10. Canadian Reflections on 'the Abstract Police'[1]

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Introduction

Taking as a starting point the notion of 'the Abstract Police' (Terpstra et al., 2019), this chapter argues that the transformation of 'the police' into an abstraction is a symptom of what Bauman termed 'liquid modern times', and what Marx called human alienation. Observing and interpreting the symptomatology of 'the Abstract Police' in Canada, the chapter reveals fundamental contradictions in both the professional police métier and the moral economy in which it is exercised. Putting it in philosophical terms, rather than the modern symbol of universal legality, justice and the social contract binding rational, autonomous, human subjects, the heteronomy of 'the Abstract Police' is the contradictory accomplishment of the political economy of Technopoly and its attendant 'liquid modern' culture of personalised ends, demands for individualised freedom, justice and special legal treatment for each unique case. Can police professionals in democracies reform and overcome the conditions of their own alienation? Perhaps some guiding constabulary ethic could be inculcated within professional policing and police strategic command structures re-engineered to facilitate human security and well-being? As will be argued, the alternative is continuing participation in processes that further global authoritarian drift. However, before anyone can consider the possibility that policing institutions might be reformed, it is essential to confront 'the Abstract Police'.

The modern police idea was seeded prior to the French Revolution (Bowling et al., 2019). Opinions differ as to the high point of 'the police' as the keystone of modern governance, but there is now general consensus that time has passed, and policing has entered a new phase of history. The new 'dark age' has arrived (Jacobs, 2004). Described theoretically as 'liquid modern times', history is now without foundation or destination and uncertainty seems the only certainty (Bauman, 2007 Ericson, 2007; Flusser, 2013).

The evidence strongly supports the contention that the global system is based on a highly unequal political economy (Graeber, 2011; Picketty, 2014; Shaxson, 2011, 2018; Sprague, 2009). What are the chances for social democracy to right the imbalance in a 'post-democratic' future (Crouch, 2004; Reiner, 1992; 2012; 2020)? The symptoms associated with criminal justice practices are not simply indicators of changes in political and cultural values constitutive of new meanings regarding major social structures (Garland, 2001; Loader & Mulcahy, 2003). Rather, they are indicators of real changes in the material basis of social order; technological developments that have worldwide social, cultural and political ramifications. Science and technology have merged into 'Technopoly', superseding democracy, and the age of 'surveillance capitalism' is upon us, ushering in a 'global turn to authoritarianism' (Frickel & Moore, 2006; Hannem et al., 2019; Postman, 1992; Wood, 2017; Zuboff,

2018). Further, it is now widely recognised that, in one way or another, the looming environmental crisis creates 'climate terror', inevitably bringing with it a human insecurity, crisis and conflict (Chaturvedi & Doyle, 2015; Spapens & White, 2016; Verbeek, 2019). Modern democratic police legitimacy is in tatters. From a global perspective, the politics of the police are everywhere becoming increasingly conflicted and contradictory.

This chapter argues that the authoritarian drift of policing in democratic societies is the result of misalignments between the police métier and the moral economy in which it takes place. The police métier combines the practices of tracking, surveillance, keeping watch and unending vigilance coupled with the ability to apply force up to and including fatal force, in pursuit of the organisational goals of reproducing order, making crime, managing risk and governing insecurity (Bowling et al., 2019: 36-37). Moral economy is here understood to be "the production, distribution, circulation and use of moral sentiments, emotions, and values, norms and obligations in social space" (Fassin, 2013: 263). Some readers may recall an earlier period in the history of criminology and police studies when the moral economy imbued the police métier with the 'community policing' ideal (Brodeur, 1998). Then the imagined best police officer lived in the community, walked the beat and was engaged in 'problem solving'. It is debatable whether the ethic of the 'community police officer' was achieved in practice. Today police in many of the so-called democracies of the West often look like storm troopers and are, in any case, estranged from the communities they are supposed to serve. The shift in the moral economy from then until now parallels the rise of a new kind of technology-based transnational political economy – 'Technopoly', in short (Postman, 1992). Insofar as policing is concerned, the many and varied symptoms that emerge from these tensions can be encapsulated using the overarching notion of 'the Abstract Police'. Police reformers might think the symptoms surveyed here could be addressed by training in an appropriate set of meanings within police culture (that is a 'constabulary ethic'), but the prospects are not that good (Aitchison et al., 2014; Devroe, et al 2012; Flemming 2015; Goldsmith & Sheptycki, 2007; Newburn et al., 2017; O'Rourke-Dicarlo & Sheptycki, 2011; Sheptycki, 2010; 2012).

The concept of 'the Abstract Police', first introduced by Terpstra et al. (2019), is an ideal type with two dimensions. Within police organisations, the interrelations of persons in the police division of labour have become less personal, familiar and direct and more formalised and governed by system knowledge (Terpstra et al., 2019: 343). Relations with citizens and others in the police 'external environment' are also increasingly mediated by technological means and have become less personal (Terpstra et al. 2019: 343). The notion of 'the Abstract Police' may suggest a similar dehumanisation that sociologists attributed to 'McDonaldisation' some time ago (Ritzer, 1983) or 'Uberisation' more recently (Sandhu & Fussey, 2020). All of these are manifestations of what the young Marx identified as human alienation brought about as a consequence of the division of labour, which itself continuously changes and adapts as new technological means come to hand. As the relations between

police and society are increasingly mediated through technology, the police and policing become more abstract, more alienated from the very people who practise it and those who experience it.

In the first quarter of the 21st century, the most important technological changes have to do with computers, connectivity, communications and media technology. For better and for worse, police organisations have been at the forefront of these technological innovations. Consequently, within the contemporary police division of labour there is "a sort of complete acceptance of the abstractness", and police officers believe their work is "an abstract task, with abstract responsibilities, working for abstract communities, abstract citizens, and evaluated by means of abstract performance targets and procedures" (Terpstra et al., 2019: 354). The point of view of external audiences is of an imaginary world of professional policing projected through a multiplicity of media channels to multiple audiences simultaneously. Social consensus regarding the moral economy and the rightful practice of the police métier is thereby fractured, further obscuring the abstraction (Bowling et al., 2019: 209-218; Hannem et al., 2019; Morselli & Décary-Hétu, 2013).

Terpstra and his colleagues worry that "it may be expected that the increasing abstractness will cause new conflicts within police organizations and with communities" (Terpstra et al., 2019: 355). Police in democratic jurisdictions like Scotland and the Netherlands have reportedly been "deeply concerned with the consequences of many of these changes", and some researchers and police professionals have asked

> what the relations should be between, on the one hand, the increasing emphasis of technology and the belief in 'systems', and on the other hand, the fact that the police have to work for communities and are dependent on 'the human factor'. (ibid.: 355-356)

This chapter further contributes to the discussion by considering a host of Canadian examples that symptomatise the problem of 'the Abstract Police', understood as a conceptual stand-in for a specific facet of a more generalised human alienation. People suppose that communications and information technologies 'connect' them to others, but, in fact, the opposite is the case, and the idea of a technologically 'connected world' is an ideological inversion. The 'global networked society' is achieved by processes of mediated communications that are, in fact, *in-between* human agents (cf. Castells, 2011; 2015). Under these conditions the idea of 'the police' has become an abstraction. The police were once part of a set of modern symbols ultimately signalling the ideal of universal legality, justice and a social contract binding all rational, autonomous, human subjects. The 'Abstract Police' offers a more fluid conception. What is to be done about 'the Abstract Police'? The answer one may give to that question depends on believing that the making of collective human history is a conscious choice.

The Abstract Police – An Inventory of Symptoms in Canada

In their initial presentation of the idea of the 'Abstract Police', Terpstra et al. offered empirical examples (from the Netherlands and from Scotland) to begin to tease out an understanding of the term.

In what follows, some outstanding symptoms of the condition in Canada are surveyed. These are many and varied, and they all illustrate the point that, practically speaking, 'the police' have become an abstraction alienated from both practitioners and the public that they serve. As will be demonstrated, this symptomatology arises out of fundamental contradictions and conflicts in the practices of the police métier and the moral economy in which they take place.

Questions of method arise. Always remembering that the order of presentation is the presentation of order, the catalogue of symptoms that follows is deliberately not delivered in abstract empirical terms along the lines of a prescribed typology based on operational definitions and key institutional indicators decided in advance, which is the usual preferred idiom of so-called pragmatic policy reform. Rather, this cascade of symptoms is presented more as people and police themselves evidently experience these phenomena: as one damn thing after another. Gestalt-like, contemplated cumulatively and interpreted, the wider significance of this survey of symptoms becomes evident.

Police and Serious and Organised Crime – Symptoms of Core Deficiencies

In 2018 a confidential report to the Attorney General of British Columbia by Peter German QC, a private consultant and former senior RCMP officer with 31 years of police experience, revealed that there were essentially no police anti-money laundering investigative teams operating anywhere in Canada, other than on a piecemeal ad hoc basis (Schmunk, 2018). The report said that more than 100 million Canadian dollars had been laundered through casinos licensed through the British Columbia Lottery Corporation (BCLC) system annually over the preceding years. Not long before, in his last public act, the outgoing RCMP Commissioner revealed that 500 officers had been reassigned, moved from organised crime files to national security ones, owing to staffing shortages and shifting priorities, indicating an erosion of police capacity in the face of rising demand for police resources (Freeze, 2017).

While the capability of Canada's national police service in relation to organised and serious crime and cybercrime were demonstrably eroding, a civilian intelligence analyst working for the RCMP was revealed to be selling police secrets to a 'foreign entity or terrorist group' (Tunney & Brewster, 2019). The alleged spy had been fast-tracked into a position with access to sensitive intelligence with strong backing from the RCMP Commissioner. Another important revelation was that the organisation was experiencing a 'staffing crunch' (Tunney, 2018). Among other things, in order to attract new recruits, Canada's national police service was considering altering or removing existing requirements, including credit checks, criminal background bans, the two-hour aptitude test (gauging memory, logic, judgement and comprehension) along with long stints of training at the central depot. Around this same time, it was revealed in the media that the computer systems, information and communications infrastructure of the RCMP were decrepit and in need of a complete overhaul (Crawford, 2017). In

other words, significant weaknesses have been identified in both personnel and IT systems nationally in the Canadian federal public police sector.

How these stories can be squared with the practical police mandate to control organised crime in Canada is largely left to 'the Abstract Police', where successful police operations advertise agency success. Contemporary independent academic research mapping the police intelligence division of labour in Canada has revealed a patchwork of poorly coordinated and overlapping networks (Giacomantonio, 2015; Sanders & Hannem, 2012; Sanders & Henderson, 2013; Sanders & Sheptycki, 2017; Sanders et al., 2015; Sanders et al., 2020; Sheptycki, 2013a; 2013b; 2017; 2018a; 2018b). At the same time, other evidence suggests that transnational organised crime and serious domestic crime had increased significantly in Canada during the recent past (Chung, 2019; Morselli & Décary-Hétu, 2013; Ouellet et al., 2019; Preston et al., 2012; Prowse, 2013; Schneider, 2017; Sergi, 2018). There are measurable increases in the prevalence of guns and a rise in drug-related deaths associated with illicit markets, and the 'crime severity index' is on the rise in western Canada (Beattie et al., 2018; Frew, 2020; Imtiaz et al., 2020; Popova et al., 2009; Sheptycki, 2009).

This indicates a weakness of practical police capacity in relation to a core challenge. This cluster of symptoms indicates the eroding police capabilities and might suggest merely a degree of infirmity in the professional police métier attendant to the neoliberal 'hollowing-out of the state'. However, the observable inventory of symptoms of 'the Abstract Police' in Canada is more complex.

Militarised Police – Symptoms of Bad Reflexes
Nothing symbolises the militarisation of police in Canadian jurisdictions better than the special units known colloquially as 'SWAT teams' (Roziere & Walby, 2017), and this is true of North America generally (Kraska, 2007). Although still relatively rare in Canada, municipal police services have attracted criticism regarding the acquisition of armoured vehicles (Johnson, 2020; Tutton, 2020). As a result, in Canada police these units are called Emergency Response Teams (ERTs) or something similarly anodyne and abstract. Regardless of acronym, these units concentrate police firepower in an awesome way that is symbolically crystallised in the heavy armoured police vehicle. Is this of any practical use in the vast majority of police situations? Opinions vary, but the special armed response units of urban police departments have had unforeseen, negative consequences, attracting public opprobrium and delegitimising the police in the community (Roziere & Walby, 2019).

In North America, the existence of these units has given rise to a phenomenon known as 'swatting', where pranksters call police to report an occurrence likely to mobilise an armed response team. In one case, a Canadian youth pleaded guilty to twenty-three such incidents. Most of these took place in US jurisdictions, illustrating the transnational capacities of 'the Abstract Police'. Further, this particular

prankster live-streamed the police swarming of two Ohio homes on YouTube (Tynan, 2016). This case is far from unique. In general they demonstrate that a core competence of the overly militarised public police can be triggered into knee-jerk overreaction (Roziere & Walby, 2020). This element of the symptomatology of 'the Abstract Police' should be considered alongside others.

Police Calls-For-Service – Nervous Symptoms of Police and Community
Canadian cities have public police services, not 'Police Forces'. As a rough estimate, 80% of policing in Canada is delivered through public municipal police departments, and 20% of the calls they respond to pertain to people who have mental health issues or who are in significant emotional distress (Mukherjee & Harper, 2018; Marquis, 2016; Public Safety Canada, 2013). The deteriorating quality of public services in Canada causes nervous tension.

Regis Korchinski-Paquet fell to her death from her 24th-floor apartment balcony on 27 May 2020 while police were in her home. Members of the Toronto Police Service (TPS) were responding to a call-for-service involving a domestic conflict in which ill-defined mental health issues and the presence of a knife may have been factors. The initial call came from Korchinski-Paquet's mother, with whom she lived.

The case resonated widely across the county. In the immediate aftermath of the death, the mother alleged that the police had pushed her daughter off the balcony, but an inquest by the Special Investigations Unit determined that was not the case. Speaking for the family after the five officers who had attended the scene were exonerated of wrongdoing, the family's lawyer argued police acted insufficiently when they failed to 'coax or physically pluck' her from the balcony when she attempted to escape her apartment by climbing onto the neighbouring balcony. Invoking the intersection of institutional racism and mental health, the legal representative argued that the officers assumed a duty of care as soon as they entered the apartment and that their actions were negligent. He claimed that the officers "burst into the apartment" and that "without a doubt, without them going in there, Regis would be with us today" (Ryan, 2020; Ward, 2020). Very few know what actually happened during the occurrence, but in Toronto hundreds of people marched in protest, and across Canada people got the message through broadcast news and social media. The message was that ' the Abstract Police' in Canada are institutionally racist and violent towards people with mental health issues.

Two years previously, on 23 April 2018, a TPS traffic cop, Constable Ken Lam, distinguished himself when he arrested Alek Minassian who had killed ten people and injured sixteen by deliberately ramming them with the vehicle he was driving. Constable Lam exhibited remarkable coolness in the circumstances, despite Minassian's attempts to provoke the situation into a 'suicide-by-cop' (Kassam

& Cecco, 2018. Long after his heroic display of police minimal use of force was forgotten, the incident continued to have repercussions.

The so-called Toronto Van Attack was characterised as a vicious hate crime against women. The foundation for the woman-hatred impelling this crime was attributed to the online 'Incel subculture', which earned that sobriquet because its supposed devotees claimed 'involuntary celibacy', which they evidently believe is due to the social and political dominance of 'extremist feminism' (Swain, 2018). Incels were likened to 'militia groups' and the 'alt-right' by cultural commentators, who linked them all with the 'virulent misogyny of the man-o-sphere'. After another attack in a Toronto massage parlour on 24 February 2020, which was also attributed to the 'Incel subculture', the Toronto Police Service sought to bring charges under federal terrorism statutes on the grounds that it is an 'extremist ideology' (Ling, 2020; Nasser, 2020). The symbolic intensification invokes an abstraction – the threat of terrorism charges – as the answer to a social problem that the Abstract Police are required to be seen to respond to and that there is, as yet, no adequate language to describe.

The cases of Minassian and Korchiski-Paquet expose contradictory expectations of the police role. They show that the moral economy in which police work is undertaken is a cauldron of conflict and that it is harsh and retributive. Both the police and the public become 'hyperreal' as a result of the 'new visibility' afforded in the spaces of commercial news and entertainment media, and 'social media' (Goldsmith, 2010; Sandhu & Haggerty, 2015). Once that happens, 'the police' become an abstraction to all concerned.

FIDO – Symptoms of Economic Stress
One response is for officers to do as little as possible, and then only when specifically told to do so. This work-to-rule response even has an acronym in police subcultural circles. FIDO, stands for 'fuck it, drive on'. In other words, if a police officer sees something that ought not to be happening, and if it is not tasked on the computer-dispatch system, it is not happening. Drawing on the responses of over three thousand rank-and-file police in twenty-three police jurisdictions across Canada, and in the state of New York, Greg Brown has shown this is occurring (Brown, 2016; 2019). In short, a substantial number of front-line police officers are intentionally reducing, or eliminating, proactive interactions in the community on the grounds that such discretionary activities are too risky. This is de-policing, and it is a widespread symptom of the Abstract Police in Canada.

The converse of de-policing, a quiet and largely unseen symptom of the Abstract Police, is a much louder and angrier one crystallising around demands to 'de-fund the police'. These have significantly shaped public debates in Canada (Bridges, 2020). Here we see the moral economy of policing

intersecting with an already established governmental agenda concerning the economics of policing (Marquis, 2016: 235-237; Public Safety Canada, 2015; Ruddell & Jones, 2014).

Since the economic crash of 2008, publicly funded policing in Canada has been 'austerity policing', where the rising costs of militarised policing mask the decline in policing resources relative to the increased demand. The increase in demand is twofold. On the one hand, declining funding for other public services in health, education and welfare has created more police calls-for-service that involve social, community or neighbourhood problems. On the other, increasing crime – measured, for example, in the rising 'crime severity index' – has bolstered the argument that public policing in Canada should be freed from these 'peripheral duties' in order to better focus on 'crime fighting'. This tension suggests clues to the causes of increasing police misuse of force. In the economics of policing agenda (established prior to calls to 'defund the police'), widening gaps in the provision of public police service were envisaged as being filled by a combination of an expanded market for private security, further civilianisation and privatisation of public police services, and the extension of police-community partnerships that responsiblise community nodes of social power.

There is a good deal of ambiguity and vagueness concerning the governance and accountability of this expanded and pluralised policing web of the future (Council of Canadian Academies Expert Panel, 2014). A perverse consequence of this pressure could well be further expansion of the democratically unaccountable pluralised policing web (Bowling et al., 2019: 145-163; Brodeur, 2010: 268-278; 329-334; Marquis, 2016: 221-222).

The Abstract Police might be ideologically defended or defunded, depending on the newsfeed. Yet everyone seems to agree that the symptoms of economic stress productive of increasingly calls for police service are not ultimately solvable by police intervention. Again we observe fundamental contradictions in the practices of the police métier and the moral economy made all the worse due to the political economy.

Colonial Police – Symptoms Affecting the Heart of the Country
The foundations of modern police in Canada are colonial (Bowling et al., 2019; Christmas, 2012; Marquis, 2016). After 1867 on the Canadian frontiers, police were a buffer between the existing inhabitants and the newly arriving European migrants. Among the latter, the emphasis was on preventing violence, with the enforcement of laws concerning gambling, prostitution and liquor infractions used as resources to that end. With regard to the former, police participation in governmental policies of cultural assimilation placed them on the front line of culture clash (Christmas, 2012: 453-455). The legacy of distrust between police and the Indigenous communities of

Canada has yet to be reconciled by official policies of restorative justice, truth and reconciliation (Monchalin, 2016).

Executed in 1885 for leading the Red River Rebellion, Louis Riel is the consummate historical symbol of resistance to the suppression of minority rights by an intolerant protestant Anglophone national majority in Canada. His symbol is antithetical to Sir John A. MacDonald, Canada's first Prime Minister, whose statue was vandalised in November 2020, in a public park near McMaster University. Adrianne Xavier, director of the university's programme in Indigenous Studies, herself from the nearby Six Nations of the Grand River, was quoted as saying, "Sir John A would be really easily identifiable as someone who was part of the history of what is now understood to be Indigenous genocide in Canada." (Hristova, 2020)

For those who do not know, the Red River Rebellion, on which Louis Riel's fame rests, began somewhere near the fork of two rivers, the Red and the Assiniboine, after the settling of a mass migration of Scottish protestants that began in 1811. In those years the incoming Scottish migrants, the already settled Metis (descendants of early French Catholic intermarriage with local First Nations), and Indigenous aboriginal tribes of the region were afflicted by disease, weakened by food shortages and in conflict from the beginning (Marquis, 2016: 53-61). The confluence of the Red and Assiniboine rivers is called 'the Forks' in downtown Winnipeg today. In September 2011, an Air Canada internal memo was leaked to the press referring to hotels in that vicinity. It cautioned aircrew to avoid the area on the grounds of the threat of crime and violence. The memo was denounced by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs as 'inciting hatred against aboriginals' (CBC, 2011a; 2011b). The fork of the two rivers has remained a hotspot of colonial policing and culture conflict for well over one hundred years.

In late October 2020, Indigenous protesters from the Six Nations reserve, less than 100 kilometres south-west of Toronto, commandeered a large backhoe and dug up a section of two-lane highway while officers of the Ontario Provincial Police looked on. Skirmishes between police and Indigenous land-claims protesters have been ongoing in Canada for many years with varying degrees of violent confrontation (Beare & Murray, 2007; de Lint, 2019; Edwards, 2003). In this instance it resulted in the trading of insults between the chair of the Haldimand County police services board and a local member of parliament for the New Democratic Party (NDP). The former stated publicly that the protesters had 'crossed a line': "They have openly disobeyed orders of the court. They have committed acts of aggression and intimidation which by Canadian Criminal Code definition are acts of terrorism. These Aboriginals are not protesters, they are now by legal definition terrorists." The latter's rejoinder that police board's statements were 'racist' and examples of 'anti-Indigenous colonial violence' showed an entirely different point of view (Barrera, 2020).

Policing at the intersection of official multiculturalism and continued inward migration on colonial grounds long occupied by Indigenous peoples has shaped Canada's entry into the present. Many more symptoms emerge from this. They are reoccurring because they emerge from a fundamental contradiction in the conflicted moral economy in which Canadian policing takes place. They are all the more intractable as they have come to be played out through multiple alienating channels of media communication. Democratic policing of the Canadian colonies is a contradiction in terms debated in shouts and whispers in an echo chamber of technological communication.

Transnational Policing in Canada – Systemic Symptoms of Global Distress
On 1 December 2018 a Chinese national with permanent residency in Canada, named Meng Wanzhou, was arrested at Vancouver International Airport in relation to an extradition request by US authorities in connection with fraud charges in the United States. Her extradition case quickly became a geopolitical game involving the United States and China turning the Canadian legal process into showcase theatre.

The fraud charges against Wanzhou concerned violations of trade sanctions against Iran, a long-time foe of the United States. A senior executive with the Chinese telecommunications company Huawei, she was accused by US authorities of having a direct hand in the corporate evasion of the sanctions. The legal details of the arrest and extradition proceedings are many and varied. The extradition hearings involved considerable wrangling to obtain testimony from the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA). Lengthy cross-examination of personnel from those agencies by defence counsel in the extradition case exposed the web of routine transnational police-to-police cooperation, which was portrayed in negative terms – not surprisingly given defence counsel's aim (Proctor, 2021). The story became emblematic for understanding the weak position of Canada in the world, especially vis-à-vis the United States (its continental neighbour and global superpower) and China (the rising power, a significant trade partner and source of inward capital investment and migration into Canada) (Vayeghan, 2020). The unfolding story brought visibility to the Abstract Police on a different level of the international state system, so to speak.

Only days after the arrest of Wanzhou, two Canadians (Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor) were arrested in China on drug-related charges. Canadians argued this was retaliation for the arrest of Wanzhou, a charge denied by Chinese authorities. In response, the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, stated the Canadian government

> will remain absolutely committed to working with our allies to ensure that China's approach of coercive diplomacy, its arbitrary detention of two Canadian citizens, alongside other citizens of other countries around the world, is not viewed as a successful tactic by them. (Blanchfield, 2020)

This riled the Chinese authorities even more. Then, after a Canadian parliamentary subcommittee stated that ongoing actions of the PRC in Xinjiang province against the ethnic Uighurs amounted to genocide, the anger intensified. Chinese authorities responded by pointing to the Canadian residential school system forced on First Nations Canadians, suggesting a moral and practical equivalence between the concentration camps in contemporary China and the historical wrongs that have been the subject of much controversy in Canada (Miller, 1996; Niezen, 2017).

The Canadian government has continued to reiterate the point that the persecution of the Uighur minority – through mass detention, concentration camps, forced labour, population control measures and 're-education' – is a clear violation of universal human rights meant to eradicate a specific people, culture and religion (Tasker, 2020a). In late 2020, democratic protests in Hong Kong against the imposition of new security laws elicited positive affirmation in Canada and anxious assurances to the more than 300,000 Canadian passport holders resident in Hong Kong. The Canadian government also provided assurances regarding safe haven for political dissidents fleeing Hong Kong, attracting great disapprobation from Chinese embassy authorities in Ottawa who "strongly urge the Canadian side not [to] grant so-called political asylum to those violent criminals in Hong Kong" because it would amount to "interference in China's domestic affairs, and certainly it will embolden those violent criminals" (quoted in Blanchfield, 2020).

To Canadians the national security and anti-sedition laws introduced in Hong Kong were a clear violation of international legal obligations and democratic norms, and the Uighur genocide was, if anything, even more condemnable. Chinese officials warned outsiders not to get involved in 'internal matters'. Evidently, the practices of the police métier look decidedly different from the standpoint of the moral economy of the 'Confucian Sphere' (Sheptycki, 2008). Certainly, the conditions of detention suffered by Meng Wanzhou under house arrest in a private luxury residence in West Vancouver (albeit under surveillance with an electronic tag) were very different from the secret detention endured by 'the two Michaels'.

As Chinese riot police imposed a different kind of political order under the new 'security law' in Hong Kong, student protesters in Canada found themselves subject to surveillance and harassment by 'pro-China students'. Classified documents obtained by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists demonstrated that the PRC maintains a worldwide surveillance network of secret police (Miller et al., 2019). In short, the evidence suggests that Chinese political police have been operating in Canada, undertaking harassment and surveillance of pro-Tibetan, Uiguhur and Hong Kong student activists (Dyer, 2020; Tasker, 2020b).

The operational details revealed in the testimony of Canadian police given in the Wanzhou extradition case showed a rare glimpse of alienation experienced by individual front-line agents who are cogs in a vast Kafkaesque machine that they are not really even part authors of. The actions of political authorities at the international level on all sides revealed them to be abstracted from the situation by institutionalised media relations deployed as the means of political organisation and control. Caught in the contradictory framing of identity politics and the alienation of geopolitics, policing the seemingly endless Wanzhou extradition process lost its drama while remaining in the spotlight.[2] Media sources attract media audiences by turning cases like this into 'infotainment', which exists in a vast information ecosystem alongside other 'news of the day'; misplaced, irrelevant, fragmented and superficial information that creates the illusion of knowing but that actually tends to lead away from knowing (Postman, 1985).

The extradition hearing concluded on 18 August 2021 with the judge announcing she expected to take many months to write her decision, but on 24 August Wanzhou reached a deal with the US government after appearing 'virtually' in a Brooklyn federal court, where she pleaded guilty to charges and accepted a deferred prosecution agreement. Within 48 hours she boarded a chartered plane and returned to the PRC where she arrived to great pomp and ceremony. Chinese authorities warned Canada to 'learn from its mistakes' and released Spavor and Kovrig – the two Michaels – for 'health reasons'. Officials in all three countries celebrated Canada's adherence to the 'rule of law'. Here at the level of the global system we have another glimpse of the Abstract Police. At a world-system level where the local and the global meet, the Abstract Police, technologically enhanced symbolic manifestations of social order, were exposed in the light of conflicted and contradictory demands where the police métier operates in a mediated global moral economy (CBC 2021).

Anomic Police – Symptoms of a Decaying Police Image
In October 2019 Steve Walton, a former city of Calgary police officer with 25 years of experience, and his wife Heather were sentenced for their role in the sustained harassment of Akele Taylor (Grant, 2019). The Walton's detective agency had been paid $1 million by Ken Carter, a wealthy entrepreneur who was angry about the terms of his separation agreement and wanted to alter the rules of access to the couple's child. He hired the Waltons who were subsequently charged and sentenced for criminal harassment. Three serving Calgary police officers were also convicted for corruption-related offences in the case, which involved the surreptitious use of Calgary Police Service databases, after it was revealed that they were on the Walton's payroll. The case reverberated because the role of the public police in the social response to violence and conflict between intimate partners has been controversial for decades, as has the misuse of police resources for private gain. It gained added notoriety because it

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[2] www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/community/sanctioned-the-arrest-of-a-telecom-giant-1.5067697.

exposed a mundane and yet nefarious example of subterranean connections between public and private spheres of policing, demonstrating that, in Canada, the Abstract Police have been mobilised in the service of the highest bidder in the effort to police family 'relationships'. Even though the story ended with criminal convictions, it reminds us to look for unforeseen ways in which the symptoms of the Abstract Police emerge amidst the developing, often overlooked, web of pluralised policing. The case suggests that the Abstract Police are penetrating deeper into the social fabric than existing theories about the relations between public and private police in Canada have yet ascertained (Brodeur, 2010: 345; Lippert & Walby, 2014).

Over two days, on 18 and 19 April 2020, disguised as a police officer and driving an almost perfect replica of a police car, a paranoid man named Gabriel Wortman engaged in a thirteen-hour crime spree, killing twenty-two people and setting fires at sixteen different locations, before being shot dead by an RCMP front-line patrol officer in a chance encounter while refuelling at a small town gas station. This shocking occurrence became the subject of a public inquiry only after protracted media debate about the desirability of doing so (Currie & Anjuli, 2020). Internally, the police operational response evinced considerable disorganisation, shots were mistakenly fired at civilians and the RCMP's main conduit for getting information to the public was via Twitter rather than through public broadcast media (Gorman, 2020; MacDonald, 2021; McMillan & Donkin, 2020). In the immediate aftermath, fraudsters attempted to cash in with an online fundraising effort ostensibly for the benefit of victims (Colbert, 2020). There was also a flurry of stylised debate concerning gun control in Canada, with politicians and policymakers attempting to advance stronger regulations for certain 'assault-style' weapons, while gun enthusiasts argued against increased regulations on the grounds that the weapons used in the incident were acquired illegally (Oh, 2020). Underlying this instantaneously hyperreal abstraction was an empirical occurrence that is another symptom of the Abstract Police in Canada.

These instances of anomic policing demonstrate decay in the police public image. Degraded cultural meanings of what Canadian police are and what they do are abstractly woven into the fabric of the collective imagination through such dramas.

Symptoms' Summary

The above inventory of symptoms could well be extended. However, cumulatively it shows the fundamental alienation built into techno-society manifest in contradictions and conflicts concerning the police métier and the moral economy in which policing is enacted. Social alienation arising out of technology is not a new idea (Ellul, 1964). The symptoms reviewed here focus on the Abstract Police and bring into question the possibilities of police reform, not only in Canada, but worldwide.

What Is to Be Done About the Abstract Police?

What is to be done about the Abstract Police? Any answer to that question has to account for the alienation of police both from their work and from the communities where they work. There are many possible ways to answer the question, depending on audience. Assuming a readership largely restricted to scholars and students of academic criminology and police studies, the answers have to do with teaching, education and research in the field, and there are three possible (not necessarily mutually exclusive) responses. One is to narrow the focus, the second is to change the focus, and the third is to broaden and deepen the focus. Axiomatically, both police education and public education about police are critical to overcoming the alienation symptomatic of the Abstract Police, because policing and society mirror each other (Bjørgo & Damen, 2020).

Narrowing the focus onto 'what works in policing' often means further adhering to thinking most likely to conclude that more of the same will work better where less has not (Ericson, 2007). However, there are examples where focused empirical research has generated the evidentiary basis for important criticisms of so-called 'intelligence-led policing' and the other affectations of the Abstract Police (e.g. Brayne, 2020; McDaniel & Pease, 2021). A narrow scientific focus can shine a critical spotlight on emerging forms of techno-policing, even if it risks missing the bigger picture.

Changing the theoretical focus to look at 'the power of surveillance', or the 'governance of security' or 'regulatory networks' often misses the crucial point that, in general, the police métier combines the practices of surveillance and coercive force in pursuit of the organisational goals of reproducing order, making crime, managing risk and governing insecurity. The practices of police agents remain an important subject for scrutiny, and the terminology needs to bring them into clear view. However, shifting the focus from 'the police' can reveal the same phenomena in a different way (e.g. Haggerty et al., 2011; Schuilenburg, 2015; Wood, 2017).

Broadening and deepening the focus places these considerations in the context of the historically evolving moral and political economies in which they play out. The present moral economy is fraught with contradictions (e.g. Fassin, 2013; Hörnqvist, 2016), ultimately because, under conditions of surveillance capitalism, the means of communicative production are the property of a relatively small economic class. Modern democratic police legitimacy is in distress, as the symptomatology of the Abstract Police indicates, and this is only to be appreciated by theoretically broadening and deepening the study of policing. The best kind of police studies aim to contribute, if only in a small way, to fundamental change

> not just micro-level reforms aimed at individual officers (eg. selection and training), nor grand policy declarations and meso-level organizational and legal reformation. It requires reshaping the basic character of the police role, through wider transformation of the macro-structures of economic inequality and power. (Bowling et al., 2019: 184)

The more exposed the ideological conditions, the less abstract 'the police' become.

Concluding Thoughts

It is difficult for police practitioners and the public alike to make sense of the buzzing profusion of symptoms that characterise the Abstract Police. Experienced largely as a stream of up-to-the minute news happenings, these symptoms, properly analysed, are actually indicators of more general societal alienation. The claim is not that police symbolism merely moved from the sacred to the profane (Loader & Mulcahy, 2003), nor simply that cultural sensibilities have somehow evolved to be in line with neoliberal conditions (Garland, 2001). Rather, it is that technological change has fundamentally altered the material basis of social order, and the changes can be glimpsed by appreciating the symptomatology of the Abstract Police. In the circumstances, steering the direction of future developments by social democratic means is challenging, if not impossible (Reiner, 1992; 2012; 2020).

The evidence reviewed here suggests that, without anyone really noticing, over a period of time policing has become an abstraction. Certainly fundamental transformations in the moral and political economy have profoundly affected the practices of policing in what were once liberal democracies, but the changes have been poorly understood. In the democracies of the West most attention is directed at police misuse of force and other iatrogenic practices aimed at keeping the lid on a decaying neoliberal social order. Police violence arises in the context of a specific police division of labour, an ill-understood (even by police agents), technologically driven, complex patchwork of overlapping information-security-intelligence networks. The organised communication of day-to-day policing alienates police in the conduct of their work.

The Abstract Police are perhaps algorithmically and technically intelligent but cognitively impaired. They are equipped with highly advanced police computer systems that create difficulties with communication. More often than people realise, the Abstract Police serve divided loyalties. But, of course, one cannot serve more than one master without being ethically confused.

Practically speaking, the Abstract Police in Canada are heavily armed, trained to shoot and very often required to operate under conditions where the use of force is inappropriate. While not bereft of normative axioms, they inevitably find themselves ethically conflicted since the moral economy in which the police métier is enacted does not provide the basis for agreement about what their mission ought to be. In the event, police action is revealed to a generally uncomprehending public, fragmented into different audiences who are variously disinclined to trust the institutions of policing largely because they experience the police as a multimedia abstraction.

The Abstract Police are not anchored in the communities they are supposed to serve and are therefore disconnected from their moral economies. Under such circumstances police organisation becomes defensive of institutional and individual practitioner interests against those of the external public. There is a danger that this defensiveness will further escalate police delegitimisation to the breaking point, as illustrated by remonstrations concerning the racist connotations of 'thin blue line patches' unofficially adorning some Canadian police officers' uniforms despite instructions from senior command that rank-and-file officers refrain from such displays (Anchan, 2021).

Symptoms analogous to those reviewed here can also be found in other countries with liberal democratic police traditions. In these places modernity has become 'liquid', and the old symbols of universal legality and justice binding the social contract between rational autonomous human subjects are giving way. Human history is now the product of mediated communications. It is not possible to use the tools of surveillance capitalism to resist surveillance capitalism, and, as a consequence, Technopoly rules. Social life is now supervised and profitably redefined through the means of communications surveillance. Symptoms of the Abstract Police arise in the context of the liquid modern struggle to salvage personal identity in a sea of ontological uncertainty. Present transformations in the human social system are accompanied by looming environmental catastrophe. The 'pandemic panic' of 2020 is only one episode in an ongoing series of crisis events (Sheptycki, 2020).

The extent to which the conscious choices of historical actors shape the future is crucial to our time. What is to be done about the Abstract Police? The available answers depend significantly on the quality of abstractions concerning the police discoverable in the social imaginary, which in turn depend on the practices of police, who themselves directly experience the effects of human alienation and suffering fundamental to the conditions in which they work. The contemporary moral economy is dominated by feelings of fear and anxiety about the future, and so the challenge to develop a 'constabulary ethic' such that police professionals can help steer a course that resists further global authoritarian drift is more difficult than it was before.

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