de policía de la Ciudad de Montreal (SPVM). Los documentos obtenidos al término de un episodio jurídico de más de dos años demuestran que lejos de fundarse únicamente sobre los eventos susceptibles de criminalización, la puesta en marcha de GAMMA problematiza profundamente la marginalidad política de los grupos sociales. Presentamos cómo los movimientos marginales son implícitamente instrumentalizados en indicadores visibles y cómo problematizar las convicciones políticas específicas así como las características que, lejos de ser indicadores de criminalidad, amalgaman dichos movimientos a un potencial criminal, prescribiendo a los policías de GAMMA de adoptar actitudes de sospecha generalizada para con ellos. El presente artículo explora la subjetividad de los saberes policiales sobre los cuales reposa la institucionalización, a nivel municipal, de una respuesta policíaca suplementaria que apunta diferencialmente a los movimientos marginales. Inscribimos los resultados de nuestra investigación en el seno de la literatura científica, específicamente en virtud de las tesis de « neutralización estratégica », del « control inteligente » y de los « paisajes de exclusión ».

Palabras clave

Policía, vigilancia, movimientos sociales, marginalidad, Québec.