

"Rendering the Invisible, Visible": A Day and Night on Notre-Dame Street in Saint-Henri, Quebec, June 12, 1895

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ABSTRACT

This paper challenges gendered spheres of action by arguing that the mechanisms of social space arising from the timing and rhythmic patterns of people's lives are linked to activities outside and inside the home. It employs newspaper coverage of a trial resulting from domestic violence in Saint-Henri, Quebec, on June 13, 1895 to reconstitute events on Notre-Dame Street the previous day, an episodic drama revealing a complex range of shared and alternative spaces conditioned by relations to the mode of production and social reproduction.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article défie les sphères d'action entre les sexes en discutant que les mécanismes de l'espace social qui émergent des modèles de choix du moment et rythmiques de la vie des gens sont reliés aux activités au foyer et hors du foyer. Il se sert des reportages dans les journaux du procès qui a résulté de la violence domestique à Saint-Henri, Québec, le 13 juin, 1895, pour reconstituer les événements de la veille de la rue Notre-Dame, un drame épisodique qui révèle un rayon complexe d'espaces partagés et alternatifs conditionnés par des relations entre le mode de production et la reproduction sociale.

Who hasn't experienced invisibility at some level: the anonymity of rambling in a ghettoized urban space; nominal inclusion at an exclusive gathering in light of differing financial means or social status; brought by circumstance into the company of an otherwise close-knit circle of friends; or engaged in an awkward conversation with a group of estranged schoolmates? One's sense of self is at best obscured, or at worst, obliterated, through the structural confinement of social, political, economic and moral forces. By definition, one's physical presence is real, but not duly noted. Social and urban historians have similarly lamented the "invisibility" of certain people in the written public record of the nineteenth-century city, particularly the working classes, women, children and the marginal social elements whose voices are rare in traditional sources and denied expression by the "invisibility" of alternative sources in the writing of traditional history (Burke 2001, 9-10; Katz 1975). Historians have recently employed both conventional and original sources to disclose the inclusive nature of the participant public in nineteenth and twentieth-century Canadian towns

and cities (Adams and Gossage 1998; Bradbury 1993; Parr 1990; Ward 1990).

As Michael Katz has observed in his classic study of mid-nineteenth-century Hamilton, in the province of Ontario, the historian of a working-class community has the authority to take back what is real, to render the invisible, visible (1975, 16). A case study of Notre-Dame Street, the main street of the industrial Montreal, Quebec, suburb of Saint-Henri from 1875 to 1905, reveals that in spite of the limitations of existing sources, possibilities exist for the reconstruction of working-class and female experience in the late nineteenth-century urban environment. As the site of a vibrant working-class culture and a visible female public presence, a local street in an industrializing community is a useful perspective from which to analyze the class and gender relations of a modern Western city.

By 1901, with a population of 21,192, Saint-Henri was the province of Quebec's third largest city and the eleventh most populous city in Canada. Its growth surpassed that of any other which developed in the same period. Francophones (93 percent) and Roman Catholics (85.5 percent)

made up the vast majority of Saint-Henri's population from 1881 to 1901 (Government of Canada). Profiting from the exchange value of land, *grande* and *petite bourgeoisie* busily acquired property, staking out their respective territories in an expanding suburb. A small group of Saint-Henri contractors and manufacturers dominated local government and represented a *bourgeoisie* of a different scale, a second stratum to that of the *grande bourgeoisie* of Montreal.

Land and property transactions on Notre-Dame Street, known as Saint-Joseph Street in 1881, indicate that rapid urban expansion in the late 1870s and 1880s profited both an anglophone *grande bourgeoisie* of Montreal, who dominated land speculation and ownership of vacant lots (29 percent of total property value), and an established resident francophone *petite bourgeoisie* who owned most properties (58 percent of the property value). Skilled tradesmen controlled 13 percent of property value (Lord 2000, 77-93). Female household heads and a single shop renter accounted for only 2.8 percent of Saint-Joseph Street properties, although in 1881 women headed an estimated 8.7 percent of households in Montreal (Olson 1989). Three-quarters of the population, "the majority tenant classes" occupied upper flats on the main streets and homes on adjoining streets.

This paper contributes to Quebec social and gender history by integrating a wide variety of written and visual sources, ranging from newspapers, municipal tax and evaluation rolls, manuscript censuses, city directories, notarial contracts and sketches by courtroom artists. I argue that the rhythms of the lives of women, men and children engaged in street activities and events are revealing mechanisms of social space. I begin by considering phenomenological Marxist and Anglo-American feminist theory to demonstrate that a person's relation to the mode of production and social reproduction shapes subjective experience and social reality, which in turn govern the rhythms of local street space. In the second section, I recreate an actual day and night on the street from the perspective of different individuals and families over the course of a summer day. Newspaper reports of courtroom testimony over a six-month period resulting from a critical moment of domestic violence on June 13, 1895, permit me to reconstitute events of the previous day. Such

coverage indicates a legal recourse to social justice which established the female virtue of the victim and revealed a local defence of neighbourhood street use. I explore a gendered treatment of social space, contributing to a body of feminist literature that challenges the theory of gendered spheres of action.

CLASS, GENDER, SPACE AND SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Canadian social historians have devoted considerable discussion in recent years to the significance of historical materialism and Marxist class analysis in historical inquiry (McKay 1995-6; Palmer 1997; Valverde 1995).¹ Their concerns have been motivated by both a "growing unease with the fragmentation of the historical record" (Ryan 1997, 3) on the part of social scientists since the early 1980s and a phenomenological school of thought. Growing disenchantment with the emphasis on a scientific interpretation of Marxist theory with a "quantitative" methodology in the social sciences of the 1970s has driven appeals for a more complete treatment of the self. Phenomenological scholars have "asserted the importance of identity, perception, intention and resistance, subjective responses to place, the distinctive experience of each individual life and each cohort in history" (Olson 1986, 3). These tendencies have spawned a more diverse theoretical orientation and greater tolerance amongst various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Some consensus appears to have emerged that a Marxian class analysis can be rescued as a valid historical construction of late nineteenth-century urban society through an integral treatment of the "dialectic of mind and material reality" (Sweeny 1993, 71) or the metaphor of base, structure and superstructure (Givertz and Klee 1993, 116; Lefebvre 1958, 64).

In effect, Marx was a deeply humanist materialist, and the historical interpretation of subjective experience is enhanced by the Marxian theory of alienation, where he argues that the material basis of class oppression leads to a degrading human experience (Marx 1971, 66; McLellan 1973, 143). The young Marx perceived unbridled capitalism as reducing people's relations to material objects or things, resulting in the

deterioration of emotional and spiritual fulfilment. The writings of both the young and old Marx treat the whole person and "compel a collaboration of heart and mind" (Olson 1986, 1). In a study of Marx's method of dialectical phenomenology, Roslyn Wallach Bologh has observed that "*The Grundrisse* is particularly important as it combines the humanistic, philosophical concerns found in Marx's early writings with the technical analysis found in *Capital*" (1979, xi). A holistic treatment of Marxian philosophy hence provides the theoretical underpinnings for a more sensitive engagement with people's everyday lives on a late nineteenth-century street.

The writings of Henri Lefebvre, a French Marxist philosopher and sociologist, and Gaston Bachelard, a French philosopher, demonstrate the convergence of Marxist and phenomenological thought. For Lefebvre, the politics of public space are characterized by various forms of material exchange and class distinctions with numerous cultural implications. He argues that every society creates its own social space and that social practice derives from the demands of economic production and social reproduction. In his estimation, different classes have appropriated, managed and exploited space to suit their own historical purposes (1974). In *Éléments de rythmanalyse, La production de l'espace* and *La vie quotidienne*, Lefebvre enhances our analysis of everyday experience and critical moments of celebration and tragedy which punctuate the rhythms of daily street life (1992; 1968).

Gaston Bachelard extrapolates on the metaphysics of the imagination and the variations of subjective responses to a sense of place. In *La poétique de l'espace*, Bachelard asks the reader « de ne pas prendre une image comme un objet, encore moins comme un substitut d'objet, mais d'en saisir la réalité spécifique » (1981, 3). He claims that objects "speak" to us, presenting problems which demand solutions and constant reflection. In the course of a walk on a street, for instance, one is confronted with a series of stimuli which elicit individual responses tied to our memories and our intimate self (1981, 10-21).

Despite the usefulness of a Marxian conceptual framework as a method for categorizing social and class relations and a more integral treatment of subjective experience in a spatial

context, limitations exist with regard to the subject of gender. Because Marx gave little consideration to female class oppression (*The Woman Question* 1951, 27-40), the question of gender as a tool of historical analysis has been problematic for many contemporary Marxist feminist historians (Bradbury 1987; Scott 1999). Anglo-American feminist theorists have attempted to reconcile feminist critiques within a Marxian tradition (Benston 1970; Eisenstein 1979; Kelly 1984; Rowbotham 1973).

Joan Kelly has posited a capitalist patriarchal social order where women's activities relate to their work both outside and in the home. In her words, the Marxist feminist "perspective unifies what is at once an economically and a sexually based social reality." A sex/gender system and a system of productive relations operate simultaneously to reproduce the socioeconomic and male-dominant structures of that particular social order. She has observed that "it has been a strength of patriarchy in all its historic forms to assimilate itself so perfectly to socioeconomic, political and cultural structures as to be virtually invisible" (1984, 61).

Zillah Eisenstein has argued that a cohesive socialist feminist political theory evolves from a dialectical approach which uses Marxist class analysis as the thesis, and radical feminist patriarchal analysis as the antithesis, both interrelated through the sexual division of labour. In her estimation, feminist empowerment draws from the Marxist theory of alienation and the dualities of consumption and family. Eisenstein acknowledges that reproduction is the first source of the division of labour in *The German Ideology* (1979, 6-16).

Several American feminist Marxist historians of public space have linked class ideology to gendered social practices. Mary Ryan (1990; 1992), Christine Stansell (1982; 1987) and Temma Kaplan (1977; 1992), have scoured original and traditional sources, situating the female more accurately as an active participant in public space and in the political economy of the nineteenth-century city. Their interpretations challenge the liberal discourse of a capitalist political economy. Liberal politics is based on the spatial practices of inclusion and exclusion which are "tied to the way a society constructs and administers its locations and eligibilities to participate in them." In effect the politics of

exclusion and inclusion creates divisions "between private and public space, industrial space and leisure space, educational space and family space (among others)" (Shapiro 1993, 54). This body of feminist historical writing attempts to modify the perspective that a dichotomy divided the nineteenth-century world into female private spaces and male public spheres. Taken together with other forms of collective and communal sociability amongst the working classes and marginal social elements, the realities of the female presence on the city streets defied the parameters of liberal discourse. This resistance reveals class antagonisms.

The convergence of Marxist and phenomenological thought is central to my approach. The writings of Henri Lefebvre, in particular, combine the historical constructs of class position and structural history with a critique of everyday life. Lefebvre's "rythmnanalysis" traces the relations of linear time and circular time, drawing important connections between spatial structures and subjective experience. Lefebvre argues that people's daily experience of social space is governed by these two perceptions of time: through the cycles of our body, which are circular and tied to nature; and the structures of society, which are repetitive and linear (1992, 13-8). Of specific relevance is Lefebvre's "theory of moments," which allows us to situate a critical "moment of truth" in the everyday (1992, 34). His acute analysis of everyday life is particularly pertinent to the female experience as well as that of children, the working classes and other marginalized groups where he asserts that:

...les tâches fastidieuses, les humiliations, la vie de la classe ouvrière, la vie des femmes pèse la quotidienneté. L'enfant et l'enfance toujours recommencé. Les rapports élémentaires avec des choses, avec les besoins et l'argent, comme avec les marchands et les marchandises. Le règne du nombre. Le rapport immédiat avec le secteur non dominé du réel (la santé, le désir, la santé, la spontanéité, la vitalité). Le répétitif. Les survivances de la pénurie et le prolongement de la rareté: le domaine de l'économie, de l'abstinence, de

la répression des désirs, de la mesquine avarice. (1968, 71-2)

For Lefebvre, although everyday life may weigh heaviest on women and other disempowered groups, it also "provides women realms for fantasy and desire, for rebellion and assertion arenas outside of bureaucratic systemization" (McLeod 1997, 18).

The phenomenological analysis of Gaston Bachelard nuances these individual and social perceptions of space, linking causal events with psychic reactions. Brief and isolated acts, a singular image or movement, a specific spatial arrangement, incite both individual and shared, subjective and objective, intuitive and cognitive, rational and irrational perceptions of space, which encompass the metaphysics of the imagination. In his words, «L'espace est vécu, non pas dans sa positivité, mais avec toutes les partialités de l'imagination, » where *un espace heureux*, *un espace louangé*, and *un espace d'hostilité* can evoke a range of human values (1981, 17).

The confluence of space, class, gender and subjective experience is revealed in the daily life of Mélina Massé, the victim, and those of her neighbours on Notre-Dame Street in Saint-Henri. Lefebvre's "rythmanalysis" is especially relevant in that it allows us to position a melodrama alongside true "history." Mélina's daily life was at once governed by the rising of the sun, her awakening and those of children and husband, and the household routine which a working day entailed (Ursel 1992, 5).² The structures of society are evidenced by the delivery of milk on her doorstep, the passing of her neighbours to morning mass, the opening of stores, and the departure of her husband Napoléon for work. Mélina's apprehensions regarding the interminable violations of her personal space, given the abuse she suffered at the hands of her husband, were an added dimension specific to her individual experience, which attest to her own "invisibility" (Kirby 1996; Duncan 1996).

Reflecting the international contributions noted above, the approach derives from two convergent influences in Canadian family history: Bettina Bradbury's *Working Families*, a structural analysis of female survival strategies in industrializing Montreal, and Peter Ward's treatment of a romantic liaison between a Victorian

bourgeois couple in *Courtship, Love, and Marriage*. Their differing perspectives are conditioned by current theoretical tendencies, subjective choices and the nature of the source itself. Bradbury establishes a socioeconomic base from a core of manuscript censuses (1993), whereas the expression of people's emotions and feelings derives from Ward's use of personal papers (1990).

Combining sources lends greater veracity and richness to an account of people's past lives, for it is not so much that history is a lie, but the sum of partial truths, drawn from segmented sources. This paper thus employs a wide variety of written and visual sources to serve various purposes. A social historian can reconstruct, can glean glimpses of daily reality from written documents when combined with visual sources. A semi-fictional account drawing from the critical treatment of newspaper coverage of a single event blends fact with fiction.

The methodology involves the cross-referencing of municipal tax and evaluation rolls, manuscript censuses, city directories and notarial contracts, which provide a representative sample of the people of Notre-Dame Street. Because so many traditional sources were instruments of political and economic power, they often obscure the role of the working classes, women and children. The municipal tax roll exemplifies these limitations. The gathering of property and rental taxes generated revenue for the state and records of owners' and tenants' names, as well as property and rental values, number of occupants, and the number of horses, pigs and cows kept by a household. Since the political system gave recognition to the male as "head of household," most wives and children are unnamed, appearing only in the number of occupants. *Lovell's City Directories* complement tax and evaluation rolls by providing addresses and more specific occupations, yet they too give preferential identification to male business owners and heads of households engaged in commercial exchange. The occupations and enterprises of women are rarely identified. Although manuscript censuses provide information on the religion, ethnicity, gender and age of all members of a family, one must retrace the census-taker's movements as no addresses are recorded. The notarial records of Ferdinand Faure and A.C.A. Bissonette provide complementary

information on property transactions. Newspaper coverage and the sketches of courtroom artists supply factual details. There is fiction in the gaps surrounding people and in the reality of these events (Chapman 2000). Particularly subject to historical interpretation are emotions, the instinctual reactions, often negative, that are not necessarily appropriate to the events that seem to stimulate them; and feelings, the specific responses that arise in resonance to the unique qualities of a specific moment.

The situation of a critical moment of truth in the everyday requires historical subtlety and a questioning of sources. Although Mélina's eventual fate, her murder, a tragic moment in the everyday, may have allowed me to reconstruct daily movement on the street, the question arises: why is it that an aberrant event - a critical murder - and the ensuing six-month coverage of this event in newspapers reveals more detail of everyday life than all of the other sources combined? I return to the question of the nature of historical sources. I treat the sources as *faits divers*, traces, which, taken alone, are not true "history," but by combining the structure and analysis of feeling with the structure and analysis of society, reveals particular elements of historical truth (Burke 1973, 12-5).

A DAY AND NIGHT: JUNE 12, 1895

Some things do not bear much telling. I think my father knew this. I think he knew how words can sometimes flatten the deepest emotions or pin them like wild butterflies stunned out of magnificent flight, flimsiest souvenirs of what moved and coloured air like silk. Better to imagine it. Imagine music playing, imagine light falling through clouds into the morning street. (Williams 1997, 289)

5 A.M.

Lingering in languid semi-consciousness, Mélina Massé (Figure 1) groped toward the shed to gather the morning's wood (*TG*, September 19, 1895, 3). Gazing at the muted daylight on the eastern horizon, she pondered the stillness of the morning air. In these brief moments before factory whistles blew, summoning streams of neighbouring

Figure 1
Mélina Massé



Figure 2
Napoléon Demers



Figure 3
Rosalma Sauvé



Figure 4
Mélodie Déguise



Figure 5
Charles Déguise



Figure 6
Père Décarie



Sources: Figure 1: *La Presse*, 14 juin 1895, 1; Figure 2: *The Montreal Daily Star*, June 15, 1895, 1; Figure 3: *La Presse*, 28 juin 1895, 6.

women, men and children to work, and thick coalsmoke belched forth from Merchants and other nearby factories, the city conjured up memories of her former Saint-Charles home. Blighted by the untimely deaths of both of her parents, Mélina's recollections of early childhood were scarce. Her aunt and uncle had kindly provided for her needs, and her cousins had been good companions, yet still she had longed for the warm presence of her mother and father. In young adulthood, her thoughts had

Sources: Figure 4: *La Presse*, 21 juin 1895, 1; Figure 5: *La Presse*, 28 juin 1895, 6; Figure 6: L'abbé Élie-J. Auclair, *Saint-Henri des Tanneries à Montréal*. (Montréal : Imprimerie de-La-Salle, 1942), 64-5.

often turned to them as she swept and dusted the local presbytery (Bellavance et al. 1987, 20; McCullough 1992, 164-8; *LP*, 23 septembre 1895, 6; *TG*, June 15, 1895, 3). How she had longed for happiness then. When Napoléon, a handsome carter (Figure 2), came to call, he had personified her hopes and intense desires (*LP*, 23 septembre 1895, 6). She remembered well the man she had known (Marshall 1995, 2). How had it come to this? Last night he had struck her once again after she refused



Figure 7 Site of Mélina Massé's Murder, 1895. The bedroom where the murder was committed. The cross indicates where the body was found. Source: *La Presse*, 14 juin 1895, 1.

him money for liquor (*TG*, July 20, 1895, 2; Ross 1982). She stroked the spots on her arms and legs where throbbing pains remained, a numbing reminder of his senseless but calculated violence. Chilling testimony of Napoléon's brutality and abuse remained obscured from neighbours, family and friends (*TG*, July 1, 1895, 6; *MDS*, June 28, 1895, 7; *FHWS*, July 1, 1895, 6; *LP*, 7 octobre 1895, 6).

She drew on unknown reserves of strength. Her thoughts focused on her two children, her young boy and sickly infant, and the baby she had lost last year, and the letter she had written to her sister-in-law about her miserable life with Napoléon (*TG*, June 14, 1895, 2; *MDS*, June 15, 1895, 1; *FHWS*, July 1, 1895, 6; *LP*, 23 septembre 1895, 6).³

Where did he wander nights? Just yesterday, Madame Poirier told her he had been seen at Sohmer Park last Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day with Rosalma Sauvé (Figure 3), a piano teacher from Atwater Avenue (*LP*, 24 juin 1895, 6; 7 octobre 1895, 6; *FHWS*, July 1, 1895, 6; *MDS*, June 15, 1895, 6; Lamonde et Montpetit 1989). Countless evenings she anxiously awaited, with supper warmed, his return from Latimer's Carriage Factory in Montreal (*LP*, 14 juin 1895, 1; *LPa*, 14 juin 1895, 3; *TG*, June 14, 1895, 2; *FHWS*, June 17, 1895, 10). She was tired of his drinking bouts and philanderings, and of the frequent moves since their arrival in Montreal, but at least the downstairs neighbours, the *Déguise* (Figure 4 & 5), seemed

kind enough (*MC*, Saint-Henri, 1891, folio 3; *AVM*, *FCSH*, *Rôle d'évaluation*, 1891, P23/D1, 5,6, 163; *LCD*, 1895-6, 270; *LP*, 14 juin 1895, 1; *TG*, June 14, 1895, 2; *FHWS*, July 1, 1895, 6). And last week she had met Père Décarie (Figure 6) on Notre-Dame Street as she returned from the home of Madame Nantel, her Sainte-Cunégonde washerwoman (*TG*, June 17, 1895, 5; *LP*, 11 septembre 1895, 3; *FHWS*, July 1, 1895, 6; Bradbury

1989, 151-2). She thought of confiding in him, expressing her unhappiness, but she feared he would think her an unfit wife and mother.

The clatter of bottles on the front steps on Notre-Dame siphoned through the lane, rousing Mélina from her reveries. They signalled the arrival of Ovila Touchette, who delivered milk between five-thirty and five-forty-five. She trudged back to the kitchen door, to begin her day's work, starting up the stove and preparing tea and toast for Napoléon and her child.

The routine of everyday life was disrupted by the murder of Mélina Massé (Figure 7) in her home at 3426 Notre-Dame Street on June 13, 1895 (*LP*, 14 juin 1895, 1; *MDS*, June 15, 1895, 1; *TG*, June 14, 1895, 2; *LPa*, 14 juin 1895, 3; *FHWS*, June 17, 1895, 10). A series of lengthy court proceedings followed. They entailed a preliminary inquest and a first and second trial at the Court of the Queen's Bench in Montreal. The prosecution's persistence in the case indicates that Napoléon Demers, her abusive husband, was thought to be guilty of the murder, yet he was acquitted on December 31, 1895 on grounds of insubstantial evidence (*LP*, 31 décembre 1895, 6; *TG*, October 9, 1895, 2). There was extensive coverage in several Montreal newspapers, including *La Presse*, *La Patrie*, *The Gazette* and *The Montreal Daily Star*. The murder trial was one of the longest in Canadian criminal history up to that point⁴ and attained national coverage in *The Family Herald* and *Weekly Star*. Sensationalist reporting included sketches of the

deceased, complete with demarcated knife wounds (*LP*, 20 juin 1895, 1). This incited a letter from Monseigneur Bruchési to *La Presse* editors, and criticism of newspaper coverage by Judge Wurtele. Both authorities called for more discretion (*TG*, September 4, 1895, 2; Felteau 1983, 304).

The murder gripped the community (*LP*, 20 juin 1895, 1). It heightened social interactions on the main street (Goffman 1966). Crowds gathered on the sidewalk the entire day, discussing the crime and the family of the victim (*MDS*, June 15, 1895, 1). Initially, women feared for their safety in their own homes. As the murder trial progressed, interest mounted. Courtroom dramas were a source of free entertainment for many nineteenth-century Montrealers, and crowds flocked to the preliminary inquest at the Saint-Henri town hall (Bradbury 1993, 47; *TG*, June 18, 1895, 3). An estimated three hundred spectators, mostly female, crowded the courtroom; many of them brought their lunches and knitting and participated noisily (*TG*, June 20, 1895, 5; *LP*, 23 septembre 1895, 6). The trial became the subject of a popular musical drama, entitled "La plainte de Demers," published in leaflet form by *La Presse* (10 octobre 1895, 6).

Newspaper coverage reflects a range of contemporary social mores, notably a social awareness of the injustice of domestic violence (Fingard 1994, 211), a cult of female domesticity and racial prejudices. Of primary concern was establishing the female virtue of the victim (Dubinsky and Iacovetta 1991). In the week following the murder, *The Gazette* reported that "Mrs. Demers was a good looking woman of thirty years of age, all who knew her say that she was most ladylike and quiet in her habits," and that she was "industrious and a good housekeeper" (*TG*, June 14, 1895, 2; June 20, 1895, 5). She was deemed "the best of wives and all her neighbors gave her a reputation that any woman would be proud to bear" (*TG*, June 15, 3). The first suspects were Syrian street peddlars who made periodic visits to homes selling leaf tobacco, religious ornaments, trinkets, scissors and knives (*LP*, 1 février 1895, 6; *AVM*, *FCSH*, *Règlements*, P23/B2,2, pp. 51-60, 69-70). Newspaper reports reveal elements of bigotry, racism and distrust of these peddlars (*TG*, June 14, 2; June 20, 1895, 2; *LP*, 15 juin 1895, 6). Isolated from the majority francophone and anglophone communities, a group of Syrians

inhabited an apartment block in central Montreal (*TG*, June 15, 1895, 3; *LP*, 15 juin 1895, 6; *FHWS*, June 17, 1895, 10). Both English and French newspapers reveal racist attitudes. A *La Presse* account on June 15, 1895 notes that:

On croit généralement à Saint-Henri que l'auteur du crime est un colporteur. Durant les dernières semaines, Saint-Henri et Sainte-Cunégonde ont été envahis par une nuée de colporteurs de toute nuance qui pénétraient dans les maisons sans s'annoncer, et qui, une fois à l'intérieur, ne sortaient que sous l'effet de menace. C'est la même chose un peu partout dans la ville. Quand les hommes ne sont pas à la maison, ce qui arrive presque toujours, ces gens sont d'une indolence et d'une grossièreté inconcevables. Sous prétexte qu'ils ne comprennent pas un mot de français ou anglais, ils refusent de s'en aller quand on le leur dit. Beaucoup ne partent pas sans que l'on recourt aux moyens violents (*LP*, 15 juin 1895, 6).

On the same day, *The Gazette* reported that "one lady was surprised to find one of the Syrian genus in her bedroom, and when she told him to get out he simply grinned until she set the dog on him, when he got out" (*TG*, June 15, 1895, 3). This newspaper commentary was indicative of a widespread phenomenon that persisted until the early twentieth century, resulting in federal government attempts to restrict Syrian and Jewish immigration in 1900 (*LP*, 13 août 1900, 1).

The case raises many implications for the gendered analysis of social space in a working-class milieu. It contributes to a body of feminist historical writing, the works of Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall (1991), Mary Ryan (1990, 1992, 1997) and Christine Stansell (1982, 1987) who "modify traditional perspectives on women's role in the family by challenging the dichotomy that divided the nineteenth-century world into female domestic and male economic spaces" (Harvey 1991, 12-3). The crucial elements of daily life and social practice stemming from this tragic event demonstrate that the social exchanges of working-class life transcend the dichotomies of public and private.



Figure 8

Ten-year old Jules Bergeron appeared as a witness in Méliņa Masse's murder trial. He testified to his activities near the scene of the crime.

Source: *La Presse*, 4 juillet 1895, 6.

A trial of this sort meant that "private, individual acts of violence were no longer hidden from public view in the home" (Harvey 1991, 1). From the moment when Madame Nantel found Méliņa dead on the bedroom floor (Figure 7) with her sick baby by her side at 2:35 P.M. on June 13, 1895, the domestic violence was open to public scrutiny. Madame Nantel alerted local authorities and neighbours gathered at the scene of the crime. Chief Massy of the Saint-Henri Police force, Coroner McMahon and Père Décarie (Figure 6) arrived shortly thereafter (*LP*, 14 juin 1895, 1; *MDS*, June 15, 1895, 1; *TG*, June 14, 1895, 2; *LPa*, 14 juin 1895, 3; *FHWS*, June 17, 1895, 10).

This murder case could form part of a broader study examining domestic violence situations in various class contexts within the same time frame and different locales (Gordon 1988; Strange 1995, 293-304). In view of the proximity of dwellings, the thinness of walls, the amount of traffic on the street and neighbourhood ties, the murder appears to have premeditated and carefully orchestrated (*TG*, June 20, 1895, 5). The downstairs neighbours, Charles and Mélodie Déguise (Figures 4 & 5) testified to having heard no unusual sounds throughout the day. Their only departure from their shop and home prior to the murder was for five o'clock morning mass at Église Saint-Henri celebrating the Feast of Corpus Christi or Fête-Dieu (*MDS*, June 14, 1895, 7; *FHWS*, June 17, 1895, 10;

LPa, 14 juin 1895, 3; *LP*, 14 juin 1895, 1; *TG*, June 14, 1895, 2).

Significant residential mobility in late nineteenth-century Montreal (Gilliland 1998) may have contributed to a breakdown in social support networks and the lack of community intervention to prevent the crime. The Demers family had only lived in this dwelling for a month and a half. Prior to this move, they reportedly had lived in Saint-Henri, at the corner of Richelieu and Atwater, and in Hochelaga (*TG*, June 14, 1895, 2; *MDS*, June 26, 1895, 6; *LP*, 19 juillet 18895, 6). In the course of court proceedings, family members and a former boarder testified to having witnessed Napoléon's abuse of his wife and child (*TG*, July 1, 1895, 6; July 20, 1895, 2; September 4, 1895, 2). Méliņa's appeals for help were directed to family in Saint-Charles, and not to neighbours in Saint-Henri or Montreal (Olson 1997). Her entrusting of the care of her eldest child to grandparents in Saint-Charles prior to the murder may have resulted from the occurrence of escalating abuse characteristic of the cycle of domestic violence (*FHWS*, September 9, 1895, 11; Thorne-Finch 1992).

5:45 A.M.

Barely awakened from the slumber of his warm bed, widower Norbert Émond joined his daughter Caroline for morning coffee after she had awakened the children for school (*LCD*, 1895-6, 270; *MC*, Saint-Henri, 1891, folio 10; *AVM*, *FCSH*, *Rôle d'évaluation* 1891, P23/D1, 5, 6, 143; *LP*, 9 avril 1896, 8; 29 octobre 1896, 8; 9 février 1897, 4). After bidding her goodbye, he went downstairs to open the grocery below. As he swept the dust off the wooden sidewalk, he noticed Napoléon Demers (Figure 2) entering Charles Lachapelle's butcher shop down the street. Shortly after, Napoléon crossed the street and unlocked his front door, with his brown meat package in hand (*TG*, July 23, 1895, 3; *LP*, 23 septembre 1895, 6).

Strange man, that Napoléon. Strange family altogether. Unlike his own family who had been established in the community for decades (*AVM*, *FCSH*, *Rôle d'évaluation* 1881, P23/D1,2; 1891, P23/D1, 5, 6; *MC*, Saint-Henri, 1891, folio 10), Napoléon, his wife and children had just moved in above the Déguise family at the corner of

Notre-Dame and Rose-de-Lima Streets in May (*MDS*, June 26, 1895, 6). Last week, Lucien Boucher, a Saint-Henri inn-keeper, had told him that Napoléon was a frequent customer at his tavern (*LP*, 24 septembre 1895, 4; *TG*, September 24, 1895, 2; *FHWS*, July 1, 1895, 10). In the short time he had lived in Saint-Henri, Napoléon had gained a reputation for his late night drinking bouts. Neighbours had mentioned that Méлина, Napoléon's wife, was somewhat shy and reserved, preferring to keep to herself (*TG*, September 13, 1895, 5; 15 juillet 1895, 6). She often walked home alone after Sunday mass rather than mixing with the crowd (*TG*, July 20, 1895, 2).

10 A.M.

The gentle rhythm of Méлина Cantin's deft fingers slipped the needle in and out, in and out of the olive green felt hat (*LCD*, 1895-6, 270; *MC*, Saint-Henri, 1891, folio 52). She took special pride in putting the finishing touches to an elaborate creation commissioned by Mary Brodie (*AVM*, *FCSH*, *Rôle d'évaluation* 1895, P23/D1, 10, 123; *LCD*, 1895-6, 270; *MC*, Saint-Henri, 1891, folio 23). The widow could have afforded a Montreal hatmaker, but chose to come to Méлина instead. As she arranged three fine feathers on the wide brim, she envisioned Mary proudly descending the steps of a Notre-Dame Street shop on a Sunday stroll.

People occasionally questioned her need to work and her status as a married woman operating her own business. Louis' milk delivery job did not always bring in enough cash to feed the family of nine and cover the rent of the home and shop (*TG*, July 1, 1895, 6; September 14, 1895, 3; *LP*, 2 juillet 1895, 6). Operating a shop offered flexibility. The children could enter as they pleased. In the event of emergencies, like Frédéric's accident on the train tracks last year, she simply displayed a sign, indicating her imminent return. As she scanned the room, proudly displaying her various works, she felt an immense satisfaction in her abilities, her achievements and independence. The jingle of the storefront door signalled the arrival of another customer.

12:20 P.M.

Despite his mother's request, ten-year old Jules Bergeron (Figure 8) stubbornly refused to fetch milk for neighbour Monsieur Migneault (*MC*, Saint-Henri, 1891, folio 113). Perched on a wooden box in a lane off Notre-Dame Street (*LP*, 4 juillet 1895, 6), his contemplations of the universe and the unfairness of his daily chores were distracted by the calls of a Syrian pedlar. He bounded toward the cart of goods, negotiating the bustling crowd of the main street. His father, a railway gatekeeper, said these Syrians were no good and that he should stay away from them, but the trinkets fascinated him (*TG*, June 15, 1895, 3; *LP*, 28 avril 1903, 1; *FHWS*, June 17, 1895, 10). His friend Cécile, a servant in a wealthy home (Lacelle 1987) assured him that the pedlar who visited her often was very kind.

3 P.M.

Michael Dineel stepped onto the street after his latest appearance before Judge Larochelle at the Saint-Henri Recorder's Court. Joining William O'Brien later for beer on the sidewalk, he chuckled as he recounted his retort to the judge's questioning. When asked why he drank so much, he had replied, "I am neither priest nor minister. Every man has his weakness. Mine is drink." (*LP*, 23 juillet 1895, 6; 24 février 1896, 6; *TG*, September 24, 1895, 2).

6:35 P.M.

Exhausted, thirteen-year old Élisabeth could barely put one foot before the other as she crossed the main street on her return home from work at Merchants. The voice of her companion Ovide was barely audible as he vented tales of the foreman's cruelty. Her mother said that at twelve, Ovide was too young to be working as a bobbin boy and that he should be in school. As they approached his darkened home, she lamented the fact that his father was a day labourer often out of work. Her own father has just been rehired at Williams. She thought of bringing Ovide some warm soup later to comfort his aching bones and broken spirit.

Black bag in hand, Doctor Joseph Lenoir rushed to the home of a sick patient. He was troubled by the sight of the two beleaguered

children crossing the street toward him. The image of his own healthy seven-year old son Joseph, whom he had just embraced a few moments ago, came to mind (*MC*, Saint-Henri, 1891, folio 42). He pondered the constant demands of daily rounds and the sense of futility arising from numerous infant deaths. He worried about the recent arrival of so many poor working families, and the deplorable conditions at Merchants. He recalled the tense negotiations of the 1891 strike, when workers took to the streets (Bellavance et al., 20).

7:30 P.M.

Clara Lanctôt stood before the mirror in her comfortable bedroom, adjusting a corset and assessing her red velvet dress for attending tonight's musical performance of *L'Homme au figure de cire* by the Cercle Dramatique (*MC*, Saint-Henri, 1891, folio 88; *LCD*, 1895-6, 270; *LP*, 12 mars 1895, 1). The town hall was a modest venue, but she looked forward to meeting friends, neighbours and patients of her devoted husband. In part, she did this for Joseph's sake. She was also anxious to outdo Madame Eugène Guay, who was so proud of her elaborate Parc Saint-Henri home and who so vainly presided over the prize-giving committee at the annual bazaar (Chambers 1905, 299; *LP*, 14 août 1897, 16).

8 P.M.

You could tell a man by the cut of his cloth, Louis Abinovitch mused, as he closed up his tailor shop for the day. Sighting throngs heading for a musical performance, he reflected on the loneliness of his craft, the absence of a larger Jewish community and synagogue in Saint-Henri, and the prospect of opening up a larger store one day. He consoled himself by sharing with his brothers William and Jacob his fragmented childhood memories of Russia and the joy and peace his religion brought him. Together they celebrated the sabbath and read from the Torah (*LCD*, 1895-6, 270; *AVM*, *FCSH*, *Rôle d'évaluation* 1895, P23/D1, 10, 160; *MC*, Saint-Henri, 1891, folio 11; Tulchinsky 1992, 96-116, 129-30, 242).

10 P.M.

Stroking his thick dark moustache, Mayor Toussaint Aquin surveyed his dominion as he stepped out of the town hall. The fundraiser had gone well, he thought. The community was prospering and his contracting business was showing substantial gains. In his typically jovial fashion, he greeted John Guest, the Grand Trunk clerk who was returning home to his wife Mary and their three children after closing up the station for the night (*MC*, Saint-Henri, 1891, folio 20).

MIDNIGHT

Victoria Johnson's yelps pierced the eerie stillness of the moist night air. Confused feelings periodically overcame her, leading her to wander the streets whilst others slept (*TG*, December 11, 1895, 3; *LP*, 11 juin 1896, 1). Although accustomed to her uncontrolled and drunken behaviour, Mélina Massé and other Saint-Henri women were awakened from their dreams by Victoria's disturbing screams. A cloud broke the full moon's silvery spell and enfolded the street once more in darkness (Highway 1998, 74).

CONCLUSION

The rhythms of street life stemming from newspaper coverage of Mélina Massé's murder disclose several mechanisms of social space in late nineteenth-century Saint-Henri. A summer day was deliberately chosen as a period of heightened activity for the urban working classes. The daily routine which took people to the street was punctuated by moments of pleasure, comedy and tragedy: special celebrations, religious holidays, parades and processions, and in this particular instance, a crime. The visibility of women, men and children in the public space of the street was intimately tied to their responsibilities in the home and workplace. Although variations in timing and rhythmic patterns were dependent on the nature of paid work and household tasks, overall the social use of the street indicates no clear distinction between public and private spaces. Movement was more clearly defined along the lines of class and gender differences. Mélina Massé's care of her husband and children, Ovila Touchette's milk

delivery, Napoléon Demers' departure for work in Montreal, Norbert Émond's opening of his grocery, for instance, entailed an early rise and a street unfolding at the crack of dawn. Relations to the mode of production and social reproduction shaped a day in the life of a housewife, a milkman, a carter and a shop-owner.

This paper illuminates the ways in which class and gender differences shaped social practices, spatial and sexual politics and economies of movement within the framework of unbridled capitalism. Relations to the mode of production and social reproduction contributed to the marked social and spatial redefinition of Montreal suburban streets which presented many inherent contradictions in the mid-1890s. The prevalent liberal economic ideology of the propertied classes may have defined a closed system, drawing a fundamental political distinction with perceived social boundaries between public space and private space, yet social claims to this physical space indicated an open system and a vibrant street culture.

A diverse range of shared and alternative spaces involved people of various classes, and of specific genders, ages, races, ethnicities and religions. These spaces were marked by the rhythmic patterns and digressions of the everyday and the unusual. Daily routine reveals that the most obvious class demarcation was between the *petite bourgeoisie* and the working classes and marginal social elements. A *petite bourgeoisie* of entrepreneurs, professionals and merchants dominated local government, philanthropic and cultural organizations. Their differing concerns are characterized by their presence at attendant rituals and leadership at various social gatherings. By necessity, they also frequented the public space of

the street. The majority tenant population, the working classes, women and children and the marginal classes shared these spaces with the *petite bourgeoisie*, but were also creating alternative spaces for themselves (Podmore 1999; Schmidt 1996). The visible presence of women on city streets is evidenced by women and children departing for and returning from work in local factories, as employees and customers in local shops, and exceptionally, as owners. For both male and female vagrants, the street was home. These concrete examples challenge the theory of gendered spheres of action.

Crises, such as murder, provoked class, gender, racial, ethnic, religious and other conflicts. The disclosure of a violent domestic dispute meant that as gender relations broke down, and events spilled onto the street, private individual acts of brutality became public. With the recourse to local justice, former acts of privacy entered the public domain of the press and the courtroom where a majority of women created an alternative space for themselves by modifying the formal atmosphere to suit their own entertainment purposes. These crises, in rendering the private, public, make it possible for the historian to render the invisible, visible.

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ENDNOTES

1. The writings of Richard Evans, Antonio Gramsci and E.P. Thompson, amongst others, have influenced the current shift in Canadian leftist historiography.

2. I employ Jane Ursel's definition of reproduction, the production of human life which involves three processes: procreation, socialization and daily maintenance.
3. Mélina Massé's baby boy died on August 31, 1895 at the home of his grandparents, during the course of her husband's court proceedings.
4. According to a *La Presse* report, the trial lasted fifty-three days and cost the state \$40,000.

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