

**Ghosts in our Corridors:**  
**Emotional Experiences of Participants**  
**in Québec's General Unlimited Student Strike Campaigns (2005 - 2012)**

Nadia Hausfather

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By: Nadia Hausfather

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_____	Chair
Dr. Elena Razlogova	
_____	External Examiner
Dr. Francis Dupuis-Déri	
_____	External to Program
Dr. Kimberley Manning	
_____	Examiner
Dr. Steven High	
_____	Examiner
Dr. Erica Lehrer	
_____	Thesis Supervisor
Dr. Jean-Philippe Warren	

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. David Howes, Graduate Program Director

Monday, September 11, 2017

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. André Roy, Dean Faculty of Arts & Science

## ABSTRACT

### **Ghosts in our corridors: Emotional experiences of participants in Québec's general unlimited student strike campaigns (2005 - 2012)**

**Nadia Hausfather, Ph.D.**

**Concordia University 2009**

In this dissertation, I elucidate the emotional experiences and trajectories of participants in general unlimited student strike campaigns in Quebec from 2005 to 2012. Contrary to my initial hypothesis that anger dominates striking emotions, I argue that, especially near the beginnings of these strikes, participants were able to transcend feelings of anxiety and uncertainty -to be 'vulnerable'- thanks in part to the existential or spiritual 'high' of collective-oriented emotions heightened by deliberative decision-making and a sense of making history. As these strikes continued, I illustrate how such 'positive' experiences were intertwined with or overwhelmed by more 'negative' emotions, mediated by power and interpersonal dynamics, creating a confusing array of emotions that were thus difficult to process. The sense of intensity and urgency of these student strikes amplified the more 'negative' emotions, in part because of insufficient time for 'emotional reflexivity' to deal with the resulting ambivalence and disappointed expectations from their existential collective-oriented emotional experiences -what I term the *dialectics of vulnerability*. I point to how such dialectics were in turn coloured by interviewees' particular life stories as well as by the location that formed the basis of their experience, the educational institution. Finally, I illustrate how despite the inevitable emotional 'lows' that these strikes entailed, and despite what I term the 'masculine' emotional habitus of the Quebec student movement more generally, many participants emerged from the strike with a more collective-oriented spirit and set of values, which I suggest could be considered the seeds of new 'structures of feeling' -or of a collective sense of existential meaning. The latter played a part in contributing to continued activism for some, especially in the case of the strikes that were general and unlimited (2005, 2012). Continued activism was also mediated by the degree of participants' involvement in the strike and the interpersonal support from individuals and groups with opportunities for emotional reflexivity to cushion and transform vulnerability -thus pointing to the need for diverse collective possibilities to address difficult emotions and mourning within this province's student movement as well as other syndicalist and social movements.

For  
René (1939 - 2015)  
and  
Mateo (2017 -)

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It is surely a rare occurrence to have a combination of three such encouraging supervisors. I am grateful to Jean-Philippe Warren for his constant support, detailed feedback, and optimistic spirit; to Steven High, for inspiring me to love public and oral history and storytelling; to Erica Lehrer, for her feminist mentoring and reminding me to enjoy the art of writing, even a thesis! It is faculty like you who make students feel like people rather than numbers. My examining committee members, Kimberley Manning and Francis Dupuis-Déri, provided me invaluable insights for future thought and inspiration. Other faculty and staff guided me along the way, whether they knew it or not: Sharon Fitch, Susie Breier, Satoshi Ikeda, Eric Shragge, Anna Kruzynski, Valérie Nicol-Courville, Barbara Lorezkowski, Norman Nawrocki, Jennifer Spiegel, Aziz Choudry, and Robert Whitney.

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My family was my lifeline with their love, understanding, and time. My mom reviewed my entire dissertation with her keen eye for French grammar and spelling mistakes, for what to cut and clarify; my dad was a gentle listening ear for my impromptu needs for brainstorming. My brother and sister-in-law brought me hugs and cooked meals, even when pregnant with my nephews Canek and Mateo, whose existence continues to give me joy and hope. My grandma, Ana, always encouraged me despite not being able to see me much when she visited from Spain. My partner, Tareq, constantly instilled me with confidence and patiently rode through the ups and downs of this dissertation, teaching me that ambivalence is part of life, and of strikes: we feel like giving up when we sense its ambiguous effects on our lives, but it is always worth the struggle.

My ability to persist both through the student movement and this dissertation process was also sustained by my friends Tania and Philippe, Stéphanie, and Danilo. In those regards I am especially indebted to Marya and Tania (pseudonyms): it is my conversations with them that ultimately convinced me there was value to this dissertation when I doubted it most, and their emotional labour throughout was an irrefutable sign to me of their admirable dedication to our friendship and to the project of social justice. They, alongside other participants of these strikes, are the ultimate supervisors of this never-ending project.

Gratitude does not convey enough to all the participants who took the risk to speak or write their minds and hearts for this dissertation. If any theoretical insight emerges, I owe it to their astute words and analyses, and I take responsibility for any lackings. The insistence of Lucie (pseudonym), and the long line of feminists before her, allowed me to present my initial dissertation findings at the CLASSE founding congress, thus to keep me motivated about the action potential of academic work. There would have been no strikes without the sleepless nights, restless days, tireless research, and emotional labour of thousands of students across the province who did the often unrewarded task of political organizing. If this dissertation accomplishes anything, I hope it can be one step towards insisting that the full immensity and intensity of their efforts and experiences be remembered, and perhaps *felt*, in the corridors of our memory, our pages, our institutions, our streets.

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Glossary  
(of common Québécois terms in alphabetical order)

AG = assemblée générale = general assembly

Ben (pronounced 'bein') = 'so' or 'well'

Cégep = Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel

Criss = Interjection or swear word

Crime (pronounced 'creem')= Interjection or swear word

Débrayage = strike

Esti = Interjection or swear word

Faque = fait que = 'it means that' = 'therefore' or 'so'

Flic = police

Genre = like

Hein? (pronounced 'eiyɲ') = huh?

Mob = short for 'mobilization'

Manif = short for the French word 'manifestation' (demonstration)

Tsé = T'sais = tu sais = y'know



## Introduction

*Those who are weak don't fight.  
Those who are stronger might fight  
for an hour.  
Those who are stronger still might fight  
for many years.  
The strongest fight  
their whole life.  
They are the indispensable ones.*

- Bertolt Brecht, *The Mother*<sup>1</sup>

Back in the spring of 2005, I was off completing my Master's degree in Ontario when something happened back 'home' in Québec -though I did not find out until years later. A wave of red flooded my province,<sup>2</sup> reached the heights of the Mont Royal Cross, and soared over the city of Montréal like a sail with a message. *Arrêtons de sacrifier nos enfants*, stated the large black letters on white cloth pinned beneath the enormous red, square-shaped flag floating smack in the intersection of the looming cross. For more than 24 hours, students converted the municipal symbol of Christianity and colonialism into the mast of an educational platform, a political manifesto to the skies, an eerie reflection of Quebec's socio-cultural historical tension between polity and church, activism and imperialism. The cross commemorates the original one built in 1643 by Governor Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve to "thank god for saving Montréal from the floods"<sup>3</sup> but in 2005, Montréal was not protected from the tide.

As I scurried to finish my Master's thesis about homeless youth activism in Ontario –still wishing through rose-coloured, white-privileged lenses that I had been born in the vibrancy of the activist sixties– an ocean of possibility was navigating its way through this province in hues of

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<sup>1</sup> Brecht (1931)

<sup>2</sup> While Montreal is the city where I was born and where my parents live -thus now I consider it 'home'- it is important to acknowledge that it sits on the stolen homes and lands of the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island. It should further be noted that if Marcel Rioux (1974) notes that use of the word "province" as opposed to "national" betrays a position against sovereignty, I remain undecided about what my position on sovereignty is; rather I use the term 'province' to encourage understanding by a diverse readership.

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.lemontroyal.qc.ca/carte/en/html/Mount-Royal-Cross-42.html>

red that would in some ways make the sixties pale in comparison.<sup>4</sup> It was the longest and largest student strike until that point in this province's history, with 228,500 students on strike at its peak.<sup>5</sup> After adopting the small square-shaped piece of red fabric on a safety pin –the *carré rouge*- as the official symbol of the strike<sup>6</sup> and translating it across the province into red posters, red cubes, red banners, red flags; after covering sidewalks, streets and esplanades with white chalk silhouettes and still bodies draped in red blankets to embody the deadweight of student debt;<sup>7</sup> after picketing classrooms and occupying educational institutions, at times in the form of communal living experiments; after thousands of red felt brooches bubbled through the corridors of this province carried by bodies with effervescent humours bringing traffic to a halt;<sup>8</sup> and after weeks of freezing hands on predawn picket lines and cold feet on the part of the provincial government, the latter finally reversed most of the cutbacks of 103 million dollars to its bursary program.<sup>9</sup>

Almost seven years later, pursuing doctoral studies in Québec, I was about to dive into the red sea that I had missed while in Ontario. It was December 3, 2011, the cold eve of a heated spring that would change my life and this province's political landscapes. I didn't quite realize what was about to hit us. I was too wrapped up in my anxiety about presenting about students' emotional experiences during strike campaigns, the topic of this dissertation. My friend and

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-Philippe Warren (2008 p. 254) has referred to the 2005 as a “une réussite sans précédent” for the student movement in Quebec, in comparison especially with the 1968 student mobilizations in this province.

<sup>5</sup> This was out of a total of approximately 450,000 students in post-secondary institutions across Quebec, according to Bédard et al. (2006). It is difficult to provide a complete picture of numbers of students on strike during a general unlimited strike with one number, since different students associations vote to start and end their strike at different times, and some might vote an ‘unlimited’ strike while others might not: numbers of striking students on peak days includes those associations who voted on a one-day strike for that day only.

<sup>6</sup> The red square had already been employed by the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté* in 2004, yet the students in the sociology department at UQAM who came up with the idea were unaware of its precedent during their search for an evocative symbol for the first strike demonstration of 2005 (Chiasson & Coutu, 2012). They associated it with the expression ‘Carrément dans le rouge!’ meaning ‘Squarely in the red’ -in other words ‘completely in debt’- though “l'idée que le rouge est la couleur associée au socialisme révolutionnaire traînait également dans nos esprits” (Ibid). Then at their late February congress in 2005, the ASSÉ's strike coalition -Coalition de l'ASSÉ élargie (CASSÉE)- unanimously voted : “Que le carré rouge devienne le symbole officiel d'appui au mouvement étudiant” (Coalition de l'ASSÉ élargie [CASSÉE], 2005, p. 7).

<sup>7</sup> Bédard et al., 2006; Christoff, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> For example, in 2005 students blocked the Concordia bridge to the Casino (in French it is called Pont de la Concorde), as well as the Metropolitan Autoroute (Bédard et al., 2006).

<sup>9</sup> To be clear, before the strike, the provincial government had transferred the 103 million dollars from student bursaries into student loans. By the end of the strike, the full 103 million dollars had been reinvested from loans into bursaries, yet nothing was retroactively reinvested for the 2004-2005 year, and for 2005-2006 it was only partially reinvested, “entirely financed through federal transfers that should have been used to improve the financial aid system instead of compensating for provincial cutbacks” (Lafrance, 2014, p. 69).

fellow student organizer, Marya,<sup>10</sup> had convinced me to present in front of the provincial congress of *l'Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante* (ASSÉ).<sup>11</sup> We had attended these congresses as observers<sup>12</sup> a few times before, but this was different: It was the first time that a general unlimited strike was being seriously envisioned by students in Quebec since the failed attempt in 2007. And it was the first time I was planning to speak for so long in front of an ASSÉ congress! I had always felt intimidated by these congresses, yet this time such a feeling was somewhat alleviated by Marya being by my side, and by the echoes of students whom I had interviewed for this dissertation who had described similar feelings. We left Montréal later than expected, so when Marya and I finally arrived at the large auditorium at the Cégep de Valleyfield, the congress had already started. We quickly seated ourselves in front of students we knew from other universities, and browsed our ASSÉ Congress booklets,<sup>13</sup> trying to figure out what point of the agenda the congress had reached.

When the congress voted for a lunch break, Marya turned to the row behind us, and introduced me to Lucie from the *Comité femmes* of the ASSÉ.<sup>14</sup> Earlier that week, I had emailed Lucie to ask if she could find a way to get my presentation proposed and approved by congress in the “Femmes” point of the congress agenda. “*Ah c’est toi que j’ai contacté par courriel!*” I exclaimed. Lucie seemed very interested, even seemingly passionate about my presentation, and I immediately appreciated her humble, gentle tone. We all headed together to lunch. What my memory does not hold from that day, Marya’s retained in tonnes.<sup>15</sup> With a giggle, Marya recalls

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<sup>10</sup> Marya is a pseudonym. In the rest of the text of this dissertation, I will not indicate whether the name is a pseudonym, since the Table of Participants in Appendix F lists which names are pseudonyms. As requested by Marya, her real name is in that table.

<sup>11</sup> The ASSÉ is composed of student associations from CEGEPs (junior colleges) and universities across Québec that are democratically controlled by their members and that endorse public, free, secular, accessible, quality and non-discriminatory education alongside ASSÉ’s other core principles and membership criteria (ASSÉ, 2016). These associations come together at congresses to make collective decisions that are based on decisions of each association’s respective members.

<sup>12</sup> Marya and I had never voted at these congresses, since the student associations of which we were members had not been affiliated to the ASSÉ, and we had previously attended as members of Free Education Montreal.

<sup>13</sup> The ASSÉ *Cahier de congrès* (Congress Booklet) is distributed by email before every ASSÉ congress so that members can peruse the proposed agenda as well as the arguments and reflections that student members.

<sup>14</sup> The *Comité femmes* of the ASSÉ is one of its numerous permanent working committees: It is composed only of women and facilitates the creation of women’s committees on local campuses, where it also organizes feminist tours and distributes information about feminism. It also contributes to reflections at the ASSÉ-wide level regarding the particular experiences of female activists (Delvaux et al., 2014). Its other practices will be discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>15</sup> The following quotes are only some of the excerpts from an informal interview I recorded with Marya in 2015 about what she recalls about that weekend at the congress. The incorporation of such informal interviews in my methodology is described further below.

“I think it was just in the *air*, everybody was excited” and “there were lots of familiar faces” - surely in part because of the meeting she had attended a few days earlier to figure out how the anglophone and francophone students could work together more effectively. It was “more *welcoming*, more *chatty* than other congresses!” as typically, “the anglophones pretty much remained the “observers” in their corner.”

This congress was different, yet unlike Marya, I didn't quite yet understand to what extent. After lunch, I had difficulty paying attention to the congress: I was still trying to shorten my presentation. I scratched out a sentence about my involvement in the student movement that gave a sense of where I was at then, emotionally: “j'ai senti que j'oubliais de prendre soin de moi, que je négligeais mes ami-e-s et ma famille, que j'étais toujours soit stressée, soit en colère ou bouleversée. J'ai fait plusieurs burn-outs et j'ai perdu l'intérêt et la foi dans le mouvement étudiant.”

Students continued to debate about the regulations and criteria for a temporary strike coalition that would open the structures of the ASSÉ to other student associations. Finally, the congress voted: The *Coalition large de l'ASSÉ* (CLASSE) officially became the new name of the ASSÉ for the purposes of the 2012 strike campaign. For non-ASSÉ student associations to become members of the CLASSE, it was voted they should have: 1) the general assembly “comme instance de décision suprême de l'association étudiante”; 2) a mandate to consult their members about a general unlimited strike; 3) a position against all tuition fee increases “dans une perspective de gratuité scolaire.”<sup>16</sup> This last requirement would later become most relevant to me, as our Graduate Students' Association (GSA) here at Concordia University, where I had been involved as an elected student councilor for a couple of years, did not yet have a clear position on free education.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Similar to the ASSÉ, the CLASSE's basic principles included: “Pour un syndicalisme étudiant démocratique, féministe, combatif et indépendant” (Coalition large de l'ASSÉ [CLASSE], 2011a).

<sup>17</sup> Yet soon after in January 2012, the GSA Council unanimously voted (with one absence) for “the gradual diminution of tuition and other fees until their eventual elimination for all students regardless of their background” (GSA, 2012a). Then in March 2012, the GSA general assembly reaffirmed that position; we also voted for the general assembly to be our highest decision-making body and to join the CLASSE (GSA, 2012b). While I thought that the strike would be more effective and democratic at the departmental or faculty student association level, I played a part nonetheless in organizing the GSA strike in part to be able to effectively support graduate and faculty associations with strike mandates at Concordia.

After dinner, the addition of a *Comité féministe*<sup>18</sup> for the CLASSE was rejected by congress: Lucie was visibly disappointed. Then we arrived at point 5.0 of the agenda: “Accueil des associations membres de la CLASSE.” The congress proposed that seven student associations meeting the criteria for membership should become members of the newly created CLASSE. That vote passed,<sup>19</sup> and suddenly, I felt like time stopped. The climax of the congress was happening under my eyes, and it was *not* related to my presentation. Everyone started clapping, and before I knew it, there was a standing ovation. I found myself on my feet in the midst of an unexpectedly enthusiastic wave of claps and whistles that seemed to go on and on, and on. I was witnessing the foundation of the coalition that would spark the largest student strike Quebec would ever know, even bigger than 2005. History was in the making under my eyes, and it felt surreal. If this euphoric feeling felt new to me, at that point I had not yet uncovered that many participants of this dissertation would feel it during their strike experience, albeit at different moments and for different reasons, expressed in different ways. I did not yet realize that this feeling of living a historic moment was collective in its essence; that our collectivity added to its existential significance, which in turn nurtured our ‘high’; and that it was a high that I would grab onto, like others I interviewed, for better or for worse.

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Those last words, ‘for better or for worse,’ form the crux of my argument in this dissertation: that particularly in the case of those who were more involved in organizing these strikes, such ‘high’ collective-oriented emotional experiences dialectically led to existential and emotional void and despair as time went on. For those students who participated in the strikes yet were not organizers, such collective-oriented ‘high’ emotional experiences were similarly accompanied by emotional ‘lows,’ yet did not entail such extreme dialectical emotional effects,

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<sup>18</sup> The failed motion had suggested that “Le Comité féministe sera, durant le temps de la Coalition, un Comité de soutien au Comité femmes de l’ASSÉ [...] Les mandats du comité seront : Organiser des actions féministes; Former des porte-paroles féministes; Créer du matériel de mobilisation féministe; Publier des textes et/ou articles féministes; Assurer la visibilité du féminisme lors de manifestations” (Coalition large de l’ASSÉ [CLASSE], 2011b, p. 13).

<sup>19</sup> The seven student associations that were not members of ASSÉ and that were voted to be members of the newly created CLASSE included: L’Association étudiante des diplômés en histoire de l’Université de Montréal (AÉDDHUM), l’Association générale étudiante du Cégep du Vieux Montréal (AGECVM), l’Association facultaire étudiante en science politique et droit de l’UQÀM (AFESPED), l’Association générale des étudiants et des étudiantes prégradués en philosophie de l’Université Laval (AGEEPP), l’Association générale des étudiantes et étudiants du Cégep Limoilou (AGEECL), l’Association générale des étudiantes et étudiants de la Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de l’Université de Sherbrooke (AGEFLESH), and l’Association générale étudiante du Collège de Valleyfield (AGECoV) (CLASSE, 2011a).

as these were overwhelmed by the seeds of a new collective-oriented structure of feeling sown into their lives.

Thus the title of this dissertation, *Ghosts in our corridors*, in part symbolizes the collective-oriented emotion and meaning that crept out of dormancy into these students' lives during these strikes, as if waiting to be discovered.<sup>20</sup> *Ghosts*, in part because I will argue that this collective impulse circulates in the corridors of our minds and of our veins, yet lays at bay in contemporary individualistic societies until certain situations bring this collective meaning into the light. The general unlimited student strike campaign is one of those situations, I will propose here, based on the words and feelings of those I interviewed.

*Corridors*, for this bilingual term rekindles my multi-ethnic experience in a francophone high school and my associated ambivalence about the French language and Quebec nationalism; and because this term elucidates how school grounds formed the heart of these student strikes and collective movements, even if back in high school, I did not yet realize this potential.

*Ghosts in our corridors* also evokes how the collective imaginaries of some participants later vanished, emptied by disillusionment, haunted by the faint memory of collective-oriented and existential emotional experiences -and thus by the inevitable vulnerability of memory and experience. Indeed a sense of having *ghosts in our corridors* is also relevant to personal, recurring moments when I happen to be running through this institution's corridors for whatever reason and get a sudden flashback of my heart racing through these same hallways during the

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<sup>20</sup> By using the plural term 'ghosts,' I am opening its meaning up to various interpretations, as elucidated in the paragraphs that follow. In other words, through 'ghosts' I am not just referring to something that is lost -or dead- but also to something that can emerge from a dark place, or from hiding, or that has been lurking or ignored; that can be influenced from without but that also can be latent within. By using this term, it is not my intention here to be tied to the *Communist Manifesto*'s famous 'specter of communism' nor Derrida's (1994) 'specter of Marx' as this would imply that the desire for collectivity is limited to one man and one label -one that was spoken by some but certainly not by all participants of this dissertation. And I am wary thanks to Cameron (2008), of how the idiom of haunting now popular in the academe, in certain cases (at least as applied to Indigenous-settler relations) can inculcate guilt that occludes changes necessary to the present. Cameron notes that rather than Derrida's intention for hauntings to signal "a recognition of the always unfinished and unfinishable in our relation to the present and past and, by extension, a sense of generosity and hospitality towards ghosts," they might simply mean an "endless dancing around a wound" (p. 389), especially if the subject of analysis is confined to the ghostly idiom. Taking that caution, I use the term 'ghost' certainly *not* to lock my dissertation within the heritage of theory this idiom brings, but rather for the ways the term 'ghost' can highlight other aspects of these participants' emotional experiences related to strikes, as the paragraphs below and the rest of the dissertation elucidate. Furthermore, I do not intend to use the term 'ghosts' to invoke paralyzing guilt on certain parties; rather, this title comes in part from some strike participants' experiences of place haunted with past memories; and it reflects my desire to put the spotlight on the 'ghosts' of these strikes and their related emotions in order to move them from a past that is unspoken in the official corridors of the academe, to the archives of the present, and perhaps most importantly, to reinvigorate the actions of the future.

2012 strike, to stop a class from taking place. In those increasingly rare moments, I am shocked by how vividly I remember what these corridors looked and felt like back then, images and feelings from those days momentarily inhabiting me. *Ghosts in our corridors*, in that sense, is an analogy for the memories of the past that inevitably haunt our present, just as our present haunts the form of those memories.<sup>21</sup>

So from time to time I weave through this dissertation stories of my own 'striking emotions,' so to speak, to give a sense of my positioning as a researcher; and I seek as much as possible to tell the stories of other strike participants as chronologically as possible, to provide the reader with a sense of these interviewees' own ghosts. Thus the above story of my experience at the CLASSE founding congress will continue in a later chapter; and interviewees' stories will sometimes be continued in later chapters, to illustrate new patterns and themes. I will let the reader know when a story is 'to be continued' as well as when a story is the continuation of a previous one.

## THE STORY OF THIS DISSERTATION

Before encountering the power of stories through the discipline of oral history, I had initially been motivated to explore emotional experiences of the student movement because of my own experience as a student organizer here at Concordia University. It all started in June 2009, when I started my mandate as elected representative on the graduate student council of the Graduate Students' Association (GSA). That first month, I found myself co-organizing a protest against international tuition fee increases, during which protest organizers decided to call ourselves Montreal Students Against Tuition Increases (MSATI).<sup>22</sup> Our meetings were open to anyone in Montreal who wanted to join, but we were mostly undergraduate and graduate students from Concordia, and mostly funded by the GSA. So from 2009 until 2012,<sup>23</sup> student activism was like an unpaid job, sometimes full-time, sometimes part-time, in addition to required coursework for my PhD. I spent late nights at the student association office or in my apartment, doing what I

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<sup>21</sup> On a somewhat similar note, Eng and Kazanjian (2003, p. 4) note that "melancholia might be said to constitute, as Benjamin would describe it, an ongoing and open relationship with the past -bringing its ghosts and specters, its flaring and feeling images, into the present."

<sup>22</sup> MSATI's old website can be found at: <https://sites.google.com/site/msati2009/>

<sup>23</sup> In April 2012, I was acclaimed into the position of Vice-President External of the GSA for a one-year mandate (from June 2012 until June 2013); during that year, us executives received a \$750 monthly honorarium.

felt was duty and passion: organizing students to think critically and politically about the world that I considered profoundly ruptured by capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism, and other forms of oppression and injustice. In 2010, we changed our name to Free Education Montreal (FEM).<sup>24</sup> With support from the GSA, we continued to initiate petitions, workshops, speaker events<sup>25</sup> and demonstrations against tuition increases.<sup>26</sup>

The GSA elected team was supportive of FEM during my first year as an elected representative; yet when I continued as representative for a second year, one new executive was staunchly and publicly against FEM's activities, arguing against them in a disparaging, teasing way. Thus GSA meetings suddenly became more conflictual and upsetting for me. In this arena of formal student politics and meetings, I increasingly felt and heard that there was no space for emotions. At one point, a fellow GSA councilor suggested to me that anger was the only emotion worth having as a reaction to such issues. My disagreement with such a way of doing and feeling politics alongside my long-existing critique of the dichotomy between emotion and reason inspired me, by 2011, to focus on the role of emotions in student activism.

Influenced by feminist theorizing about emotions, I wondered: despite being critical of many societal norms, are student activists in Quebec nonetheless influenced by mainstream societal and academic norms about emotions?<sup>27</sup> Was it different for student activists at francophone institutions? And why did it always seem as if anger was the only acceptable emotion? Like Deborah Gould (2009, p. 9), I was not necessarily questioning the allowance and

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<sup>24</sup> While the following website is not in its original form, the description remains the same:

<http://freeeducationmontreal.org/about/>

<sup>25</sup> For example, we organized a panel in which the Concordia University president accepted to debate, and we invited students to participate in the April 1 protest against the provincial government's new budget. Both these events are documented in the April 6, 2010 edition of *The Link* (see [http://thelinknewspaper.ca/pdf/thelink\\_vol30\\_iss29.pdf](http://thelinknewspaper.ca/pdf/thelink_vol30_iss29.pdf)). Interestingly the headline on the front page of the newspaper was: "Rage against the budget: 8,000 Montrealers hit the streets."

<sup>26</sup> This included a week-long string of protests at Concordia called *Angry Week*, in reaction to a change to the graduate fee structure that would see students paying the bulk of their tuition, and continuation fees, sooner than before, thus paying more overall for their degree, with particularly devastating increases each semester for international students. In hindsight, the fact that we chose 'anger' to label our event is quite pertinent to the argument I will be making in Chapter 1 about the student movement's emotional habitus; in the case of *Angry Week*, it seems 'anger' was effective, as simply the threat of our activities led the university to cancel their proposed changes for currently enrolled students. It might be pertinent to note, however, that our flyers situated anger in other emotions as well as in rational claims, as we cited Harriet Lerner's (1985) words: "Anger is a signal, and one worth listening to. Our anger may be a message that we are being hurt, that our rights are being violated, that our needs or wants are not being adequately met, or simply that something is not right." Video footage of these events can be viewed at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d\\_54TX6etqE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_54TX6etqE) or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rws24AtB1tc>.

<sup>27</sup> Alison Jaggar (1989) underlines the traditional historical perception of emotions as irrational.



justification of anger, but rather wondering what the effect of anger's possible emotional predominance could be on the student movement and its activists. Based on my experience as a student politician until then, I hypothesized that Quebec student politics were dominated by an angry yet otherwise generally anti-emotional culture –in other words, a culture that, because of its attempt to mimic traditional politics and to be considered legitimate, would imitate the male-dominated mainstream and academic emotional culture in which emotions are relegated to the private, and definitely not to public meetings (Boler, 1999). While my hypothesis was partly confirmed, I was surprised to find that anger was only one piece of a more complex emotional puzzle that the student movement potentiates, in part due to its general unlimited student strikes.

Back in 2011, I already knew that general unlimited strikes were different than other strikes. Because of FEM's continual contact with the ASSÉ, we knew that students across the province were preparing for a general unlimited strike against the government's proposal for a 75 per cent increase over five years (see Ancelovici & Dupuis-Déri, 2014). So to prepare Concordia students to vote on whether to join, FEM wrote and published an English comprehensive booklet called "Why should we strike?"<sup>28</sup> In the process, I learned much about the particularities of general unlimited strikes *in theory* before learning about them *in practice*. We translated the term 'Grève Générale Illimitée' to 'Unlimited General Strike'<sup>29</sup> and explained it as:

"a voluntary and collective cessation of [academic] activities in order to assert claims that would not be addressed otherwise. The word "unlimited" points to a confrontational stance with the government. It does not mean that the strike is limitless, but that its length is undetermined in advance. This means that the strike goes on until demands are met or until students decide to stop the strike. As for the word "general," it means that the strike involves a large movement that includes a significant number of student unions in Quebec, giving it strength and credibility" (p. 3-4).

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<sup>28</sup> FEM (2012). See: [http://www.bloquonslahausse.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/why\\_should\\_we\\_strike.pdf](http://www.bloquonslahausse.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/why_should_we_strike.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> In this dissertation I reversed the order of the first two words and use 'general unlimited strikes,' as it is in line with how I now usually talk about it in English. Another way we used to refer to it even among Anglophones was 'GGI,' the initials of 'Grève Générale Illimitée.' For clarity's sake throughout this thesis I will use the term 'strike.' Later, some students decided that the term 'Unlimited' was misleading and they published the term 'Open-Ended General Strike' (see: <http://www.bloquonslahausse.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/HUGS-readingdoc.pdf>).

We also sought to provide a basic understanding for students who had never heard about these strikes, their particular impact and process:

“An Unlimited General Strike gives students maximum leverage to make their demands heard. It is a way of getting the government to listen to students, while giving students real leverage when it comes to negotiations. It is a way for students to gain visibility, both in the media and among the population, to debate and to let their demands be known. Students who oppose the tuition increases may have great arguments, but these arguments can’t spread and take hold until a substantial movement captures popular attention. Furthermore, the fact that students collectively decide not to attend school during a strike prevents those who want to participate in protest [and other] actions from facing academic penalization.”

Finally, based on the history of previous successful general unlimited strikes in this province, we highlighted an important point, one that we would later learn was often overlooked here at Concordia University by various students and professors, notably the economic threat that a strike signifies for the government. We wrote:

“most importantly, when facing an Unlimited General Strike, the government is under pressure to quickly solve the conflict, because the possibility of canceling a term is unthinkable, economically and logistically, especially because of employee salaries. The education system is a crucial part of the economy and it requires human capital in order to survive. It would be impossible to coordinate the institutional congestion generated by a whole cohort of students that [sic] would not graduate” (p. 4).

In other words, the main pressure point of the strike is effected by ensuring that classes do not take place and that assignments do not get handed in.

For this dissertation, I chose to focus on general unlimited strike campaigns -which for convenience I will refer to in this dissertation as ‘strikes’- from 2005 to 2012, because I could only imagine that they might represent the emotional dynamics of the student movement at their extreme. After interviewing participants of the 2005 and 2007 strikes, I expected that the

upcoming 2012 strike would be a tumultuous experience for myself and other students across the province, and I felt compelled to incorporate its story into my dissertation. If I could not predict the size of the red multitude that the 2012 *Maple Spring*<sup>30</sup> would invite, it seems I felt in my bones that something was in the air, having prepared for it in the flesh for some time.

Indeed, we had clarified in the "Why should we strike?" booklet that a general unlimited strike is considered only after having attempted all other tactics -a process referred to as 'escalating the means of pressure' (Poirier St-Pierre & Ethier, 2013; Olivier, 2005)- and there had already been many such pressure tactics across the province since 2010. This escalation culminated with the one-day strike on November 10, 2011: it constituted "the largest student protest since the 2005 strike" (FEM, 2012, p. 5). At Concordia, the general assemblies of the GSA and the ASFA (*Arts and Science Faculty Association*, regrouping all undergraduate students in that faculty) voted to join that strike, giving us a preview as early as 2011 of the unprecedented magnitude of what was to come: the largest and longest student strike in Quebec's history.

While a fuller story of Concordia and Quebec's *Maple Spring* will unfold in the pages that follow from the voices of some of its participants, suffice for my purpose here to note that this 'jamais vu' of the 2012 strike changed the landscape of the literature devoted to Quebec's student movement. A new world of scholarship emerged to fill previous gaps (in both francophone and anglophone literature) about Quebec's student strikes, yet literature about the 2005 strike remains surprisingly sparse considering the length and breadth of that strike.<sup>31</sup> Some comprehensive books about the 2012 strike already reveal, in often poetic ways, the complex emotional experiences lived therein (e.g. Collectif 10 novembre, 2014; Collectif de débrayage, 2013; Surprenant & Bigaouette, 2012). Yet within the vast amount of academic literature about

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<sup>30</sup> 'Maple Spring' is an expression translated from 'Printemps érable' (Ancelovici & Dupuis-Déri, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Millette (2013) points to the virtual absence of 2005 in the Francophone academic literature. The only works that focus specifically on it before 2012 are: Bédard et al. (2006), Millette's (2011) Masters dissertation, and Giguère and Lalonde's (2010) psychological study that includes consideration of affect. The latter argue that 'ingroup' affect was directly related to participation in the strike and was uncorrelated to rational decision-making; in contrast to that study, my dissertation's findings, in addition to looking at emotion beyond its motivational power and problematizing memory, challenge Giguère and Lalonde's dichotomous operationalization of reason and emotion as well as their use of quantitative concepts to analyze affect. Lacoursière (2007) reserves mention of 2005 only to his book's epilogue, though he dedicates his 2006 and 2008 writings to it, and Beauregard-Langelier (2007) and Nengeh Mensah (2005) also focus on the 2005 strike. After 2012, Simard (2013) dedicates a total of three pages to both the 2005 and 2007 strikes, and Lafrance (2014) also discusses 2005. While Theurillat-Cloutier's (2017) book finally provides a comprehensive account of the student movement from the perspective of someone who was involved, there are around 15 pages dedicated to the 2005 strike and six pages to the 2007 general strike campaign.

2012<sup>32</sup> and other literature about Quebec social movements, scholars have not explored the emotional dimension, with the exception of Warren and Ronis's (2011) analysis of love in the 1995 Montreal Unity Rally, and Bhéreur-Lagounaris and colleagues' (2015) qualitative and biometric study of the affective and spatial dimensions of the *Printemps érable*.<sup>33</sup> My methodology, my conception of emotion, and the questions guiding this dissertation differ substantially from the latter related and important study.

The questions I seek to answer in this dissertation are: **What is the emotional trajectory of those who were involved in the general unlimited strike campaigns from 2005 to 2012? More specifically, what were their emotional experiences building up to and during these strikes, and what emotional legacies persisted in their lives? What is the role of interpersonal relationships therein? And what can emotional experiences, trajectories, and legacies, tell us about emotions, about these strikes, and about the Quebec student movement more generally?** I heed to Jasper's (2011) note that "[c]ombinations and interactions of emotions are crucial to action, yet still relatively unexplored" (p. 14.7), and that there has been an overemphasis on the positive effect of emotions on social movements. I have thus sought to explore all stages of the strike (the lead-up, beginning, middle, end, and subsequent years) and all types of emotions, to map the trajectory of emotional experiences over time and to piece together their relationship to each other and to their influences.

In so doing, this research seeks to bring together the continually growing field of scholarship about the relevance of emotions to social movements, with the more limited scholarship about emotional experiences of (student and labour) strikes. Indeed I seek to illustrate how general student strike campaigns are particular phenomena that -potentially similar to general labour strikes- deserve particular focus and study, because of the particular collective-oriented, existential, and dialectical emotional intensities the engender due to their particular historical and deliberative qualities. Beyond Bhéreur-Lagounaris and colleagues' (2015) study of the 2012 *Printemps érable*, social movement literature has never studied the particular case of a

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<sup>32</sup> For a summary of 'academic' and 'non-academic' literature about 2012 to date, see Bhéreur-Lagounaris et al. (2015, pgs. 2-4), as well as the "Bibliographie indicative sur le Printemps érable" of more than 50 sources provided at the end of Ancelovici & Dupuis-Déri (2014).

<sup>33</sup> 'Printemps érable' was a term commonly used by not only by media, but also by the student movement itself, to refer to the 2012 student strike in Quebec and the popular movement that accompanied it (Ancelovici & Dupuis-Déri, 2014).

strike (neither student nor labour), much less general unlimited strikes. Historical or management studies of industrial organization tend to lack a focus on the emotional impacts on strike participants.<sup>34</sup> This has left it to studies in the field of economics, which have tended to focus on the emotional motivations to strike or not.<sup>35</sup> Psychology is thus the only field in which a handful of researchers have approached the topic of workers' emotions during labour strikes *beyond the motivation to vote to strike or not*. Yet psychological studies have been limited to assessing the mental health and psychological impacts on strikers with quantitative measures, often focusing on the negative impacts.<sup>36</sup> An interesting exception is Brunnsden & Hill (2009)'s phenomenological analysis of interviews with one firefighter who participated in a strike. These latter authors make a plea for researchers to study strikes from the perspective of workers rather than "solely from an organisational perspective aimed at conflict resolution," because "strikes present an unfamiliar and unusual circumstance which facilitates a complex set of social interactions and relationships, both positive and negative" (p. 99) including "psychological consequences for those involved" (p. 109). On a similar note, Barling and Milligan (1987) refer to strikes as acute stressors. Where relevant, in future chapters I will compare the findings from such literature about labour strikes with those emerging from this dissertation.

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<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, even in the case of literature about Russia's revolutionary period, Koenker and Rosenberg (1989) note their surprise at discovering that "the strike phenomenon itself, one of the most important aspects" of the Russian revolution, "was virtually untouched in both Soviet and Western historical writing" (p. xv). Brunnschweiler, Jennings and MacKenzie (2014) note that the decreasing interest in labour strikes could be in part explained by the fact that they have become increasingly rare from the 1990s onwards, at least in the UK and the US. One interesting exception to such research is McBride, Stirling, and Winter's (2013) article in the interdisciplinary journal *Work, Employment and Society*, focused on the emotional effects a strike can have on workers' families through the narrative of one striker's wife, in the case of a rather particular strike in which strike action continued after the workers were fired. And while not about strikes, historian Steven High's (2003) exploration of workers' emotions about their work in the context of deindustrialization and job losses suggests that emotions during labour strikes might be equally or more fervent.

<sup>35</sup> For example, Glazer (1992) hypothesizes in the journal *Economic Inquiry* that "a union member who obtains a non-infinitesimal emotional benefit from the act of voting for a strike may therefore vote in its favor" even "if they do not expect to thereby increase their wages" (p. 733). Building on Glazer's work, Brunnschweiler, Jennings and MacKenzie (2014) note that a perception of unfairness leads to such emotional (in their words "expressive") benefit and the benefit is "more important the larger the union" (p. 125), when the willingness to sacrifice for the union is strong since the costs are not too high.

<sup>36</sup> Wickens' (2007) quantitative study assesses anger, cynicism, and general mood with quantitative closed-ended questionnaires, before, immediately following, and four months after the strike. Similarly using quantitative questionnaires, Barling and Milligan (1987) studied 117 full-time community college teachers and counselors' 22-day strike on three campuses. Their findings will be briefly discussed in the Conclusion chapter of this dissertation. And as mentioned above, Giguère and Lalonde (2010) explore 'ingroup affect' of participants of the 2005 strike through quantitative measures.

## ORAL HISTORY AND FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES

Because of the possibility to probe and expand on meanings and stories, Brunsdén and Hill's above-mentioned phenomenological study about the emotional repercussions of labour strikes is illustrative of the power of qualitative interviews to allow for a deeper exploration of strike participants' (emotional) experiences.<sup>37</sup> Andrew Beatty (2014) even argues that "only a narrative approach can capture both the particularity and the temporal dimension of emotion, restoring verisimilitude and fidelity to experience" (p. 545). This is because for Beatty, "the occasion, expression, and meaning of emotion are personal and particular" (p. 555), and because "emotions are biographical: primed by evolution, to be sure; shaped by culture; constrained by subject position; but given personal relevance and intensity by individual history" (p. 552).<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, while this dissertation is about strikes, it is also about people.<sup>39</sup> Some participants of this thesis project spontaneously related the strikes to their life stories. Some had been involved in the student movement for various years and through various strikes. In line with Beatty's caution, where possible I try to assess the emotional legacies of these strikes within the larger context of participants' lives. I had not initially planned to consider life stories for this project, but in some cases the interviewees and their stories made their decision for me: the intensity of the striking emotions they described at times appeared to derive their meaning precisely from the context of their broader stories. As Benmayor (1991) notes, life histories give a sense of "the issues and experiences around which identities are formed and a sense of how these may change over time" (p. 164), and were described by her participants as "therapeutic." In the words of Steven High (2014), the "expanded frame" of a life story approach goes beyond the event in question and tells "more about what was lost and how this event shaped the interviewees' subsequent lives -the silences, absences, activism, and memories" (p. 43). High adds that "life story interviews are an especially rich source for understanding the multiple layers of significance in people's lives" (p. 39).<sup>40</sup> Incorporating the significance of socio-historical

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<sup>37</sup> Franzosi (1989) discusses the limitations of quantitative approaches applied to this topic.

<sup>38</sup> A fuller discussion of the various meanings and definitions of 'emotion,' in part elucidated by Beatty (2014) himself, will follow in Chapter 1.

<sup>39</sup> On this note Narayan (1997, p. 36) urges, "it seems more urgent than ever that anthropologists acknowledge that it is people and not theoretical puppets who populate our texts, and that we allow these people to speak out from our writings."

<sup>40</sup> High (2014) adds that the shift from testimony to life story means a change from "an outward act of witness to an inward reflection on the meanings derived from one's own life journey [...] By taking a more holistic approach to the

context to the life stories they document, James (2000) with *Dona Maria's story* and Behar (1993) with *Esperanza in Translated woman* manage nonetheless to build a sense of closeness between the reader and the interviewee/interview setting; their work inspired me to attempt to create a similar sense of intimacy and character development by attempting to keep each participant's story as intact as possible throughout this dissertation, incorporating the whole within a larger social analysis.

Further influenced by Sheftel and Zembrzycki's (2013) edited compilation about the often untold stories behind oral history interviews, I have sought to tell participants' strike-related stories as fully as possible, attempting to pay respect to the timing, place, and context of their emotional experiences and their stories -including the interview setting itself. As Julie Cruikshank (1998, p. xii-xiii) writes, "What is important is not just knowing the story but sharing the context for knowing when and why it is told so that conversations can build on that shared knowledge." Providing such context is also a reminder that despite overarching themes and patterns that hold across these strikes and participants, each story is particular and can not represent the entirety of any strike, as each holds within it an unimaginable diversity of stories, contexts, and emotions. Indeed, oral historians remind us that any story inevitably remains incomplete; the written word can only tell one version; and it evolves depending on how much is told, who tells it, when it is told, and why (Portelli, 1991). Like the reflexive ethnographic storytelling increasingly encouraged in academic oral history and narrative inquiry<sup>41</sup> circles, and like any comprehensive account of emotions,<sup>42</sup> I will do my best to reveal who, when, and why through the telling.

Yet the telling will always start and finish with me: despite this feeling like a collective work, composed of many voices and the emotional labour<sup>43</sup> of various strike participants and

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narrated life -its structure and form as well as the words spoken- we have an opportunity to consider how and why these stories are told and to whom" (p. 40).

<sup>41</sup> Riessman (2008)

<sup>42</sup> I will discuss my definition of emotions in Chapter 1.

<sup>43</sup> By 'emotional labour' here I am referring in particular to my friends and dissertation participants Marya and Tania, who spent time listening to me talk about my thesis, giving me feedback and support, and bearing with my observations and questions before and after their interviews; and I am also referring to the difficult emotions that some interviewees felt during their interview or during their subsequent review of their stories. Some requested to view the video of them, while Tania, Marya, Julie, Marie, and Lucie read the stories I wrote about them and commented on them. Marya also provided in-depth feedback to many parts of this dissertation. The sometimes emotional reactions that some of these participants had in response to reviewing their stories about the strike will be recounted in more detail in Chapter 6.

friends, the conventions of academic theses only allow for one author. In line with feminist methodologies that place great importance on the self-reflexivity and (always shifting, intersectional) location of the researcher,<sup>44</sup> instead of seeking to hide my positioning I consider that the personal experience of the researcher can be an asset because it provides an honest “explanation of the researcher’s standpoint” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 259). Such perspectives have also influenced the realm of ethnography (Behar & Gordon, 1995; Lehrer, 2013). Whereas traditionally ethnography was a method to understand and study the ‘other,’ “[i]n the new postcolonial and postmodern world at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the relationship between the observed and the observer has been called into question at every level,” notes Patton (2002, p. 85). Narayan (1997, p. 37) argues that by “Writing texts that mix lively narrative and rigorous analysis,” anthropologists can “acknowledge the hybrid and positioned nature of our identities.”<sup>45</sup>

Auto-ethnography takes this to a different level, as the researcher studies “one’s own culture and oneself as part of that culture” (Patton, 2002, p. 85) -such as, for example, the story that introduced this chapter. More specifically, “what distinguishes autoethnography from ethnography is self-awareness about and reporting of one’s own experiences and introspections as a primary data source” (p. 86). Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe auto-ethnography as an “autobiographical genre of writing and research”:

“Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and the cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. Usually written in first-person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms—short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. In

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<sup>44</sup> E.g. Koobak & Thapar-Björkert (2014)

<sup>45</sup> Narayan (1997, p. 36) further writes: “Adopting a narrative voice involves an ethical stance that neither effaces ourselves as hybrid nor defaces the vivid humanity of the people with whom we work. Narrative transforms “informants” whose chief role is to spew cultural data for the anthropologist into subjects with complex lives and a range of opinions (that may even subsume the anthropological enterprise).”



these texts, concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language” (p. 739).

For this dissertation, I documented my own story and emotions through intermittent field notes and diary entries about my own emotions before, during, and after my participation in and co-organization of the strike. Inspired by Ellis’s (2004; 1999) personal and dialogue-imbued storytelling style, I also tried to include my own presence and oral comments, as well as my thoughts and feelings when recounting participants’ stories in this dissertation -particularly when I was the interviewer.

Yet an autoethnography that is relevant and honest is not easy (Behar, 1996), due to the difficulty in writing well, in being sufficiently observant and self-questioning, in confronting unflattering aspects of one’s self that can generate “a lot of fears and doubts –and emotional pain” and the “vulnerability of revealing yourself” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 738). That being said, as a researcher I am less vulnerable than my research participants, who have less say in deciding whether to reveal themselves once they have signed the consent form and completed the interview. Feminist approaches are helpful in this way, as they provide “a better defined and more eloquent conception of the *other*” (Glassman & Erdem, 2014, p. 215) by questioning and complicating the insider/outsider dichotomy (Naples, 2003; Narayan, 1997), recognizing that shifting identities and power relationships can exist as much within groups as between them. For example, contributors to Behar and Gordon’s (1995) seminal book *Women Writing Culture* remind that being an insider does not necessarily mean that one will produce a “politically correct ethnography of the Other” as there are various forms of academics who are ‘insiders’ in certain communities yet who are still more privileged than their research participants.

Indeed, Donna Haraway (1988, 1991 cited in Koobak & Thapar-Björkert, 2014, p. 50) notes that “scientific and scholarly knowledge is not value-neutral and disinterested but needs to be understood as embedded in its contexts of production, which include the researcher subject’s location in time, space, body and historical and societal power relations as well as the research technologies as part of the research process.” Precisely in these respects, there are parallels between feminist approaches and oral history, suggests Baillargeon (1993): both open up space to

groups traditionally absent from written documents and public space (and often in solidarity with such groups) and both seek to bring out a “*mémoire autre, souvent dérangeant, encore contestée*” (p. 54). In other words, both focus on subjective experience and view interviewees as historical actors who hold the key to understanding historical phenomena.

Portelli would agree about such similarities, but further clarifies the particularities of oral history. In his seminal (1991) book, *The death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories*, he reminds us that oral history’s *origin* (marginalized groups) and *content* (the ‘daily life and material culture’ of these groups) are not unique to oral history, as many other traditional historical methods have incorporated these, not to mention other disciplines. What makes oral history different is its *form*, notably its orality, explains Portelli, as “the tone and volume range and the rhythm of popular speech carry implicit meaning and social connotations which are not reproducible in writing” (p. 47). More specifically, he writes that these can fulfill:

“essential narrative functions: they reveal the narrators’ emotions, their participation in the story, and the way the story affected them. This often involves attitudes which speakers might not be able (or willing) to express otherwise, or elements which are not fully within their control. By abolishing these traits, we flatten the emotional content of speech down to the supposed equanimity and objectivity of the written document” (p. 48).

Video in particular, notes Abrams (2010, p. 145), “can maintain the vibrancy, tonal inflections and presence of the original” thus allowing the oral historian the opportunity “to analyse the whole performance.”

### **Methods beyond myself**

Keeping such aural and visual benefits in mind, for this dissertation I conducted video interviews when possible, to have the possibility for myself and readers to have both aural and visual cues from the interview.<sup>46</sup> In 2011, I sent out emails to the ASSÉ email list-serve<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Some excerpts of my interviews are viewable at [activistemotions.net](http://activistemotions.net), as will be discussed below.

<sup>47</sup> I was already signed up to the ASSÉ list-serve, so I could send out the announcement about my research several times, as members of the list-serve are free to send and reply to list-serve emails at their discretion. If my interviewees thus tended to be supportive of the ASSÉ model of organizing as well as its principles over those of the student federations (the FEUQ and the FECQ) regrouping a larger number of student associations across Quebec at the time, this was not always the case, and it certainly did not stop participants from being critical of the ASSÉ. The

searching for students who had participated in the 2005 or 2007 strike campaigns and who would be willing to participate in video or audio interviews. I received replies back from various recipients from that list, six of whom I interviewed. I also interviewed two friends who had been involved in these previous strikes. These eight interviews I conducted about the 2005 and 2007 strike campaigns were all filmed: for all of these video interviews except two,<sup>48</sup> I both managed the camera and did the interviewing, in part because of the costs involved in hiring someone to film, in part because of the lack of intimacy in the interview with the presence of a stranger behind the camera. These interviews generally lasted from two to five hours.

Then from 2013 to 2016, I focused on collecting data about the 2012 strike. At the Concordia level, I interviewed four students: two undergraduate students who participated in the geography strike, and my two best friends from the strike, Marya and Tania, who both also allowed me to observe our informal conversations and their behaviours related to the strike over time,<sup>49</sup> under the agreement that they would be able to review and edit what I wrote about them.<sup>50</sup> By the time I interviewed Marya, I had decided that the technical complications of the camera were too distracting, thus it consisted of the only audio (as opposed to video) interview that I recorded. I was also given access (by the two interviewees themselves) to two audio interviews that Concordia geography undergraduate student Leila Ayad had conducted with fellow geography undergraduate students about emotions during the 2012 strike.

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consent form for these interviews can be found in Appendix A; the list of questions that guided my interviews can be found in Appendix B and C.

<sup>48</sup> In two cases, I hired someone to videotape so that my complete focus could be on the interview. My initial focus on high quality video was to be able not only to archive these interviews, but also to create short documentary films from my dissertation work. A first short documentary film that I created from some of these interviews, as well as other excerpts of those interviews in which participants consented to the video or audio being public, can be viewed on the website that accompanies this dissertation: [www.activistemotions.net](http://www.activistemotions.net).

<sup>49</sup> In addition to verbal consent, they signed the consent form for participant observation, which can be found in Appendix D, and after reading two drafts of my dissertation, they sent an additional attached consent message by email to me, clearly indicating that they consented to having approved the second (and final) version of the dissertation draft.

<sup>50</sup> In doing so, I was inspired by Tillmann-Healy's (2003) rendition of 'friendship as method,' which she posits "as a kind of fieldwork" that "involves researching with the practices, at the pace, in the natural contexts, and with an ethic of friendship" (p. 730). Interestingly, Tillman-Healy notes that friendship and fieldwork have much in common, as both require us to cope with "relational dialectics," such as "negotiating how private and how candid we will be, how separate and how together, how stable and how in flux." While 'friendship as method' involves participant observation and (formal and informal) interviewing, what differs is that its "primary procedures are those we use to build and sustain friendship: conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, giving, and vulnerability" (p. 734). It thus requires "radical reciprocity, a move from studying "them" to studying *us*" (p. 735). As such, "researchers must examine, scrutinize, and critique ourselves in ways not required by traditional qualitative inquiry" (p. 740).

Beyond Concordia, I was granted access to a rather large archive of interviews about the 2012 strike collected as part of an assignment in a History course at Dawson College and archived in the Dawson Oral History Project (DOHP) website.<sup>51</sup> From the latter online archive, I selected 11 interviews of the total of 20 students who had participated in at least one demonstration during the strike and who spoke about emotional experiences related to these.<sup>52</sup>

While it was important for me to transcribe as many of these interviews as possible to get a sense of the oral cues that Portelli (1991) emphasizes, due to time restrictions I hired my participant and friend Tania to transcribe three of the interviews I had conducted with Concordia students (with these interviewees' consent). I then reviewed her transcriptions in order to ensure reliability in transcription styles. Strongly influenced by Alessandro Portelli's focus on sound and orality as key to oral history's potential to document emotional utterances, and seeking to accurately represent interviewees' speaking styles, in transcriptions I sought as much as possible to include "um's" and "aw's" and "like's" and repetitive words; intonations through italics or capital letters; tones of voice that could not be explained merely through italics or capital letters (for example, "sarcastic tone"); noticeable inhalations and exhalations, and facial and body gestures (all indicated in parentheses); pauses and silences (through different quantities of punctuation periods, with each period referring to one second); different types of laughter (e.g. whisper laugh versus exuberant laugh); and the emphasis or time spent on certain letters of a word (for example, "I was so happy-y-y"). Since my method of transcription entailed including as many words as possible, only in rare cases in which one or two insignificant words confused the reading or impact of a sentence did I cut out words like "um's" or "euh." In those cases, I sought to alert the reader by only putting two elipses in square brackets ("[..]") versus the usual three elipses to indicate a greater number of words deleted ("[...]"). Since this is the first time I have transcribed in so much detail, the time required and the process of attempting to transfer the five senses to a two-dimensional piece of paper brought up many questions about whether it is worth

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<sup>51</sup> Two History faculty members at Dawson College, Mark Beauchamp and Ben Lander, granted me access to the archive after I signed a Researcher Agreement Form. See the archive website at: <https://dohp.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/>. To see their assignment/interview guidelines, see Appendix E.

<sup>52</sup> In my search through the DOHP online archives, I found a total of 20 interviewees who had participated as students during the strike. I did not use nine of them for the following reasons: two of them had only participated in general assemblies; one did not mention any emotional experiences; two did not recount any emotional experiences related to their participation in the strike; two of the interviews were difficult to hear due to background noise or poor sound quality; and finally, I could not get access to consent forms of two participants by the time that I needed them.

attempting to transfer oral and visual cues to the written page; thus I do not claim to have done so completely nor successfully, yet I did my best to capture what the audio and visual interviews convey that can tend not to be included in a transcript.

To further encourage the sense of orality that Portelli underlines, when transcribing or writing interviewees' stories, I often returned to the original interview recording to confirm visual or auditory emotional cues. I also tried as much as possible to re-listen to my interviews in my mp3 player when taking a walk or doing house chores: listening to the tones and voices of interviews in this way immersed me more fully in the context of the interview, allowing me to remember the person's affective expressions and gestures and the way they described certain events. This also helped me to recapture subtle interview dynamics and my own presence therein, which I considered important to represent in the stories of this dissertation. My role in the interview was of course nonexistent in the case of those 13 interviews (11 from the DOHP archive, and two from geography student Leila Ayad) that I did not personally conduct, which is inevitably conveyed through the absence of my presence in the stories I tell about these participants.<sup>53</sup>

That being said, Portelli (2011) notes that “There is no such thing as a neutral transcript: each comma is an act of interpretation” (p. 10), “thus, one must seek a compromise for which there are no set rules beyond the good faith and the ear of the transcriber/writer.” While I follow Portelli's lead in “striving to retain on the written page some of the impact of the spoken performance” and retaining “the speakers' choices of vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and construction,” I depart slightly from him in another regard. In his book *They say in Harlan County*, Portelli “avoided efforts to reproduce orthographically the sound of Appalachian speech” because it is “an endeavor always marred by negative connotations and excessive “othering”” of the Appalachian people. In contrast, while transcribing I attempted to reproduce orthographically, where possible, the case of French Québécois parlance while attempting to keep it readable<sup>54</sup> to

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<sup>53</sup> Not to mention, the questions posed in such interviews were different: While the two Geography interviews included questions specifically about emotions, the DOHP interviews did not have any questions specifically related to emotions (beyond 'how did the strike affect you?'), and yet the strong evocation of emotions in the latter is even more suggestive of their relevance in these interviewees' experience, as will be clear in Chapter 6.

<sup>54</sup> There were some inescapable exceptions: for example, in the spirit of readability, even though French Quebecers tend to emphasize the 't' in a way that might be phonetically spelled 'tte' (for example “il s'était faite sauter dessus”), to avoid misunderstandings I nonetheless spelled this as “il s'était fait sauter dessus.” In other cases, when the pronunciation did not make grammatical sense, I left the original pronunciation yet indicated the mistake with

those unfamiliar with it. I chose to do so in part out of a sense of affinity towards Québécois French for the first time in my life, grown out of my pride about the Quebec student movement's uniqueness within Canada, while recognizing and valuing that there are francophones, anglophones, and allophones living in Quebec and who were involved in the strike who do not always employ such parlance, including myself.<sup>55</sup>

Speaking of language, since some of these interviews were in French and some were in English, this dissertation interweaves French and English, sometimes within the same sentence. In doing so, while cognizant that these remain two colonial languages, I hope to respond to Sommer's (2004) "invitation to play bilingual (and multilingual) games" (p. xiii) and to mitigate the irritation from such games by contributing to the recognition of "multiplicity as a medicine for the monolithic condition" (p. xv).<sup>56</sup> Democracy, argues Sommer, "depends on constructing those miraculous and precarious points of contact from mismatches among codes and peoples." Indeed simply the prospect of typing in both English and French within the same document provided much frustration when the keyboard would automatically insert French-style quotation marks when I was writing French text, instead of the English-style quotation marks that I chose to use, since English is the dominant language of my voice within this dissertation.<sup>57</sup> A similar annoyance would occur when the English Spell Check would correct French words, and vice versa. This awkward interaction of two languages within the same sentences and text represents the multilingual reality of my youth at a Francophone primary and secondary school during which I spoke to my friends in at least three languages at the same time. While such 'play' with linguistic customs and official languages can be seen as contributing to the necessary humility required in a province and country responsible for the withering away of the languages of its

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"[sic]" - for example: "j'me sentais tout seule, là [sic]!" In the spirit of readability for those who do not know Québécois French, I have also included a Glossary of Québécois terms at the beginning of this dissertation.

<sup>55</sup> English and Spanish are technically my mother tongues. While my mother learned French in Spain before coming to Canada, she does not speak with a Québécois accent. This is the case for me to a certain extent: Since English was the language we spoke at home growing up, I am able to take on a Québécois accent, but I am also able to speak without it, as my accent and parlance changes depending to whom I speak. Speaking with a Québécois accent used to be a source of some anxiety for me, as before the 2012 strike I never felt that I spoke "Québécois" enough.

<sup>56</sup> I take further inspiration from Lydie Salvayre's (2008) beautiful tapestry of French and Spanish in her novel - essentially an oral history- *Pas Pleurer*, based on her mother's recollection of the Spanish Civil War.

<sup>57</sup> Regarding quotation marks, I inserted French-style quotation marks only when participants were quoting speech actions. Here is an example from Élise, one of the participants of this dissertation: "j'passe ma tête par la porte, « Fou!!! »" In the latter sentence, I use the English-style quotation mark to indicate that Élise is talking, and the French-style quotation marks to refer to her own reference to spoken words of the past.

Indigenous peoples, it is also the reality of modernity, contends Sommer: “Now that mass migrations take home languages to host settings, the sound of alternative languages interrupts the single standard that modern states had demanded and thereby refreshes regional variants that modernity had banished” (p.xii).<sup>58</sup>

In addition to playing with languages, I have sought to play with *fonts*, since in addition to the above-mentioned total of 25 individual interviews, three participants provided me with written material that they wrote during or immediately following the strikes. Élise, who participated in the 2005 and 2007 strikes, gave me a copy of the exit report she wrote upon leaving her paid position at her student association, in addition to her diaries. Since all of Élise’s diaries were written by hand, I sought to convey their original essence by using ‘*Lucida Handwriting*’ font (size 10). Keara, who participated in the 2012 GGI, also provided me with her electronic diaries, some of which were infused with academic quotes and intriguing theoretical insights, as she had also submitted some of them as assignments to her professors; and Alex Matak provided me with her zine, an abridged version of her undergraduate Honours thesis submitted in 2012, composed of an analysis of her own experience alongside her own interviews with Concordia strike organizers and participants.

To complement individual interviews, I both participated in and observed a reunion for Concordia 2012 strike activists at *Café Artère* on March 22, 2014.<sup>59</sup> That experience confirmed to me why taking methodical fieldnotes and recordings during the strike would have been difficult for me to do without threatening my own comfort levels during the strike. Indeed during the strike I at times felt uncomfortable wearing my researcher’s hat at meetings, for fear that francophone students might perceive me not only as an anglophone but as a researcher; and sometimes I did not want to take precious time away from strike organizing tasks with my complicated consent forms. Finally, I also transcribed a recording from a public presentation about the 2012 strike that took place in February 2015, during which Marya spoke alongside Anas, an undergraduate student from Fine Arts who was involved in the 2012 strike.

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<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, Sommer adds that “Mikhail Bakhtin noticed the cost” of monolingualism: “human sciences miss their targets of study precisely because they limit evidence to one language at a time and ignore the normal clusters of living language” (p. xxv).

<sup>59</sup> During this meeting I followed the fieldwork guidelines of Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1995), including writing as many notes during my bathroom breaks as I could.

To differentiate quotes from recorded or written sources from those that were not recorded nor written, I followed Contreras' (2012) method in his book, *The Stickup kids*: when quotes are from my memory or from typed or handwritten fieldnotes, I italicized them in addition to putting them between quotation marks. This allows me to differentiate them from representations of my thoughts (sometimes in italics) and mostly to distinguish them from quotes that are non-italicized between quotation marks in the case of quotes transcribed from a recording or copied from a written piece or correspondence.

Thus this dissertation comprises the voices of a total of 30 individuals beyond myself. They include 17 women and 13 men; 11 of these participants' stories were recorded, observed, or written in French, and 19 in English; 14 of them attended a francophone institution during the strike in which they participated, while 16 attended an anglophone institution; and with the exception of two participants who were in high school, two studying in the sciences, and two who did not share which CEGEP program they were in, all participants were studying in the social sciences or humanities<sup>60</sup> at the time of the strike in which they participated, including a total of nine participants who were geography students at Concordia.<sup>61</sup>

### **Analyzing individual stories about a collective movement**

It should be noted that Sherna Berger Gluck (2013) provides a caution to the life story approach I have discussed until now. Based in part on her experience doing collective interviews in the cultural context of Palestine, she argues that it may be time to “reconsider the practice of life history interviewing, particularly for social movement activists or people who were part of a collective experience” (p. 39), particularly a “movement that eschewed individualism in favor of collectivism” (p. 36).<sup>62</sup> Despite this important caution, and while my methods included the observation of a group meeting, I propose that individual life stories do not need to be seen in isolation –just as the personal does not necessarily have to negate the political. They can intertwine and complement one another, and either at the expense of the other can be problematic: one student strike may end, but another student’s activism may be only beginning.

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<sup>60</sup> Warren (2013) points to how student associations in the social sciences and humanities at the undergraduate level of university, were much more likely to vote to strike in 2012 than other student associations at the undergraduate level.

<sup>61</sup> The table in Appendix F lays out such information about each participant; one question that I did not ask participants was their socio-economic background.

<sup>62</sup> Similar to some of my participants, from her research experience there, Gluck had a sense of the irrelevance of individuals' childhoods and life stories within the exploration of the experience of a collective movement.



Indeed, Gluck does wonder whether the practice of following an individual interview by a collective interview could be a way of honouring the work and life of a person without supporting “gross individualism.” Benmayor (1991) brings up a slightly different point than Gluck with her research illustrating that “when testimonies are generated in an organized, group context, they have the potential of impacting directly on individual and collective empowerment” (p. 159). While the group meeting at *Café Artère* that I observe did not necessarily lead to collective empowerment, it did provide for me and at least one other participant the simple relief of not feeling alone in our feelings about the strike.

Somewhat contrary to Gluck's caution, Berger and Quinney (2005, p. 2) underline sociologist C. Wright Mills's observation that sociologists' preoccupation with “abstract empiricism” threatened to endanger the subject matter of sociology. In other words, they imply that biography was the forgotten component from C. Wright Mills's call for intertwining biography and history. They note Mills's call could be seen not just as a statement about content, but one about methodology: the need to seek out individuals' stories. The field of sociology, they add, was “born in an intellectual space between positivist science and literary representation, alternatively striving for analytical understanding and practical application, on the one hand, and the conveyance of meaning and empathy, on the other” (p. 1).

Addressing the latter concern with meaning more directly, oral historians focus not just on memory itself but on the meaning that people give to such memories, a meaning that is inevitably located in and connected to the present moment of the interview (Baillargeon, 1993). Considering oral history's interest not just in historical facts but also in the inaccurate recollection of events (Ibid; Portelli, 1991), where relevant I consulted mainstream and student newspapers alongside archived documents from the ASSÉ, the CLASSE and local student associations to provide further background or to verify participants' recounting of events, and to discuss the meanings of such inaccuracies. Indeed, oral historians Samuel and Thompson underline how the individuality of each story is an essential document of the construction of consciousness in the present. As Steven High (2014) notes:

“What is remembered and why are vitally important in oral history. Meaning and memory can be found not only in the words spoken but also in the form and structure of the oral narratives. (...) People's relationships to their own stories -where they linger and what

they skip over- helps us to understand the logic of what we are hearing. The telling of a story is a dialogical process that is charged, contingent, and reflexive.” (p. 39)

In line with such a focus on meaning, narrative, history, and biography, I incorporated different elements of narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008). I sought to pay attention to “local (micro) contexts of the interview and/or ethnographic encounter” (Riessman, p. 139) and attend “to time and place of narration,” while preserving the “sequence and the wealth of detail” and “attempting “to keep the “story” intact for interpretive purposes” (p. 74). So I first transformed each interview transcript into a chronological story that attempted to include the interview process itself, and my presence within it.<sup>63</sup>

While Riessman differentiates such narrative methods from grounded theory, for this dissertation I have sought to combine them. In other words, while keeping true to the above qualities of narrative analysis by writing up participants’ stories, I also sought to identify thematic elements across stories to develop an overarching theory that was grounded in these stories (or data). Following Urquhart (2013) I went through the transcripts and diaries several times attaching codes while “staying open” to what the data might be telling me; I then grouped these codes “into larger categories” and finally related those categories to each other and considered the relationships between them (p. 10). Finally, I sought to engage and compare the theory emerging from (‘grounded in’) the data with other relevant theories.<sup>64</sup> Instead of chopping up participants' quotes to assign them to a certain theme, I sought to keep the chronology of their stories intact, in a delicate balance simultaneously illustrating the themes and patterns their stories reveal. As Narayan (1997, p. 36) notes, “Calling for a greater integration of narrative into written texts does not mean that analysis is to be abandoned, but rather that it moves over, giving vivid experience an honored place beside it.” She explains:

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<sup>63</sup> To be clear, I used the present tense to refer to the time of the interview, and to differentiate it from the past tense of stories of being recounted; to avoid the confusion with the present time of the reading, and to convey the diversity of interview moments that such a present tense inadvertently glosses over, I have indicated what year each interviewee's 'present moment' (their interview) took place.

<sup>64</sup> While the recommendation from grounded theorists is to refrain as much as possible from reading the literature before analysis, this was clearly impossible since I had to do my doctoral comprehensive examinations before being able to take defend my proposal for this dissertation. However, I nonetheless tried to refrain from returning to the literature throughout the transcription and analysis process. For example, I only found out about Dupuis-Déri's notion of 'agoraphilie' after having come up with the concept of 'collective-oriented' emotions from the data.

“narratives are not transparent representations of what actually happened, but are told for particular purposes, from particular points of view: they are thus incipiently analytical, enacting theory. Analysis itself is most effective when it builds directly from cases evoked through narrative, providing a chance to step away, reflect on, and reframe the riveting particulars of the story at hand.”

Of course, part of the difficulty in doing so was that when I split up interviewees' stories across chapters in order to emphasize the sequential patterns of their experiences, it felt like an artificial compartmentalization of each participant's fuller, chronological story. As a possible antidote to my dilemma, in order to encourage the reader to recognize or follow their full story, upon introducing interviewees for the first time I have sought where possible to give a sense of the person's story leading up to the strike, and to let the reader know when I am continuing their story in a later chapter; when I return to their story, I remind the reader at what point of the story we left off in a previous chapter.<sup>65</sup> In some cases, where necessary and relevant, I have left some of the stories more intact from their 'beginning' to their 'end' (Simon in chapter 1 and Jeff in chapter 6).

While my attempt to fuse approaches to analysis might make for an unconventional format different than that of the established tradition in qualitative inquiry (Riessman, 2008), I hope it also makes for a more pleasurable, contextualized reading of the themes that illustrate the arguments I seek to make. “As companions clothed in nontechnical language, narrative and analysis join to push open the doors of anthropological understanding and welcome in outsiders” (Narayan, 1997, p. 36). To facilitate and highlight the most pertinent quotes throughout these stories as they pertain to the chapter or section's themes, I have sometimes **bolded** certain words in the text of the chapters that follow.

It should be noted that in the case of my own diaries, I was surprised both by how earlier diaries about which I had forgotten were completely in line with what others were saying, whereas in other cases, my experience was an anomaly. This could be because I had more

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<sup>65</sup> The exception to this would be Victoria, the composite character, as well as the stories of some geography students whose full stories I could not include beyond Chapter 5 due to space limitations. It should also be noted that in order to focus on the fuller stories of some participants, some DOHP interviewees' stories were left out completely, even though they helped to nurture my overall analysis.

personal and detailed information and context about myself for a very long period before and after the strike, but also because my positive moments were, especially immediately before and after the strike, dampened by my anxiety about also being a researcher.

### **Vulnerability and strength, in research and strikes**

Indeed, vulnerable (auto-)ethnography is not always easy. For one, activist scholars are inevitably confronted with the dilemma of how much to reveal and conceal in order to respect the quality of the research and the safety of activists (including the ‘activist researcher’ herself) and their movement.<sup>66</sup> I spent some tormented days fretting that my data inevitably faced a small risk of being subpoenaed by the authorities;<sup>67</sup> or that the information this project would reveal might *hurt* instead of *help* the student movement, as Jeff, one of the participants of this study, warned in his kind way. Could revealing strikers’ emotional ‘soft spots’ make them more vulnerable to government infiltrators and provocateurs who might learn, in the fold of this dissertation, the best formula to create activist burnout? I don’t have the answer, but I can only assume that if they wanted to know, they would find a way anyhow -and arguably they already have.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly related to the security and well-being of my interviewees, should I disclose activities in which my interviewees and I participated that could be considered illegal, even if the interviewee allowed it? In order to address this latter worry, I decided to create a composite character with a pseudonym (Victoria) to combine the elements of stories that I did not feel comfortable making public.

It was also the opinion of mainstream society that worried me. By bringing out the internal doubts and insecurities of strikers, and problems or mistakes within the movement, I wondered if the mainstream media or conservative elements of society and government and university administrations could appropriate it as a sign that they are thus “free from the burden

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<sup>66</sup> Gluck (2013)

<sup>67</sup> Gabriella Coleman (2014) speaks about a similar fear, including her recurring nightmares- and arguably her topic of research, *Anonymous*, had a much higher risk of being the target of a subpoena.

<sup>68</sup> Clough (2012) notes that “scholars of policing and security have pointed out how the state operates on the emotions of activists in order to deescalate their tactics, inhibit new member recruitment, and limit the ability of movements to sustain their momentum or act as effective political agents” (p. 1671); his study of “how particular emotional and affective structures of anarchist political organizing drive and interact with police attempts at social control” is arguably in itself an example of how academic work can document such practices to enable groups to critically reflect upon how to prevent such infiltration.

of responsibility”<sup>69</sup> of brutality or inequality.<sup>70</sup> If that weren’t enough to worry me, the works of reflexive ethnographer Ruth Behar (1996) and auto-ethnographer Carolyn Ellis (2004) constantly reminded me that studying one’s self is a difficult task. By fully disclosing my own experience and emotions as both researcher and striker, I feared that even if I managed to do it ‘well’, I would likely receive judgment and sneers from academics and future employers, from my peers, and perhaps even my family. *Would they be embarrassed of me or see me as self-obsessed? Would it change how I see myself? Would my participants be disappointed in my descriptions of them or my analyses of the strikes? Could it be that, alongside those who wanted to be interviewed about emotions, we were more narcissistic, more emotional, or more over-analytical than others?* What is certain is that we all felt that speaking about our emotions in relation to the strike was important.

Then there was the irony that I was often seeking to escape the same topic I was studying -just as I would later find out some wanted to escape the ghosts of 2005 by avoiding an interview with me.<sup>71</sup> This sometimes made this dissertation difficult to write, when I felt the pressures of mainstream society to let go of activism and get on with ‘real life.’ While I literally live off the gains of the student activists who preceded me -both in terms of government financial aid but also in terms of research ‘capital’ from the participants of this thesis project- I still have ambivalent feelings towards the strike. It reminds me of everything I loved and hated about the student movement, the hopes I eagerly fell into through its hoops, the limits of my own strength and commitment I discovered in falling. Perhaps learning to fight for hope, and then feeling we don’t have sufficient courage, is more difficult than never having that hope to begin with?<sup>72</sup>

A few days after writing the last sentence, I chanced upon a quote subtly echoing its sentiment with more poetic language, albeit somewhat sarcastically, in a letter that Pierre Bourgault wrote to André Laurendeau in 1961:

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<sup>69</sup> hooks cited in Behar (1993, p. 277)

<sup>70</sup> As Behar reveals was the case for white society when African-American or Latina women speak to the oppression they face from men in their respective communities.

<sup>71</sup> According to Marie, one of my interviewees, who will speak about this more fully in Chapter 1.

<sup>72</sup> This is a possibility that Ancelovici and Dupuis-Déri (2014) also discuss, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 and the conclusion chapter.

“Vous avez lâché avant le temps, et à ce compte, vous auriez mieux fait de ne jamais vous engager dans la bataille et de n’avoir jamais fait de sacrifices. Vous seriez aujourd’hui plus serein et l’on ne verrait pas à travers l’épaisse couche de poussière qui recouvre votre génération, surgir sans cesse le visage morbide de l’amertume de la déception.”

This quote was cited in a postface written by Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, one of the spokespeople for the CLASSE during the 2012 strike. Nadeau-Dubois emphasizes the author’s “impatience,” “fougue,” “rage,” and “colère” and his representation of youth contestation still relevant today despite the different historical context (2012, p. 214). I was struck by my different interpretation of Bourgault’s words, perhaps because I read them *without* their veil of anger and sarcasm. Because yes, in my darker moments I sometimes wonder whether it is better to never have ‘engaged the battle’ and to ‘never have made sacrifices’ if we are not able to continue our activism throughout our life, ending up stifled by the stench of disappointment.<sup>73</sup> This dissertation is borne in part out of my urge to pause and analyze the “visage morbide de l’amertume de la déception” before dismissing it with the assertion that it must simply be overcome.<sup>74</sup> Because maybe that is what I have become? Just another “visage morbide de l’amertume de la déception?” Or, in the words of the Bertolt Brecht introducing this dissertation, have I just become weak? While my ‘former activist self’ might have agreed with the judgment implicit in the words of Brecht and Bourgault, that judgment now seems rather simplistic and *machista*. Should not the question of activist maintenance be one for social movements rather than individuals? What about when people can physically no longer fight, or who have to take care of their kids? Those who become burnt out, after incarceration and alienation? Those who lose hope after many “deceptions” and “tellement de violences,” in Bourgault’s words?<sup>75</sup> Those who have suffered from depression and anxiety? Are we all merely *not strong enough*? Or is there more to the story? Are we perhaps, rather, not vulnerable enough with each other? I hope this dissertation can help to address these questions; and when exploring my own story, I hope to have been ‘strong enough’ to ask these questions of myself and of my participants in an honest

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<sup>73</sup> The word ‘déception’ in French does not mean ‘deception’ in English but rather ‘disappointment.’

<sup>74</sup> As does Shepard (2011) -dismissing activists who get disappointed and stop being involved- in his book review of Gould’s book *Moving politics*.

<sup>75</sup> The latter quote, ‘tellement de violences’ is a quote from Marie’s interview.

and reflexive way.

Indeed, strength and vulnerability can not be torn away from questions of power and context, which play a role in defining the value we give to those very words. Thus in Chapter 1, "The 'power' and context of striking emotions," I begin by exploring the power struggles and social dimensions inherent in defining 'emotion' and its space within academia, and how such power and contextual dynamics influence the student movement in turn. More specifically, I explore how power is related to the notion of 'emotional habitus', and I argue that the Quebec student movement is shaped by what I term a 'masculine' emotional habitus, despite the various 'emotional styles' that exist within the movement. Thus, rather than asking if those who discontinue student or activism are merely not strong enough, I suggest the question might need to start with asking: how does the emotional habitus of our movement view and encourage strength in the first place?

In Chapter 2, "'Le sentiment de tous ensemble': The existential 'high' of collective-oriented emotions," I argue that despite the *masculine emotional habitus* of the student movement, the historic, deliberative qualities of these general unlimited strikes brought out particular emotional potentialities: 'high,' collective-oriented emotional experiences laden with existential and spiritual meaning. I further illustrate how such emotional experiences allowed participants to transcend more difficult feelings of uncertainty or fear -in Brené Brown's (2015; 2012) words, to be *vulnerable*, especially at the beginning of their strike experiences during all three general unlimited strike campaigns -even the failed general strike campaign of 2007.

As time went on, the dialectical emotional impact of the strike was more intense, discomforting, and despairing, particularly for those participants who were also invested organizers of the strike. Such, I begin to argue hence, are the dialectics of vulnerability (Ibid). Such is the focus of Chapter 3, "Dialectics of vulnerability: From discomfort to despair," the latter encompassing a broad gamut of more 'difficult' emotions, which I argue became more intense the longer these participants were involved in strikes and student organizing, regardless of the outcome of the strike. I argue that this was in part because the sense of urgency left little time for interpersonal support and 'emotional reflexivity' to address the diverse and increasingly disappointing power dynamics internal and external to the movement. In this way the emotional habitus of the student movement was not adequate to deal on a collective level with such (often

existential) disappointments, more geared to emotions depicting strength rather than vulnerability.

Before exploring how such dialectical experiences transformed these interviewees in the longer-run, I move backwards in time to explore certain interviewees' life stories *before* the strikes. Thus in Chapter 4, "Life stories of striking emotions," I explore in greater depth how the above pattern of certain interviewees' high, collective-oriented, and dialectical emotional experiences were also influenced, intensified, and coloured by their idiosyncratic, personal life histories.

I then move from the role of biography to the role of place. In Chapter 5, "Within these walls: The place of (be)longing, anger, and power," I look at how the institution and department formed the basis of geography students' emotional experiences during the strike. Despite the dominantly 'masculine' emotional habitus of the student movement, geography students at Concordia revealed an 'emotional style' that included strong interpersonal support and emotional reflexivity, and less public expression of anger. These geography students' experience is yet another example of how interpersonal support and a sense of departmental belonging lightened the blow of the emotional lows of these strikes, giving greater meaning to the experience without alleviating it completely. And yet simultaneously, while various professors were supportive and reaffirmed students' sense of departmental belonging, picketing within a tight-knit department in an (anglophone) educational institution in which professors and administrators do not have a striking tradition left geography students particularly disappointed and confused by the role of certain non-supportive elements in the department, pointing to how a *general student* strike can be more emotionally confusing and tumultuous than labour strikes. Indeed the unclear role of power within the academic institution and within student organizers affected emotional experiences: even with a sense of belonging to one's department and even with interpersonal support systems in place, the mostly female, queer, and racialized main strike organizers experienced particular internal power dynamics from within the group of strike organizers that complicated their vulnerability and despair.

In Chapter 6, "Collectively ever after? Vulnerable legacies," I compare and contrast the legacies of these strike campaigns for all participants of this dissertation. I explore how especially for those who were *not* strike organizers -notably the majority of the interviewees from the Dawson Oral History Project archives about the 2012 strike- the above-mentioned 'high'



collective-oriented emotional experiences were translated beyond the strike into a more collective-oriented spirit and set of values, which I suggest could be considered the seeds of emergent 'structures of feeling' or of a collective or societal sense of existential meaning. For those who had been more invested in the strike, the traces of such 'structures of feeling' were more difficult to discern, buried in disappointments and despair; yet some managed to emerge and continue being involved in activism. While interpersonal relationships could not completely alleviate such despair, they did seem to be the one factor that was present among those who continued to be involved in activism within or beyond the student movement, to help transform the dialectical combination of emotions into new meaning and feeling.

In the Conclusion chapter, I summarize this dissertation's contributions to literature about emotions, social movements, and strikes. Based on the above, I propose lessons that can be drawn for activists and scholars, including but not limited to the role of collective mourning and interpersonal support for social movements. Finally, I point to the limitations of my research, alongside avenues for future research.

In putting forth my thesis that such strikes brought out a collective-oriented emotional 'high' that held potential to dialectically engender existential despair in part because of the *masculine emotional habitus* of the student movement, I will be confronted with the question of whether the latter is akin to what Wendy Brown (2003) describes as:

“a Left that has become more attached to its impossibility than to its potential fruitfulness, a Left that is most at home dwelling not in hopefulness but in its own marginality and failure, a Left that is thus caught in a structure of melancholic attachment to a certain strain of its own dead past, whose spirit is ghostly, whose structure of desire is backward looking and punishing” (p. 464).

If such is the case, in the spirit of feminist, oral history, and other methodologies that look towards action (Frampton et al., 2006; Green, 2000; Hussey, 2012; Lehrer, 2013; Lehrer & Smotrich, 2007; Olson & Shopes, 1991; Smith, 2003; Smith, 1990; Smith, 1987; Tillmann-Healy, 2003), I hope this dissertation can contribute to the exorcism of some of the student movement's intransigent habits, and to honouring the vulnerability that grounds -and the despair that dialectically follows- the flight of collectively felt moments of meaning.

## Interlude

*What is life  
if it doesn't dance  
through the streets  
make us fly  
without defying gravity*

*What is life  
without lifting  
our mind  
above  
our body's pains,  
without letting music  
drain  
the inevitable despair  
straight out of our soul*

*What is this life  
without creating  
something new  
at every break of dawn  
another way of being  
another way of seeing*

*What is life  
without the dance  
that floated us  
through the air  
of night  
where all that exists  
is beauty*

*What is life  
without the effervescent zeal  
that brings us to the streets  
again and again  
despite dread and tired eyes  
without the bonds  
the only ones that make this real*

*What is struggle  
without loving each rhythm  
of the saddest tear  
what are we learning  
if not to conquer our fear  
of life itself  
to know death so intimately  
that we can only rejoice  
at the continuous pain  
that life has borne us*

*So dance to the sunrise  
play with the darkness  
sleep with the stars  
roam with the clouds  
strum the trees  
hug the leaves  
and hum a tune  
that can only be sung  
with words that can't be spoken  
with lips that can't be heard  
with faces that can't be broken  
except by Emotion's fanciful game;  
without Her,  
we are not living up to our glory  
so let me tell you her story.*

- My diary, November 15, 2011

Chapter 1  
**The context and 'power' of (striking) emotions**

*L'attrait qu'exerce encore le Printemps érable réside d'ailleurs dans cette part d'inaccessible [...]*

- Marcos Ancelovici and Francis Dupuis-Déri, *Un printemps rouge et noir*<sup>76</sup>

*By raising the specter of emotion publicly, I confirmed my disqualification from their club. And I fulfilled the common cultural stereotype of it being only the "unreasonable" woman who speaks, inappropriately, about emotion in the hallowed halls of academe.*

- Megan Boler, *Feeling power*<sup>77</sup>

Writing about her experience during the 2012 student strike at Concordia University, Keara writes in her diary<sup>78</sup>: "In this time emotion overflows in hallways and sidewalks built to be void of feeling." Echoing Megan Boler's above sentiment, this line in Keara's diary highlights how the context in which we live and breathe can be imbued with messages about emotionality: that it belongs to the private sphere, not the *public* sphere of university and pedestrian pathways. In this chapter I interweave literature and participants' experiences to illustrate how this public-private dichotomy stems in part from our (academic) social context and its power dynamics, which influence the study and experience of emotions, including those felt and expressed within the student movement -more specifically its masculine emotional habitus, and the alternative emotional styles that form in reaction to the latter. Indeed the title of this dissertation, *Ghosts in our corridors*, touches on how emotions were written out of certain official academic histories for a time; yet it also refers to the sense of emotions being notoriously difficult to see or describe, "cette part d'inaccessible" to use Ancelovici and Dupuis-Déri's above words.<sup>79</sup>

"Where does emotion begin and end?" asks anthropologist Andrew Beatty (2014, p. 545) rhetorically. "Is it a matter of interpretation, feeling, category, situation, response, expression, or some or all of these?" Some scholars in the social sciences and humanities have focused on the

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<sup>76</sup> p. 33

<sup>77</sup> p. xvi

<sup>78</sup> The diary was written in April 2013; we will return to Keara's story in Chapter 5.

<sup>79</sup> Indeed, various participants of this dissertation expressed a sense of not being able to describe certain emotions.

difference between ‘emotion,’ ‘feeling,’ and ‘affect’ to distinguish the more physiological (and even ‘nonconscious’) sensation from the cognitive or cultural label assigned to that sensation, with terminologies that are not always consistent across scholars.<sup>80</sup> In Sara Ahmed's (2004) words, it is a challenge to:

“work across or between disciplines, many of which now claim emotions as a sub-discipline. It is a rather frightening task. Doing interdisciplinary work on emotions means accepting that we will fail to do justice to all of the intellectual histories drawn upon by the texts we read. It means accepting the possibility of error, or simply getting some things wrong. For me, this is a necessary risk; emotions do not correspond to disciplinary objects (the social, cultural, historical and so on), and tracking the work of emotions means crossing disciplinary boundaries” (p. 18-19).

Alison Jaggar (1989) similarly underlines that attempting to define emotions can lead to more questions than answers. She argues that this is due in part to the different meanings attributed to emotion in its everyday usage, the variety of phenomena it encompasses, and the diversity of emotional references in different cultures. With regard to the latter, and particularly relevant for this bilingual dissertation, Lindholm (2005, p. 31) explains that the word ‘emotion’ differs even between French and English: the French word ‘sentiment’ unites both feeling and emotion. Even the etymological origins of the term ‘emotion’ are somewhat ambiguous, lying with the Latin word ‘emovere,’ which means to “move away – indicating both elusiveness and agitation.” In English, the term ‘emotion’ has only been used since the eighteenth century; previously the only relevant term was ‘the passions,’ deriving from the Latin word ‘passus’ meaning “suffered, submitted” – suggesting “the overwhelming power of desire and the passivity of the individual, who is believed not to control feelings but to be enslaved by them.” Considering that the heritage of that term relegated emotions to a type of enslavement, it might not be surprising that classical sociologists' initial descriptions of modern society tended to involve "a move away from the

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<sup>80</sup> For example, Day Sclater and her colleagues (2009) agree with Greco and Stenner (2008) that the distinction between the terms ‘affect’ and ‘emotion’ is not useful, in part “because the terms are used highly inconsistently” (p. 1). Similarly, literary scholar Julie Ellison (1999) argues that there are more commonalities than differences between terms such as ‘emotion,’ ‘affect,’ ‘feeling,’ ‘sentiment,’ ‘sensibility’ and even ‘sympathy;’ historian William Reddy (2001) and cultural theorist Sara Ahmed (2004) use the term ‘emotion’ and ‘feeling’ interchangeably.

alleged emotionality of so called traditional societies," and early social scientists tended to associate emotion "with the primitive, the embodied, the female" (Greco & Stenner, 2008, p. 5).

Associated in this way with the body, emotions were initially a topic of study of the natural sciences and scientific psychology (Greco & Stenner, 2008). Yet ideas have evolved even in those domains since William James's (1884) definition of emotions as mere physical arousal, based on decades of previous medical and physiological research. Recently, contemporary experimental psychologists tend to agree that emotion is a complex system, or set of responses or reactions, that "involve multiple components or factors, coordinated or organized into a temporarily unified and coherent response": these include not just physiological and expressive reactions, but also a *behavioural response and a cognitive appraisal* (Greco & Stenner, p. 7). Already here, we see that cognition is starting to be considered part and parcel of an emotion. On a similar note, neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's (1999; 1994) points to evidence suggesting that what we consider 'rationality' *requires* what we consider 'emotion.' According to Deborah B. Gould (2009, p. 17), scholars of the 'emotional turn'<sup>81</sup> not only challenge such dualisms, they challenge "both the equation of emotionality with irrationality and the notion that emotion necessarily engenders irrational behavior, arguing that *both* thought and emotion can be irrational, and *both* can lead to irrational behavior, although neither necessarily is or does so." Alison Jaggar (1989), for example, transcends the inner/outer, individual/collective, mind/body dichotomies. Excluding "automatic physical responses and non-intentional sensations, such as hunger pangs" (p. 148), she recognizes both the biological and social nature of emotions, writing: "[a]lthough it is probably true that the physiological disturbances characterizing emotions –facial grimaces, changes in the metabolic rate, sweating, trembling, tears, and so on– are continuous with the instinctive responses of our pre-human ancestors," this does not contradict the possibility that mature human emotions are also "socially constructed on several levels" (p. 150).

So if emotions were initially "territorialized by the psychobiological sciences," this was challenged in the seventies and eighties by scholars who saw emotions as "social and cultural subject matter" (Greco & Stenner, 2008, p. 8). Indeed, sociologists and anthropologists who view

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<sup>81</sup> According to Gould (2009, p. 16-17), "the *emotional turn* in the study of social movements and other forms of contentious politics" was greatly influenced by a February 1999 conference on social movements and emotion organized by Francesca Polletta, Jeff Goodwin, and James Jasper, creating the summit of sorts of the critical mass and momentum that had been slowly growing among scholars of this topic since the early nineties. They draw on an abundance of growing research in various fields, from history to anthropology.

emotional meaning as “fundamentally structured by particular cultural systems and particular social and material environments” are an important influence in this dissertation.<sup>82</sup> Day Sclater and colleagues (2009) note that emotions:

“exist partly in the body, but they are also in our minds, in our language and in the cultures that surround us. They can be understood as a crucial bridge between the individual and the social, and are quintessentially psychosocial phenomena. They have a mercurial status, not existing without an individual to experience the emotion, but often having little significance without a socio-cultural framework that imbues feelings with meaning” (p.1).<sup>83</sup>

In short, various scholars of the 'emotional turn' contend that “emotion suffuses all aspects of life” (Gould, 2009, p. 17).

#### THE ‘POWER’ IN STUDYING EMOTION

It follows that in this dissertation I do not wish to impress upon emotions as a separate phenomenon, but rather to redress the imbalance in certain fields of academia that accord greater value, historical importance, and thus power to facts, dates and ‘rational arguments’ (Jaggar, 1989), or that strictly detach these from emotions. Such is the case, for example, with Bhéreur-Lagouanaris and colleagues' (2015) study of the ‘affectivité’ of the 2012 *Maple Spring*, measured through participants’ biometric activity while recounting their experiences. While the methodology is certainly original, these researchers' analyses end up dichotomizing the strategic/ideological realm from the affective realm, which I consider to be unsustainable considering that both participants and researchers linked ‘bodily intensities’ to linguistic and ideological concepts.<sup>84</sup> Finally, these authors pay little attention to how participants’ (and their body signals’) location in the *present* affects their retelling of the *past*. This dissertation’s firm

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<sup>82</sup> Lutz (1998, p. 5-6); see also Briggs (2000), Lutz & Abu-Lughod (1990), Rosaldo (1980).

<sup>83</sup> These scholars define themselves within the transdisciplinary ‘discipline’ of psychosocial studies. Similar to Day Sclater and colleagues (2009), Harding and Pribram (2009) just as vaguely conceptualize emotion as “constitutive of individuals *and* of cultural communities, practices and beliefs” (p. 12).

<sup>84</sup> The evocative quotes from participants of their study reveal the latter could not detach their intense ‘affective’ reactions from ideologies, strategies, and linguistic concepts (‘friendship,’ ‘sharing,’ etc.)

grounding in oral history seeks to address that gap, while also proposing that complex and intense emotional experiences during these strikes were *intimately tied* to rational and ideological ideas, which is in part what made them so powerful.

In critiquing Bhéreur-Lagounaris and colleagues' (2015) strict focus on affect, I am not claiming that it is an irrelevant concept. As Gould (2009, p. 19) proposes, 'affect' reminds us of the "nonconscious, nonlinguistic, and nonrational aspects" and thus the open-ended "potential" of emotions to be transformed or interpreted in diverse ways; as such, the notion of affect ensures a more all-encompassing understanding of different aspects of the "emotional dimensions of political action and inaction." That being said, I am not convinced that one can study 'affect' without inevitably labelling it as an emotion-to-be, which Gould inevitably ends up doing. Even when my participants uttered "I can't explain the emotion in words," the interpretation of such a comment depends on each participant's vocabulary and subjective understanding of emotion labels. Keeping such conundrums in mind, I have nonetheless sought to consider 'emotion' in a way that includes its blurrier counterpart and predecessor, 'affect' by being as inclusive as possible to when analyzing 'emotional experiences.' Being wary of the mind-body dichotomy, I tried to pay attention to the 'bodily' and 'affective' realm that Calhoun (2001) and Gould (2009) argue is so often ignored in social movement literature about emotions.<sup>85</sup> On the flip side, I refrained from focusing *solely* on physiological or bodily intensities to avoid a focus on certain types of emotions over others.<sup>86</sup> Indeed James Jasper (2011, p. 14.3) notes that 'reflex emotions' such as anger, fear, joy, or surprise are often mistakenly taken "as the paradigm for all emotions, thereby exaggerating the intensity, suddenness, and disruptive capacity of emotions."<sup>87</sup>

Including a focus on the different lengths of time an emotion can last, late philosopher Robert Solomon (2007) helps to comprehensively capture all of the above with his broader notion of 'emotional experience' as:

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<sup>85</sup> Similar to Gould (2009, p. 30), I transcribed and analyzed "in a manner that was attuned to the silences, to the inarticulable," and to volume and tone. In my analysis, I did not only code what participants labeled as their emotions, but also utterances that clearly denoted an emotional experience or an experience beyond the solely rational realm, despite the absence of what are typically considered 'emotion words.'

<sup>86</sup> Despite the fact that Gould (2009) argues that emotions require bodily intensity to be considered as such, I would argue that she was also rather open in what she described as emotions, as it was not always clear that the emotions she described (e.g. pride and shame) necessarily came with distinctly clear physiological reactions.

<sup>87</sup> Jasper (2011, p. 14.3) differentiates 'reflex emotions' and 'moods' from the more stable 'affective commitments or loyalties' and 'moral emotions.'



“a complex of many experiences; sensations; various ways of being aware of the world, our own bodies, and intentions; and also thoughts and reflections on our emotions, all melded together in what is typically encountered as a single more or less unified experience” (p. 244).

In what follows, I will use the terms “emotional experiences,” “emotions,” and “feelings” interchangeably, while using the terms “affect” and “affective” specifically for cases indicating that vaguer physiological descriptors or indescribable feelings were at play.

I have also tended to prefer the term 'emotion' because it exists in English and French ('*émotion*') and is used in common parlance -certainly more than 'affect.' Such common usage is important, as the mere mention of 'emotion' was sometimes enough to relax participants who did not feel confident enough to recall 'facts.'<sup>88</sup> Indeed I learned to understand 'emotion' not solely a topic or product of research, but as a powerful research *process* or *method* of sorts that can bring out colours and nuances of experiences and social movements that might otherwise be kept 'off the record.'<sup>89</sup> As Clifford argues, emotions in oral history can more often be a “useful set of filters,” an entry point into learning about a person’s experience (Clifford, 2012, p. 211). On a similar note, Andrew Beatty (2014, p. 560) argues that "we are all narrators because we all have emotions; and emotions tell their own story." In such a light, defining emotions becomes less important than 'what emotions do' (Ahmed, 2004) for the interviews and stories of students involved in these strike campaigns.

## BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE: THE POWER OF MEANING

Just as there are idiosyncratic responses to an interview question, there are individual histories behind striking emotions. Thus before stepping into a description of the particular social context of these strike campaigns, I will take a step inward theoretically. For if “the sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society,” as C. Wright Mills (1959, p. 6) wrote, then the study of emotions in social movements

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<sup>88</sup> Audrey’s interview was a case in point: she was only able to relax enough to continue the interview-and remember the numbers of the tuition increase six years earlier- once I asked her a question about the emotions she felt then.

<sup>89</sup> The term ‘off the record’ was brought to the forefront in oral history by Sheftel and Zembrzycki’s (2013).

might seem like a particularly relevant endeavour for sociology.<sup>90</sup> Nonetheless, it remains a controversial one, according to Calhoun (2001). Despite being challenged by Romantics like Rousseau, or by Freudians, mystics, and post-modernists, Calhoun argues that the history of various dichotomies related to the emotions has “not been escaped” in terms of how it affects the study of social movements, notably: the view that the body and emotions need to be controlled, and the inherited “tradition of reasoning” that “has been built in part by putting emotions in a specific and contained place” (p. 45). While there have been “wide-reaching” efforts in the sociology of emotions, “they have not yet deeply transformed sociological theory in a general way” (Ibid) and thus he contends that “the founding definition of the field” of social movement studies “is directly hostile to grasping emotions well” (p. 47).<sup>91</sup>

Sociology's resistance to anything outside of “serious science” and what is ‘observable’ partly accounts for these persisting dichotomies, explains Calhoun: there is a fear of an approach to emotions that is based on interpretation, because of mainstream sociology's reticence to address the “problem of meaning.”<sup>92</sup> Not to mention, “studies of emotions raise the specter of psychologism for many sociologists.” Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983, p. 224), for example, focuses on how culture and social context influence not only “what we feel” but “how we name it.” And yet while Hochschild agrees with psychologist Elizabeth Duffy's (cited in Hochschild, 1983, p. 201-201) point that emotion, thought, and perception “represent loose and overlapping categories of phenomena,” she disagrees with Duffy's alternative to dispense with such ‘cross-sectional concepts’ in favor of longitudinal concepts (which describe phenomena that happen sequentially) as this “simply eliminates the complexity we ought to be trying to describe” in the realm of emotion. While I agree with Hochschild that ignoring emotion and other inter-related concepts is not a solution as it would allow them to continue to be marginalized by academia,<sup>93</sup> I nonetheless see Duffy's (cited in Hochschild) focus on longitudinal concepts as an

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<sup>90</sup> Indeed Hochschild (2011, p. 271) notes: “If, as C. Wright Mills said, the job of sociology is to trace links between private troubles and public issues, then the sociology of emotion lies at the very heart of sociology.”

<sup>91</sup> Calhoun (2001) goes as far as critiquing his fellow contributors in Goodwin and colleagues' (2001) volume for following a tendency to conceive of emotions as “irrational” either explicitly or implicitly “because of the opposition to “rationalistic” analytic approaches” (p. 49).

<sup>92</sup> As hypothesized by Wuthnow (cited in Calhoun, p. 46). This message echoes the words of Berger and Quinney (2005) in Chapter 1 of this dissertation that the field of sociology was “born in an intellectual space between positivist science and literary representation, alternatively striving for analytical understanding and practical application, on the one hand, and the conveyance of meaning and empathy, on the other” (p. 1).

<sup>93</sup> Boler (1999)

important one, when speaking of life stories: notably, how the experience of emotions and events hold a particular significance in the context of idiosyncratic life trajectories. This does not mean, as Hochschild cautions against, seeing emotions as “having an independent presence or identity within a person through time.”<sup>94</sup> I contend that there is an interesting middle-point between the longitudinal focus of Duffy and the view of Hochschild: looking at emotions both within their historical, socio-political moment and from the perspective of their meaning in a particular person’s culture and life, without necessarily objectifying or reifying the emotion.

Faced with the above-mentioned resistances, Calhoun underlines the importance of affirming certain commitments around social movement research into the emotions. These include a 'critical theoretical perspective' about implicit historical and linguistic biases, thus transcending various dichotomies;<sup>95</sup> and studying emotions not just sociologically but also psychologically. The latter, Calhoun specifies, "requires frameworks for bringing intrapsychic and cultural dimensions of meaning and action into clear relationship with social organization" to finally challenge "sociology's long-standing" resistance to psychological analysis (p. 51).

Heeding to Calhoun's call, in this dissertation I seek to integrate a psychological approach into my sociological analysis about emotions, notably a focus on personal and interpersonal histories and existential meanings, and their relation to vulnerability. More specifically, in the chapters that follow I incorporate the existential-humanistic perspective of psychiatrists, psychotherapists, and scholars who, sometimes explicitly influenced by existentialism and other times not, focus on the freedom that humans have to find their own meaning in the face of despair, meaninglessness, and death (Frankl, 1984; Yalom, 2008, 2002), particularly through emotion (Brown, 2015, 2012; Greenspan, 2004). Indeed, the late philosopher Robert Solomon (2007, p. 1) stated that “in isolation, experimental psychology, neurology, and the new methods of “cognitive science” tend to deprive our thinking of what I consider the most important dimension of our emotional life: its connection to ethics, to values, to living happily, healthily, and well” (Ibid). Thus Solomon aimed to “show how the emotions provide insight and meaning to our lives, not just in special cases [...] but across the emotional spectrum and in virtually every

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<sup>94</sup> Hochschild (1983, p. 202)

<sup>95</sup> Feminist scholars have been arguing this throughout different disciplines for long before Calhoun (2001) wrote.

moment of our waking (and at least some of our sleeping) lives” (Ibid, p. 2).<sup>96</sup> Social work professor Brené Brown (2012, p. 33) connects such possibility for existential meaning specifically to vulnerability. Based on her interviews with more than 1,000 individuals and more than 3,000 pieces of secondary data, she concludes: "Vulnerability is the core of all emotions and feelings. To feel is to be vulnerable. To believe vulnerability is weakness is to believe that feeling is weakness. To foreclose on our emotional life out of a fear that the costs will be too high is to walk away from the very thing that gives purpose and meaning to living." Throughout this dissertation, I will be slowly knitting the existentialist thought of the above-mentioned scholars - particularly Brown's conceptualization of vulnerability- into my interdisciplinary explanatory quilt of these strike participants' experiences, to propose that meaning -and its interconnection with emotions and vulnerability- is not simply a question of individual freedom, but can arise organically from collective activities and moments.

## POWER AND EMOTIONAL HABITUS

If scholars of the ‘emotional turn’ sought to recognize the *social* dimensions of feeling states, might the focus on the psychological, and even “bodily, affective components of emotion return us to a notion of feelings as individual and presocial?” Gould (2009, p. 31) answers her own question, arguing that “it need not,” thanks to the concept of ‘emotional habitus,’ which helps to theorize the relationship between affect and the social.<sup>97</sup> Gould borrows the term ‘emotional habitus’ from various scholars, most notably Bourdieu and his notion of ‘habitus,’ which Gould describes as:

“the socially constituted, commonsensical, taken-for-granted understandings or schemas in any social grouping that, operating beneath conscious awareness, on the level of bodily understanding, provide members with a disposition or orientation to action, a “sense of the game” and how best to play it” (p. 33).

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<sup>96</sup> On a similar note, social psychologist Wetherell (2012, p. 4) defines affect or “human emotion” as “embodied meaning-making.”

<sup>97</sup> Indeed Raey (2015, p. 10) proposes that Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ is at the intersection of psychology and the social, thus holding potential for holistically understanding “lived, embodied, affective experiences.” Bourdieu himself pointed to the importance of combining sociology and psychology despite these fields’ “mutual suspicion” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 166, cited in Raey, p. 11).

Thus like an ingrained *habit*, habitus might be thought of as a “way of being” (Costa & Murphy, 2015, p. 7). Through the daily act of living in different social contexts, we develop a sense of what to do and what to say (*and* as we will see, what to *feel*), without necessarily realizing it (Gould, 2009). We might not be conscious of its simultaneously social element, because each field has “its hierarchical structure, regularities, logic, and stakes” and can feel natural and intrinsic (Ibid, p. 33). Therein lies precisely its hegemonic potential, argues Gould: “social forces are powerful to the extent that they are able to manipulate the affective charges that get attached to all aspects of living” by operating “at the visceral affective level, often bypassing thought altogether” (Ibid, p. 39).

And yet, underlines Gould, emotions in turn have the capability to *challenge* power and the habitus, a dialectical relationship to which I will return to below. Suffice for now to note that habitus reflects Bourdieu’s attempt to transcend the structure/agency dichotomy “whilst acknowledging the external and historical factors that condition, restrict and/or promote change” (Costa & Murphy, 2015, p. 3). Thus transcending the subjectivism/objectivism and individual/collective divides, habitus is “socialised subjectivity that agents embody both individually and collectively, through the interrelationships they establish in the social spaces to which they belong” (Ibid, p. 7).

While Bourdieu's notion of habitus already included emotions albeit not always directly or in a focused way,<sup>98</sup> Gould (2009) makes its emotional dimension explicit with her concept of 'emotional habitus.' In other words, she “extends the habitus concept into the realm of feeling,” adding that “an emotional habitus contains an emotional pedagogy, a template for what and how to feel, in part by conferring on some feelings and modes of expressions an axiomatic, natural quality and making other feeling states unintelligible within its terms and thus in a sense unfeeling and inexpressible” (p. 34).<sup>99</sup> Gould (p. 35) prefers the term *emotional habitus* to that

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<sup>98</sup> Scheer (2012, p. 204-205) suggests that this could be why habitus has “been largely neglected by anthropologists and sociologists of emotion,” with the exception of anthropologist Deborah Reed-Danahay -and of course Deborah Gould (2009). Interestingly Bourdieu (2000, p. 140-141) writes in one of his parentheses: “(and nothing is more serious than emotion, which touches the depth of our organic being) [...]”

<sup>99</sup> While Gould’s concept of ‘emotional habitus’ has been criticized for being linked “rather one-sidedly with the body and the non-conscious” (Gammerl, 2012, p. 163), for being “anti-constructivist” (Ibid, p. 172), for being “redundant” and implicitly dividing “the habitus in a way that runs counter to Bourdieu’s theory” (Scheer, 2012, p. 194), I consider her concept helpful in specifying and focusing on the emotional dispositions of a habitus. I do not

of *emotion culture*, “a concept from the sociology of emotions literature,” because the former term “by emphasizing practices, especially those that are nonconscious and noncognitive, offers an account of why and how specific feelings become widespread within a collectivity and why and how they sometimes change.” Yet Gould does not deny the social construction and hegemonic dissemination of habitus and of emotions: "Our affective states and emotions, shaped by the social world but experienced as solely our own, can smooth the workings of power in part by obscuring its very operations" (p. 40-41).<sup>100</sup> Such an emotional embodiment of social forces helps to explain how, consciously or not, people might perpetuate emotion rules that do not necessarily fit with their ideological conception of the world, and that they might only realize in hindsight.

### **Emotional habitus of Quebec’s student movement**

Accordingly I paint here a sketch of the emotional habitus of the student movement more generally in order to place in their larger context the emotional experiences of *strikes per se* that are the focus of this dissertation. In other words, I seek to illustrate how striking emotions exist both *because of* and *in spite of* such habitus. Since not all interviewees participated in the movement beyond the strike(s) themselves, this sketch of the student movement emotional habitus will be predominantly based on the experiences of those interviewees who were involved in the student movement for various years beyond the strike. I seek to contextualize and illustrate the potential influence of broader emotional, educational, and activist cultures on this emotional habitus, providing specific Québécois sociohistorical and cultural markers where relevant, keeping in mind that a detailed exploration of Quebec’s history and emotional culture is beyond the scope of this dissertation. While I acknowledge that media -including social media- can play an important role in moulding emotions (Scheer, 2012, p. 210), a comprehensive analysis of media coverage of the student movement or its strikes is beyond the scope of this dissertation, and was not included within my methods.<sup>101</sup>

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read Gould’s focus on the bodily and “non-conscious” as necessarily “anti-constructivist,” but merely one that seeks to encompass the cognitive, social, and bodily, as well as the conscious and unconscious elements of emotions.

<sup>100</sup> I do, however agree with Gammerl (2012) and Scheer (2012) that the notion of ‘emotional style’ can be helpful for making explicit that change of habitus can be due to more than nonconscious and noncognitive practices, and for emphasizing the plurality of mutually interdependent or opposing styles, which I will address in the sections below.

<sup>101</sup> I hope however that the sketch I am drawing of the emotional habitus of the student movement can be elaborated in the future by exploring student movement media and communications as well as Québécois media.

I am proposing here that the common thread of participants' stories reveals the fabric of what I call the 'masculine' emotional habitus of the student movement from 2005 to 2012.<sup>102</sup> I place the word 'masculine' in quotation marks to indicate that I am referring to the traits traditionally associated with the socialization of masculinity. Indeed, by using the term 'masculine,' I am not suggesting that there are emotions that males are biologically predisposed to over females, nor am I referring to a "discrete and polarized masculine/feminine distinction" (Coleman & Bassi, 2011, p. 207). Rather, I am referring to emotional tendencies or habits traditionally associated with the performance of masculinity -more specifically, the Western cultural and societal expectations of masculinity. In this sense the student movement could be considered to be encouraging within its womb "scripts which assume the privileged and universal status of forms of rationality characteristic of capitalist modernity and its ongoing colonization and subjugation, not only of territories, but also of other ways of being, imagining, and working" (Ibid, p. 219). Indeed, "Keeping your emotions under control is another element in the modern, Western construction of masculinity," writes Maria Zackariasson (2009, p. 43).<sup>103</sup> There is an emotion that forms the exception to this stoic rule: masculinity is associated with anger (Robinson, 2002). The easy flare-up of anger and aggression is illustrated by a reflection written for congress by the Executive Council of the ASSÉ in the aftermath of the 2005 strike:

"Que ce soit dans un contexte de congrès, à plusieurs dizaines de personnes, ou en plus petit groupe, lors d'une réunion de comité par exemple, il arrive que des personnes puissent s'abandonner à leurs émotions et finir par hausser le ton, crier ou même insulter les personnes qui débattent avec eux ou elles. Cela s'est déjà vu au sein de l'ASSÉ mais également à travers l'histoire du mouvement étudiant (ASSÉ, 2005b, p. 108)."

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<sup>102</sup> This is perhaps unsurprising for feminists who have consistently denounced the "langue macho" (ASSÉ, 2005b) or the "machisme de tradition" (slogan cited in Delvaux et al., 2014, p. 120) of the ASSÉ and the student movement more generally. To be clear, I am not suggesting that this emotional habitus is something particular to the Québec student movement alone; as I will elaborate below, it is influenced by various other social movements as well as by academia's eschewal of emotions and mainstream society's valorization of masculinity. Indeed as Gould (2009, p. 33) notes, a habitus does not just structure "individual and collective practices" but is itself "also structured by such practices and thus as well *by the social conditions that shape people's dispositions*" [italics are mine].

<sup>103</sup> Oransky and Mareneck (2009)'s interviews with middle-class and upper-class male high school students in the United States similarly reveal the association of manliness to "acting stoic, tough, and unfeeling" (p. 225).

Such a *masculine* emotional habitus -generally anti-emotional with the exception of anger- was described critically by both male and female interviewees in this dissertation.<sup>104</sup> Particularly when speaking about its provincial structures and the locus of formal student association structures on local campuses, participants spoke of a student movement emotional habitus that is stoic: Austerity and anger are expressed and accepted over joy, with a general side-stepping of emotional expression and interpersonal well-being; and guilt to the point of shaming both self and others for not doing enough primes over compassion towards and recognition and tolerance of others. Philippe<sup>105</sup> comments that “Quand on mène une lutte aussi large,” the first goal is “aller au *but, tsé*,” notably to change government policy, whereas interpersonal relationships are relegated to the “second plan.” He adds that ways of relating that are “tendues, plus froides, euh, plus euh, bureaucratiques” are more common in the provincial and faculty-level student associations, yet also manifest themselves sometimes in the “associations modulaires [at UQAM].”<sup>106</sup> On a similar note, Pierre<sup>107</sup> reflected that Québécois student activists need to work more on tolerance towards others. His girlfriend, who is sitting next to him and involved in the student movement at the time of our interview in 2011, adds :

"Aussitôt qu’y’a un *minime* différence [sic], rapport à l'idéologie véhiculée, t'es tout de suite comme mis de côté, pis, ça crée des divisions pis des pertes d'énergie [...] Si tu réussis pas à tolérer en fait euh.. quelqu'un qui pense *généralement* comme toi, peut-être pas totalement comme toi, mais *généralement* comme toi, comme comment veux-tu faire un travail efficace de syndicalisme [étudiant]?"

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<sup>104</sup> Quite differently from my participants, Zackariasson (2009, p. 41) notes that during her participant observation and 18 qualitative interviews, male global justice activists rarely spoke spontaneously about fear related to protests. She supposes that it could be because “Fear is an emotion that mainly has negative connotations, and to admit being afraid is consequently not necessarily something desirable” especially for men as it “is not generally a part of the cultural conceptions of young men” and even regarded as “unmanly.” In the case of one male activist who spoke openly about his fear, Zackariasson suggests that despite scholars who note the difficulty in interviewing men about emotions, it might be easier for them to admit difficult emotions to an unknown researcher who does not know their friends, especially if the interview is anonymized.

<sup>105</sup> Philippe was involved in the student movement from 2005 until 2008 at both the CEGEP and university levels and attended ASSÉ province-wide congresses. His story will be fully introduced from its beginnings in Chapter 2.

<sup>106</sup> “Associations modulaires” refer to departmental student associations (as opposed to faculty-wide or university-wide student associations).

<sup>107</sup> Pierre was involved in the student movement from 2006 to 2008 at UQAM through the *Association étudiante du module de science politique de l'UQAM* (AEMSP) and as a delegate at various ASSÉ congresses. His strike story will be introduced from its beginnings in Chapter 2.



### *Activist and sociocultural contexts of this habitus*

The Quebec student movement is certainly not unique among Leftist social movements in adopting -or reproducing- what I am calling a *masculine* emotional habitus. Solnit (2004, p. 15-16) notes that by focusing on “bad news,” the most visible elements of the Left reinforce an emotional tenor that is “masculine, stern, disillusioned, tough enough to face facts”; Gould (2009, p. 438) adds that “the emotional demand of those narratives is to be outraged and not give in to despair.”<sup>108</sup> Scheer (2012, p. 210) considers political activism to rely “on the practice of negative feelings.” Brown and Pickerill (2009, p. 27) lament that even in activist spaces committed to horizontal, participatory organizing in Britain, Australia, and the United States, when a movement is successful burnout can still occur in part due to:

“the policing of an ideal ‘perfect standard’ of what it means to be an ‘activist,’ and the perpetuation of gendered performances of machismo in social movements that can disrupt the emotional sustainability of all involved. These strong identities confound long-term emotional sustainability by positioning practices of emotional reflexivity and practices of attending to one’s emotional needs as self-indulgent acts that get in the way of ‘proper’ activist priorities.”

In addition to the potential modeling of other activist cultures, Quebec's student movement is embedded in its particular activist and sociocultural history. Indeed, “[t]he habitus -embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history- is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product,” writes Bourdieu (1990, p. 56). As Shawn Katz (2015, p. 12-13) notes, “[f]rom its origins, the trajectory of the student movement evolved in intimate relation with the ebb and flow of Québec’s broader social and political currents.” Katz portrays this province's student movement as “born of the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, a period of radical social and political change that forged the structures of the modern Québec state.”<sup>109</sup> The

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<sup>108</sup> The worldwide popularity of Stéphane Hessel’s (2010) 32-page book *Indignez-vous!*-in English, *Time for outrage!*- confirms, or played a part in influencing, this tendency. In English it was translated to: *Time to outrage!*

<sup>109</sup> However, Warren (2008) suggests we can not explain the burst of the student movement solely by the election of Liberal Party Jean Lesage in 1960. Indeed it has also been argued that “the tradition of activism started in the mid-1950s” when the *Jeunesse étudiante catholique* initiated the *Presse étudiante nationale* (PEN) and “the Catholic French-Canadian Youth Association called for a 24-hour strike to protest the Quebec premier’s refusal of federal government transfers to higher education” (Bégin-Caouette & Jones, 2014, p. 415); Theurillat-Cloutier (2017) and

previous Duplessis government had left the Catholic francophone majority in a socially and economically marginalized position compared to the Protestant anglophone business establishment, despite the government's French-Canadian nationalism and ties to the Catholic Church (Ibid). Sean Mills (2010, p. 21) reports that there is "statistical proof of the discrimination that many francophones had been experiencing for years" in terms of access to the workforce, income, and control of the economy, not to mention infant mortality rates that "long surpassed those of the English-speaking neighbourhoods," and the utter poverty of French-speaking working class districts of Montreal. The newly elected Liberal Party vowed to return Quebec to its people from the authoritarian tendencies and laissez-faire policies that had allowed foreign companies to extract the province's resources: If the Church had previously been in charge of education, health, and basically "all facets of social existence," Quebec's "new welfare state arose to replace the Catholic Church at the centre of French-Canadian life" (Katz, 2015, p. 13). Indeed such historic ties of the province to Catholicism are specifically mentioned by Pierre:

"Tu me parles de la grève de 2012, pis je commence à ressentir la culpabilité de pas m'impliquer tsé? C'est, c'est très *chrétien* en fait [...] c'est une mentalité un peu masochiste!"

Pierre acknowledges that he himself was "guilty" of guilting others:

"Y'a des gens qui en faisaient pas assez à mon avis à [mon association étudiante], tu te mets à les juger tsé, tu te mets à dire 'Ouais, tu pourrais en faire plus!' [...] T'essaies de leur dire *indirectement* que si vous faites pas plus c'est à *cause* de vous que la grève va pas marcher, c'est à cause que vous avez pas passé assez de papiers! [...] Justement, en ne

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Warren (2008) specify that most university student associations participated in said strike. In addition, Mills (2010, p. 40) notes that the antecedents to political activism in the case of Montreal stemmed from "labour radicals, socialists, and anarchists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries" as well as "to the Communists and social democrats during the 1930s." In Quebec more broadly, in addition to the "influence non négligeable" of the JEC, Theurillat-Cloutier (2017, p. 36) points to the growing number of unionized workers since the 1930s, their militancy peaking with three intense strikes in the 1950s, and other liberal humanist challenges to the Duplessis' 'clerical conservatism' (p. 33) since the second world war on the part of intellectuals, feminists, artists, writers, and even agricultural cooperatives.

militant plus, je me suis quand-même auto-culpabilisé souvent, parce que je [ne] m'impliquais plus."

Whereas Goodwin and Pfaff (2001) argue that shame is one of the many factors that convinced people in the sixties to get involved in the civil rights movement, the question that arises here is how much shame or guilt is helpful.

If some scholars focus on "une actualité et d'une persistance multiformes de l'imprégnation du catholicisme dans la culture populaire, touchant la culture politique" (Foisy & Laniel, 2016, p. 11),<sup>110</sup> others have focused on the Quiet Revolution's residual collectivist influence on Quebec's policies and culture. The break of State from Church in the sixties meant that official Québécois identity could loosen its anchor to religion and become tied to "the province's territory, language and institutions" (Ibid). In the realm of education, the famous *Parent Commission*<sup>111</sup> of the new Liberal Government soon initiated a "profound reorientation" [my translation] of the Quebec education system that would continue over the next fifty years (Lenoir, 2005). Following the recommendations of that commission, the government secularized curriculum; in the realm of higher education, it created a loans and bursaries program for students; and in 1967 the CEGEP (*Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel*) system was founded, notably a set of free junior colleges that students can attend before university or for professional training.<sup>112</sup> Indeed Katz (2015, p. 6) notes that Quebec differs from North America in that our "ideal of public education has been deeply embedded since the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, when tuition was instituted as a short-term compromise on the path to free university education." The *Parent Commission* declared that "[e]ducation is like health, an essential social service, as indispensable for the collective as it is for the individual" (Ibid, p. 14), and recommended the elimination of tuition fees (Drainville, 2013). Thus Quebec's "communitarian principles" have "remained deeply engrained" in its psyche, writes Katz (p. 5). In their book *Le*

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<sup>110</sup> "Par ailleurs," note these authors, "nous pouvons aussi remarquer que certaines dimensions du catholicisme, bien que désacralisées, prennent place dans l'inconscient populaire, notamment dans le langage du culte qui entoure certaines manifestations sportives ou artistiques" (p. 11-12).

<sup>111</sup> This *Commission royale d'enquête sur l'enseignement dans la province de Québec* was presided by Mgr Alphonse-Marie Parent. In Canada, education is regulated by each province; as such, education became for Quebec "un outil essentiel de différenciation par rapport à l'univers anglophone canadien comme étatsunien" (Lenoir, 2005, p. 641).

<sup>112</sup> These would "replace the province's antiquated classical college system" (Mills, 2010, p. 143).

*Code Québec*, Léger and colleagues' (2016) even argue that the “joie de vivre” associated with francophone Québécois behaviour is in part due to the province's 'egalitarian' society, more specifically its high level of taxation and social services.<sup>113</sup>

Adding further nuance to the sociocultural history of this province, if the above story of the Quiet Revolution as the precursor to emancipatory politics in this province is a “firmly anchored popular perception” in Quebec, Sean Mills (2010, p. 19-20) argues that such a narrative “needs to be challenged for what it ignores, suppresses, and pushes to the margins of historical memory.” The government that progressively took over from the church in the sixties was definitely not socialist, argues Mills. Rather, the newly acquired government promoted the “development of a mixed provincial economy,” notably a private sector dominated by francophones, aligned with the Keynesian state (Ibid, p. 24). On a similar note, Lenoir (2005, p. 639) questions the official discourse claiming that the realm of education has been for this province an essential tool to differentiate itself from the anglo-Canadian or American cultures. Rather, he argues that the Quebec education system, facilitated by the discourse of the *Rapport Parent* of the Quiet Revolution, has increasingly become “fortement intégrée à la logique anglophone nord-américaine” and its individualistic, utilitarian aspirations, replacing “des orientations humanistes classiques d'origine européenne française.” Lenoir (p. 661) goes as far as asking if the tendency in education in the last half of the twentieth century in Quebec “ne conduit pas tout doucement les Québécois à intégrer les conceptions anglophones nord-américaines de manière à devenir des anglophones qui s’exprimeraient en français et des catholiques qui se comporteraient en protestants?”

On that note, if “[f]ew cultural realities in Quebec have not been captured in some way in a dynamic of resistance or acquiescence to the English language or North American culture” (Simon, 2015, p. 502), the student movement might be said to be caught within a similar dynamic when it comes to its emotional habitus. Léger and colleagues (2016) note that francophone Québécois are equally tied to the cultures of France, English Canada, and the United States, thus

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<sup>113</sup> While not an academic book, Léger and colleagues' (2016) characterization of the seven traits that distinguish francophone Québécois is based in part on statistical surveys including “analyse sémiométrique” (p. 42) to compare francophone Québécois to Anglophones in the rest of Canada, in addition to focus groups. They note, however, that Québécois are not homogeneous, composed of various distinct groups from city to rural, First Nations and non-francophone Montrealers; and that the majority (71%) of attitudes and behaviours of francophone Québécois are identical to those of anglophones from the rest of Canada, but that it is the 29% that makes the difference.

constituting a fusion of these cultures.<sup>114</sup> Placing the student movement's emotional habitus in such context thus brings up the possibility that it unconsciously adopted emotional mores from the Anglophone North American culture upon which Lenoir argues its educational system has been modeled. In other words, despite a francophone Québécois culture that has sought to distinguish itself (Bouchard, 1978; Rioux, 1974), Western Anglo-Saxon education models and theories' disavowal of emotions might have influenced the student movement as it is based in academic institutions, after all. Thus the student movement might be particularly vulnerable to the subtle as well as the more direct academic views of emotions, notably academia's historical propensity to ignore, devalue, or unduly dichotomize emotions, as described at the beginning of this chapter.

Indeed in her book, *Feeling power: Emotions and education*, Megan Boler (1999, p. xvii) reaffirms that "the social control of emotions is a central and underexplored aspect of education in relation to hegemony." She adds: "As a result of Western cultural discourses, which on the whole do not value emotions, even the most radical social theories [about education] tend to overlook this most silenced terrain of social control and resistance" (p. xx). Such discourses and their associated emotional rules are not universal, but are specific to capitalist and patriarchal culture, Boler specifies, in order to "enforce our acceptance of gendered divisions of "private" and "public," of women as emotional and men as rational" (p. xxi). The particular success of "patriarchal capitalist hegemony," writes Boler, "requires that divisions between public and private spheres be upheld" (p. 7).<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> They add: "La parlure québécoise est d'ailleurs un mélange de vieux régionalismes français (*bavasser, broue, barnique, guenille, patate*), d'amérindianismes (*Quebec, Yamaska, caribou, ouananiche, ouaouaron*), d'anglicismes (*stop, checker, hot dog, week-end, bon matin*), d'américanismes (*joke, cruiser, tomber en amour, bozo, toune*), auxquels se sont ajoutés les québécoismes (*bûcher, mouiller, cossin, blonde, char*)" (Léger et al., p. 40).

<sup>115</sup> Interestingly, Gidney (2015, p. 6) points to possible health-related and imperialist origins of the focus on 'masculine' traits in the university. Towards the end of the 19th century, she notes, administrators of Canadian universities were implementing programs focused on student health, influenced by the association of athletics with "valuable training for national militaristic and imperial aims as well as for an Anglo-Christian cultural vision keen to spread civilization throughout the British Empire." For example, within the British public school system team sports were seen "a way of cultivating gentlemanly virtues and Christian manliness." And at the international level, historians have linked athleticism in educational institutions to "a means of imparting such values as discipline, order, moral and physical courage, and the leadership necessary for the duties of nation and Empire." Similarly, British private schools promoted "Anglo-Protestant ideals." Such an "emphasis on manliness" was reaffirmed in the late 19th century by both church and scholarship. This included an effort to replace "what was seen as an increasingly feminized, pietistic church" by a more "manly and robust" image of Christ, and "[s]ecular corollaries emerged in the psychology of Stanley Hall and the personality of Teddy Roosevelt," who "rejected the feminized domesticity of the late nineteenth century in favour of a virile and tough masculinity."

In the particular case of university students, Hochschild's (1983) contention that middle-class families are more prone to emotional management than working-class families would be relevant here, considering the perceived link of higher education to higher class status, thus arguably a site for subtly reinforcing middle-class feeling rules. Indeed Bourdieu (1984) underlines how class struggles form the basis of culture, which we inevitably internalize. In addition to being mostly male, white, and heterosexual, the student movement has been criticized by its own members for being mostly middle-class (Delvaux et al., 2014) or even upper-middle class -as universities and CEGEPs are increasingly deserted by the working-class- thus for being "centrée sur le milieu universitaire" with "un discours universitaire peu accessible" (Dagenais, 2010, p. 18). The spokespersons for the 2012 student strike, for example, are considered to have "astonished the Quebec public on the nightly news with their fabulous eloquence" without speaking *joual* and without swear or English words characteristic of Montreal's "street language" (Simon, 2015, p. 508). Thus if "c'est la langue québécoise, avec ses mots, ses accents et ses structures de phrase uniques, qui porte en elle toute la charge émotive de notre identité" (Léger, Nantel, & Duhamel, 2016, p. 39), the student movement did not adopt it completely.

If the Quebec student movement sets itself apart from the traditional Québécois cultural mores simply in the way its spokespersons speak, it might not be surprising that it seeks to set itself apart from its emotional mores, for the latter have also been used historically to dismiss francophone Québécois. The first francophone Prime Minister of Canada, Wilfrid Laurier, stated that "La province de Québec n'a pas d'opinions, elle n'a que des sentiments" (Léger, Nantel & Duhamel, 2016, p. 47). Léger and colleagues (2016, p. 47) rephrase it with a positive twist, affirming that "Il serait plus juste de dire qu'elle exprime ses opinions avec plus de spontanéité, d'émotion et de passion que le reste du pays." Yet this characteristic is not always portrayed positively even by English Canada in recent times. Lacombe's (2013) study of the 2012 strike coverage by three English-language newspapers<sup>116</sup> based in Toronto suggests a preponderance of reports of students' "colère"<sup>117</sup> alongside an associated fear on the part of those reporting. Lacombe's main point is that such coverage reveals an image of Quebec francophone culture as irrational, of Québécois' fidelity to social programs as "un sentiment sans fondement légitime"

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<sup>116</sup> More specifically, les "éditoriaux et chroniques" of *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, and *National Post*.

<sup>117</sup> To be clear, this was not a focus of Lacombe's article, yet it was the only emotion mentioned by her repetitively as emerging from the coverage, alongside fear to a lesser extent.

(p. 570) associated to France's political culture<sup>118</sup> -more specifically to the "agitation sociale," effervescence, and violence of May 1968 and the French Revolution, and even to the realm of the apolitical and undemocratic, in part due to the province's historical flirtation with sovereignty (p. 569). Indeed the "Western discouragement of anger" dominant since the Victorian era has been particularly aimed at oppressed groups, notes Holmes (2004), and emotions more generally have historically been associated with women and people of color, as well as other marginalized groups, crowds, and masses (Goodwin & Jasper, 2006; Harding & Pribram, 2009; Jaggar, 1989). Such an association of emotions with the 'irrational,' 'private' and 'subjective' realms and the 'Other' -alongside the idea of 'the dispassionate investigator'- has served as a rationale for the dominance of certain groups, notably white males, notes Jaggar (1989), who can thus more readily discredit the 'Other' and justify their political authority. In such a context it could be said that the traditionally francophone student movement -though certainly not entirely francophone, especially in 2012- adopted or veered closer to the emotional mores of the country they are housed within, albeit on an unconscious level.

Yet Quebec's student movement can not be seen solely in the light of its academic heritage or francophone-anglophone divides. It is also the product of a province that is "the colonized among the colonizers" (Berque, 1967 cited in Mills, 2010, p. 6), and that holds greater diversity than 'two solitudes',<sup>119</sup> and thus a diverse activist heritage. Indeed Léger and colleagues' (2016) briefly point to the democratic and consensus-oriented disposition of its francophone population thanks in part to its interaction with Indigenous populations, depicted in Carole Poliquin and Yvan Dubuc's documentary, *L'empreinte*.<sup>120</sup> And even in the sixties, notes Mills

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<sup>118</sup> Léger and colleagues (2016) suggest based on focus groups that francophones from France tend to be more comfortable with conflict while Québécois francophones prefer finding a consensus as quickly as possible. Regardless of whether such methods are valid and reliable, it is clear from their book that there exists a conception of francophones from France as more open and public with their emotions. I will return to this point with Marie's story below.

<sup>119</sup> The concept of 'two solitudes' was popularized by the novel of the same name by Hugh MacLennan, about the tensions between English and French Canadians (<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/two-solitudes/>). Yet various scholars contend there are myriad types of 'solitudes' experienced in the Quebec context (e.g. Peters, 1998), not to mention the implicit problematization of the concept of 'two solitudes' by those who point to the white settler myths that continue to affect the lives Indigenous peoples and migrants in Canada (e.g. Thobani, 2007; Muir, 2015).

<sup>120</sup> Some, however, have criticized the film as "whitewashing" because it too easily wipes away Québécois' continuing complicity in colonialism as settlers (personal communication with Stéphanie Vaudry, PhD candidate in Anthropology at Université de Laval).

(2010), some groups fared even worse than French Canadians:<sup>121</sup> at least within Montreal, a diversity of worldwide influences left a particular activist heritage. Diverse groups and social movements, including Caribbean and other Black political groups, had something in common, he argues: they “drew on the examples and theoretical works of Third World decolonization to interpret their own conditions” (p. 7).<sup>122</sup> If francophone and anglophone activists “generally worked apart from one another,” their worlds also “overlapped and intersected to a greater degree than is generally acknowledged” (p. 8), as did other groups and movements in Montreal - including left-wing Catholic ones-,<sup>123</sup> intermittently crossing linguistic and ethnic boundaries and benefiting from each other’s analyses. Francophone activists still disagreed amongst themselves about whether Quebec was a victim of colonization of English Canada or of the United States; and Quebeckers’ status as a colonized people was questioned, considering they were “descendants of European colonizers” (p. 5). Such a language of decolonization, Mills argues, even influenced the mass protests for unilingualism, nationalism, and the militant labour movement that emerged in the sixties.<sup>124</sup> But it eventually withered in part due to its reliance on “a heavily gendered language that appealed to a robust masculinity,” notes Mills (p. 15).<sup>125</sup> If it has been argued that thereafter, “nationalist and language politics in Québec rapidly took on a life

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<sup>121</sup> Notably the Italian and Indigenous populations. The Collectif dix novembre (2014) note that since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Catholic missionaries had played a significant role historically in the process of colonization and in “the attempt to strip Indigenous peoples of their cultural autonomy in order to assimilate them into the settler society,” and from the 19<sup>th</sup> until the 20<sup>th</sup> century “residential schools managed by the Catholic Church or other types of missionaries were established, in which children from reserves were taken to spend most of the year away from their communities, as an attempt at cultural genocide.” Yet if “the Catholic Church retained a crucial importance in Québec society until at least the 1960s,” it “was not successful in extinguishing Indigenous cultures.” The Black populations who arrived as slaves in the 17<sup>th</sup> century also faced oppression on a racial basis.

<sup>122</sup> Though Mills notes that Indigenous peoples were practically nonexistent in early writings about the decolonization of Quebec.

<sup>123</sup> Indeed scholars have pointed out that pre-sixties Catholic thought was not monolithic nor solely conservative (Gauvreau, 2005; Meunier & Warren, 2002); by the early sixties the *Presse étudiante nationale*, the press organization created by the *Jeunesse étudiante catholique*, is responsible for successfully mobilizing for student general assemblies and student federations in colleges and other pre-university institutions (Leduc, 2010, p. 2); and both the PEN and the provincial student union that formed in 1964, UGEQ, were “animées par la volonté de participer et d’influencer le mouvement de réforme de la Révolution tranquille” (Ibid, p. 3).

<sup>124</sup> Linking cultural domination and linguistic alienation of francophones to capitalism and colonialism helped to radicalize “a new generation of anglophones who would continue to defend the cause of Quebec decolonization,” notes Mills (2010, p. 153). In 1969, for example, the largest street protest in Quebec since the end of World War II demanded that McGill University “serve the francophone working class” (Mills, 2010) and increased access “to education for working-class and francophone students”; it was “organized by a coalition of French language rights groups, left-wing militants, labour activists and nascent student associations” (Collectif dix novembre, 2014).

<sup>125</sup> Mills also notes that metaphors of race and victimization to describe the situation of francophone Québécois became unsustainable once Indigenous and Black Power activism emerged throughout the continent.



of their own, eventually at the expense of working-class or revolutionary politics” (Collectif dix novembre, 2014), Mills contends that decolonization theory fused and birthed mass movements and political energies that persist in different forms to this day, their complex legacies “woven into the fabric of Quebec society, deeply altering its nature” (p. 216) -and in the short-term, even inspiring in part the program that landed the Parti Québécois in power in 1976.

Indeed with the Quiet Revolution, the nationalist movement of this province had shifted “from aspirations for greater autonomy for French-language speakers within the Canadian federation, to aspirations for national independence for Québec” (Collectif dix novembre, 2014).<sup>126</sup> In 1968, the Parti Québécois was formed out of other parties, and soon became “the rallying point for almost all Québec nationalist movements and associations.”<sup>127</sup> Also since the sixties, the *Front de libération du Québec* (FLQ) had been targeting the anglophone bourgeoisie with various terrorist actions, culminating in October 1970 with two kidnappings. If some student associations and other groups showed their support for FLQ’s goals at demonstrations (Ibid), Mills (2010) notes “the campaign of political violence” initiated by the FLQ caused a great degree of controversy within activist groups. The government made use of the War Measures Act to “maintain security” and conduct mass arrests of social movement activists and sympathizers (Collectif dix novembre).

After the 1970 repression, “Most social movements in Québec suffered from major demobilizations” (Collectif dix novembre, 2014; Mills, 2010). One exception to this was the labour movement,<sup>128</sup> which was politically radicalized and further spurred by a united declaration of three province-wide workers’ unions against the FLQ and the government’s reaction to it.<sup>129</sup> If the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux* (CSN)<sup>130</sup> had started to be radicalized earlier than the

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<sup>126</sup> The Collectif dix novembre (2014) clarify well that “Since this shift, the word 'national' as used in Québec most often refers to Québec, and not to Canada, which is referred to as a 'federal' level of politics.”

<sup>127</sup> See: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/parti-quebecois/>

<sup>128</sup> Other exceptions were the Marxist-Leninist and Maoist far-left movements, and the 'hippie' movement (Warren, 2007; Collectif dix novembre)

<sup>129</sup> Mills (2010) explains that up to 30% of arrests were of labour activists, “and it was within their ranks that the new mobilization began” (p. 186).

<sup>130</sup> In English this stands for the Confederation of National Trade Unions (of Quebec). If previously the CSN was a Catholic union federation, in 1960 it shed its religious character and changed its name to the CSN and is now Québec's major public-sector union. Interestingly, around 1968 Mills (2010, p. 167) notes that the Montreal Central Council’s general assemblies abounded with dissent and disagreement (and excitement), similar to what Simon will recount below about student general assemblies during student strikes. This Council was “the organization that did the most to open its doors to the multi-faceted world of dissent” (p. 162).

the CEQ and the FTQ, the labour movement in general increasingly took on a “confrontational stance” (Mills, p. 189) and “began seeing itself as the only legitimate force defending democracy in the province” (p. 186). By the early seventies, “radicalization had spread throughout the labour movement as a whole” as “Quebec became, in the words of one labour historian, “the syndicalist centre of direct action in North America”” (Ibid, p. 48). This culminated when workers around the province started an unlimited general labour strike in 1972; when three provincial union presidents<sup>131</sup> were sentenced to one year in prison, workers across the province spontaneously walked off the job, in some cases “shutting down entire cities” (Ibid, p. 202). The CSN president at the time, Marcel Pepin, “for his part, emerged from May 1972 angry and even more convinced of his anti-imperialist position” (Ibid, p. 209).

This flavour of one of the most intense weeks of local activist and labour history is relevant for my purposes here because the Quebec student movement was in fact influenced since its inception by labour movements both here and abroad. As early as 1964, the province’s first provincial student union<sup>132</sup> was influenced by the CSN and other labour unions, in part because of “La stabilité identitaire et organisationnelle que conféraient la figure du travailleur et le modèle du syndicat” (Leduc, 2010, p. 5). Students were inspired by the “discours, de la structure et de la culture syndicale des centrales ouvrières, alors objets d’admiration parce qu’elles ont joué un rôle déterminant dans la Révolution tranquille” (Theurillat-Cloutier, Leduc & Lacoursière, 2014, p. 40). In the early sixties, Québécois student associations started to adhere to their version of the French ‘student syndicalism’ that categorized students as ‘young intellectual workers’ [my translation] (Katz, 2015; Lacoursière, 2007; Warren, 2008). In 1961, for example, the *Association Générale des étudiants de l’Université de Montréal* “adapted the French students’ *Charte de Grenoble* to craft the *Charte de l’étudiant universitaire*, which would effectively lay the movement’s orientation for the next three decades” (Katz, p. 15).

So if student associations had existed in this province since the beginning of the 20th century, this new orientation in the sixties had “une connotation plus clairement politique,” according to Theurillat-Cloutier and colleagues (2014). “En définitive, cela constitue la grande originalité du mouvement étudiant dans le paysage des années 1960,” explains Leduc (2010, p.

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<sup>131</sup> Notably the presidents of the CSN, the Corporation des enseignants du Québec (CEQ), and the Fédération des travailleurs du Québec (FTQ).

<sup>132</sup> Union générale des étudiants du Québec.

7), referring to how, "contrairement aux autres mouvements sociaux, le mouvement étudiant tente de s'arrimer au rapport salarial, que ce soit par la figure de l'identité du travailleur intellectuel, par le modèle organisationnel de la centrale syndicale ou même par les processus de négociations avec l'État." In part because of the influence of the *Charte de Grenoble*, "Les étudiants deviennent des travailleurs intellectuels en formation, et c'est sur cette base que se formulent des revendications sur les conditions d'études (gratuité scolaire, salariat étudiant, etc.) et sur le droit d'association (reconnaissance des associations étudiantes, droit de grève, etc.)" This new "culture syndicale" would progressively become "majoritaire au sein du mouvement étudiant" (Theurillat-Cloutier, Leduc & Lacoursière, 2014, p. 39).<sup>133</sup>

If for Pierre, the participant of this dissertation introduced above, such a syndicalist culture has had the benefit of lessening the influence of cliques on the movement, the downside is the "austere" and "sérieux" emotional habitus that came with it. He thinks that one emotion particularly missing from the Quebec student movement is "la joie!" which is reminiscent of "des critiques par rapport au militantisme à la CSN dans les années 70." The logic, he says, is based on the idea that "si on est joyeux y'a rien à changer. Faque il faut être malheureux pis il faut être fâché" and "y'a pas beaucoup de gens qui rient pis eu-u-u-h l'humour même on dirait que ça pourrait être contre-révolutionnaire!" Pierre thus highlights that on some level both the syndicalist and student movements were eschewing the "joie de vivre" that Léger and colleagues (2016) suggest is one of francophone Québécois' defining traits. Tremblay-Fournier (2013, p. 87) adds that "les organisations syndicales étudiantes sont des endroits de recrutement de prédilection pour les partis politiques et les grands syndicats, d'où l'importance pour une poignée de personnes d'expérimenter les attitudes et les comportements valorisés chez les professionnels de la politique": notably models and qualities that are traditionally linked to masculinity.

While the student movement was influenced by the spirit of local and international labour movements, in the legal realm the Canadian labour context would soon also guide the student movement's syndicalist path. In 1946 Justice Rand, in the Supreme Court of Canada, ruled that all workers must pay union dues,<sup>134</sup> and in 1977 Quebec gave the 'Rand formula' legal force in

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<sup>133</sup> These authors interestingly note (p. 39) that the *Charte de Grenoble* "exprime aussi le désir de voir les universitaire sortir de leur tour d'ivoire et se rapproche de la classe ouvrière. En tant qu'intellectuelle ou intellectuel, donc, l'étudiante ou l'étudiant recherche la vérité, combat toute forme d'oppression et doit chercher à « dégager le sens de l'histoire ». En d'autres mots, le devoir de s'engager représente « sa mission sacrée »!"

<sup>134</sup> <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/rand-formula/>

its Labour Code.<sup>135</sup> Ensuring that student unions could automatically collect fees in a similar way, a 1983 law entitled *An Act respecting the accreditation and financing of students' associations* “clearly modelled the Labour Code in many respects” (Association des juristes progressistes, 2012).<sup>136</sup> The Act did not mention strikes, nor did it prohibit them (Ibid).<sup>137</sup> Yet the eighties also saw an increase in “morosité et d’apathie politique” due to the failed referendum, an economic crisis, and the end of the Maoist movement (Theurillat-Cloutier, Leduc & Lacoursière, 2014, p. 45), not to mention the CSN’s embroilment in “a fierce battle over union raiding in the construction industry” that might have “tarnished the image of the labour movement as a whole” (Mills, 2010, p. 209). In this context what Theurillat-Cloutier and colleagues (2014, p. 45) refer to as “la tendance concertationniste” emerged in the form of a provincial university student organization that was close to the Parti Québécois. The divergence between the latter and ‘combative syndicalism’<sup>138</sup> was popularized by political scientist Jean-Marc Piote’s (1977) book in which he described *syndicalisme de combat* as emphasizing the student membership’s democratic control of its union and the necessity to escalate means of pressure to build up to a general strike. The concertation strategy, by contrast, argues Piote, privileges dialogue with the government based on the assumption that they can negotiate on equal ground, and when unsuccessful resorts to lobbying, public relations campaigns, and temporary coalitions with other social groups. Tensions between these two tendencies -which Martin (2013) argues exist in similar fashion within labour movements- are relevant for my purposes here for their link to the 21st century strikes and the student movement emotional habitus.

While concertationist student organizations of the eighties can be credited with elaborating the 1983 accreditation law for student unions alongside the government, none of the general student strikes of this province’s history were launched by concertationist organizations (Theurillat-Cloutier et al., 2014). While there have been innumerable sporadic student strikes at individual educational institutions across the province before this century, seven of them were

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<sup>135</sup>[http://www.lacsq.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/csq/documents/documentation/enjeux\\_sociaux/formule\\_rand/FAQ\\_formule\\_Rand\\_questions.pdf](http://www.lacsq.org/fileadmin/user_upload/csq/documents/documentation/enjeux_sociaux/formule_rand/FAQ_formule_Rand_questions.pdf)

<sup>136</sup> More specifically, the Act lists the conditions for student associations to be accredited unions and requires that educational institutions collect union fees from students and redirect those fees to the respective accredited unions, as well as guaranteeing access to an office (Theurillat-Cloutier, Leduc & Lacoursière, 2014, p. 46).

<sup>137</sup> The term ‘grève’ (‘strike’) for students is still controversial today, in part because it does not fit the legal definition of the *Code du travail du Québec* (Simard, 2013; Isabel & Thérone-Marcotte, 2012).

<sup>138</sup> In France it is called ‘syndicalisme de lutte’ whereas in Quebec it is called ‘syndicalisme de combat.’

general and unlimited: 1968, 1974, 1978, 1986, 1988, 1990 and 1996.<sup>139</sup> The latter strike solidified the animosity between concertationist and combative strategies: After a second failed referendum in 1995, then Parti Québécois Education Minister Pauline Marois had proposed a 30% tuition increase, and when the combative association at the time -the MDE<sup>140</sup>- organized for a strike, the concertationist student federations (FEUQ, FECQ)<sup>141</sup> opted against it, but then called on their member associations to join once they saw its success. When the government refused to negotiate with the MDE, this left the federations greater influence over the terms of negotiation; the latter supported the idea of cuts to education in exchange for a tuition freeze (Ibid), much to the chagrin of the MDE.

If access to education was one of various goals of the 1968 and 1974 strikes, it was the main demand of the other strikes. Theurillat-Cloutier and colleagues (2014, p. 41) note “Le parallèle avec le syndicalisme ouvrier saute aux yeux: ce sont bien les conditions matérielles d’existence qui mobilisent le plus [...]” These student strikes had a demonstrable track record, reaching their goals to different degrees.<sup>142</sup> When successful, they modified the bursaries and loans programs and froze tuition,<sup>143</sup> both of which I have personally benefited from as a resident of Quebec.<sup>144</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> century took this heritage to a new level: in 2001 it formed, out of the ashes of previous radical province-wide student associations,<sup>145</sup> *l’Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante* (ASSÉ). The latter formed in part because of resentment against the FECQ’s recent agreement with the government about the CEGEP “taxe à l’échec,”<sup>146</sup> but also because of the burgeoning anti-globalization movement. Considering that elements of the latter movement have been criticized by some feminist scholars for "privileged masculine performances" that reproduce the very patriarchal and capitalist power relations that such movements contest

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<sup>139</sup> Theurillat-Cloutier, Leduc & Lacoursière, 2014

<sup>140</sup> MDE stands for le *Mouvement pour le droit des étudiants*, predecessor of the ASSÉ.

<sup>141</sup> These acronyms refer to both the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ) and the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ).

<sup>142</sup> Warren, 2008

<sup>143</sup> Simard, 2013

<sup>144</sup> Yet those who were not residents were not so fortunate, as the 1996 strike resulted in an increase in tuition fees for out-of-province and international students, underlining the position of privilege for some as compared to others in the movement.

<sup>145</sup> Predecessors of the ASSÉ included the ANEEQ (l’Association des étudiants et étudiantes du Québec) and later the MDE (Mouvement pour le droit des étudiants).

<sup>146</sup> At the end of the 1996 strike, this fee was reinstored: it consisted of an hourly two-dollar fee that students had to retake a class they had failed. Then in 2001, the FECQ signed an agreement with the government to replace it with des “contrats de réussite” (Theurillat-Cloutier, 2014, p. 53-54).

(Coleman & Bassi, 2011, p. 204),<sup>147</sup> and that this movement's large international demonstrations since Seattle in 1999 were often portrayed by the media as angry and aggressive (Zackariasson, 2009), the student movement might have been further influenced by this particular anti-globalization emotional heritage, in addition to the local influences and context I have mentioned above. As Lafrance (2016, p. 288) notes, "[w]hile the democratic sensibilities of the anti-globalization movement of the turn of the millennium were internalized by the ASSÉ, this organization was also built on a syndicaliste (i.e. trade-unionist) model."

Yet ironically, trade unions in Quebec did not follow the 21<sup>st</sup> century trend of indignation and contestation against the neoliberal order that grew stronger after the 2007-2008 financial crisis (Frappier, Poulin, & Rioux, 2012). At the provincial level, the "collectivist foundations of Québec society" had been slowly whittling away at the hands of the government (Katz, 2015, p. 5), and at both levels of government, the state continued to disengage and move towards the commercialization of education through budget cuts to postsecondary education (Frappier, Poulin & Rioux). This reached new heights at the provincial level when Jean Charest, a former conservative, came to power in 2003 under a Liberal government, proposing a "réingénierie de l'État"; the latter would attempt to essentially and inefficiently dismantle the strong state presence distinguishing Quebec from other North-American states, and the notion of public service based on the universality of access to quality services and "une philosophie de redistribution des richesses" differentiating it from "les conceptions française, britannique ou américaine" (Fortier, 2010, p. 803).

Two years after Charest came to office and four years after ASSÉ's foundation, member associations of the ASSÉ invited their allies to conceive a coalition called the CASSÉE<sup>148</sup> and birthed the 2005 strike, which lasted around two months. Seven years later, with Charest still in power, the ASSÉ sought to do it again with the CLASSE and the 2012 strike. These latter strikes were the longest strikes the student movement had ever seen; while they represent peak moments in student movement history and discourse, in terms of time they constitute a very small piece in

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<sup>147</sup> After pointing to a handful of studies including their own that reveal heteropatriarchal hierarchies, masculinist speech cultures and machismo "privileging conventionally masculinised dimensions of physical strength" for direct action (p. 216), these authors note that "the gendered operation of power in and through (anti-)globalization politics is an under-studied area" (p. 205). Coe, Goicolea and Ohman (2013, p. 695) similarly contend that "few studies examine how youth activism intersects with gender hierarchies."

<sup>148</sup> Coalition de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante élargie (Coalition of the ASSÉ)

comparison to the entire pie of the student movement. Yet since various interviewees of this dissertation had participated in the student movement before or beyond the strikes, they could see the strike as an event within the larger student movement, and their local experience as part of a provincial process -as many had participated in ASSÉ congresses. Thus I consider the entire trajectory of these participants' experiences as helping to point to an emotional habitus that extends beyond the strikes to the movement as a whole. Despite the fact that at the time of our interview, most participants supported the ASSÉ more than the FEUQ, their opinion of the ASSÉ was not always stable, depending on the moment of their involvement; some interviewees entered the student movement having no idea what the ASSÉ was, much less its tensions with the other two provincial associations at the time, the FECQ and the FEUQ<sup>149</sup> (often referred to as "les fédérations" or "les fédés").

Simon's case is interesting, as he was well aware of such inter-organizational tensions early on; yet only at the time of our interview, six years later, did he realize how strongly emotional forces -and the lack of space for emotional expressivity- affected the movement. Since Simon participated in the student movement for a total of four years, and because his exit from the movement was clearly influenced by the 'masculine' emotional habitus, his story helps to contextualize the gradual effects of such a habitus on a participant of the strike. Indeed if Roper (2005) laments the focus solely on cultural influences on men's emotions without demonstrating or explaining how these emotions are lived and experienced at a subjective level, here I seek to illustrate in a concrete manner how the above-mentioned sociohistorical context subtly inhabited the idiosyncratic life (and habitus) of a man through an interview, a movement, a strike. Indeed, Simon's experience is also illustrative of "the dialectical relationship between structure and practice" (Gould, 2009, p. 33) if we consider the strike as a 'practice'; for if habitus "structures individual and collective practices" yet is also itself "structured by such practices" (Ibid), then we can look at how the student movement emotional habitus structures strikes, yet is also structured by them, due to their intensity and urgency.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Since the 2012 strike, the FEUQ has ceased to exist.

<sup>150</sup> This is a point that I will return to in more depth in Chapter 3.

### Simon's search for sensitivity

Simon was studying music at the Cégep de Saint-Laurent in 2002 and “tout de suite quand j’suis arrivé au cégep, ben à l’automne 2002 y’avait des mobilisations.”<sup>151</sup> Since Simon had showed tremendous interest in these mobilizations, those who were active in his CEGEP student association asked him to get involved: he was soon elected to the executive committee,<sup>152</sup> after which he got a paid staff position at the association. By the end of February 2005,<sup>153</sup> “une fois que la grève a commencé” at his CEGEP, “on a *occupé* le cégep pendant euh, toutes les huit semaines de la grève,” he recounts. Interestingly, when I ask Simon what emotions he remembers from the strike, his first answer is anger and indignation: By telling students they would be leaving CEGEP with even more debt than expected, “les gens étaient étaient fâchés de d’ça!” he says, “parce que euhhh dans le fond tsé c’tait comme leur *subsistence* qu’on mettait en jeu.” And yet Simon was not receiving loans and bursaries, so he was not directly affected by the reform; nonetheless “c’est clair que y’a, tsé, c’tait une *grosse vague d’indignation*.” Thus for Simon outrage was an emotion ‘out there’ that others experienced, and that had “an axiomatic, natural quality” -to cite Gould’s above-mentioned words- so much so that Simon, despite not necessarily feeling it himself, considered it an “*émotion de base*” of the movement.

Indeed, since Simon often spoke about emotions in the third person, it was sometimes difficult to tell the difference between collective emotions and those that he experienced himself.<sup>154</sup> This sometimes impersonal manner of speaking about emotions -similar to most male interviewees of this dissertation- points to how such a *masculine emotional habitus* can affect the speech and habits of men in Western society independently of the student movement, even when they are open about speaking about their emotions. Indeed, Gergen (1992) notes that in

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<sup>151</sup> Simon remembers such mobilizations being about the *World Trade Organization*, surely referring to the 1999 protests against the WTO negotiations in Seattle. Just one year earlier, the ASSÉ had been officially founded during the mobilization against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (ASSÉ, 2017) and there was still a lot of follow-up to the Summit of the Americas that had just taken place in 2001. The ASSÉ website reports that it made the struggle against neoliberal globalization “un de ses chevaux de bataille”; in 2002 its campaign “*Bas les masques! À bas la ZLÉA!*” had led to more than 10,000 people in the streets of downtown Montreal (ASSÉ, 2017).

<sup>152</sup> This was before the changes to the executive structure of their student association.

<sup>153</sup> According to this website, it was February 24, 2005: <http://www.fedecegeps.qc.ca/salle-de-presse/communiqués/2005/02/les-etudiants-et-les-etudiantes-de-six-cegeps-sont-presentement-en-greve/>

<sup>154</sup> As another example, at one point, having described how students who were very involved tended to resent those who would not participate, I ask Simon if he also felt resentful; interestingly, he answers, it was rather that “ça me fait de la peine” and “un espèce de tristesse de dire tsé pourquoi est-ce que tout le monde est pas aussi engagé?” Yet what he remembered first in the interview was others' resentment, not his sadness.



recounting their life stories, women tend to and are expected to tell stories that speak of the “centrality of emotional well-being to all facets of life much more vividly than men’s stories do” (p. 139).<sup>155</sup> In men’s stories on the other hand, emotional bonds are mentioned “as ‘facts’ where necessary,” and often contain a tone of aggression, hostility or domination.<sup>156</sup>

Yet in addition to gendered ways of recounting emotions, Simon’s use of the third person might have been the result of his different “rapport” to the strike, since he was a paid staff person, so he spent a lot of time doing “plus du travail de soutien logistique mettons que du travail de sur-le-terrain.” Indeed, the fact that Simon had not attended many of the bigger, more intense direct actions was something that clearly bothered him, revealing a sense of guilt bordering on shame symptomatic of the *masculine* emotional habitus. He even spoke about it in the first person: it was “le sentiment de, de pas être à fond” or “à la hauteur.” Such shame, in turn, was related to an underlying fear: “Dans le fond,” Simon says, “je pense y’a une autre partie de moi qui-i, tsé qui avait peur.. de.. tsé d’être en première ligne.” He was scared to get arrested and “de me faire péter la gueule,<sup>157</sup> tsé!” Thus if anger was the first, most easily recognized emotion circulating at the “base” of the strike movement for Simon, shame and fear (and shame about his fear) was more intensely felt by him at a personal level. In hindsight, he recognizes his undeserved “auto-flagellation” when, during the strike, he reproached himself : “Tu vas ouvrir le cégep euh tsé, tu vas faire ton [...] p’tit affaire confortable là le, de, de soutien, là, tsé!” It wasn’t fair to himself because “j’tais vraiment impliqué!” yet “j’tais impliqué peut-être à un niveau moins euh” -and then he catches himself- “ben j’allais dire moins *important*.” Even though Simon did not actually believe that the kind of work he did was less important, he pointed to an unsaid rule of the student movement that the fearlessness required to be on the ‘première ligne’<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Daniel and Thompson’s (2005) study of stepchildren’s memories of love and loss confirms such a finding, as did Grysman, Merrill & Fivush’s (2017, p. 294) study using a “large, internet-based, developmentally diverse” sample, which found that “women reported more emotionally intense memories than did men, and narrated memories that expressed more emotional content than did males,” especially if they subscribed to more traditional feminine traits.

<sup>156</sup> Interestingly, Gergen questions how patriarchal authority “has controlled the narrative forms” (p. 129) and has placed the public-only, less-emotional male story as the dominant storyline. Indeed this dissertation is an attempt to go beyond that monolithic storyline.

<sup>157</sup> “Péter la gueule” which literally means to get your face broken, more generally signifies to be physically beaten.

<sup>158</sup> The term ‘première ligne’ refers in military parlance to the division between the front and the rear.

is what primes -reminiscent of the division of labour that assigns more recognition to the public sphere than the 'private' one associated with women and emotions.<sup>159</sup>

If Simon consciously felt some elements of the student movement habitus (the public circulation of anger, his underlying shame of fear) back then, he only recognized other elements of it in hindsight. "C'est plus en, en *parlant* avec toi maintenant," he explains, "que je réalise à quel point.. c'est *déterminant*, en fait, les émotions dans, dans le..... dans la dynamique du mouvement, tsé." The tension at general assemblies during the strike was rife, he realizes, because "c'tait des émotions qui étaient pas bien canalisées." For example, there was the time,<sup>160</sup> recalls Simon, when two female student activists who were core strike organizers proposed a "comité d'éthique" at a general assembly to address ethical and relational concerns related to the occupation, such as disrespect towards individuals and their property. Yet "y'a personne qui voulait de c'te comité-là, tsé!" For Simon, the reason behind the refusal to create the committee lies in that in the student movement, there is no room to talk about "comment on se *sent*."

Yet there was ample room for expressing resentment and anger against the FEUQ and the FECQ, especially when they signed an agreement with the government on April 2, 2005.<sup>161</sup> If before the strike there had been "énormément de ressentiment" about the student federations, this only grew during and after the strike, says Simon.<sup>162</sup> He felt an abominable<sup>163</sup> "sentiment de trahison," almost "de la *haine*," he explains. "J'veux dire c'est *viscéral*, là, ça me, ça revient me chercher là, pis c'est comme, même encore aujourd'hui là, tsé, six ans plus tard.. je l'ai encore à

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<sup>159</sup> Boler, 1999, p. 6. Tremblay-Fournier (2013), in part drawing on her own experiences of the 2005, 2007, and 2012 student strikes, notes that "les activités dont les femmes assurent traditionnellement la charge" don't receive "la même reconnaissance à l'intérieur du groupe auquel elles participent que celles des hommes" (p. 75), a phenomenon that happens within ASSÉ despite its feminist principles. "Ainsi, dans les groupes militants, les associations étudiantes et les syndicats, on retrouve généralement, comme dans d'autres milieux sociaux d'ailleurs, une tendance à la ségrégation des femmes dans un nombre réduit de tâches: cuisine, soutien psychologique, secrétariat général et éducation populaire" (p. 77) and other logistical tasks.

<sup>160</sup> Simon can't remember which general assembly nor which student association is the setting for this anecdote.

<sup>161</sup> For Simon, the agreement "y'a pas été négocié en fonction de, de c'tait quoi les demandes de la majorité des gens qui étaient dans, qui étaient en *grève*," as various member associations of the FECQ or the FEUQ were also part of the CASSÉE and thus had more demands than the simple return of the 103 million dollars to bursaries, says Simon. Indeed Lafrance (2014) notes that the CASSÉE's demands for a commitment not to decentralize the CEGEP network, as well as its "longer-term goal to eliminate post-secondary tuition fees" and "to clear student debt" went completely unaddressed by the government (p. 63)

<sup>162</sup> Simon clarifies that there was "une *culture* de dénigrement mutuel!" in which ASSÉ activists labelled the federations "réformistes" and other names to denigrate their political positions. Simon was in turn frustrated by the way the ASSÉ and student activists were treated ("Ah vous êtes immatures," or "vous êtes violents") by leaders of the FECQ and the FEUQ, as the latter are not the ones who "ont vraiment *animé* ce mouvement là, tsé?"

<sup>163</sup> The word Simon used was "épouvantable."

travers de la gorge, tsé!” Because, despite having put “toute ta vie entre parenthèses” for two months and the size and strength of the 2005 movement, “fais le calcul, là, tsé on n'a rien gagné avec cette grève-là.”<sup>164</sup> After the strike ended at his CEGEP on April 11,<sup>165</sup> Simon proposed a motion that was voted by his general assembly, calling for the dissolution of the federations.

By September 2005, enrolled at the *Université du Québec à Rimouski* (UQAR), Simon decided to run for president of the student association with the electoral promise of disaffiliation from the FEUQ “pis s'affilier à l'ASSÉ!” He wanted to flatten the hierarchical structure of the UQAR student association, rendering all positions on the executive committee “égalitaires” instead of having a president and vice-presidents. It ended up being “l'assemblée générale d'élections la plus euh *houleuse* que j'ai vu de de ma vie tsé!” The former student president had mounted a campaign for people to vote against Simon, so the entire question period “y'a plein de gens qui sont venus un peu pour me pour me *descendre*.” Students finally decided to have no president rather than vote for Simon. “Évidemment, ça ç'a quand-même été euh, assez euh rough, là,” he recalls, “je me suis fait un peu blasté, tsé!” Nonetheless, one month later Simon managed to get elected as “Vice-président aux finances.” Faced with a way of doing politics that he saw as less democratic than his CEGEP student association, and realizing that “ça faisait comme quatre ans que j'tais impliqué dans la politique étudiante,” Simon soon after decided to stop, “pour aller plus dans quelque chose plus socio-culturel.” He co-founded a music and dance troupe at UQAR. “J'avais besoin de quelque chose peut-être de plus-s euh, tsé de plus *convivial*,” as opposed to student politics where “on lutte contre euh la privatisation de l'éducation, on est, tsé, t'es toujours comme en *opposition*, en *conflit*.” He isn't implying that struggle isn't important, clarifies Simon, but that others could now carry it forward, because “à [un] moment donné c'est *épuisant* aussi d'être toujours dans cette euh dynamique-là de lutte, tsé!”

By that point, Simon was seeking “quelque chose de sensible, où est-ce qu'on pouvait se parler comme.. tsé.. de, de ce qu'on vivait.” He realizes now that student politics canalizes “beaucoup des émotions négatives” such as rage, “la colère” and emotions that “drive” people to be engaged in politics, while pleasure and “convivialité” are left behind; and emotion in general

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<sup>164</sup> Here Simon is referring to the fact that students did not get the full 103 million back because the first two years, only partial amounts of the bursary were recovered.

<sup>165</sup> “Le retour en classe s'annonce difficile. Au cégep Saint-Laurent, où la grève s'est terminée hier, la fin du trimestre est prévue pour le 20 juin,” stated *La Presse* (Allard, 2005, April 12).

tends to remain “sous-jacent” in the movement, “personne la nomme,” “personne en parle,” it is canalized “sans le dire.” Sure, the strike was a very intense period, yet “en même temps, le mouvement étudiant c’est un peu *toujours* comme ça.” At the Cégep de Saint-Laurent he had closer friendships -probably because there were more women, says Simon- yet even then, there was not necessarily room for emotional communication, and even less when he was at UQAR. In contrast, at the time of the interview, Simon is in touch with some of those same people whom he organized with in the student movement: Politics is very much still a concern for them, but “quand on se parle on.. on se parle de comment qu’on se *sent* par rapport à ça, tsé.” In the student movement, by contrast, emotion was meant to be dealt with “à l’extérieur de la reunion,” especially in meetings of student executives; even outside of meetings there was never time, as there were activities and people to organize. “Tsé bon pis là ça fait longtemps que j’suis plus là,” Simon acknowledges, “peut-être que ç’a changé, là, mais permets-moi d’en douter un peu, tsé!”

#### ALTERNATIVE EMOTIONAL STYLES

Simon is partly right: a masculine emotional habitus appears to remain dominant seven years later, in 2012. However, since Simon exited the movement, we can observe that the emotional habitus has been increasingly influenced by alternative ‘emotional styles’ within its fold. The concept of ‘emotional style’ resembles that of ‘habitus’ yet “implies a higher degree of fluidity and malleability” and the possibility of a plurality of emotional styles within a certain context, thus highlighting the differences that can exist between communities and spaces within an emotional habitus (Gammerl, 2012, p. 163; Scheer, 2012).<sup>166</sup> Historian Barbara Rosenwein’s (2006) notion of ‘emotional communities’ is similar to ‘emotional style’ yet differs in that it is more static, starting “with the assumption that styles correspond with notions of community” (Gammerl, 2012, p. 163), which is not always the case as ‘emotional styles’ can form simultaneously through “patterns of exclusion and inclusion” (Ibid, p. 164). Indeed the term “emotional style” is more appropriate for my purposes here than “emotional community” because the former allows one to conceptualize how gender communities “do not predate but are formed

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<sup>166</sup> That being said, as mentioned above, Gould (2009, p. 33) is very open to how habitus “structures individual and collective practices” yet is also itself “structured by such practices”; through this lens we can consider in later chapters not just how the strikes dialectically influence the student movement emotional habitus, but how different campuses, departments, or committees’ emotional styles influence it and are influenced by it in turn.

at the same time as a specific emotional style, as both are underpinned by continuously reiterated patterns of exclusion and inclusion" (Gammerl, 2012, p. 164). This way of conceiving emotions coincides well with what I am terming "feminist emotional styles," as these often came as a way to address, or as a reaction to, women's emotional experiences due to their exclusion in the student movement. In the student movement, at least within the ASSÉ, this sense of exclusion has included, for example, feminists' struggles to have the "alternance homme-femme" respected at meetings in order to redress the imbalance wherein women are generally under-represented when it comes to speaking (Robert, 2013; Dagenais, 2010); or the emotional burden and frustration that often falls upon women to provide emotional support to fellow activists, among other 'private' tasks or 'subaltern' roles that go unrecognized (Delvaux et al., 2014; Tremblay-Fournier, 2013; Dagenais, 2010).<sup>167</sup> Other examples of women's difficult experiences within the ASSÉ include "humiliation publique entourant le travail, insultes, ton agressif ou condescendant," as well as sexual aggression, harassment and threats, homophobia, paternalism, and intimidation, and on a more subtle level, men's appropriation of women's ideas as if they were their own (Dagenais, 2010, p. 12-13; Delvaux et al., 2014), "langue macho" including "insinuations et sous-entendus, moqueries" and "ricanements" (ASSÉ, 2005b, p. 84), or simply not being listened to or heard (Roy-Blais, 2013). As noted in the words of former members of the *Comité femmes en grève de l'UQAM* after their experience in the 2005 strike: "il y a son lot de sexisme et de machisme dans le monde étudiant, et encore plus pendant des moments de tension comme lors d'une grève" including physical and verbal harassment on the part of fellow student activists (Tremblay-Fournier, 2013, p. 75).

While the concept of 'emotional style' allows one to keep such sociohistorical patterns of exclusion in mind rather than falling at risk of implying that certain communities have essentialized emotional traits, the element of plurality and interdependency of Rosenwein's 'emotional community' is useful in that it helps to paint a more complex picture of "people's

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<sup>167</sup> It should be noted that such experiences on the part of women are not particular to the student movement as they are nothing new within Left movements in Quebec and the West, not to mention within the structures of society at large (Delvaux et al., 2014; Dumont, 2013). Indeed Delvaux et al. (p. 126) refer to these dynamics as being symptomatic of the "logiques patriarcales du militantisme" that continue to "opérer et de miner, de l'intérieur, le potentiel subversif des mouvements sociaux à hégémonie masculine."

adaptability to different sorts of emotional conventions as they move from one group to another” (p. 25). More specifically she writes (p. 24):

“Imagine, then, a large circle within which are smaller circles, none entirely concentric but rather distributed unevenly within the given space. The large circle is the overarching emotional community, tied together by fundamental assumptions, values, goals, feeling rules, and accepted modes of expression. The smaller circles represent subordinate emotional communities, partaking in the larger one and revealing its possibilities and its limitations. They too may be subdivided. At the same time, other large circles may exist, either entirely isolated from or intersecting with the first at one or more points.”

Keeping this image of overlap and plurality in mind, the concept of ‘emotional style’ as “in between groupness and individuality” (Gammerl, 2012, p. 162) then allows us to conceive of even further variation within groups.<sup>168</sup> Thus the concept of ‘emotional style’ marks an “(individual) departure from widely shared patterns of conduct” as well as “bonds to specific groups that set alternative rules” without restricting itself to “identity-based concepts” nor to “rules and models” (Ibid, p. 162-163). Considering the size and diversity of the student movement in Quebec, with its own particularities on each campus and each department, the notion of ‘emotional styles’ allows for the exploration of various emotional styles co-existing and overlapping within the movement’s habitus. Thus in what follows when speaking about feminist ‘emotional styles’ within the student movement masculine emotional habitus, it is meant to delineate tendencies or communities that are not fixed -certainly not essentialized- but rather fluid, which have their own internal variations. Such is the case with the women's groups and committees (as well as the emotional practices and styles they have put in place) over the years within the ASSÉ and its predecessors: They are not necessarily fixed communities that identify primarily by their gender or by the ‘feminist’ label, nor is their membership in groups or

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<sup>168</sup> With this focus on ‘emotional styles,’ I seek to go beyond Reddy’s dichotomy between emotional regimes and refuges (Rosenwein, 2006, p. 23) and King’s (2005) notion of dissonance, both of which focus solely on dominant versus non-dominant emotional cultures. (To be clear, while King (2005) does not explicitly mention the term ‘emotional culture’ or ‘emotional habitus,’ she refers to Hochschild’s focus on how dominant framing rules influence “social expectations about how people should respond to a situation emotionally, as well as the display rules which govern how these emotions should be expressed.”)

attendance in certain spaces constant, in part because of the transient nature of student involvement, in part because it is not always the same student delegate attending congress on the part of their student association. Indeed I am calling these "feminist" rather than "women's" emotional styles because the practices allowing these styles to emerge were historically initiated by feminists within the student movement, yet these emotional styles also benefit people who might not identify as 'feminist.'

### 'Non-mixte' spaces

One of the practices that I consider allowed different emotional styles to emerge was 'non-mixte' spaces, notably respective women-only and men-only spaces for discussion and political organizing. The idea of 'non-mixité' continued to be defended by the Women's Committee of the ASSÉ in 2012 as a way for women to "mettre en commun des réalités discriminatoires et oppressives, des comportements, attitudes, et structures qui (re)produisent des inégalités" and to "accumuler les forces nécessaires pour effectuer une action politique dans les espaces mixtes" (Tremblay-Fournier, 2012, p. 20-21). Within the ASSÉ, 'non-mixte' caucuses have tended to take place during congress to facilitate the sharing of experiences, ideas, and motions -and particularly for women "en ayant le moins possible à composer avec des attitudes opprimantes"; these are then followed by discussions "dans les réunions mixtes afin de collectiviser les réflexions" (Delvaux et al., 2014, p. 134).<sup>169</sup> While certainly not as common, on some occasions within the ASSÉ, "les militant-e-s se regroupaient selon leur orientation sexuelle ou encore leur degré d'études (cégep ou université)" (Ibid).<sup>170</sup> According to Lacoursière (2007), in the ANEEQ<sup>171</sup> - considered the unofficial predecessor to the MDE and the ASSÉ-, feminists were creating

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<sup>169</sup> In line with the concept of 'emotional styles' elucidated just above, referring to women-only spaces Mayer (2010) argues that "il est essentiel d'éviter une conception fixe, rigide et unitaire de sa forme, de ses objectifs et de son mode d'inclusion et d'exclusion," and that it is important to consider them temporary spaces -for *some* yet not necessary *all* women- rather than a ghetto or a female social club.

<sup>170</sup> Indeed, Tremblay-Fournier (2012) notes that 'non-mixité' can be helpful for various minority groups. In 2012, the *Comité femmes GGI* sought to assess diverse power relations within the movement in addition to gender (students active in their local student associations versus those involved at the provincial level, experienced versus veteran activists, activists versus non-activists) "afin que toutes et tous se sentent impliqué-e-s au sein du mouvement" (Delvaux et al., p. 132). However there is strangely little mention of racism or 'non-mixte' caucuses for students of colour -as was the case in 2005 and 2010; as Dagenais (2010, p. 24) recommends, "il serait pertinent de travailler à créer différents comités: LGBTQ, antiracisme, anticapacitisme, etc." This lack is perhaps because the *Comité femmes* appears to emphasize the importance of an "analyse féministe transversale" instead of intersectionality, the latter of which Dagenais suggests is less present in the academic francophone world in comparison to the anglophone one.

<sup>171</sup> L'Association des étudiants et étudiantes du Québec (ANEEQ) existed from 1975 (at which point its name was ANEQ, but in 1980 it feminized its name) until the early nineties.

women-only spaces<sup>172</sup> nonexistent in other provincial student associations at the time. This feminist impulse carried itself through to the MDE and then to the ASSÉ, which at its foundation included a women's committee. The *Statuts et Règlements de l'ASSÉ* oblige the inclusion of a point about "Femmes" on the agenda of congresses and meetings of the *Conseil de coordination*, and for a 'non-mixte' caucus to take place therein (Ibid). This tradition of "groupes non-mixtes" was also taken up by feminists within the anti-globalization movement, which emerged at a similar time as -and inspired- the ASSÉ (Dumont, 2013). Yet during the 2005 strike the necessity for 'caucus non mixtes' was constantly challenged (Robert, 2013). After that strike, the *Comité femmes* proposed that 'caucus non-mixtes' take place more than just during the point "Femmes" on the agenda (ASSÉ, 2005b). By the May 2010 congress, delegates unanimously adopted a motion suggesting that congress members always be reminded during the 'points procéduraux' of the possibility to propose a 'caucus non-mixte' at any time (Dagenais, 2010, p. 20). Such women-only spaces have been reported as allowing female activists to become more confident (Ibid); my interviewees' experiences further suggest that such 'non-mixte' spaces often open up space for emotions that seem unexpressable elsewhere in the structures of the provincial movement, for both men and women.<sup>173</sup>

For example, one of my interviewees, Élise, notes of her participation in ASSÉ congresses during her last year of involvement<sup>174</sup> that feelings were not encouraged except in the caucus non-mixtes, where "toutes les questions qui avaient *rapport.. aux sentiments, aux dynamiques internes, aux relations de pouvoir, à-à-à comme, tsé, dans le fond à la manière dont on s'organisait pis dont on se traitait les uns les autres, toutes ces questions-là sortaient, pis*

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<sup>172</sup> For example, the ANEEQ's influential and rather autonomous *l'Organisation des femmes* (ODFA). However, by the nineties when the ANEEQ was undergoing a difficult period, Dagenais (2010, p. 5) notes that "les caucus non-mixtes étaient de moins et moins fréquents."

<sup>173</sup> To be clear, I am not suggesting that the ASSÉ *Comité femmes* members are the only proponents of 'alternative emotional styles,' but simply that within the structures of the ASSÉ, this committee has been the most long-standing (other 'alternative emotional styles' and their protagonists will be considered below and in future chapters). Nor am I suggesting that everyone defines these 'caucus non-mixtes' as having a particular emotional style. Indeed in a 2013 article from the ASSÉ newspaper *Ultimatum*, such spaces are ultimately justified by their potential for reflection in order to build up to action, with not one mention of the role of emotional expressivity, perhaps because they continue to have to feel the need to defend the right to non-mixité to begin with: "Il n'est donc pas ici question de se rassembler pour comploter, mais bien de mettre en place les conditions qui permettent la réflexion et l'action" (see: <http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/ultimatum/le-feminisme-dans-le-mouvement-etudiant/>).

<sup>174</sup> Élise was involved in her student association at the Cégep de Saint-Laurent from 2006 to 2008. According to online ASSÉ documents, she attended five ASSÉ congresses from September 2007 to April 2008. Her story will be introduced more fully in Chapter 2.



souvent y'avait du monde qui *pleurait*." And even when the caucuses reported their discussions to the larger congress, "ça restait toujours *cantonné* à genre un *point* sur la liste du congrès, tsé." Then the congress would continue "pis les mêmes *dynamiques* continuaient.. à... à se perpétuer, tsé." If the all-women caucuses did not necessarily change very much of the general dynamic of the student movement, they were very important moments for women, explains Élise, because "tsé les personnes qui étaient le plus bouleversé.. c'était des *femmes* qui vivaient des situations.. ben des dynamiques de marde" and the caucus allowed them "d'*exprimer* qu'est-ce qu'ils ressentait par rapport à ça... avec du monde qui les *supportait*." In other words, argues Élise, it was "une culture militante, euh... genrée," meaning that "y'avait une culture militante *homme*, pis une culture militante *femme*" and "toutes les questions d'*émotions*, de relations *interpersonnelles*, eum, de dynamiques de *groupe*, de rapports de *pouvoir*, on s'en parlait presque *juste* entre femmes."

In contrast, in the men's caucus, unless there were feminist men "qui avaient plus fait une réflexion par rapport au genre" and took the initiative to talk about emotions during the caucus, for the most part, says Élise, "ce qu'on m'a raconté, les hommes s'assoiaient en rond pis... parlaient d'un sujet, pis parlaient vaguement des rapports de genre dans leur association *étudiante*, et s'*emmerdaient*, pis personne était, comme, plus euh, plus motivé qu'il faut, tsé." Emotions are particularly difficult to talk about with those who have positions of power, "j'irais jamais parler de mes émotions avec un gars sur l'exec (le comité executif) de l'ASSÉ ou de l'AFESH-UQAM, tsé?" And yet it was often the women on those very executive teams who had the most to say during the "caucus non-mixtes," as these executive committees were "justement les places où est-ce que les dynamiques de groupe sont le plus dérangeantes pis que y'a le plus de comportements patriarcaux, comme, ou *machos*, vraiment *définissables* pis observables!" If Élise characterizes the male non-mixte caucuses as less useful than the female ones, for Pierre, it was clear that these small group spaces of discussion could lead to an alternative emotional style for men as well, simply by providing a space to feel more relaxed and thus open up. "Ça me stressait moins de parler juste entre hommes," he notes, especially when he first got involved and did not know anyone at congresses. This was probably because "la plupart de mes amis c'est des gars," but it was mostly the smaller size of the group. This sense of ease with others of the same gender is by no means universal. As Dagenais (2010) notes, at a 'caucus non-mixte' she attended in May 2010, one woman admitted to feeling more intimidated by women and feminists than by

men, at least within the ASSÉ, as she feared being considered anti-feminist. And yet, the fact that it was within the space of a 'caucus non-mixte' that she was able to express such feelings highlights the possibility that such caucuses are not necessarily always about gender, and have the potential to be a space where emotions are more at liberty to be expressed.

### 'Gardien-ne du senti'

Another feminist contribution to alternative emotional styles is the position of 'gardien-ne du senti' -which translates roughly to English as 'the guard of what is felt'- at congresses, general assemblies, and other meetings. The idea emerged from the *Comité femmes* in the *Cahier des mémoires* for the November 2005 ASSÉ congress, as a reaction to women's experiences during the 2005 strike, based on their observation of "la langue macho" and its negative consequences (ASSÉ, 2005b), as mentioned above. So the *Comité femmes* borrowed the idea of 'gardien-ne du senti' from the "milieu militant anglophone," as they sought something in between a *vibes watcher* and a *process watcher* (ASSÉ, 2005b, p. 85).<sup>175</sup> Specifically relevant to emotional well-being:

"Le rôle de la ou des personnes désignée-s serait d'observer la façon dont les personnes interagissent entre elles durant le congrès, si certaines personnes ou un groupe de personnes dominant la discussion (une délégation nombreuse ou forte en gueule, les hommes, etc.), si la réunion se déroule bien ou s'il y a des bogues; d'être attentive ou attentif aux sentiments/émotions/feelings que les gens n'expriment pas ouvertement en observant le *body language*, les conversations privées, les expressions faciales; de suggérer des pauses au besoin. La gardienne ou le gardien du senti peuvent intervenir si elle le juge nécessaire en faisant remarquer qu'il y a une certaine tension et en invitant les gens à s'exprimer sur le sujet" (Ibid).

In addition:

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<sup>175</sup> Similarly in the same booklet for the ASSÉ Congress, the student association the AFESH wrote: "il devrait exister un recours à l'ASSÉ pour dénoncer les comportements agressifs ou dominateurs de certaines personnes lors des congrès" (ASSÉ, 2005b).

"il ou elle doit s'assurer que personne n'est ignoré ou attaqué. Elle ou il doit aussi s'attarder aux différents signes d'épuisement et de frustration liés à la fatigue. Il ou elle peut intervenir par exemple sur les cas de langue macho, sur les attaques politiques et la stigmatisation de personnes et ou délégations en raison de leurs positions, etc. Elle ou il doit s'assurer, lors de ses interventions, de séparer l'action de l'actrice ou de l'acteur afin de ne pas critiquer la personne mais la situation et ainsi laisser les gens se calmer. En retour, les gens doivent s'efforcer de ne pas prendre de façon personnelle une intervention du gardien ou de la gardienne du senti" (Ibid, p. 85-86).

At that November 2005 congress, students voted to "Créer la fonction de gardien et gardienne du senti pour le Congrès" and "Que soit accordé un tour de parole prioritaire à la personne désignée comme gardien ou gardienne du senti afin que tout problème soit réglé rapidement" (ASSÉ, 2005c, p. 17). In doing so, students were implicitly challenging the masculine emotional habitus of the student movement, as the gardien-ne du senti -without stating it explicitly- was a practice intended in part to counterbalance the aggressive and angry tenor of the student movement and its ignoring of emotions, by clearly stating and elucidating the relevance and presence of emotions and by seeking to curb aggressive or angry outbursts that were considered harmful to –or at least dominant in- the movement. Indeed in 2005, the *Comité femmes* had suggested of the 'gardien-ne du senti' that "il ne faut pas hésiter, tout au long du Congrès et durant les pauses, à aller lui parler s'il y a des malaises concernant des comportements et dynamiques qui sont difficiles, malsains, etc." (ASSÉ, 2005b, p. 86).

Improvements to and critical clarifications about the role of the 'gardien-ne du senti' with implications for emotions continued throughout the years. For example in 2008, one gardien-ne du senti summarized her suggestions for the future, notably that the 'gardien-ne du senti' should be more proactive during congress by surveying student delegations during breaks about their comments, questions, suggestions and "états d'esprit" (Dagenais, 2010, p. 51); and that by reminding students to be attentive to the way they communicate, as well as all of the above, "ce procédé rassure les participants et leur donne confiance pendant le Congrès" (Dagenais, 2010, p. 52). In 2010, students interviewed by Dagenais commented that in order to avoid that this position becomes simply another form of authority, that it would be ideal that the person taking on the role have "une connaissance et une attitude féministes et que, le plus possible, la

dénonciation d'attitudes ou de situations problématiques provienne des associations membres” through the voice of the *gardien-ne du senti*, and anonymously if preferred (Ibid, p. 22-23).

Considering the practices described above, I am suggesting here that feminists since the inception of the ASSÉ have helped to foment alternative ‘emotional styles’ (in the form of women’s committees, groups and ‘non-mixte’ spaces, and since the 2005 strike in the form of the ‘*gardien-ne du senti*’), forming a counterbalance to the movement’s “masculine” emotional habitus by allowing for and even encouraging the expression of diverse emotions including sadness (in the caucus non-mixtes) and seeking to create a more respectful and sustainable emotional space during meetings by being more explicit about their emotional dimension (with the *gardien-ne du senti*).

Despite such improvements, there are indications that women in the student movement continue to pay a higher price than men for being emotionally expressive, as is the case in most realms of society.<sup>176</sup> In 2010 for example, various women left a congress in tears due to aggressive and hurtful comments by various men, only to suffer doubly when their reactions were considered “comme un attribut féminin inapproprié dans un endroit comme un congrès” (Dagenais, 2010, p. 25). Similarly during the 2012 strike, women reported that they were ostracized and discredited “lorsqu'elles devenaient émotives en assemblée” (Roy-Blais, 2014, p. 56). Indeed, female participants of my dissertation tended to speak about the ‘masculine’ nature of the emotional habitus more explicitly than men and sought ways to challenge it; and some of these women also exhibited traces of the masculine emotional habitus through their need to perform in front of the camera -which arguably represents the student movement as audience because of the possible public dissemination of their interview. For example, female participants tended to exhibit a more paternalistic mocking of their experiences of extremely positive or particularly negative emotions, either by laughing or using a juvenile or mocking voice as if to imitate a previous ‘self.’ I suggest that these reflect unconscious inherent biases that certain emotional experiences are unacceptable by the more dominant masculine emotional habitus of the student movement. Indeed, Sandra Bartky (1990) reports how some women don’t *believe* they are inferior to men yet nonetheless *feel* such inferiority, reminiscent of the “time-lag

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<sup>176</sup> For example, Groves’s (2001) study of an animal rights group similarly suggests that despite the societal turn towards the emotional realm in the late 1980s, youth and women paid a higher price than older men for being emotionally expressive; Jamison (2014) also speaks about how women’s anger is more punished than that of men.

between an activist's shift in their cognitive and their emotional frames" that King (2005, p. 152) underlines.<sup>177</sup> For example, Marie's experience in front of the camera was particularly surprising as she appeared so confident -yet it makes sense when considering that she experienced first-hand the above-mentioned difficult experiences of women involved in the student movement, in part leading to her diagnosis of 'burnout.' I tell part of her story now, as it reveals the experience of someone for whom feminist emotional styles salvaged the student movement, and whose cultural origins granted her an outsider's perspective of what might be considered the Québécois particularities of this emotional habitus.

### **Marie and the *Comité Femmes GGI*<sup>178</sup>**

Marie describes herself as someone who does not generally hide her emotions. While her full story leading up to 2009, including her burnout, will be told in a later chapter,<sup>179</sup> suffice for my purpose here to note that in 2008, she registered as “une étudiante libre” at the *Université de Québec à Montréal* (UQAM). In 2009, she was elected at a general assembly to the executive council of her faculty student association, *l'Association facultaire étudiante de Sciences humaines* (AFESH).<sup>180</sup> For the next few months, “j’ai vécu, comme, mon pire cauchemar.” She felt intimidated by the jargon and felt shy to ask questions. “Je [ne] comprenais pas les enjeux, pis mais personne m'expliquait tsé?” After leaving every executive meeting “pas en brillant mais presque,” Marie decided to resign. The only other woman on the team pleaded with her not to leave, but “je me suis vraiment détachée assez rapidement parce que je sentais qu’émotionnellement c’était, c’tait trop demandant, tsé? Faque ça ç’a été super démobilisant!”

Eventually, Marie decided to get involved with the *Centre des femmes de l’UQAM*,<sup>181</sup> where she soon became an executive and where our interview takes place in 2011. There, she met “des anciennes militantes [étudiantes] écoeurées qui ont, y’ont décidé de plus jamais militer dans le mouvement étudiant de leur vie tsé? Faque c’tait intéressant tsé, j’ai pu avoir des discussions

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<sup>177</sup> In this case, however, the difference is not between the dominant and activist frames on which King focuses, but more specifically between the frames -or emotional habitus and alternative emotional styles- within the movement itself. King's notion of dissonance will be explored further in chapter 3.

<sup>178</sup> 'GGI' stands for grève générale illimitée (general unlimited strike).

<sup>179</sup> Marie was involved in the student movement from 2005 to at least 2012.

<sup>180</sup> The ‘Conseil exécutif’ of the AFESH usually has nine executive positions:  
<http://www.er.uqam.ca/nobel/afesh/docs/charte.pdf>

<sup>181</sup> The Centre des femmes de l’UQAM “est un groupe agréé de l’université qui a pour premier objectif « d’informer et de sensibiliser la population étudiante aux réalités plurielles de la condition féminine »” (Delvaux et al., 2014, p. 121). See : <http://cdeacf.ca/organisation/centre-femmes-luqam>.

avec ces filles-là, pis là me dire bein” -she slaps her hands together and then puts her fists in the air- “NON. C'est pas vrai tsé, que que les femmes s'impliqueront plus dans le mouvement étudiant.” Thus Marie felt it was important to create “le *Comité Grève Générale Illimitée Femmes tsé?*”<sup>182</sup> She lowers her voice a bit, continuing, “pour comme emmener ces femmes-là à discuter, pis à comme...” she moves both her fists forward then opens them, “..lâcher ce qu'elles ont sur le coeur, et, et à les *remotiver*.”

Marie is explicit that “le féminisme a beaucoup à jouer là-dedans,” as when discussing “avec des militantes” she often discovered that they lived “la même souffrance.” Marie thus felt that they were “en train de *tisser des liens*” that were getting stronger, to the point of improving their experience in the student movement thanks to an almost naturally emerging “contingent féministe.”<sup>183</sup> Already at the most recent general assembly of her student association, “j’ai fait une proposition, pis elle a été votée, pis *si* elle est passée pis tsé on, on m’a *beaucoup* questionnée, pis je.. répondais au micro pis je me sentais *à ma place*,” because “je savais que *derrière moi*,” Marie says, bringing her fingers together and waving them gently, “j’avais une gang de huit personnes qui étaient *solidaires*, tsé, pis qui, pis qui étaient prêts à me ramasser si jamais je, tsé, je m’effritais.”

The *Comité GGI Femmes* is spending a lot of time and energy fomenting this kind of support between women, explains Marie. There is “beaucoup *d’amour*, tsé, on, on est dedans, tsé, pis on, on laisse *beaucoup beaucoup beaucoup* de place à nos émotions, tsé?” In contrast, says Marie, “je ne me sens pas *aimée* par les hommes *militants* du mouvement étudiant, tsé?” Many women are telling her how good they felt to talk and to not feel alone in their experiences, to “chialer *ensemble*” and strategize about what they can do about it. “Moi je sens une *grande solidarité*” with these women, “y’a du respect, du partage,” and “j’ai confiance en *elles*.” More specifically, “y’a un *grand respect* de, de, de *l’autre* et de *où* est rendu *l’autre* dans son processus pis dans son *désir* d’implication, tsé.” At their last meeting, the conclusion they came to “c’était, bein... il faut qu’on se trouve des *allié-e-s*, parce que si il y en a une qui *capote*, bein faut que

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<sup>182</sup> The *Comité femmes GGI de l’UQAM* was formed in the fall of 2011, originally as a sub-committee of a larger UQAM-wide GGI mobilization committee, but soon transformed into an autonomous network composed of a few dozen feminist activists, most of whom are students (Delvaux et al., 2014). It was hoped to be a “safer space” to counter the “boys’ club de l’ASSÉ” and to defend feminism “comme une cause transversale, tout en refusant l’essentialisme” (Ibid, p. 134).

<sup>183</sup> At the time of our interview, Marie is preparing a motion for there to be a ‘gardien-n-e du senti’ who is feminist at the AFESH general assemblies.

l'autre puisse la ramasser pis lui dire, « Je suis là pour toi, »" says Marie, shaking her head to express discontent, "parce qu'on vit tellement de violences dans.. dans peu importe ce qu'on va faire autour du mouvement étudiant, que ce soit de la part des militants OU d'autres personnes à l'extérieur du mouvement tsé?" So it is important "de se sentir à l'aise de pouvoir exprimer nos émotions, tsé? Et pas comme vivre *seule* notre souffrance."

Marie has felt limited within the movement by not only masculine, but also *Québécois* expectations about emotions -the latter very different from those of her home country, France, she explains. Regarding the former, "des émotions euh « typiquement masculines »" -she gestures with her fingers during those last two words- "sont plus socialement acceptables en assemblée générale que les émotions typiquement féminines, tsé." Women also contribute to this emotional culture: "On dirait que quand une femme prend sa *place* dans le mouvement étudiant, bein elle prend des réflexes qu'on va dire « typiquement masculins, »" she says, gesturing quotation marks. "C'est-à-dire que elle devient aggressive, elle parle fort, euh.. elle prend beaucoup de place, pis tsé?"<sup>184</sup> Marie does not want to separate the feminist student movement from the larger one; but until women feel "suffisamment fortes pour eum, être *nous-mêmes*"<sup>185</sup> au sein du mouvement étudiant," she feels that women still need "non-mixte" spaces.

And change will take a long time to come, partly because it will require a change in the culture not just of the student movement, but the larger societal culture, Marie implies -though careful about the words she uses to judge the emotional culture of Quebec society. "Je [ne] veux pas généraliser, mais je crois que, au *Québec*, y'a quand-même un... eum, je vais vraiment *peser* mes mots là, mais j'pense que y'a, y'a-a-a-a quand-même un gros *blocage* autour des émotions." She cannot imagine herself becoming emotional about a topic in her sociology class and crying, she explains. "On dirait que y'a, y'a quelque chose de *non-dit*! Y'a un *non-dit* qui qui qui demande à ce que on *gère* et on *contrôle* nos *émotions*, tsé." In Marie's case she notices such differences because "moi je viens d'une famille *française*," where it was normal to scream when

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<sup>184</sup> Camille Robert (cited in Delvaux et al., 2014, p. 140) notes a similar tendency as elucidated by former Parti Québécois politician Lise Payette : "les femmes en politique devaient se transformer en « hommes politiques » et utiliser leur langage pour se faire reconnaître. Elles doivent parler fort et défendre leurs idées avec agressivité, sans quoi elles sont jugées « trop sensibles »."

<sup>185</sup> To be clear, Marie was not suggesting that women have natural or essentialized emotions nor that they should try to fit a certain stereotype, but rather that they should resist the pressure to be, act, or talk a certain way during general assemblies and during student struggles, including being able to cry should they feel the need -even if crying is less acceptable at these student general assemblies than anger and aggressivity, in her opinion.

angry. “Quand j’ suis arrivée au Québec,” during her first arguments with her boyfriend “je me mettais à *crier*, sur le trottoir, tout le monde nous *regardait* pis même lui était comme « shhh ,»” she says, echoing Léger and colleagues’ (2016) depictions of the difference between French and Québécois culture. Whether at school or at work, “j’ ai pas l’ impression que, qu’ on puisse comme se laisser aller à nos émotions, euh, mais *nulle part*” -whether it’s screaming or crying. “Y’ a une Mexicaine qui m’ avait *dit* la même chose.” Thus, notes Marie, “les personnes qui sont pas, comme *moi* qui ont plus de difficulté à contenir leurs émotions,” continues Marie “sont.. désavantagé-e-s, on part avec une longueur de *retard*, parce que, be-e-i-i-n moi à chaque fois que je dois m’ exprimer en assemblée générale au micro[phone], bein je stresse *30 minutes* avant parce que je me dis « Bon, là il faut que je dise telle affaire pis ta ta ta » parce que j’ ai *peur* de comme, laisser, tsé, me retrouver comme laisser aller mes émotions pis juste comme, avoir l’ air d’ une *hystérique*.” She knows is not the only one to feel this, she says, as “j’ ai des copines c’ est pareil.” Marie believes that to counter this tendency, everyone needs to take responsibility “tsé de dire « Bon, bein, moi je vis une émotion en ce moment. Pis je vais le verbaliser [...] j’ ai pas le goût de me mettre derrière un *masque*. »”

If it appears that Marie is referring solely to student movement instances as she makes these suggestions, I will soon learn that she is in fact *coaching herself* throughout the interview to ‘be herself’ in front of the camera. At the beginning of our interview, when Marie says of her life story, “ça c’ est pas obligé d’ être, comme, euh, sur la caméra,” I assume she is being cute with her self-deprecating humor;<sup>186</sup> little do I know that Marie had been battling her worries about the camera even before the interview started. I never would have guessed, as my impression from the very beginning of the interview when Marie cozies into her couch in the *Centre des femmes de l’UQAM* office is that she is wonderfully confident and easy-going. At the beginning of the interview I do remind Marie to try not to feel pressured to answer quickly because of the camera, and to ignore it all together if she can. “Ça va,” she says non-chalantly, fooling me with her apparent ease; at that point I am oblivious to how the camera will be representing her fears of the judgment of student movement audiences. Only at the very end of the interview, when I ask her my standard questions about her impressions of the interview process, does Marie admit this:

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<sup>186</sup> Later, after viewing her video, again she suggests that she doesn’t think that her life story context is that relevant; yet she eventually decides that she is okay with her entire video interview remaining public.



“J’avais vraiment peur de comme, d’avoir *pas rapport*,” she says, taking me completely by surprise. “Ma plus grande peur c’est qui va regarder ça pis me juger, pis je pense euh-h surtout aux militants,” she says, adding:

“j’ai essayé de rester comme, super concentrée sur ce que je disais, pis, parce que je sais que je peux être vraiment intense, tsé? Pis... je peux avoir, on en parlait tsé comme, tsé j’fais des trucs comme, arrêter de parler pis respirer pis faire des affaires de même pis je me dis « Ah c’est pas comme super professionnel » pis, mais en même temps je me disais « Ben non! Tsé c’est, justement le le discours que je défends c’est que il *faut* être qui on est » faque..”

She shrugs her shoulders and adds: “mais c’est, c’est, c’est demandant.” During the entire interview, Marie has been managing her anxiety in order to *not* manage her emotions for the camera. In this way, the interview itself was a stage for Marie to practice what she preached for the student movement: to tell her story authentically and emotionally, and to honestly admit the ‘emotional work’ the telling involved for her –one step of the long-term labour of unsettling the masculine emotional habitus.

### **Back to CLASSE in 2011**

A few weeks after my interview with Marie, I was about to share some of her quotes with the first CLASSE congress in Valleyfield. It was December 3, 2011, and the euphoric clapping to initiate new CLASSE members had fizzled out. Congress members then voted to end the congress for the day, meaning that my presentation of preliminary dissertation findings would only happen the day after. Yet before congress adjourned, the gardien du senti gave his suggestions to congress members based on what he had observed so far that day: Students should talk to the presiding chair rather than to each other when they are arguing in order to avoid the personalization of different opinions; students should not stand up when talking as it could intimidate others; and if something sounded condescending, they were asked to not say it. He reminded everyone to be attentive to encouraging women to speak as much as men, and CEGEP students to speak as much as university students.

That evening, Lucie told us that she felt that the subject of women was never taken seriously enough at ASSÉ: although the implementation of practices such as the ‘gardien-ne du

senti' and 'l'alternance homme-femme' since 2005 had been an improvement, it definitely was not completely effective yet.<sup>187</sup>

The next morning, before I knew it, the AFESH delegation had proposed to skip points 6.0 ("Femmes") -where my presentation was supposed to be- as well as 7.0 ("ASSÉ"), 8.0 ("Revendications") to go straight to the point 9.0 ("Plan d'action"). It seemed I might not get to present after all. During the next break, Lucie was visibly upset and determined to get my presentation on the agenda, asking student associations if they would second her motion for it.<sup>188</sup> A decision was made by congress delegations about the timing of the province-wide demonstration for the "déclenchement de la grève" and then before I knew it, a student proposed the motion: "Une plénière de 20 minutes [...] afin de permettre une présentation par la chercheure Nadia Hausfather de ses résultats préliminaire de recherche sur le rôle des émotions et des relations interpersonnelles dans le mouvement étudiant."<sup>189</sup> Considering the congress had just been planning a provincial demonstration, I thought to myself: *Oh no! My presentation might waste the time needed to plan the strike!* But the motion passed, so I had no choice anymore. I picked up my notes, and walked down the flight of stairs to sit at the table at the front of the room, next to the congress chair, secretary, and 'gardien-ne du senti.' My voice slightly trembling, the room was completely silent as I felt all eyes upon me. After presenting a summary of my findings and reading participants' quotes, I ended with a list of questions:

“Est-ce que le gardien du senti et les caucus non-mixtes ont réglé les problématiques émotionnelles et interpersonnelles mentionnées? Mettons-nous plus de valeur sur le rationnel que l'émotif dans le mouvement? Est-ce que vous êtes d'accord qu'il y a des

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<sup>187</sup> More specifically, Lucie wrote to me in an email a few months later that if "la procédure des gardien-ne-s du senti est quasi-systématiquement utilisées depuis plusieurs sessions à l'ASSÉ," she added that "ce n'est pas vraiment le cas au local." And in January 2017, upon reading this chapter, Marya conveys to me that "Even today, with ASSÉ's anti-racist ad-hoc committee, I'm struggling to convince people that we need a gardien-ne de senti at ASSÉ's Comité de Coordination."

<sup>188</sup> Upon reading this chapter in 2017, Lucie clarifies the possible source of such disappointment: she had previously asked the AFESH delegation to second her motion for my presentation in the upcoming "Femmes" point of the agenda, yet instead the AFESH delegation then successfully proposed during congress to skip various points including the "Femmes" point (CLASSE, 2011b). Thus in this next break Lucie tried to convince other delegations to propose my presentation within a different point on the agenda.

<sup>189</sup> Lucie's efforts in asking for help from other associations, particularly CEGEP delegations, had been successful: finally, it was the Association générale étudiante du cégep de Saint-Jérôme that proposed it, and it was seconded by the Association générale des étudiants et étudiantes du cégep Limoilou (CLASSE, 2011b).

différences entre femmes et hommes en terme de comment ils et elles expriment leurs émotions? Que la colère est l'émotion la plus acceptée dans le mouvement? Est-ce que les dynamiques interpersonnelles et émotionnelles de 2005 et 2007 sont encore présentes à la veille de la grève de 2012?"

I got up and walked back up the stairs of the auditorium to my seat. Before I could blink, a student delegate had proposed a 30-minute 'caucus non-mixte' to discuss my presentation. While non-mixte caucuses were already a relatively common practice at ASSÉ congresses, I could not believe they were doing one because of *my* presentation.

At the women's caucus, we split into smaller groups.<sup>190</sup> To my surprise, in my group some spoke about not fitting into the 'feminist' or 'female' category: one, because she is not someone who is open with emotions; another because she sometimes felt judged by feminists for not understanding problems women faced when working with male executives. Yet what took me most by surprise was Marya's comment: she told the circle that she was harrassed by a male member of our student association whom I knew, and suddenly Marya was in tears.

*"I'm so surprised hon, I had no idea this had affected you like this,"* I said to Marya as we walked back to the main congress room, stunned that my topic had left the very friend who had given me the courage to come here, in tears -another indication of the potential of these 'non-mixte' caucuses for emotional disclosure. Then the AFESH delegation proposed that there be a 30-minute discussion about themes that had emerged.<sup>191</sup> Person after person reported their 'non-mixte' discussions to the room full of student delegates; both men and women commented about the overlap between the personal and the political. Men depicted elements of a masculine emotional habitus: how student activists are so keen to give critical feedback over positive feedback, and yet when it is positive feedback they don't know how to deal with it because they don't deal well with emotions. One said : *"je vous invite à la gentillesse."*

Women's reportback from the various small group discussions conveyed that *"les émotions influencent la manière qu'on milite"* and the importance of the *"sentiments positifs"*

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<sup>190</sup> The points in this and following paragraphs are a modified version of my field notes typed up in the days following the Congress, as well as during the Congress itself.

<sup>191</sup> I was unprepared for what followed: I had not even brought a notepad to write notes as I had not expected such interest, so I wrote notes on some random sheets of paper that Marya lent me.

emerging from the movement, like “*se sentir utile, [avoir un] contrôle sur sa vie,*” while some spoke of being motivated by rage and love. Yet they lamented elements of a masculine emotional habitus in which love is ruined by procedures and perceived as something for “hippies”; that some activists are “*très durs,*” and that the lack of “*un lien de confiance*” makes it difficult to work together. They noted that women who get by in the student movement act like men; that there is pressure to sacrifice one’s self for the larger group or cause, to be ‘the perfect activist’ involved in everything; that some experience guilt “*de pas faire assez dans le mouvement*”; and that new people feel intimidated by those already involved. Then there is the feeling of paranoia (“*c’est un flic*”<sup>192</sup>) around new faces and the “*déshumanisation*” of ASSÉ and FEUQ executives with criticisms that seem political but are actually personal, including “*le sentiment d’être taggés pour parler avec les gens de la FEUQ.*” Related to their experience as women, they lamented that intimidation is more likely to be aimed towards them, and that women tend to do invisible work while men tend to do more visible work.

At one point, a young man stood up and told everyone that he had a confession to make: sometimes he thought he had joined the student movement to forget the sadness of his father’s death, and that he had felt suicidal in the past and did not know to whom to turn. I was impressed that someone could speak about something so personal in front of so many people, yet I wondered: Should I now be responsible to make sure this person got help? Luckily someone proposed that a workshop be given during the upcoming training camp about the role of emotions and interpersonal relationships in the student movement.<sup>193</sup>

The next day, one of the male students at the Congress whom I had always found to be a bit emotionally reserved, sent me a text: “Thank you for that présentation! It stirred long-repressed feelings, as demonstrated by the cathartic follow-up.” Yet I continued to feel haunted by my own feelings and thoughts from that day: I had spent much of it doubting whether the topic of emotions was depoliticizing,<sup>194</sup> encouraging navel-gazing, and taking time away from the logistical planning of the strike, as something historic was coming and there was limited time. Indeed my own reactions that day were revealing precisely the student movement’s masculine

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<sup>192</sup> 'Flic' means 'police'

<sup>193</sup> I ended up giving that workshop at the end of January 2012, for which I created a website with a list of resources to address students' possible need for follow-up on these issues: [www.activistemotions.net](http://www.activistemotions.net).

<sup>194</sup> I wrote my concern about emotions having a "depoliticizing" potential twice in my notes that day.

emotional habitus, one that invaded my body and thoughts against my will. In a sense, my internal struggle that day about the place of emotions in the student movement mirrored the external struggle between Lucie and certain influential member student associations of the ASSÉ.

Indeed even though the *Comité femmes* was responsible for the very caucus 'non mixtes' that led men and women to express their emotions that day at congress, Lucie continued to feel great frustration regarding the place of feminism in the ASSÉ. By early February 2012 she sent her letter of resignation from the *Comité femmes* to the ASSÉ-support email list,<sup>195</sup> noting her fatigue from the committee never being taken seriously,<sup>196</sup> highlighting the continual hurdles faced by feminists within the ASSÉ since its inception to support an autonomous women's committee (Roy-Blais, 2013) and to have feminist issues, perspectives, and practices taken seriously without being considered 'party poopers' (Delvaux et al., 2014).<sup>197</sup> This continual struggle has implications for women, who burn out or get disillusioned about the ASSÉ structures or even the student movement as a whole (Delvaux et al., 2014), yet pertinent to my argument is that it also indirectly has implications for the emotional habitus of the student movement as a

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<sup>195</sup> This is an email list sent out to ASSÉ member organizations as well to any interested students, such as myself.

<sup>196</sup> Lucie wrote : “Depuis que je m'implique sur le comité femmes, nos analyses et nos critiques n'ont pas vraiment été comprises ou mêmes lues par les gens auxquelles elles s'adressaient [...] Il y a des gens qui ont plus de liberté financière, plus d'influence, plus de moyens de diffusion de leurs idées, plus d'ami-es, qui parlent plus, plus fort et qui voient les événements autrement. [...] toujours épuisées, si peu de résultats.” By the time of her resignation, the *Comité Femmes* was still trying to have the 'non-mixité' of their committee officialized in the *Statuts et règlements de l'ASSÉ* (Tremblay-Fournier, 2012). As another example, in May 2010 after the presentation about feminism in the ASSÉ by Anne Dagenais Guertin proposed by the *Comité Femmes*, a motion to ensure that a 'gardien-ne du senti' always be present at congresses, was once again postponed due to the large number of abstentions (ASSÉ, 2010). While ASSÉ's online archives show that the the gardien-ne du senti became a relatively regular practice in ASSÉ congresses starting as of the October 2006 congress (ASSÉ, 2006), it wasn't until May 2013 that the ASSÉ congress officially adopted the gardien-ne du senti as part of its *Nouveau code des règles de procédures* (ASSÉ, 2013) and mandated the *Comité Femmes* to draft a reference guide about the 'gardien-ne du senti' for student association delegates to “mieux cerner les entraves au dialogue ainsi que les rapports de domination se produisant en instance, afin de travailler à les enrayer pour ainsi permettre une atmosphère saine autour des débats.” See: <http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/petit-livre-mauve.pdf>.

<sup>197</sup> Dagenais (2010) also notes from her interviews that most women elected to the *Comité femmes* ended up burnt out, angry or bitter about their experience in the ASSÉ. Two responses to Lucie's resignation letter sent on the ASSÉ-support email list are illustrative of how far back these struggles go: “Étant une ancienne membre du comité femme (2007-2008), je tiens à préciser que les commentaires soulevés par (Lucie) et (Ginette) ne datent pas de 2009, mais bien du début de l'ASSÉ [...] Contrairement à d'autres, mon cynisme envers le mouvement étudiant et mon écoeurantite de l'attitude macho et paternaliste du mouvement étudiant m'ont poussé à ne jamais m'y réimpliquer (à part au local dans des tâches isolées que personne ne veut faire).” A following email stated: “je me désolé encore une fois de la situation actuelle, qui n'est pour moi qu'une répétition de l'histoire, avec un arrière goût de déjà vu [...] Je sais trop bien quels combats il faut mener lorsqu'on siège sur ce comité et je sais aussi à quel point il est difficile de porter des idées et des processus féministes en temps de grève. Je sais aussi le stress que peuvent causer ces combats et la nécessité de toujours parer les attaques. C'est le genre de situations qui ont [sic] mené à l'épuisement et la disparition de plusieurs militantes par le passé.”

whole,<sup>198</sup> as it is clearly women and feminists who have historically promoted practices that allow for alternative emotional styles to its masculine emotional habitus. For such a habitus, I seek to illustrate in a later chapter, is partly responsible for the dialectics of despair that whirled through the 2005-2012 strikes particularly towards their endings. Yet only in part: also partly responsible for such despair, in a gentle dialectical way, I suggest, was the particular collective-oriented ‘high’ that these strikes potentiated, the subject of the next chapter. On that note, to complete the quote from Ancelovici and Dupuis-Déri (2014, p. 33) introducing this chapter, “L’attrait qu’exerce encore le Printemps érable réside d’ailleurs dans cette part d’inaccessible,” but also “d’effervescence et de douce folie qui caractérise les moments de subversion.”

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<sup>198</sup> Similarly, Dagenais (2010, p. 26-27) notes the potential benefits of feminism for men, including "gagner une nouvelle compréhension des émotions [...]"

## Chapter 2

### “Le sentiment de tous ensemble”: The existential 'high' of collective-oriented emotions

*There is something profoundly unsettling, and utterly fascinating about the unlimited general strike. On the one hand, it opens up a cyclonic vortex that devours all economic rationality and produces a sort of animated suspension, a temporality of its own. And on the other, it appears as the culminating point of life, its pure and glorious expenditure.*

- Épopée<sup>199</sup>

*Le monde est beau, et hors de lui, point de salut.*

- Albert Camus, *Noces*<sup>200</sup>

Both the “beauty” of life, as Camus might have it, and the “point of life” as Épopée describes, were central to the emotions at the heart of these student strikes. More specifically, in this chapter I illustrate the particular collective-oriented ‘high’ characteristic of these participants’ striking emotions: notably how they hold the potential of an existential or spiritual hue, thanks in part to the sense of a historic moment and the deliberative qualities of these student strikes. I argue that amidst -and despite- the student movement’s masculine emotional habitus, the particularities of these strike campaigns allowed such 'high' emotional experiences to emerge. Especially at the beginning of their strike experiences, such 'high' collective-oriented experiences allowed these students to temporarily override anger, fear, and uncertainty, increasing their capacity to be 'vulnerable,' to use Brené Brown's (2012, 2015) term. In turn, their willingness to be vulnerable opened them up further to a host of new feelings.

Indeed, important to consider upon reading the stories in this chapter is that in addition to the particular collective-oriented ‘high’ they reveal, they also have in common a consequent emotional downfall into despair and sadness at a later moment of their strike experience -what I will argue later is the inevitable consequence of vulnerability (Ibid).<sup>201</sup> Yet interviewees’ stories here in this chapter are limited to these strikes' high beginnings, leaving their subsequent, related

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<sup>199</sup> Cited in Himada (2014, p. 172)

<sup>200</sup> 1936, p. 48.

<sup>201</sup> While the stories of Simon and Marie -introduced in the previous chapter- as well as other participants also followed this pattern, their stories are either recounted in future chapters or could not be elaborated in detail in this dissertation due to space limitations.

lows to be continued in a later chapter.<sup>202</sup> While some of the voices expressed in this chapter were present in previous chapters (Élise, Philippe, Pierre, Marya), here they are introduced in more detail, from the very beginnings of their strike trajectory. Julie is new to this chapter, just as she was new to student activism when the 2005 strike campaign started: I start with her story to draw out in more detail the particularities of the ‘high’ collective-oriented emotional experiences that these strikes engendered for these participants, and how these relate and contribute to existing social movement and political theory. I then proceed in chronological order: After considering the 2005 strike stories of Julie, Élise, and Philippe, we travel to 2007 to reacquaint ourselves with Pierre and Audrey, and then to 2012 with Marya.

The commonalities of these interviewees' emotional experiences across distinct years suggests that the particular situation engendered by general unlimited strike campaigns overrides contextual and sociopolitical changes since the beginning of this century.<sup>203</sup> Regardless of the different numbers spouted, policies referenced, or demands stated during each particular strike, interviewees' experiences reveal these strikes' common potential to imbue life with a certain emotional and existential hue -or at least a common memory of such a hue.

#### JULIE'S "SENTIMENT DE TOUS ENSEMBLE"

It was the autumn of 2004 and “je venais d’arriver au cégep!” says<sup>204</sup> Julie in her soft and unassuming way, sitting comfortably on an armchair in a small room at the *Université de Québec à Montréal* (UQAM), where at the time of the interview in 2011 she is studying Sociology and remembering her involvement in the student movement. Seven years earlier, she recalls, she started studying at the Cégep du Vieux Montréal alongside a group of her best friends from high

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<sup>202</sup> Thus the order of these chapters mimics to some extent the chronology of the emotional trajectories lived by these interviewees during or throughout these strikes.

<sup>203</sup> This might not be surprising considering that Jean Charest was in office throughout the period assessed for this dissertation (2005-2012); nonetheless such similar patterns across strikes are interesting considering some marked changes during this period, notably the 2007-2008 global financial crisis (Lafrance & Sears, 2016), the 2011 Arab spring alongside the emergence of the Indignados in Spain and the Occupy movement (Dupuis-Déri, 2016), the latter two of which Katz (2015, p. 154) places alongside the 2012 strike within the category of a “network society” and “social media generation.” And yet Lafrance's (2015) critique of Katz's regrouping points to how these strikes hold characteristics beyond what Lafrance calls the “technological determinism” (p. 287) of social media explanations, but also beyond analyses that view the 2012 strike solely as a product of the post-2011 context. In other words, to account for the 2005 strike that took place before the existence of Facebook and Twitter, Lafrance distinguishes the fervour of the Quebec student movement from elsewhere based on its “democratic model of organizing.”

<sup>204</sup> In this dissertation, when relating interview dialogue, the present tense and ‘now’ refers to the moment of the interview.



school. She was already “un peu marxiste si on veut,” yet this was different, as it was first time she would attend a general assembly. “Là y’avait des gens qui faisaient des propositions, votaient, y’avait des propositions qui étaient faites sur euh, le, la politique québécoise en général! Dont euh, la... la campagne, là, que y’avait, je pense, contre les, la coupure de 103 millions!”<sup>205</sup> Julie has already seen the interview questions, but by that point in the interview I have not yet asked her about emotions; nonetheless within the first few minutes she is talking about her feelings. “Là j’avais l’impression que j’tais vraiment rentrée dans un monde politique, où on pouvait avoir euh une *prise* sur, une emprise sur le déroulement des choses!” she explains smiling. “J’avais l’impression que y’avait quelque chose qui se passait là, faque j’ai vraiment été intéressée par la politique étudiante!” exclaims Julie, “avec ce sentiment-là de.. *pouvoir* changer le monde!”

Julie soon found out that the general assembly was not the only way she could be involved in the student movement: “y’avait un comité de mobilisation!” So she attended the ‘comité de mob’ meetings of around twenty students and from time to time she distributed flyers, put up posters, carried out “la sensibilisation près des gens!” When I ask her if anyone had convinced her to join the strike movement, she insists that rather what had stood out for her was “une *effervescence* politique devant moi, j’avais l’impression qu’on pouvait révolutionner le monde,” she says, smiling again.<sup>206</sup>

Thus as early as the fall of 2004 Julie had this sense that something historic was happening through this strike campaign (“quelque chose qui se passait là”) that she could not ignore, which came alongside a feeling of “effervescence” in turn linked to a feeling that together they could change the world (“sentiment-là de.. de *pouvoir* changer le monde!”) Indeed, through the stories that unfold in this chapter, I argue that rather than the predominance of anger that I had been expecting, what stood out was interviewees’ common elicitation of the following interconnected duet: 1) ‘high’ positive emotional experiences relating to intense enjoyment, excitement, including a sense of aesthetic beauty or of something so amazing that it felt surreal; and 2) collective-oriented emotions. While diverse, I am calling ‘collective-oriented emotions’ those feelings characterized by their direct orientation towards the collective. I use this term to

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<sup>205</sup> As explained in the Introduction chapter, the provincial government had transferred 103 million dollars from student bursaries into student loans.

<sup>206</sup> Julie often smiled during the initial part of the interview as she recounted these first moments.

designate and encompass various emotions of rapprochement that an individual can feel between him or herself and the collectivity: solidarity, togetherness, unity, collective empowerment, hope and pride related to the collective, feelings of belonging to different collective entities, and even a collective form of love.<sup>207</sup> Thus the term "collective-oriented emotions" can encompass conceptualizations of a more political or community-oriented form of 'love' by scholars of the social sciences and humanities (Chabot, 2008; hooks, 2000; Kelley, 2002; Stern & Brown, 2016; Warren & Ronis, 2011).

Because of its specific reference to the deliberative process of direct democracy, "collective-oriented emotions" perhaps resembles most closely Dupuis-Déri's (2016) notion of 'agoraphilie,' which he refers to as love, empathy, and solidarity towards the assembled people.<sup>208</sup> Dupuis-Déri writes that the reference to "love" in his definition "permet de désigner un sentiment profond face au peuple assemblé, ainsi qu'une affinité politique avec cette manière de prendre des décisions politiques collectivement et des valeurs considérées comme supérieures et auxquelles on s'identifie: la liberté, l'égalité et la solidarité" (p. 24). Yet my use of the term goes beyond the love, empathy, and solidarity that he mentions, to include the above-mentioned broader range or extension of emotions experienced by participants (e.g. collective empowerment, hope and pride related to the collective, feelings of belonging to different collective entities) because of the strike. In such a way, it might be said that I am broadening the emotional outreach of agoraphilie.<sup>209</sup> Another divergence from Dupuis-Déri is that in their feelings of rapprochement to the collective, the participants of this dissertation do not always express what he considers part of agoraphilie, notably "la peur, la haine ou le mépris des chefs, de l'autorité, des institutions hiérarchiques, de la collaboration à la domination et de la soumission imposée ou volontaire" (p. 25). This is perhaps related to the fact that for these participants, the term 'collective-oriented emotions' has a broader object of affection than Dupuis-Déri's "people"

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<sup>207</sup> Within the term 'collective-oriented emotions,' I also include a sense of collective duty, explicitly expressed as an emotional experience by at least one participant and implied by various others. Interestingly, while it seems most definitions of 'duty' contain no reference to emotion but rather to a moral or legal obligation or responsibility, the Online Cambridge Dictionary defines 'duty' as "something that you have to do because it is part of your job, or something that you feel is the right thing to do" (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/duty>).

<sup>208</sup> In French, Dupuis-Déri uses the singular term, "peuple."

<sup>209</sup> On a similar note, including a particular focus on the 'high' feelings of such situations allows me to more explicitly incorporate anthropologist David Graeber's idea that direct democracy can be *pleasurable*, as elucidated in his Tedx talk (see <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/53276/> and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eR\\_95sIEFw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eR_95sIEFw)).

assembled to deliberate.<sup>210</sup> Certainly, his notion is certainly very relevant to many if not most of these participants' experiences, as will be seen, as oftentimes collective-oriented emotions were in reaction to the deliberations at meetings, or simply in reaction to large gatherings of people. Yet because *agoraphilie* does not encompass the emotional experiences of all participants of this dissertation, I employ the vaguer term 'collective-oriented' feelings to extend the object (or collective subject) of affinity beyond the physical assembly of a people, to also include a more abstract notion of the collectivity encompassing all people (and even all living creatures) in a territory, or even on the planet. Such broader reach of the object of 'collective-oriented emotion,' as well as its 'high' or effervescent associations, can be theorized in part by Durkheim's notion of 'organic solidarity' and 'collective effervescence' as applied to social movements by Collins (2001, 2005) and Summers-Effler (2002, 2005), as will be discussed further below.

For now, I should clarify further particularities of this dissertation's participants in comparison to the above theorizations, that I thus seek to intertwine in order to more comprehensively explain the tenor of their emotional experiences during these strike campaigns. Specifically, I argue that these strike campaigns' potential for 'high' collective-oriented feelings were particularly *intense* and *diverse* for these participants because they took place alongside one or more of the following particularities of these student strikes: 1) the deliberative experience of direct democracy with its particularly empowering effects; 2) a feeling of living and creating something 'historic' in part due to repetitive and populated moments of assembly; 3) an existential or spiritual potential -reinforcing the 'high,' so to speak. I am referring here to 'spiritual' in the secular sense: borrowing from existentialist philosopher Robert Solomon (2007), I consider 'spirituality' as the "philosophical emotion" of gratitude, more specifically "appreciating the bigger picture and having a chance to play a role in it, no matter how small"; appreciating "the beauty of the whole" (p. 270).<sup>211</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, Solomon also links emotion to existential concerns, as does Brené Brown (2012, 2015), through vulnerability in particular. By 'existential,' I am referring to human beings' ability and desire to

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<sup>210</sup> This is true regardless of which definition of "people" we consider, for Dupuis-Déri describes various definitions of "people." While most of the time he refers to the people assembled to deliberate, he sometimes also includes the possibility that "peuple assemblé" can refer to gathering to protest.

<sup>211</sup> Brené Brown (2012) similarly notes that spirituality is related to vulnerability and wholeheartedness -"Not religiosity but the deeply held belief that we are inextricably connected to one another by a force greater than ourselves -a force grounded in love and compassion" (p. 151).

actualize "the potential meaning inherent and dormant in a given situation" (Frankl, 1984, p. 140) -despite "the misfortune of being thrown into a world devoid of intrinsic meaning" (Yalom, 2002, p. 136). In other words, by 'existential' I am referring to the sense that our existence has meaning and purpose. Irvin Yalom (2008), for example, refers to the dialectic expressed by Heidegger between "the *everyday* mode and the *ontological* mode." In the latter mode, "you are not only more aware of existence and mortality and life's other immutable characteristics but also more anxious and *more primed to make significant changes*. You are prompted to grapple with your fundamental human responsibility to construct an authentic life of engagement, connectivity, meaning, and self-fulfillment" (p. 34). While the existential-humanistic perspective of psychiatrists, psychotherapists, and other scholars implies a focus on the freedom that *individuals* have to find their own meaning (Brown, 2015, 2012; Frankl, 1984; Solomon, 2007; Yalom, 2008), here I seek to bring out the collective potential and relevance of such meaning -in other words, its potential to arise organically from collective moments like the strike, through collective-oriented emotions.<sup>212</sup>

Sociologist Jean-Philippe Warren (2007) and late political scientist Jean-Marc Potté (1987) also report the spiritual and existential components of the experience of Quebec activists in the sixties and seventies. Unlike Warren and Potté, however, I do not consider the existential meaning -nor the associated sense of belonging and solidarity- acquired from activism as symptomatic of the vanishing reliance on the beliefs, omniscience and sense of community provided by the Catholic Church in Quebec and the subsequent search for its replacement.<sup>213</sup> Nor do I consider such a search for existential meaning problematic. Rather, in line with the above-mentioned existential-humanist scholars, and with Dupuis-Déri's (2016) contention that

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<sup>212</sup> Yalom (2002) does point to the fact that "[m]any feel that meaning projects take on a deeper, more powerful significance if they are self-transcendent - that is, directed at something or someone outside themselves" (p. 137), yet I seek to make this possible link to the collective more explicit.

<sup>213</sup> However, as mentioned further below, I do agree with these authors' contentions that diverse sociopolitical factors may intensify activists' desire or ability to derive a sense of meaning from community, belonging, and solidarity - indeed my argument is that general student strikes encourage this, with their particular contrast to individualism and consumerism characteristic of neoliberal regimes (Katz, 2015); Stern & Brown, 2016). Based on his interviews with Quebec activists of the seventies, Potté (1987) refers to how "[v]ivre selon ses besoins et ses désirs, conformément au facile hédonisme narcissique et consommatoire véhiculé par la civilisation américaine, demeure une activité vaine. Le court moment entre sa naissance et sa mort, s'il n'est vécu que pour satisfaire ce qui permet de passer de l'un à l'autre, ne supprime pas l'absurdité. Le dévouement militant, en insérant la vie au sein de l'histoire, lui donnait une signification qui transcendait son évanescence" (p. 61). Warren (2007) refers to the institutional violence due to industrialization, urbanization, and the destruction of Keynesian model.

*agoraphilie* is a "nécessité et même une essence" (p. 362), I approach these collective-oriented existential emotions as a basic part of what it is to be human (Frankl, 1984; Yalom, 2008).<sup>214</sup>

Some clarifications are needed before continuing: I am not proposing a causal one-directional effect of each component of the above-mentioned quintet on one another, as each has potential to influence the other: collective-oriented emotions might lead to 'high' feelings, and in turn 'high feelings' could allow entrance to collective-oriented emotions, or they might be experienced simultaneously. Similarly, the sense of a historic moment can amplify high, collective-oriented emotions and (newfound or renewed) spiritual/existential meaning, just as the latter can contribute to the sense of a historic moment; and 'high,' collective-oriented emotions might contribute to spiritual/existential meaning just as the latter might contribute to 'high' collective-oriented emotions. All of the above could contribute to the empowering effects of deliberative democracy, just as the latter could in turn nurture and enhance all of the above.

Indeed, participants experienced each of the above quintet to different extents, sometimes with different variations: for example, some more explicitly emphasized a sense of meaning in their life, whereas others more explicitly emphasized the sense of a historic moment; some experienced first-hand the deliberative democracy of general assemblies, whereas others did not have that chance. Indeed in this chapter I tell many different strike stories, of students whose biographical backgrounds as well as situational contexts created a particular meaning for their emotional experiences during the strike: each experienced such 'high' collective-emotions for a variety of reasons, at different points near the beginning of their strike involvement, and in different ways depending on their position in the strike, the particular dynamics and history of their educational institution, and the year(s) in which they were involved.

I suggest that these experiences had the potential to imbue participants with existential or spiritual meaning because they bridged rational/emotional and ideological/material realms by allowing them to see and live the embodiment of their collective aspirations, making the 'high' that much higher. Thus quite differently than Bhéreur-Lagounaris and colleagues' (2015) analysis of the *Printemps érable*, I argue that these historic 'high' collective-oriented emotional

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<sup>214</sup> Interestingly, Dupuis-Déri (2016) refers to different anarchist thinkers' idea that if there is a human nature it is not homogenous but rather composed of two contradictory forces or instincts: domination/competition versus cooperation/solidarity/egalitarian autonomy (see p. 42).

experiences were intricately woven with rational ideas<sup>215</sup> involving both past and future expectations, strategies, and ideals that were often deliberated for hours in general assemblies or meetings; and that these emotional experiences were not so much determined by “l’urbanité” suggested by the aforementioned scholars as by the particular historical context created by these strikes, or the collective memory of such historic-feeling moments, notably their diverse, repetitive, deliberative, large collective events (e.g. assemblies, actions, demonstrations), within educational institutions and the streets, alongside the circulation (whether in assemblies, protests, or in the media) of collective-oriented ideas against the context of an increasingly individualistic and neoliberal culture and politics.<sup>216</sup>

Also somewhat differently than Bhéreur-Lagounaris and colleagues (2015), I seek to illustrate that emotional experiences related to interpersonal relationships were complex, not purely positive nor conducive to the student movement. Contrary to the popular myth, friendships were not always responsible for students participating in the strike: rather, some students joined *despite* their friends’ and family’s opposition to it. In Julie’s case, she is not shy to underline the important role of friends and relationships in her strike experience at the beginning of it, though as becomes undeniable as her story evolves, these friendships were certainly not the only precursor to her ‘high’ collective-oriented emotions. Sure, Julie also wanted to meet new people and to find “un réseau-u-u-u-u d’amiiiis,” perhaps even a boyfriend - “tout ça allait ensemble,” she says. “Mais tsé c’tait pas la *priorité* non plus là,” she adds, “c’tait juste... je pense que c’est tout le temps une motivation quand t’es *célibataire* pis tu rentres dans des, des réseaux, là, comme... qui peut être inconscient.” Julie started to hang out with a group of students whom she describes as “militants.” These “connaissances” talked to her a lot about what was happening in Quebec, “pis d’une chose à l’autre j’pense que ça m’a peut-être emmenée aussi à, à vouloir le

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<sup>215</sup> Indeed Dupuis-Déri (2016) notes that 'agoraphilie' (and 'agoraphobie') is an emotion that can be founded on reason (p. 25).

<sup>216</sup> Katz, 2015; Stern & Brown, 2016. If Piotte referred to the impact of neoliberalism's focus on competitiveness, individualism, private initiative, and productivity in the 80s, Lafrance and Sears (2016) note that we are now navigating "a political and economic landscape shaped by over 30 years of neoliberal restructuring" (p. 160), during which the state has continued to use its power to acclimatize society to consumerism and the market, including the buying and selling of not just goods, but our services and work. They describe, for example, the privatization of "formerly public services and spaces" (Ibid) and how "[t]he cumulative impact of over 30 years of restructuring has been intensified by the austerity regime implemented since the current global slump began in 2007-2008" (Ibid).

faire (la grève) avec eux, là.” Indeed that same fall, Julie participated in an occupation of her CEGEP that she remembers as being three days long.<sup>217</sup>

If Julie recounts this earlier, first jump into the strike mobilization in 2004 as having been sparked by a general assembly, her story about the actual general unlimited strike in 2005 revolves around neither of these: She briefly recalls the 2005 vote to join the general unlimited strike in February<sup>218</sup> and then she dives straight into the occupation. “Je me souviens que y’avait l’occupation, dans la première semaine de mars j’avais décidé d’aller voir comment ça se déroulait.” Yet her high school friends didn’t follow suit, and over the next year they would start to drift apart. Meanwhile, Julie’s exploration turned into a full-time commitment: before she knew it, she was living at and occupying the CEGEP.

“Est-ce que tu te rappelles de comment tu te sentais, dans ces, dans ces temps-là de... quand tu commençais?” I ask Julie.

“Une certaine excitation,” she answers right away, alongside “une incertitude” about what was going to happen, “mais je pense que, y’avait comme, surtout la curiosité de voir comment ça se déroulait une « *occupation auto-gérée*, »” she says, imitating quotation marks with her hands when she says the last two words. “Toutes ces *belles idées* qui m’étaient présentées, c’tait surtout ça,” recalls Julie. If ‘curiosity killed the cat’ as the saying goes, with Julie it seems it rather birthed new ways to see life. Without that curiosity, she explains, she might not have participated in the strike. “Je [ne] sais pas,” she continues, “y’avait l’envie de voir, je sais pas y’avait, y’avait un *plaisir*, là, de... l’impression de vivre un moment... *historique* auquel on pouvait pas... qu’on peut pas *éviter*! Comme, pis, qu’il fallait prendre part, j’avais ce sentiment-là, il *faut* prendre part,” she nods. That curiosity was fortified not just by the feeling of wanting to change the world, but feeling it was *possible* to change it; and feeling that she was writing history, “pis de l’importance que ça avait pour le *futur*, ouais y’avait tout le temps ça” -it was perhaps her “plus grosse motivation” for being involved in the strike, she says.

Summarizing Julie's story until now, we can see how the sense of a historic moment came with a certain vulnerability -"une incertitude"- about what would happen. "Vulnerability is not

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<sup>217</sup> According to Theurillat-Cloutier (2011 p. 5), this initial strike to escalate the pressure lasted two days.

<sup>218</sup> The decision to join the strike was decided by a three-day referendum at the Cégep du Vieux Montréal from February 16 to 18, 2005, during which approximately 2,000 students voted to join the general unlimited strike (<http://archives-2001-2012.cmaq.net/fr/node/19980.html>). Julie’s student association, AGEVVM, officially became a member of the CASSÉE during the ASSÉ congress during the weekend of February 26-27 (CASSÉE, 2005).

weakness, and the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure we face every day are not optional," writes Brené Brown (2012), adding: "Our only choice is a question of engagement."<sup>219</sup> Indeed part of the argument circulating throughout this dissertation is that historic ("l'impression de vivre un moment... *historique*"), 'high' ("l'envie," "le plaisir," "ces *belles idées*"), collective-oriented emotions (the desire to better the world because of "l'importance que ça avait pour le futur," feeling that it is possible, and the feeling of "tous ensemble") allowed students to bypass the uncertainty, fear, or stress inherent to vulnerability and jump into the strike 'wholeheartedly,' to borrow Brené Brown's (2012) term. If vulnerability is to "let ourselves be seen" (Ibid, p. 2), Julie was doing so by allowing her values to be acted upon and seen. And if "we are hardwired for connection-emotionally, physically, and spiritually" (Brown, 2012, p. 150), this was not necessarily or solely the vulnerability to connect with friends, but an engagement to connect with the collective.

When describing the daily life of the occupation, Julie often mentions herself and others drinking and smoking. "C'tait la fête," she says, with a tone and giggles that appear a bit judgmental of her past. And yet her criticisms, whether subtle or overt, are not enough for her to discredit the experience; perhaps, I wonder, because the drinking and smoking was connected in some way to what Julie describes as being ever-present from the beginning to the end of the strike: "le sentiment de tous ensemble." Especially strong when she participated in strike actions, Julie also had that feeling of togetherness during more mundane communal activities, such as the 'Conseil de grève' meetings that took place every morning during the occupation. At those meetings, they would make collective decisions about all kinds of things: action strategies; plans for that day; who would stay to watch over the occupation; how to respond to the CEGEP administration; or who would take part in the 'Comité bouffe.'<sup>220</sup> The first Conseil de grève meetings were populated by up to 60 students, many of whom had probably been in the mobilization committee since the fall, she recalls. Even though these meetings were sometimes tense and not always productive, Julie remembers them as yet another moment when "j'avais l'impression qu'on construisait quelque chose *ensemble*."

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<sup>219</sup> On a similar note, Yalom (2002) writes that "meaning in life is best approached obliquely. What we must do is plunge into one of many possible meanings, particularly one with a self-transcendent basis. It is *engagement* that counts [...] One must immerse oneself into the river of life and let the question drift away [italics are mine]" (p. 138-39).

<sup>220</sup> 'Bouffe' is an informal way of referring to 'food' in Québécois French.



For Julie, this “sentiment de tous ensemble” associated with the feeling of *possibility* to reach the common goal of a better world -which I characterize here as collective hope and empowerment- was especially strong at protests; and it was intertwined with the closer relationships of those surrounding her, like her new boyfriend. Indeed it was during the first few weeks of the occupation, recalls Julie early on in the interview, when many students were occupying the CEGEP and it was “très effervescent,” that she met the person who became her first boyfriend. Marc-André was vegan and he thought that monogamous relationships were bourgeois “pis que si on pouvait se donner de l’amour à *tout le monde*, tout le monde en sent [sic],<sup>221</sup> y’aurait plus de guerre, pis ça serait euh, la paix éternelle,” recalls Julie, giggling a bit. “Après j’ai, j’ai de la difficulté à-à-à-à me souvenir toute qu’est-ce qui s’est passé indépendamment de *lui*, si on veut!” For throughout the six weeks of the occupation, Julie spent a lot of time with her “nouvel amoureux” except for weekends when she would leave the occupation to work; thus it is sometimes difficult for her during the interview to separate such feelings from other strike-related feelings, explains Julie.

Indeed, one of the first and most emotive stories that Julie recounts related to the strike is about Marc-André. “Je pense que c’tait rendu à la mi-mars,” the eve of an occupation of the Old Port. Marc-André had spent the night making “nourriture,” she says -imitating quotation marks with her fingers and giggling because the food they made was not that good- to bring to the occupation Port the next day. Not yet knowing the trauma the end of the day would hold for them, the feeling of ‘tous ensemble’ arrived again to gently carry Julie through the morning hours. In a slightly high-pitched tone, squinting her eyes as if trying to remember, she recounts, “Quand on est parti du cégep le matin, y’était *tôt!*” She adds : “j’tais *très* fatiguée vu que je, j’avais comme [pas dormi la veille].. j’étais *lente!*” Julie slows the pace of her speech for a moment and with a nearly dreamy tone, softer still than her already soft voice, “mais... il faisait tellement *beau-u*,” she rolls her eyes to convey the extent. She smiles: “On était comme sur un petit *nuage*... pis là on s’en allait comme *tous ensemble*.” Julie stops suddenly and inhales, “le sentiment de *tous ensemble*, là,” she cups the air with her hands, “y’était toujours *présent* on dirait, mais quand on s’en allait là par exemple pour occuper le [Vieux] Port y’avait... ce sentiment-là, que y’avait plein de monde *ensemble*, pis là, y’avait des gens qui arrivaient de, de

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<sup>221</sup> Julie effectively said "tout le monde en sent" to mean everyone feels it.

toutes les cégeps, de toutes les universités *près*, euh faque, y'avait comme le mouvement qui nous grossissait un *peu-u-u..* la manifestation!"

Despite already 20 minutes of talking about her feelings rather evocatively, Julie suddenly hesitates. "Mais je sais pas comment parler de mes *émotions*," she says -yet when she continues she appears to be struggling with explaining an *affect* related to a secular spiritual experience aligned with Solomon's above description of being connected to a phenomenon larger than herself. "C'était *beau*. C'était... je me sentais *bien*, pis... je me sentais *portée* par le mouvement, si on veut! Pis tsé j'étais tellement fatiguée que si il n'y avait pas eu ce mouvement-là pour me *porter* dans... dans cette *envie* de me rendre, j'aurais pas pu me rendre," Julie recounts -and then again hesitates, letting out a small laugh, "je sais pas comment exprimer *émotionnellement*, là!" Looking for "un mot d'émotion," Julie keeps trying to explain that feeling in more depth: "plus qu'on était des gens plus qu'on se sentait légitime." Julie wouldn't be the only one of the narrators of my thesis project who felt it was difficult to put emotions in words –she related emotions to "le non-disable" – a commonly arising sentiment throughout the storytellings of this dissertation. In hindsight, following Ellis' advice<sup>222</sup> it might have helped if I had asked Julie to recall her physiological sensations; but in that moment of the interview, I simply ask Julie to keep thinking out loud. That's when she says: "Ce sentiment *d'être ensemble*, de *vivre ensemble*, de *construire ensemble* quelque chose même aussi *petit* que ça pouvait être, là. Comparé à tout ce qui se passe dans le monde par exemple, c'était comme si on était en train de construire, euh, le *monde*," she says, reaching her hand out. "De *refaire le monde*," she says with a smile, "je pense c'est ça le, le sentiment le plus important au moment qu'on est arrivé euh, à la manifestation, là [au Vieux-Port]."

Julie's story certainly does not end there, as she clearly wanted to tell her story until its climax,<sup>223</sup> which would be the most intense emotional experience of the strike for her. However I will interrupt her story here until the next chapter, to shed light on how Julie's story relates to other interviewees' 'high' collective-oriented experiences and to the existing literature about emotions and social movements. Similar to other interviewees, Julie often refers to the concept of

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<sup>222</sup> Ellis (1991, p. 25)

<sup>223</sup> In fact it happened often during my interviews that participants would insist on completing the story they were telling despite my attempt to move on to the next question, a good sign that the questions did not necessarily dictate what they said, an attestation to the desire to tell a story from its beginning to its end and the comfort that chronology can provide, as oral historians Greenspan & Bolkosky (2006) found in their study of oral history participants.

'beauty' ("c'était beau," "toutes ces *belles idées*"); on a similar note, she expresses the sense of being "comme sur un petit *nuage*," the meaning of which appears to vary between slightly different, mostly positive connotations: a state of extreme or sublime happiness<sup>224</sup> or a state of distraction or *rêverie*.<sup>225</sup> Taking these meanings into consideration, combined with the dreamy tone of Julie's voice and other participants who described feelings relating to the surreal (e.g. references to a dreamlike state, seventh heaven), a common theme emerges related to the emotional 'high' of the beautiful and the surreal in relation to collective-oriented emotions. And Julie's difficulty expressing her feeling suggests an affective intensity that could only be described by references that were simultaneously meteorological and aesthetic ("sur un petit nuage," "il faisait beau"), a 'high' affect amplified by collective-oriented emotions, as the feeling of togetherness literally carried her ("portée") to the collectivity (the demonstration) despite her fatigue. Then Julie's mention of feeling 'on a cloud' is directly followed by "pis là on s'en allait comme *tous ensemble*," which in turn she relates to "construire ensemble" and "*refaire le monde*" (solidarity, collective empowerment); in this way, I consider this collective-oriented emotional experience to have contributed to a spiritual *affect*, precisely because they led Julie to "appreciate the beauty of the whole" (Solomon, 2007).

Considering that Émile Durkheim (1947) originally applied the term to religious life,<sup>226</sup> it is interesting that Julie herself proposes that her experience can be compared to what he coined as "collective effervescence," in order to highlight "how groups become electrified by coming together through the enactment of rituals and the utilization of symbols" (Ruiz-Junco, 2013, p. 45). Sociologist Randall Collins (2001) directly applies Durkheim's idea to social movements, arguing that "at the center of every highly mobilized social movement" is collective effervescence (p. 28), "the excitement and energetic coordination of participants in their

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<sup>224</sup> "Être dans un moment très favorable, dans une période de réussite [...] être heureux, béat" (<http://www.languefrancaise.net/Bob/18113>) or "on cloud nine," "over the moon," "on a high" (<http://context.reverso.net/traduction/francais-anglais/sur+un+petit+nuage>)

<sup>225</sup> "Les nuages, qui connotent la hauteur et le moelleux, sous-entendent la rêverie, la distraction. C'est pourquoi on dit qu'une personne "vit sur son petit nuage" lorsqu'elle semble oublier totalement les règles de la société, et vivre dans un monde imaginaire qu'elle se serait créé" (see <http://www.linternaute.com/expression/langue-francaise/846/etre-sur-un-petit-nuage/>); another similar definition from another source states that "« vivre sur un petit nuage » est utilisé pour parler d'une personne originale qui vit en marge des réalités existantes de la société. Toutefois, nous ne pouvons noter aucune connotation négative ou critique quant à son utilisation pour décrire une personne" (see <http://www.expressions-francaises.fr/expressions-v/3202-vivre-sur-un-petit-nuage.html>).

<sup>226</sup> Though "Durkheim holds that most social institutions derive from religion; so he is really dealing with the origin of sociality, of human society as we know it," specifies (Allen, 1998, p. 150).

interaction” (Collins, 2005). The latter can lead, at the individual level, to high “emotional energy,” which with regular rituals can lead to “a long-term level of enthusiasm, personal strength, a sense of social connectedness, and/or willingness to initiate interaction” (Summers-Effler, 2002, p. 42) -the “individual spin-off of the creation of solidarity” (Summers-Effler, 2005, p. 137). While even with regular rituals, such a sense of enthusiasm and solidarity was not always 'long-term' for participants of this dissertation, what is relevant for my purposes here is that Collins (2001) suggests that to successfully engender emotional energy in a solidarity ritual, there must be shared emotion, face-to-face interaction, a shared focus of attention, and mutual awareness of this focus. More specifically:

“A successful social ritual operating in the collective gathering of a social movement is a process of transforming one emotion into another. The ritualized sharing of instigating or initiating emotions which brought individuals to the collective gathering in the first place (outrage, anger, fear) gives rise to distinctively collective emotions, the feelings of solidarity, enthusiasm, and morality which arise in group members’ mutual awareness of their shared focus of attention. To some extent there is a catharsis of the initiating emotions; these might well be unpleasant or painful, but the group experience transmutes them so as to take off the painful edge. Cognitively, the original label of the emotional process still remains (and likely becomes even more articulate), but there is now a positive flow, the sense that what one is doing has a higher importance, even a magnetic quality” (p. 29).

While I consider 'collective-oriented emotions' as still encompassing a broader range of emotions than those listed by Collins -thus allowing for a diversity of possible emotions oriented towards the collectivity depending on the person and the moment<sup>227</sup>-, we can nonetheless relate Julie’s strike experience to certain elements of Collins' above-mentioned quote: feelings of “morality” about the cause (“plus qu’on était des gens plus qu’on se sentait légitime”); feelings of

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<sup>227</sup> For example, with the concept of 'collective-oriented emotions,' I seek to encompass those emotions that might not require a collective gathering or ritual -though they can certainly be enhanced by them-, that might have existed before the strike or student movement, or that might remain beyond the collective moments without the effervescent enthusiasm. And as opposed to what the term 'collective emotion' implies, I am also allowing for the possibility that not everyone feels the same feeling at the same time, in the same way.

“solidarity” which in this case were oriented towards a collectivity beyond the present moment of the 'ritual' (“pis de l’importance que ça avait pour le *futur*, ouais y’avait tout le temps ça”); and the sense of the “higher importance, even a magnetic quality” of what one is doing, in this case because of the sense of historic inevitability related to general strike campaigns and the associated sense of historic duty related to the future (“l’impression de vivre un moment... *historique* auquel on pouvait pas.... qu’on peut pas *éviter!* Comme, pis, qu’il fallait prendre part, j’avais ce sentiment-là, il *faut* prendre part.”) Furthermore, Collins' focus on the interaction between ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ allows us to consider how the repetitive “face-to-face” collective ritual gatherings with a “shared focus of attention” (e.g. the demonstration at the Old Port, general assemblies) transformed Julie's above-mentioned uncertainty and fatigue -albeit not the ‘negative emotions’ expected or listed in Collins’ various examples- into a nearly ‘high’ state; or how it transformed her experience of tense *Conseil de grève* meetings into the “sentiment de tous ensemble.” The tensions or disagreements within meetings were not forgotten, but transformed into the feeling that something was being collectively accomplished.

Indeed, such tensions also helped one to make decisions, suggests Julie. For example, the CEGEP’s weekly general assemblies are remembered by Julie as having tension in the air. The assemblies were “populeuses!”<sup>228</sup> and one could feel “une agitation du moins,” says Julie, “tsé on savait que quelque chose se passait, tsé tu rentrais là pis tu sentais que les gens étaient préoccupés par les enjeux.” In this way, general assemblies during the strike were different because of that increased ‘focus of emotional attention,’ to use Collins’ (2001) term: you could feel “les *rivalités* euh, le murmure dans la foule quand y’avait des interventions qui étaient faites.” There were students against the strike, those actively involved, and those who were undecided, neutral, or who supported the idea of the strike but “n’avaient pas de conception euh de l’action politique, faque eux pensaient que voter c’tait suffisant.” So there was tension between those who were “motivés *politiquement*” and those “plus là pour faire le parté.” Some students would criticize them publically: “Ah vous devriez justement plus vous impliquer! Vous devriez faire moins la fête!” Objections would flare up in students upon hearing a comment they didn’t agree with, “ça crée un mouvement d’objection pis là ‘RA RA RA RA RA!’” screams Julie, raising her hands in

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<sup>228</sup> Julie recalls that the cafeteria could fit hundreds of students, and several other rooms full of students participated through audio or video conferencing.

the air to imitate the general assembly crowd. “Mais c’est sûr que si y’a des gens qui étaient *trop contre*, y’avait peut-être eum, un effet de ‘BOUUUUUUU,’ des choses comme ça, qui pouvaient peut-être être une certaine forme d’oppression!” Yet relevant to Collins’ focus on the capacity of collective rituals to be transformative, Julie remembers the tension as a productive one: it stimulated debate and allowed students to ‘peaufiner’ their ideas, especially compared to general assemblies she attended *after* the strike. Even though many students came to the assemblies to vote against the strike, “le fait que y’ait une tension dans la salle pis que y’avait pas un discours monolithique non plus,” for those who were undecided and listened to the debate, “permettait à ces gens là de... de prendre une decision.”

Thus Julie's experience of a general assembly within a general strike also highlights the potential of its particular historic, collective-oriented, rational-deliberative, and empowering qualities to influence emotional experiences that are not limited to the "feelings of solidarity, enthusiasm, and morality" underlined by Collins, but also encompass the collective empowerment built upon a historic moment and the space to deliberate ideas and make collective decisions as emphasized by Dupuis-Déri (2016). As Julie summarizes:

“le sentiment de vouloir changer le monde a fait que j’ai participé! Le sentiment fort d’avoir l’impression d’un espace démocratique qui pouvait faire ce changement là aussi, euh, ont fait que j’ai participé! Pis ont fait queeee, j’ai eu une *curiosité*, qui m’ont emmené à, à vouloir euh, .. participer, observer l’occupation!”<sup>229</sup>

Thus for Julie curiosity did not exist on its own, but the desire to change the world combined with the democratic space to do so is what inspired that curiosity in the first place. Indeed, she had found not just a feeling of collective empowerment, but a new way of seeing democracy and its potential for bringing people together for a collective project. She lived and learned about more participatory forms of democracy, “cet espace-là... public, [qui est] créé de discussions, d’établissement de normes, de... réflexions sur les normes collectivement,” she says, “pis d’agir en commun aussi.” The ‘ritual’ of direct democracy thus also enabled hope (described by Julie as

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<sup>229</sup> Here one might argue that these last words from Julie are merely transforming a sense or an idea into a feeling; yet I contend that it is relevant that Julie decided to focus on this as opposed to what is traditionally conceived of as emotions (anger, sadness, happiness, etc.) – these ‘feelings’ stood out for her, un conveyable in other words.

feeling it is possible to change the world). If Summers-Effler (2002) proposes that hope is necessary in order to spring emotional energy into subversive action,<sup>230</sup> Julie's and others' stories suggest that the particular deliberative ritual of direct democracy elicits such collective-oriented hope.

The stories of this chapter also highlight the particular potential of collective decision-making processes to birth feelings of solidarity and morality that do not necessarily castigate those who oppose it as “unworthy, evil, unhuman” (Collins, 2001): for in the case of the general assembly, those who oppose the strike are part of the very ritual of deliberation and tension that births new decisions and feelings of empowerment. Thus in the particular case of a general assembly, solidarity is more in line with Durkheim's notion of “organic solidarity” (Collins, 2005) than with the “mechanical solidarity” that Collins' latter quote implies. I am not suggesting that there was never a castigation of those who did not agree with the strike, as Julie will later recount such experiences. Yet as Julie suggests, particularly in the case of general assemblies, the tension with these ‘others’ can be a positive one, as the ‘emotional energy’ derived from such assemblies is not merely oriented towards a collective project, but stems from a collective decision-making space.<sup>231</sup> Indeed the participants of this study sometimes castigated others, while at other times they exhibited great empathy for those who did not agree with the strike, in part because they were listening to the reasons and emotions of these others at general assemblies.

Finally, another particularity of these strike campaigns that is not explicitly emphasized by Collins is the experience of (secular) existential or spiritual meaning that was often entangled with these collective experiences and emotions. Collins' model hints -through his allusion to “higher importance”- but does not capture or name in detail the secular existential or spiritual

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<sup>230</sup> Summers-Effler (2002) defines hope as “the anticipation that struggle will produce positive results rather than making the situation worse” (p. 53), an anticipation which is based on a combination of emotional circumstances and the cognitive assessment of risk: if there a low amount of risk is assessed, less emotional energy is required (for hope), whereas if a high amount of risk is assessed, high amounts of emotional energy is necessary to reframe the environment “so that essentially anything can be framed as a victory, even participation in a struggle regardless of consequences” (p. 53). Here, I am suggesting that deliberative processes in themselves not only decrease the risk but also increase the emotional energy and ‘high,’ collective-oriented emotions.

<sup>231</sup> On this note, Polletta (2002) argues that “participatory decision-making can help activists build solidarity, innovate tactically, secure the leverage of political opinion, and develop enduring mechanisms of political accountability” (p. viii). On a similar note, Lieberman, Yalom and Miles (1973) suggest that the most effective encounter groups were those in which participants had a sense that they had the power to determine together how the group would be led, thus leading to a feeling of belonging.

meaning potentiated by social movements. Reclaiming Collins' notion of catharsis, I contend that such an experience can be cathartic, and yet this catharsis is not *necessarily* a catharsis from 'negative' to 'positive' emotions as Collins (2001) suggests; rather it can be a transition from a sense of meaningless -albeit sometimes unconscious- to the sudden discovery of collective existential or spiritual meaning during the strike.

Similarly, while sociologist Erika Summers-Effler (2005) studied the Catholic workers movement and notes that "ritual is the foundation of solidarity and ultimately meaning" (p. 141), she interestingly never explicitly cites spiritual meaning as a necessary part of solidarity or emotional energy to sustain that movement. However, she hints at it through her emphasis on love -akin to Brené Brown's (2012) notion of spirituality as the inextricable connection between people based on "a force grounded in love and compassion" (p. 151). More specifically, Summers-Effler seeks to explain Collins' model through self-expansion, more specifically "a phenomenon that the pragmatist philosopher, Peirce, described as agape," during which "we experience the needs and feelings of the other as our own; the other not distant from us, but one of our beloved own" (Summers-Effler, 2005, p. 137-8). Thus she argues that "experiences of solidarity produce emotional energy because they are experiences of self-expansion, where our sense of self, not only our cognitive identity but also our feeling of our self, grows to include others" (p. 137). Indeed one of Julie's utterances above was, "y'avait comme le mouvement qui nous grossissait un *peu-u-u..* la manifestation!" Interestingly in that last sentence, it seems as if she initially means to say that the movement made them, as people, larger, before she adds the words "*..* la manifestation!"

However, the concept of agape on which Summers-Effler focuses is limiting for two reasons. For one, it portrays an unrealistic picture of love, notably in which the presentation of an autonomous self is undermined, in which there is an assumption that one's experience is the mirror of another's, and which involves "a cherishing and nurturing love where one sacrifices one's own perfection to the perfectionment of one's neighbor." Of course, various stories in this dissertation tell of students who sacrificed their well-being for the larger cause or collectivity, some of whom explicitly mentioned the word 'love' and 'sacrifice.' Yet in line with Singer (2009) I suggest that this concept of 'merging' is not as realistic as the concept of "self (or selves) with self (or selves)" (Chabot 2008, p. 209). Furthermore, Summers-Effler's agape does not convey a sense of love beyond those present. The experience of participants of this dissertation



suggests a sense of connection, love or sacrifice (collective-oriented emotions) not limited to a neighbour or small group of friends, those active organizers within the movement, or even Dupuis-Déri's possibly larger mass of assembled people, but could extend to a larger, unknown collective of people and living beings who are impossible to know at a personal level, akin to Chabot's (2008) notion of *agape*<sup>232</sup> -thus as part of a much larger "whole," to use Solomon's words.

Summers-Effler (2005) provides interesting societal context for such experiences: the Catholic workers did what they did in order to “accomplish their most fundamental goal of community solidarity” (p. 141) as we are “in a time when loose and overlapping networks heighten the importance of individuals in social life.”<sup>233</sup> This is an important point to underline: in addition to participants’ *idiosyncratic* histories and *micro-level* experiences (e.g. the arrival to a new city, previous feelings of alienation, as we will learn from the stories that follow), on a more *macrosystemic* level a more generalized “importance of individuals in social life” made the above-mentioned striking emotional experiences so existentially or spiritually meaningful. As Julie summarizes later in our interview about the strike:

“ça le met en perspective aussi le sentiment d’isolement qu’il peut y avoir, dans la société, pis de, le sentiment d’impuissance! Alors que quand tu te retrouves comme ça (making a ball or togetherness gesture with her both hands) euh avec tout le monde, ben y’a peut-être ce sentiment de puissance là, puis le sentiment de, de pas être tout seul, de faire partie d’un tout, qui va être *plus fort*, je pense.. faque ça c’est quelque chose qui m’a vraiment imprégnée.”

Amidst what Viktor E. Frankl (1984, p. 140-141) terms a "more general mass phenomenon" of "the feeling of meaninglessness resulting from a frustration of our existential needs which in turn has become a universal phenomenon in our industrial societies," these strike campaigns brought out the possibility for youth of all ages to have a sense of existential or spiritual meaning through

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<sup>232</sup> "[A]gape," writes Chabot, "is the most important for studying revolutionary movements. It refers to the love of all human beings and forms of life, without distinguishing between worthy and unworthy people, friends and enemies, neighbors and strangers, likeable and unlikeable creatures" (p. 811).

<sup>233</sup> Chabot (2008) similarly notes that “particularly in Western societies, we tend to accept the liberal conception of individuals as isolated and self-sufficient” (p. 809).

collective-oriented emotional experiences. Considering Frankl's note that "one cannot even force oneself" to be hopeful or to feel faith or love, this ability of the general unlimited strike is particularly impressive -especially when it affected high school students.

### ÉLISE "DANS UN VASTE RÊVE"

Indeed, if CEGEP students have been the heart of student strikes since the creation of these colleges in the sixties, they have not been its youngest members. In 2005, high schools from across Quebec participated in the strike, if only for a couple of days or weeks.<sup>234</sup> Élise Guérin-Bouchard was a student at *l'École Joseph-François-Perreault* in the St-Michel neighbourhood of Montreal, and by March 2005, she and nine others knew about the strike. Some of them were close friends with Élise, and some of them had older siblings in CEGEP. The ten of them got together one day during lunch hour in an empty classroom, and called themselves "un Comité de mobilisation" and the rest is history, as they say. "On était toutes des gens qui étaient intéressé-e-s à faire quelque chose euh pour appuyer le mouvement étudiant des cégepiens pis des universitaires!" recalls Élise when I interview her six years later, in 2011.

That first meeting of the 'Comité de mobilisation' on March 8, 2005 was organically smooth, Élise remembers, despite its lack of structure. Élise's impression back then was, "Wow on est toutes capables de se parler respectueusement, on est capables d'avoir des débats pis même si on n'est pas d'accord [...] on *s'écoute*, pis on prend des décisions ensemble *pareil*." They had organized themselves "dans l'urgence," not surprising considering the context: "Tsé on voyait que les étudiants manifestaient pis qu'y avait un gros moment... y'avait... ben un gros *mouvement* en arrière de d'ça, pis que les étudiants étaient en grève pis occupaient leurs *cégeps* et leurs *universités*." Thus she already had a sense of something historic happening. "On savait que

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<sup>234</sup> On March 8 2005, students at *Le Vitrail* became the first high school that year to vote for a general unlimited strike. "« Ce qu'on veut prouver, c'est qu'on est capable de s'organiser, » lance Hugo, élève en troisième secondaire. Hier après-midi, quelques membres de la CASSEE, un carré de tissu rouge épinglé au manteau, se trouvaient sur place. "On encourage leur décision parce que les coupures et les hausses de frais les affectent aussi", déclare David Simard, gréviste du cégep du Vieux-Montréal" (Meunier, 2005, mercredi 9 mars). They voted for: "la création et la reconnaissance d'associations syndicales étudiantes au secondaire, le droit à un espace de consultation réservé uniquement aux étudiants et étudiantes (ex: assemblée générale), le droit à un enseignement de qualité dans les écoles publiques, l'abolition des programmes élitistes au secondaire, l'arrêt du financement des écoles privées et, conséquemment, le retour de ce financement au public" (Theurillat-Cloutier, 2011, p. 13; Meunier, 2005). High school students from *Sophie-Barat*, *Lucien-Pagé*, *Georges-Vanier*, *l'École internationale* also joined demonstrations (Theurillat-Cloutier, 2011).

le lendemain y'avait d'autres écoles secondaires qui étaient en grève, euh, pis qui allaient surement venir faire une manifestation devant l'école, pis faire sortir l'école." With a giggle, she continues to recall that "on se demandait euh, avec quand-même un petit euh, un petit côté « élite éclairée », mettons là, si euh, les étudiants de notre école [...] allaient vraiment sortir pis suivre la manif pis faire quelque chose ou si y'allaient juste faire « Woohoo! Plus d'école! » et se retourner chez eux!" Élise ended up being pleasantly surprised, when "tout le monde est effectivement sorti des classes!... pis euh, le monde ont vraiment suivi la manif, là. Comme on s'est retrouvé presque toute l'école secondaire dehors, euh, dans les rues du quartier."

Élise often recounts her story of those days in a fun way, giggling a lot, to the point that sometimes her tone appears to me to be on the verge of mocking her high school years. Yet her sweet disposition and her passion for recounting the strike suggest to me that this is more a show of excitement and resulting giddiness rather than disparagement about those days.<sup>235</sup> It was clear from her diaries from that year, which she would soon share with me, that this strike experience marked her life in an overwhelmingly positive way, which, as her story goes on, point to existential significance, collective-oriented emotions, but initially, mostly the 'high' of euphoric feelings. Her tone, constant smiles and exhalations during the interview, but also her words, reveal that the strike mobilization in high school was a period of life for her that was "excitant" and "joyeux." Following that first meeting of the mobilization committee, "on se promenait toutes avec un, un, un carré *rouge* sur nos chandails," she says, pointing to the left part of her chest, "pis... les, les étudiants étaient vraiment *super* réceptifs là, c'était, c'est vraiment complètement autre chose que de mobiliser des étudiants du cégep ou d'université," she says, inhaling with excitement, "comme le monde nous *arrêtait* dans les corridors pour nous poser des questions sur la *grève* [...] pour demander des informations sur la grève, pis sur le mouvement *étudiant*, pis sur c'tait *quoi* les prêts et bourses pis toute ça!" Students were not just interested to find out what was happening, they wanted to "participer à ça, là!" recalls Élise. "Y'avait vraiment un gros momentum." So it was both "super énergisant pis c'tait super gratifiant comme contexte

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<sup>235</sup> As noted in Chapter 1, such self-mocking was more often expressed by female than male participants of this dissertation, especially when talking about very emotional experiences, which I have suggested could be due to the more intense pressure that female students face to be legitimized within a 'masculine emotional habitus.'

pour faire de la mob,<sup>236</sup> tsé!” So before even attending a general assembly, Élise felt excitement and emotional energy, coupled with a sense of living a historic moment.

Élise and others were mobilizing students to attend the general assembly that they were organizing for the following week, to vote on whether they would strike. In the morning and at lunch hour, “on se promenait, comme, dans les cafétérias, dans les espaces de l’école euh, avec comme des grosses pancartes, des grosses affiches. On annonçait l’assemblée générale, on a fait des tournées de classe aussi!” recalls Élise. It was sometimes “un peu stressant” to speak in front of “une classe de personnes qu’on connaît pas vraiment,” explains Élise. “Mais, euh, ça s’était super bien passé! Comme au début on était toujours en groupe de deux quand on passait dans les classes, pis à moment donné euh je me rappelle que je faisais des tournées de classe tout seule,” she says, starting to giggle again “dans les cours de, de *décrocheurs* de Secondaire-2, pis genre, toutes les p’tits, toutes les, toutes les p’tits *kids* de Secondaire-2 sortaient leur agenda pis écrivaient « Assemblée générale, »” recounts Élise, her giggle having transformed into full laughter. Similar to Julie above, Élise's stress was overcome by the exciting sense of a historic moment, allowing her to be vulnerable to what would come. Dupuis-Déri's (2016) conundrum that 75% of the (American) population have a fear of public-speaking (more prevalent than the fear of death) appears to be temporarily alleviated, as Élise's -but also Audrey and Pierre's stories below- convey.

Indeed, the historic context was, for Élise, a key explanation for why 2005 was so much better than her later strike experience (in 2007) as a CEGEP student. “En 2005 on était [...] comme dans un super gros *momentum* de mobilisation (inhales) tsé... le monde voyait des manifestations étudiantes à *tous les soirs* aux nouvelles à la télé,<sup>237</sup> tsé!” she says with a snicker. Yet she contends it was also because mobilization is the most interesting part of a strike -and she left at its peak. A few days before leaving to a school trip to Orlando, Élise's diary conveys the intensity and meaning of the peak of such mobilization:

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<sup>236</sup> “Mob” in French is used to refer to “mobilization.”

<sup>237</sup> ‘Tévé’ is short for ‘télévision.’

*“Vendredi 18 mars [2005]*

*De retour de la semaine la plus intense de ma vie... Depuis mardi dernier, date de la formation du fort sympathique et très efficace comité de mobilisation [...] je n'ai pas arrêté. En fait, j'ai l'impression que ces jours n'ont existé que dans un vaste rêve, et qu'on est encore la semaine passée. Maintenant, le manque de sommeil me rattrape [sic], mais je vais me rappeler de ça toute ma vie. Nos premières réunions bien joyeuses, notre organisation broche-à-foin, les débats sur le débrayage de jeudi... Cette première fierté de m'apercevoir que, contrairement à ce que j'avais d'abord vu les JFPois [students from l'École Joseph-François Perreault] suivaient la manif après être sortis.”*

In this one section of her diary entry, Élise indicates that this strike for her was a ‘high’ emotional experience that was also an existential one. For example, above she mentions feeling like she is living in a dream (“un vaste rêve”) despite her fatigue, that this week that stood out in her life as the most “intense,” one that she would always remember, imbued with a collective pride that her schoolmates had attended the demonstration.

Yet that protest was not even the highest point. Élise and her nine friends in the mobilization committee then prepared for the upcoming general assembly that would determine whether their school would join the strike. It is that long, intense day of her high school general assembly –March 14, 2005, from before sunrise until sunset– that stands out most for Élise six years later when I ask her to tell me “le moment le plus significatif ou important.” That entire morning, “c’tait juste des événements qui s’enchaînaient, un par-dessus l’autre, pis comme « OK qu’est-ce qui se passe là bla bla bla, » « Ok moi je m’en vais faire ça », « Moi je m’en vais faire ça » pis,” she says inhaling, “c’tait juste super intense du début à la fin de la journée, là.”

I ask: “Intense de quelle manière?”

“Ben intense de la manière que,” she starts laughing, then continues, “t’as jamais le temps de t’asseoir, euh, te, tu manges euh *super* vite entre deux affaires,” moving her hands quickly to and from her mouth in order to imitate quick eating, “tsé t’as pas le temps de penser à comme qu’est-ce que t’es en train de faire, pis euh avec *qui, comment, et pourquoi,*” she says, shaking her head, then moving her hands in a rolling motion adds, “parce que c’est comme... t’agis

constamment pis y'a constamment des nouveaux événements, pis des nouvelles affaires qui arrivent, pis.. tu vis beaucoup d'émotions, pis..."

I interrupt her again : "Est-ce que tu penses que c'est positif ou négatif?"

She answers: "Je pense.. que c'est vraiment quelque chose qui m'est *nécessaire* des moments comme ça là, parce que c'est *super super* stimulant pis," she inhales. "Ça donne... tsé ça donne du, euh, ça donne du sujet de réflexion," she smiles, "et d'*introspection* par la suite, tsé? Ça te fait vivre des expériences que (inhales) tu peux... prendre le temps d'intégrer par la suite, (inhales) pis... tsé des expériences que tsé même maintenant quand j'te parle, j'suis encore en train d'y réfléchir pis... d'intégrer dans ce que j'pense, pis... dans ma vision de moi-même pis de la *vie*, tsé?" Like Julie, the emotional experience of the strike played a role in forming her identity -in Élise's case, as early as high school.

If such intensity was tolerable in part because 2005 was short-lived, it could also be because during those two weeks Élise saw her efforts lead to successful outcomes, and more collective-oriented emotions. This was especially the case at the general assembly:

"J'tais à côté des portes de la grande salle de, ben de la cafétéria en fait, euh, pendant que la salle se remplissait pour notre assemblée générale de grève! Pis euhm... moi j'étais en femme 'sandwich'<sup>238</sup> et comme je parlais aux gens qui arrivaient, qui arrivaient à l'assemblée! Pis y'avait deux gars qui tenaient les portes pis qui comptaient le monde! Là je les ai entendus qu'ils étaient rendu-e-s à 100 [personnes], que y'étaient rendu-e-s genre euh à 120 ou, j'pense c'tait ça, 120, pis, j'pensais c'tait le total des deux portes tsé, ça faisait genre 15 minutes qu'on était là, pis y'étaient comme « Ah no-non, c'est juste [notre porte], check euh, y'a genre 500 personnes [total] dans la cafétéria! »"

Élise exhales and moves her head out like an ostrich to imitate herself back then: "Pis là," she continues, "j'passe ma tête par la porte, « fou!!! »" she laughs, imitating a surprised jump backwards, "c'était vraiment au-dessus de toute ce qu'on attendait, là! Ça m'avait vraiment beaucoup impressionnée." In her diary six years earlier, the importance of that moment at the

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<sup>238</sup> In an email Élise later clarified : "ça veut dire porter des grosses pancartes accrochées à son corps."

assembly stood out and the feelings she recounted were similar, not surprising considering she often leafs through her diaries during our interview.<sup>239</sup> A few days after the assembly she wrote:

*“Lundi, arrivée à l’école à 7h (trouvé ça rough de me lever à 5h30... Si j’avais su) pour poser des affiches et faire la promotion de l’AG. En tournée dans le rez-de-chaussée C, j’ai réussi à dire à un petit gars de « Venir en grand nombre. » Et le soir, juste en un instant, j’ai été récompensée de ma journée à courir partout en criant : « ASSEMBLÉE GÉNÉRALE! » [...] Enfin, je suis une foutue écrivaine et je trouve ardu d’exprimer ce que j’ai ressenti par les mots. Une espèce de fierté euphorique et reconnaissante, je crois, envers les 600 ÉTUDIANTS qui remplissaient la cafétéria, un soir après l’école. Juste ça valait une semaine de travail.”<sup>240</sup>*

During the above diary entry, the closest words she could find to express her feelings were her pride not about herself, but towards the 600 students: it was a collective-oriented, rather than an individual-oriented pride.<sup>241</sup> During our interview, she speaks of “la joie pis de l’excitation super intense, là!”<sup>242</sup>

Once the assembly started, it continued to impress her. “Les gens qui ont parlé pour appuyer la grève c’tait pas du monde qu’on connaissait, tsé. Je me rappelle qu’à moment donné y’a même une euh, une ‘yo chilleuse’ genre, de Secondaire-3 qui est venue en avant pour comme,” she points her fingers to imitate the student, “pour sermonner tout le monde que genre, « Yo, si tu votes la grève, là, comme tu restes pas dans ton lit demain matin! Tu viens à l’école à 6 heures du matin, tu piquètes, tu piquètes l’école, pis euh, tu fais de quoi de ta vie » genre... « parce que sinon vous êtes juste des hypocrites, man! »”

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<sup>239</sup> Only certain details, like the time she remembered waking up or the number of students, differed slightly.

<sup>240</sup> This is from Élise’s diary from March 18, 2005.

<sup>241</sup> Since there were around 1,200 students at her school, more than 600 students at the assembly meant that more than 50 per cent were present at an assembly after school at 3:30pm.

<sup>242</sup> Because I know what happens to Élise in 2007, I can not help but wonder, when she does not mention pride during the interview yet it is so clear in her diary from that time: did 2007 rob striking students’ sense of pride?

How did Élise feel during this assembly? I ask her, even though she is already hinting at the answer through her excited tone and joyful giggles. She hesitates, and suddenly her eyes look like they are traveling back in time to reminisce:

“C’était, c’tait vraiment pas mal de l’émotion positive euh barre en barre, tsé! C’est sûr que c’était aussi *stressant*, tsé? Mais... mais c’était un stress *bienvenu* dans le sens que, souvent quand t’es à l’école secondaire, t’es dans ta routine, et t’as pas beaucoup de pouvoir sur ta vie, et tu t’emmerdes, tsé? Pis là c’tait quelque chose qu’on faisait qui nous permettait comme... de s’organiser collectivement, de.. d’avoir du *pouvoir* sur qu’est-ce qu’on faisait, pis de, bein de pas dépendre des *adultes*, ou du monde plus *vieux* pour décider, pour décider de ce qu’on allait faire, tsé! De, de vraiment travailler de manière autonome, pis de prendre des *vraies* décisions.”

Thus the stress of organizing a strike during her high school days was converted into and overpowered by a sense of euphoric collective empowerment for Élise, in addition to a collective pride, thanks in part to the successful ritual of a general assembly during a historic time. Élise insinuates that this was powerful precisely because in high school youth don’t necessarily have a sense of purpose or power -thus the strike fills, one can argue, an existential void. Because in high school, “les gens comme se cherchent souvent quelque chose de significatif à faire,” argues Élise, “pis, le fait que t’as pas beaucoup de pouvoir dans ta vie ça fait que, d’avoir une occasion justement de reprendre un peu de pouvoir sur ce qui se passe pis de t’organiser avec *d’autres ados*, tsé, sans euh, sans être *toujours soumis* à... à la décision ou à l’autorité de l’adulte (inhales) c’est quelque chose qui est *super* important pis qui a beaucoup d’attrait!” It certainly gave meaning –even a sense of beauty- to Élise’s life at that point, as in her diary on April 5, 2005, she wrote: “*j’ai vraiment besoin de le dire, j’adore chaque instant de mon secondaire V, mes activités, mes copinoux, et c’est la plus belle année de ma vie.*”

Élise had voted alongside her 600 schoolmates for a strike to take place two days later, on Wednesday, the day of Élise’s birthday. So to prepare for the strike, she and her friend Sylvie went to the Cégep du Vieux Montréal, “où les gens étaient particulièrement sympathiques et nous ont donné plein de pancartes,” she wrote in the same diary entry. (When Élise and Sylvie stopped by the Cégep du Vieux Montréal, Julie had already been occupying the building and involved in



student organizing for quite some time already). The next day, “*on a juste couru partout toute la journée pour l’organisation de la grève, et nous avons fini par passer dans les classes pour caller<sup>243</sup> les gens pour 6h le lendemain matin. Notons ici que les petits cools [...] m’ont écoutée attentivement au lieu de me lyncher quand je suis passée dans leurs classes, seule, pas de prof en avant.*”

And then the day of the strike came, and went so quickly, despite it having started before the light of dawn. “*Le lendemain, le lever à 4h a été un peu dur et la journée a été épuisante, mais exaltante,*” wrote Élise in her diary on April 5, reminiscent of Julie's fatigue being lifted by the 'high' feelings of the moment. “*Il fallait qu’on aille piqueter notre école à genre six heures,*” Élise explains, so the mobilization committee “*s’est pointé avec nos chaînes à cinq heures du matin!*” she recounts, smiling.

“*Avec des chaînes?*” I ask, still stupefied that we are talking about high school students, my paternalism seeping out of its inevitable crevasses.

“*Ouais!*” Élise answers. “*Pour attacher les portes!*” She continues, in her enthusiastic tone : “*Pis finalement y’avait eu vraiment aucun problème pour la journée de picketage, là!*” When students started arriving, “*on accueillait tout le monde qui arrivait pis comme on leur expliquait euh qu’est-ce qu’on faisait, euh y’avait combien de monde euh, comment ça se passait pis tout.*” Everyone who arrived at school that day - except for two or three students who hadn’t heard about the news – had come to school to picket, not to go to class.

“*Socialement c’était super le fun aussi tsé! Parce que... on créait des liens vraiment forts*” even with students who were “*dans le comité de mobilisation.*” Thus for Élise the ‘high’ of collective-oriented emotions (a sense of beauty, existential impact, collective empowerment and solidarity), were not just felt at a collective level at the general assembly or demonstrations, but on an interpersonal level. During the strike picket, Élise met “*plein de monde que je connaissais pas parce que j’suis arrivée à cette école-là en Secondaire-4!*” Solidarity developed between students in different grades who normally did not speak to each other: “*tsé le monde sont toutes venus piqueter ensemble du p’tit Secondaire-1 euh jusqu’à la gang de Secondaire-5, tsé? [...] je connaissais personne dans les plus jeunes finalement! Pis ça m’a permis de connaître d’autres personnes dans mon école, pis j’pense que c’est assez généralisé comme effet là que du monde*

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<sup>243</sup> “*Caller*” is an “*Anglicisme*” from the English word “*call*”

qui normalement se parlent jamais se sont parlé-e-s, pis," she laughs, "se sont tenu-e-s les bras dans une ligne de piquetage, pis euh (inhales) ont appris pleins de belles choses ensemble, là!" Examples of the "belles choses" they learned were "le fait que quand tu te mets *ensemble*, tsé même si t'es juste un petit élève de Secondaire-1," she says -smiling and attempting to imitate the perkiness of a young student- "qui se sent bien *petit* face à tout *ça*, quand tu te mets ensemble avec tout le *monde* pis tu *t'organises*, ben tu *peux arriver* à des choses que tu serais jamais arrivé-e tout *seul-e*, tsé. Pis que tu te sentais pas du *tout* du pouvoir la-dessus, tsé. Tu peux réussir à..." she smiles, appearing near laughter "tu peux barricader ton école euh pour faire une journée de grève, tsé! J'pense que... ouais, j'pense c'est des choses.. vraiment.. *marquantes* pis *importantes* pour des ados, là..."

"Pis pour toi?" I ask her.

"Et pour moi, *clairement*."

The end of the strike, however, was more complicated, even for Élise -a story for the next chapter.

#### PHILIPPE AND "L'ESPOIR QUE J'AVAIS PAS RETROUVÉ AVANT"

Philippe did not seem to enjoy high school quite as much as Élise, in part precisely because he did not experience a strike therein. Once he lived the strike in CEGEP, it affected him on an even more existential level than Élise, in part because of the life story that preceded his strike experience. When Philippe started hearing about the "enjeu par rapport à l'éducation" at the Cégep de Saint-Jérôme, "bein ça venait me chercher!" Because, "justement je viens d'un milieu qui est comme assez *populaire*, pis bon j'pensais jamais finir mon secondaire," recounts Philippe at the beginning of our interview, in his soft-spoken, humble, and unpretentious tone. Neither Philippe's parents nor his brother had finished high school, so "dans mon univers proche j'avais jamais eu *personne* vraiment qui avait eu accès aux études supérieures." So even in high school, Philippe always felt he was from a different cultural universe than his classmates. Since "j'avais pas peut-être le même niveau de *culture* que d'autres personnes, tsé au secondaire pis tout ça," he had felt a sense of "exclusion" and hadn't felt "à niveau" compared to others around him in high school. "Je ne me reconnaissais pas entre eux, en eux nécessairement," he remembers. "Faque pour moi c'était un petit miracle de finir le secondaire!"

After graduating from high school, Philippe went straight to the “marché du travail.” At the “shop de soudure” where he worked, ironically he did not feel there was much space to connect with other workers. “On était individualisé!” says Philippe, “on était, euh, chacun à nos tables de soudure,” he recalls. “Y’étaient un peu plus dans euh, la, un peu la nécessité de *travailler* pour euh, pour survivre.” Ultimately Philippe felt this wasn’t the path for him: during his three years of work in the soldering plant, “j’avais rien trouvé qui m’intéressait.”

So at the age of 20, he decided to go back to school: to the Cégep de Saint-Jérôme. Now a mature student entering CEGEP, the cultural gap was even greater than in high school. “J’avais pas été euh socialisé dans un monde euh...où euh justement le cégep ou la culture était quelque chose qui m’était accessible,” he explains of his upbringing. “De rentrer au cégep, j’étais comme dans un milieu tout-à-fait, euhh, inconnu!” he recalls. “Y’a fallu que j’apprenne le doigté d’ordi dans le fond, parce que j’avais aucune notion de ça!” Luckily he made a friend at CEGEP, “y’était catholique!” This friend taught him how to open an email account. Philippe soon ended up cutting his ties somewhat with his friends from high school who were from similar socio-economic backgrounds, as most of them had done a professional diploma<sup>244</sup> at CEGEP or had gone straight into the work force. “Mais moi le fait de revenir au cégep bein là, déjà j’avais un *clash* d’une couple d’années avec ces gens-là qui étaient nouveaux qui arrivaient au cégep!” So once again, “j’avais de la difficulté à me reconnaître en, en *eux*!”

Yet Philippe was resourceful: “Moi, mon moyen pour aller, euh, pour aller vraiment me reconnaître dans ce monde-là, ç’a été de m’*impliquer*.” He took full advantage of the social possibilities open to him in CEGEP: “Le *retour* aux études c’était vraiment un *changement* euh, euh contrastant dans ma vie!” Now, he could return to “une forme de vie qui était plus euh, qui était plus sociale là, où est-ce que je pouvais rencontrer des gens davantage, avoir un milieu euh, un milieu qui était plus euh, plus *sain* en faite!... Puis euh, pis c’est ça pis, dans ma curiosité dans le fond de, de rencontrer des gens au, au CÉGEP, j’ai commencé à m’intéresser aux associations [étudiantes].” The students involved in his association were also involved in other forms of activism, like the Parti communiste révolutionnaire (PCR),<sup>245</sup> “des gens qui essayaient d’être proche du *monde*, du, du *peuple* un peu, tsé. Pis moi je me retrouvais là-dedans, parce que

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<sup>244</sup> The Diplôme d’Études Professionnelles at the CEGEP level is aimed towards work rather than the continuation of higher education studies.

<sup>245</sup> <http://www.pcr-rcp.ca/fr/2300>

j’sentais que je provenais bein plus du peuple,” so “ça allait me chercher les revendications qu’ils avaient, qui étaient comme aussi plus larges que celles juste euh, du mouvement étudiant.”

Philippe started to get a bit involved in different student committees and “d’autres formes d’implication aussi, euh, plus bénévoles parascolaire!”

Such involvement in extracurricular activities, and most specifically in student activism, would help to bridge the cultural gap he had felt between himself and other students since high school. For the first time in his academic life, Philippe felt he could recognize himself amongst his peers, because:

“le militantisme allait euh, comme un petit peu euh, *plonger* à la racine des problèmes sociaux que j’ai pu vivre aussi tsé dans ma jeunesse pis tout ça. Puis euh juste le fait que *moi* j’aie accès à l’éducation, pis le fait que on veuille à travers euh les mesures euh répressives, les mesures du gouvernement, euh, mettre des barrières à cet accès-là, bein ça me faisait un peu capoter parce que je me disais *déjà*, tsé, à travers la culture que j’ai eue, y’a des barrières qui sont là qui sont pratiquement euh, qui sont presque naturelles, là!”

But it wasn’t just about him:

“Si il faut qu’on ajoute en plus des barrières économiques, bein là euh, je sais pas là, je pense aux *autres* qui, qui sont comme *moi* par exemple, pis qui arrivent euh, comme ça au cégep, pis qu’il faut qu’ils.. tsé qui ont *moins* accès aux prêts et bourses par exemple pis tout ça ben, ils vont juste *renoncer* à y aller tsé, pis... Faque c’est vraiment ça qui est venu me chercher!”

In this way, explains Philippe -before I have a chance to ask him specifically about emotions- student activism “me rattachait un peu aux *émotions* que j’avais vécues” during high school, such as his feelings of exclusion. Thus even before the strike itself, the student movement brought Philippe a feeling of belonging in school (a collective-oriented feeling) that he had never experienced before; and soon, we will discover, a new kind of hope.

“Puis en plus, là, arrivait la grève en 2005, qui était comme, euh, un peu le, le mouvement de concrétisation des apprentissages que j’avais faits avant!” Once again, Philippe felt this strike

context was “l’entrée dans une nouvelle culture!” Philippe had never participated in a demonstration nor a general assembly, and now in his second semester, “y’avait des votes de grève qui se prenaient pour, euh, pour aller euh manifester contre, euh, contre les mesures du gouvernement!” So at the beginning, Philippe had “plein d’appréhensions!” People had told him that demonstrations could be dangerous, that you could get arrested, “tsé ça peut être grave pis tout ça! Pis j’avais vraiment une image glauque des manifs.” He assumed that protests were composed of just a few people “qui sont prêts à, à affronter la police, tsé!” And he didn’t know the “grève générale illimitée comme *moyen* par exemple,” he explains, so “c’est vraiment là,” at his first general assembly, “que j’ai appris que c’est à travers cette forme de contestation là-à, qu’on pouvait comme, développer un rapport de force pour vraiment arriver à aller euh, aller stopper le gouvernement!”

In addition to the collective-oriented sense of belonging, that first general assembly reaffirmed Philippe's personal and collective concern about the accessibility of education, as he saw that he was not the only one concerned. “Y’avait vraiment *beaucoup* de monde qui était interpellé!” And yet he also realized that not everyone agreed. It was the first time that Philippe was assisting a public and political debate “en temps *réel*”, “cette forme-là *d’expression... contradictoire*”: Some were arguing *against* the strike despite being against the government cuts, while others were arguing *for* the strike. This type of discussion was different for Philippe as it wasn’t “au niveau *privé* par exemple dans la famille” but rather “vraiment au niveau public, mais tsé comme *large*.” In other words, it was Philippe’s “premiers contacts avec la dimension plus politique, eum, de l’organisation des rapports sociaux,” because people were talking about “une vision qu’on voulait *collective*, qu’on voulait *commune*, puis euh, pis évidemment c’était *divergent*, les opinions allaient pas toutes dans le même sens!”

Philippe agreed with the idea of striking, “parce que je me disais que ça allait stopper justement les élans du gouvernement pour euh, réduire l’accessibilité à l’éducation!” Others argued that the strike wouldn’t change anything “parce que de toute façon, on n’arrêtait pas la production de quoi que ce soit,” or because they simply wanted to finish “leurs techniques parce que y’avaient des stages à faire, pis si ils passaient pas ces stages-là, bein ça leur reportait à une autre année plus tard.” Finally, they voted “tout-à-fait *unaniment*, euh, pour la grève,” recounts Philippe. Considering the diversity of opinions therein, including those who just wanted to finish their degree and had “des arguments qui allaient en, en faveur de, d’un peu *l’immédiat*,” Philippe

considered it to be “ vraiment comme, *spectaculaire* de voir toutes les mains se lever en même temps pour voter oui, genre! Tsé sachant que, y’a toute sorte de monde dans une AG.”<sup>246</sup>

Similar to Julie, the tension of the general assembly deliberations played a role in its spectacular feel when the decision was finally made. The tense debates and their spectacular feel also allowed Philippe to clearly position himself for the long-term over the short-term (“immédiat”), to be vulnerable by sacrificing the relative security of the present for a much larger, unknown collective, despite his uncertainties amidst this new terrain he was entering. Philippe remembers vaguely that the assembly voted to have a follow-up assembly in a week or two “pis on allait avoir à *revoter* si on *reconduisait* la grève! Puis durant ce temps-là, bein, c’est sûr que-e-e, on l’avait voté, mais moi je savais absolument pas vers où on s’en allait, tsé!” explains Philippe. The uncertainty of the situation seemed to be calmed by a sense of purpose in a historic time, a role that extended beyond school, reminiscent of Solomon's (2007) definition of spirituality described above, “appreciating the bigger picture and having a chance to play a role in it, no matter how small.” Philippe explains:

“C’tait toute *l’entrée* dans le, dans le *monde* euh, dans un dans un nouvel univers, là, dans le fond! Parce que, on venait de suspendre en quelque sorte euh le cours normal des choses! Pour aller euh, porter un message au gouvernement! Pis *moi*, tsé, en tant que personne qui avait voté en faveur de d’ça, bein j’étais porteur aussi de ce message-là, avec toutes les autres que y’avait au tour de moi tsé! Puis euh, c’était vraiment comme un *moment* où je sentais que j’allais apprendre beaucoup de choses.”

Indeed, at the beginning, it was “choquant” for Philippe to learn how “le capitaliste y’a aucun intérêt tsé à ce que *toi* tu vives bien, tsé, dans ta vie par exemple. Il veut juste comme accumuler le profit de façon infini-i-i-e.” These ideas were “transmises aussi à travers le mouvement, le mouvement étudiant, tsé qui était comme euh, les gens qui avaient une réflexion critique par rapport à la société,” recounts Philippe. Despite learning new ideas and feeling he was one of many carrying a message to the government, Philippe was surprised at how some of the activists were so sure about the best path to take and were confident enough to confront the

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<sup>246</sup> “AG” is short for assemblée générale, often used in student movement parlance.

administration and carry out radical actions; he sometimes wondered where they got that drive. In comparison, Philippe did not feel “à l’aise” to do certain things, because “j’tais pas encore *convaincu*, par exemple!”

Despite many cultural shocks –with the academic world, the student movement, the strike context, and the group of student executives and leaders- for Philippe the 2005 experience gave his life meaning and unveiled new empowering realizations and experiences. Hanging out at the student association “local,” going to every general assembly and demonstration, “ça m’a emmené justement à voir, tsé, comme tout un autre aspect, euh, de la *réalité*... qui était euh, qui concordait *pas* justement avec, euh, la *reproduction* de l’ordre social mais qui allait euh, en *contradiction* avec!” explains Philippe, adding, “puis euhh l’objectivation de d’ça s’est faite à travers les manifestations.” Philippe thinks his first demonstration must have been “à Saint-Jérôme, qui était comme une manifestation qui était plus locale. Mais juste de voir *tant de monde* que ça, à Saint-Jérôme tsé, qui *marche* dans les rues! C’était comme *assez* euh, assez spécial, tsé de de voir, j’pense qu’on avait été chercher aussi à moment donné les euh, les gens de l’école secondaire, y’en avait qui étaient sorti-e-s avec nous, pour venir marcher!” All this “contribuait vraiment à un *climat* de, *d’inconnu*, *d’effervescence*, tsé de *joie* en même temps! Même si on n’était *pas content* des mesures,” Philippe recounts, hinting at the anger alongside the sense of a historic moment due to the large numbers of people in the streets. Later during his interview when describing the lower numbers during the 2007 strike, he can not help but bring up once again the vast number of student organizers as well as the mass of students and non-students at protests in 2005 that encouraged in him a sense of euphoria and hope that change was possible, in part because of the ability of the general unlimited strike to halt everything, he explains.

At one point, students decided “de squatter le cégep tsé!” The administration of the CEGEP was not necessarily in agreement, clarifies Philippe, “mais on a réussi à négocier, pis là on avait accès au cégep pis, tsé on pouvait faire un peu ce qu’on voulait tsé! Pis, on s’organisait politiquement aussi durant ce temps là, tsé!” Philippe often used the word “nouveau,” and now added to it by exclaiming, “tout ça, c’était un monde qui m’était *complètement étranger* avant de rentrer au cégep, tsé? C’était vraiment quelque chose de, d’assez, euh, d’assez révolutionnaire, je dirais, dans ma vie, là.” Leaving the soldering plant for the halls of CEGEP led Philippe to not only meet new people, and to learn about a political world, but in so doing, to gain a new perspective on life. Because “avant de rentrer dans ce milieu-là j’étais pas [...] dans la *possibilité*

de la... de la création de nouvelles normes par exemple qui pourraient *orienter* euh ma conduite puis, ou euh.. transformer la société.”

This new ‘prise de conscience’ of the possibility that he could transform society, was linked to empowerment, but also belonging and hope linked to the collectivity. “*Moi c’était la première fois... que je sentai-i-s que je pouvais avoir une incidence sur euh le cours euh... le cours de la société, tsé sur euh, sur euh... sur le cours des choses mais tsé qui dépasse ma propre vie par exemple.*” He continues:

"C’était, c’était plus l’émotion de d’une forme d’*espoir*, là! Tsé, que.. je, j’étais pas tout seul en plus, tsé, qui pensait comme ça! Pis y’a d’autres gens pour d’autres raisons, tsé euh on n’était pas un bloc monolithique, mais.. on allait tous un peu dans le même *sens*, tsé? Euh, y’avait *quelque chose* qui arrivait genre au niveau social, pis qu’on n’était *pas d’accord*, pis qu’on était prêt à aller se battre pour *défendre* nos points! Pis là je sentais vraiment que je faisais partie de quelque chose de *plus grand* que moi, tsé? Qui me *portait* pis que je *portais* aussi en même temps."

A sense of belonging to something bigger than himself, that carried him and that he carried: this was not self-expansion as Summers-Effler (2005) would have it, but rather a connection to the collective, inspiring hope. He continues:

"Pis ça c’était euh, c’était vraiment comme peut-être *l’émotion* euh la plus forte, là, cet espèce de sentiment de *possibilité de transformation*, tsé? De, de que *j’ai du pouvoir tsé*, mais pas en tant qu’individu, mais en tant que *en lien* avec d’autres individus, en tant que *groupe social* on a... la possibilité de *transformer* l’monde, tsé? Pis euh... C’était *l’espoir*, tsé? C’était, c’était *l’espoir* que j’avais pas retrouvé avant, par exemple, dans ma vie euh, tsé quand je travaillais à *l’usine* par exemple, ou... quand... quand j’étais chez mes *parents au secondaire*, où j’ai... j’avais pas la *conscience* que c’était *moi* qui créais mon monde en tant que tel, tsé? Mon monde il m’était imposé de l’extérieur! Le cadre familial me *l’imposait*, le cadre par exemple de, du travail me l’imposait, pis là en arrivant au *cégep*, dans ce nouvel euh univers-là, ben là j’ai vraiment senti que, tsé à travers les actions que je *posais*, à travers le *groupe* dans lequel je m’inscrivais, bein je pouvais



vraiment contribuer à transformer les choses, à transformer *ma vie*, pis à transformer aussi la société.”

Just after finishing that last sentence, Philippe wants to correct himself: this feeling of the possibility of transforming society, sometimes referred to by Philippe as “l’espoir” -which he described as “vraiment comme, une première forme d’émotion que j’ai sentie”- was not the only important feeling. Like most interviewees, Philippe nuances these more idyllic emotional experiences with many other emotions. “J’y repense comme ça, pis, c’est ça qui, qui me vient, mais... tsé y’avait beaucoup de *colère* aussi, parce que, c’était nouveau pour moi que j’avais accès à, j’avais accès au cégep! Pis là on dirait qu’y’avait comme une *mesure* qui allait empêcher les autres qui étaient peut-être comme moi genre de, d’y’avoir accès faque.. j’étais j’étais un peu, j’étais un peu en crise, tsé.”

Yet soon enough, he comes back to what I am terming ‘high’ collective-oriented emotions, notably a feeling of belonging, empowerment, and hope related to the collective:

“Y’avait vraiment comme une diversité de tactiques qui s’exprimaient tsé dans un *mouvement* qui allait un peu dans le même, tsé qui, qui allaient dans le même *sens* mais qui, qui s’exprimaient de pleins de façons différentes. Pis moi mais je sentais que j’avais ma place aussi là-dedans, faque c’tait, c’tait comme, aussi l’émotion de.. tsé de, la la *prise* de conscience qu’j’avais une *place* dans la société! Que je pouvais moi aussi *déterminer* les conditions de mon existence à travers, euh, c’t’expression-*là*, qui était comme *collective*.”

#### THEY MISSED 2005, BUT CAUGHT 2007: AUDREY AND PIERRE

I have sought to highlight in this chapter until now how participants of the 2005 strike experienced 'high' collective-oriented emotions (belonging, mutual happiness, a feeling of togetherness and solidarity, a feeling of collective empowerment, pride and hope in the collective) influenced by the sense of a historic moment and the particular deliberative qualities of direct democracy that infused participants with a sense of existential and even spiritual purpose or meaning. Arriving now to the 2007 strike, only two years after the previous one, Jean

Charest is still governing through the Liberal Party of Quebec.<sup>247</sup> Yet it is not the provincial context that stands out as a commonality between participants; rather, it is the memory of 2005. Thus here I gently introduce how the ‘historic’ collective memory -and associated emotions- around the 2005 strike became contagious, so that a chain of ‘high’ emotions similar to that described just above ensued in a particular way for Pierre and Audrey, even though -and partly because- they had not experienced 2005. Indeed, both Pierre and Audrey’s interviews also stand out because they explicitly mention the sense of purpose or meaning that the 2007 strike campaign gave them, precisely in part because of the image they had of the 2005 strike.

### **Pierre and the almost ‘transcendental’**

Pierre is well-spoken, and on first appearance, seems pretty confident, yet only later during the interview do I realize that he is more complex: generally shy and self-critical, as well as a romantic in both relationships and politics, according to his girlfriend Marie-Claude, who is sitting next to him during the entire interview to listen and share her own perspectives and experience from time to time.<sup>248</sup> After attending in the West Island the Cégep Gérald-Godin, “petit cégep de mille étudiants pis étudiantes là donc euh très petit euh pis *pas* très très politisé,” Pierre found himself at UQAM in 2007. He had already been interested in politics as far back as high school, and once he got to UQAM, he had a lot of access to information from the ASSÉ newspaper, since the political science student association (AEMSP) was a member of ASSÉ. He recognized himself in the ideas “véhiculées par l’ASSÉ.”

Then in 2007, “y’a eu une élection provinciale, là! Puis le gouvernement libéral avait promis uh, de faire un dégel des frais de scolarité, pis vu qu’y’a gagné les élections au printemps 2007 c’est là que, que finalement, là ç’a commencé à se parler beaucoup, dans le milieu étudiant.” After attending some general assemblies and 5-à-7 events organized by his student association, some students invited him to get involved in an ASSÉ committee. So in April 2006 at the annual congress of ASSÉ, he proposed himself to be elected to the ASSÉ newspaper committee, and was successfully elected. Particularly at the beginning when he didn’t know

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<sup>247</sup> The relationship between strikes and the effect of time will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 6.

<sup>248</sup> While Marie-Claude was starting to get involved in student politics at UQAM at the time of our interview, she did not participate in a strike yet, so was gearing the interview mostly towards him, but I was happy to also hear her perspective, and she sometimes brought a different perspective on Pierre’s experience, even teasing him at some point that the strike helped him have more luck with the ladies, and that he was a romantic both in strikes and relationships. Perhaps because of her presence in the interview, when I transcribed the interview it was 82 pages long (single-spaced).

many people and “je me sentais seul,” songs at ASSÉ parties and other social gatherings, sung with “ferveur,” would provide pleasure and helped Pierre to feel camaraderie and a “sentiment d’appartenance collective.” By May 2007 Pierre had become an executive for his political science department association. “Dans l’fond pour toutes les gens qui gravitaient autour de l’ASSÉ, c’est clair qu’on s’en allait en grève à l’automne 2007 pis qu’on allait sortir fort,” he recounts.

Pierre spent the summer in British Columbia, and upon his return in August 2007, “y’a eu des congrès [de l’ASSÉ] qui ont commencé à s’enchaîner rapidement parce que là on voulait faire une coalition,” and just as in 2005, “on avait des débats sur la nature de la coalition pis ça ç’a pris beaucoup de temps.” In between those debates, “moi j’mobbaïs<sup>249</sup> quand-même pas mal, là. [...] j’tais un partisan euh aussi de la gratuité scolaire comme revendication,” he says, “j’voulais vraiment euh, bon on y va pour la grève générale pour la gratuité scolaire, dès l’automne 2007!” So already, he had high expectations. With others from his student association (AEMSP), he went to classes to inform students, passed out flyers at the entrance of UQAM, and visited other CEGEPs and universities.

So I ask him: “Pis eum, durant ce temps-là comme, au début de la mobilisation, est-ce que tu te rappelles de, y’a tu des émotions qui te viennent...”

He answers right away: “Ah ben leeeeee... j’dirais l’espoir. Beaucoup beaucoup d’espoir,” because “j’avais pas vécu 2005. Pis là *moi*, je voulais vivre une grève.” He also believed in the efficacy of the strike tactic and was “doublement motivé” because the provincial government was deregulating tuition, in addition to what was happening at UQAM, “une grande injustice.”<sup>250</sup> Yet after explaining that context, Pierre comes back to 2005 once again: “Mais en plus au plan personnel j’avais jamais vécu un mouvement de grève. Faque-e-e-e j’étais euh extrêmement motivé à faire la grève à l’automne 2007.” In addition to hope, he felt “exaltation

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<sup>249</sup> 'Mobber' refers to mobilizing.

<sup>250</sup> More specifically, Pierre explains : “On se faisait aussi attaqué à l’UQAM avec le plan de redressement qui a suivi en fait euh, le fiasco de l’Ilot Voyageur. Euh.. bon le 300-400 millions que l’UQAM a dilapidé dans l’Ilot Voyageur. Pis là en fait... les associations étudiantes, on avait bien dit qu’on était contre ce projet la *débil* (snickers), pis les syndicats aussi pis naturellement la direction a pas écouté les syndicats pis les associations pis y’est allé quand-même faire c’tte projet-là. Pis ensuite ils reviennent nous voir pis là c’est nous qui faut qui paye pour ça. Là il faut payer plus cher de frais afférents, en plus on perd des services. Y’a même un bar a l’UQAM qui a fermé, (with sarcastic tone) quel scandale! (laughs, we all laugh) Pis là c’est ça l’UQAM voulait aussi couper dans les employés de soutien, voulait abolir des postes et tout faque la euh, faque là ça en plus c’est clair que-e-e-e bon, je considérais ça comme une grande injustice.”

j'dirais euh, la volonté de combattre vraiment,” “le désir de vaincre.” He was not tired from 2005 like those who had already lived through it, he explains.

Luckily for Pierre, his student *department* association (AEMSP) voted for a general unlimited strike, but the larger faculty association he was part of (AFESPED) lost quorum at the end of its assembly despite having voted for the strike. In a subsequent AFESPED referendum the strike vote lost “par une p'tite marge.” So “on s'est repliés sur le module de l'AEMSP,” which had voted for a general unlimited strike once the “plancher” was reached.<sup>251</sup> Soon it seemed the 2007 strike might not happen –only 60% of AFESH members<sup>252</sup> voted for the strike, and even the Cégep du Vieux-Montréal had “carrément rejeté la grève!” Yet Pierre was motivated by those who *did* want to continue. His own association had voted for the strike and at the ASSÉ congresses, “les gens des cégeps voulaient continuer, on n'a pas à leur dire d'arrêter.” So if the “plancher” was never met and “on n'a jamais déclenché la grève générale illimitée,” those faculty associations that were on strike at UQAM decided to do a five-day strike nonetheless, more than the two-to-three-day strike proposed at the ASSÉ congress. In Pierre's interview, it is only looking back on his entire activist ‘parcours’ -which went beyond 2007 to include the 2008 strike that happened solely at UQAM- that he remembers the strong sense of meaning that the strike constituted for him: With a dreamy tone and his hands in the air, he smiles and then starts giggling as he says that the strike was, for him, “j'sais pas, là, **transcendental** presque, là,” as his girlfriend and I giggle at his tone. “Tsé bein moi c'tait juste ça là, à cette époque-là c'était, c'était, tsé j'tais vraiment là-dedans.” Again a bit later, in the midst of describing his departure from activism and the more negative emotional downfall, he suddenly adds:

“Je considère que ces années-là de militantisme c'est les plus *intenses* de ma vie, pis c'est probablement celles qui ont eu au plan *social*, là, au plan de qu'est-ce que je *donne* à ma société ou qu'est-ce que, comment je prends part aux débats dans, dans ma société, je pense que.. ces années-là ç'a été les années les plus importantes *à date* de ma vie en terme

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<sup>251</sup> Pierre remembers the 'plancher' as seven associations “regroupant 25,000 personnes.” Indeed, his memory was accurate (Theurillat-Cloutier, 2017).

<sup>252</sup> From my experience I have developed the understanding that AFESH has the reputation among students for having the most militant student union at Quebec, at least within UQAM.

euh, c'est ça, *d'implication* dans la société. Pis eu-u-u-u-h-h-h ces années ont été merveilleuses aussi à plein d'égards, tsé."

In the context of describing his depression later in the interview -the subject of the next chapter- he notes that activism was "un peu le sens de ma *vie*! Lutter finalement pour améliorer les choses!" This was not just answering to his "idéaux" but also to his desire to practice those ideals, as "j'faisais pas juste critiquer la société, j'faisais quelque chose pour la *changer*." In other words, the embodiment of the ideal through action helped to instill that sense of meaning. Indeed, a bit later when I ask him what activism brought him personally, he continues to underline the importance of being involved in a strike "avec des gens qui avaient à peu près le même idéal que le mien" and the importance of "*vivre une implication militante, de, de faire partie d'une organisation qui essaie de changer les choses,*" more specifically:

"de vivre mon idéal à quelque part. C'est sûr que, j'tais plus, j'tais pas dans une société euh *anarchiste* parce qu'on n'était en grève, mais euh, c'te milieu de grève-là aussi à quelque part euh, on avait un comité *bouffe* à l'UQAM, on avait euh... une forme, tsé, une solidarité de *groupe*."

The movement to strike and what it brought in its wake made it possible to have a foretaste of a more humane society, guided by solidarity and equality. At another point in the interview, Pierre refers to the vision that him and his counterparts sought as "un genre de paradis sur terre," and he spoke about young militants who have "beaux espoirs" to change the world. "Je ressens des choses par rapport à la société pis y'a des choses que je ressens comme injuste," he adds, it's not a career choice, as he is "sensible à la misère du monde parce que je déteste les inégalités sociales." Indeed, if Pierre speaks about the strike giving his life meaning, he also spoke about it in terms of emotions like anger, love, and hope related to the present and future collectivity:

"une colère euh, envers les injustices a toujours j'pense été encouragée, pis c'est à la base j'pense de, c'est c'est finalement notre militanti-, ou à en tout cas *mon* militantisme j'ai trouvé comme, en réaction face à une société que je refuse. Que je refusais. Pis que-e-e-e j'en voulais plus pis je voulais autre chose, pis c'est pour ça que je m'impliquais

finaleme nt tsé. C'tait par *colère* par rapport à qu'est-ce qu'on vit actuellement. Pis aussi par espoir et amour envers un *futur* qui serait euh, merveilleux ou à peu près, he he!"

### **Audrey and the purpose of life**

A similar sense of purpose transpired from Audrey's strike experience. Audrey has been a friend of mine since at least 2009, when we moved into the same apartment for a year with a group of politically-minded friends, and at which point I was very involved in student politics with the GSA. She has always had a lovely, interesting mix of being confident while more honest about her insecurities than most people, which I have always appreciated about her. Back then during our conversations about our respective student activism, Audrey would often ask me: "*don't you think we do activism because we are seeking some kind of purpose in our lives?*" I always thought that the question was strange because it made it sound as if that were a bad thing, and I would therefore answer non-chalantly, "of course it fulfills a sense of purpose!" Yet Audrey's question was clearly based on her own experience in the 2007 strike -and an insight that unexpectedly came back to haunt this dissertation.

After some hesitation and anxiety on her part about not being able to remember the exact numbers from the 2007 strike campaign,<sup>253</sup> she finally relaxes with my question: "what emotions do you remember from your experience in the student movement?" Suddenly she is answering in her confident and passionate way, and no longer seems to be performing for the camera as before:

"Well it was really like the first, um, politically thing I'd ever been involved in before, like I was *very very* new to it, and I was kind of um, put under the wing of like the person that got me involved, and I was like very um dependent on this person to like kind of lead me and like guide me through like what we were doing and I had like *complete* trust in this person and like loyalty in this person."

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<sup>253</sup> At the beginning, Audrey almost decides to terminate the interview.

She does not yet mention that she had quite a crush on Harry,<sup>254</sup> who was the one who stopped her in the corridors of Dawson College one day to tell her about the upcoming strike and the inaction of the current student union. She continues right after to say:

“So like a lot of, like... I guess my *main* emotion was um... at *first* was excitement, I was like really excited that there was something I could fight for and really, um... like I felt like I had purpose, um, doing this, like I kind of felt like my life had been very purposeless until that moment and wow there’s really something I can do in this world and that like will give my life meaning. And um... Yeah, so it was kind of my first emotions were those. Excitement, motivation, purpose, feeling *super* motivated to do this stuff and like *really really* into it.”

A mix of positive and thrilling emotions related to existential meaning and purpose, and an intermixing of interpersonal desire. Audrey's involvement was inevitably related to 2005: she tells me that she got involved “just before the 2007 student strike, which was kind of a flop, like it didn’t really work that well, like in 2005 there was like this big general strike and I think people in 2007 were very, um, had *that* in their *mind* that they would be able to recreate that.” So they called for an “indefinite general strike until we meet our demands of free quality education” in response to the government’s plan to raise tuition over the following five years -at this point she is talking like a newscaster, reminding me again how the facts made her nervous or desire to perform. “People were very angry about it, but at the same time I think people were still a little burnt out from 2005.”

Soon enough, Audrey got elected to the Dawson Student Union, “I ran uncontested so I got elected because nobody ran against me,” she laughs, “I mean there was like, you could choose the chair over myself, you know,” she says, still with her performative voice. She was the most left-wing of the elected executive team, she recalls. “Everybody else there was a little bit more like centre, you know like ‘Oh yeah, tuition fees are bad’ but not really willing to do anything about it,” she explains. So Audrey was basically on her own in the student council.

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<sup>254</sup> Like all mentions of people who did not sign consent forms, pseudonyms replace real names -thus, unfortunately the original interview could not be made public for oral history archives without cutting or erasing the names in the recording.

If in the quote above Audrey refers to the 2007 strike as a “flop,” back then she clearly did not think about it that way. Through Harry, and later from people involved in the ASSÉ, “hearing all the stories about 2005,” she says, smiling again, “*really* inspired me... It was like this like ‘Wow! like I can’t believe I wasn’t involved in that at all!’ like, I had no idea what, I was in high school at the time in 2005, right? So I had *no idea* of that stuff, so... the stories of 2005 like *REALLY* motivated me to... I *really* wanted that to happen in 2007, like that was like, that was *a very big* motivation actually for... what I was doing.” Based on these stories from 2005, Audrey recalls a desire for social interaction intermingled with a desire to be involved and a feeling of being empowered through democracy to make a difference:

“I was also like living with my parents and like hadn’t really partied that much ever, and like, ya know, it sounded like it was just so cool, like all these students like *gathering* (excited, hands moving) and like occupying the school and having a sleep-in, and... and like these giant demonstrations (excited, hands moving), and like... I don’t know, it just sounded so cool that people were so involved, and it just sounded like so much fun almost (laughs)... too. And the fact that they had so much *power*, like that they were able to do that for so long. And the fact that they would have general assemblies every week and... I don’t know, it just seemed really (serious tone), it was like, ‘Wow we can really *do* something, ya know?’”

So “when I found out about the plans for the November strike in 2007, I was like, Okay this time we’re gonna do it and I wanna *know* that I put my 100% effort.” So “I just like *threw* myself into it for like a good month, like two months, like going to meetings all the time, like trying to organize mobilization committees, and we just had all these crazy plans in school and um... Yea and I was just *there*, I *lived* at Dawson, all the time,” she explains. Audrey felt a sense of duty: “I was constantly doing like classroom visits and stuff, not because, and I *wasn’t comfortable* doing it but I just *did* it because I felt like I *had* to do it, it was just like this necessity that like this get *done* and it kind of *overwhelmed* every other emotion.”

Audrey clarifies that the sense of duty and hope was oriented to the collective. “In the beginning it was *all hope*, it was all like, *Wow* I really need to do this because I need to *contribute* and I need to *change society*, and the world’s fucked up and what can I do, okay I’m



gonna do this, you know?” This collective-oriented hope went even further back than 2005 for Audrey. “I’d kind of been thinking about like,” and she suddenly imitates a contemplative voice, “Wow, I wish I was in the sixties cuz there’s nothing to fight for these days,” Audrey says smiling. “Like I just grew up in this middle-class family where like I didn’t, like you know... we weren’t like really *well off* but like, we weren’t like, in *poverty* or anything, so like I wasn’t able to, it didn’t *occur* to me,” she laughs slightly, “that there was like issues to fight for, and I just really wanted to like put myself into... give myself *purpose* in something and *do* something, you know?”

Unsurprisingly perhaps, when I ask Audrey what the most intense emotion she remembers, “it was that sense of purpose, of like having meaning, of knowing that I was doing something and that I was like a valuable person, because I was putting so much... knowing that my involvement was very valuable,” she explains. If Audrey was working almost on her own to mobilize, she knew that other schools in Quebec were attempting to have a general unlimited strike, so when talking to students she was inviting students to the general assembly to vote about whether to strike, she was telling them, “we need to be democratic, we need to like make a decision cuz other schools are making decisions and we need to participate and.. show the world where we stand as Dawson student, you know?”

Indeed the “*biggest* emotional experience was the general assembly,” she recalls, “cuz we’d been working *so hard* for that, two weeks before there, like that was one of the times when I was really like at Dawson all the time, flyering and talking to people,” and “I was like expecting no one to show up.” Since Audrey had placed so much of her effort and self-worth on everything working out, it might not be surprising that her reaction was much like that of Élise in 2005. She felt “excitement” and “exhilaration” upon seeing the “GIGANTIC line-up,” she states with an ecstatic, excited tone, “it goes for like so-o-o far and hundreds of people,” and “*everybody* was there cuz they wanted to *see* what was going on, you know?” Audrey spoke in front of the crowd of 800 students that day, while students clapped; she found it “amazing” that students were so involved and “aren’t just these apathetic, like, you know, rich kids from Westmount,” she says giggling. The resultant strike vote was historic for Dawson College, “because in the past the Anglophone schools haven’t been as involved as uh francophone schools, especially like Anglophone *CEGEPs*,” she says. She felt “just exhilaration, complete exhilaration, I *felt like I*

was *changing the world*,” and, suddenly her tone drops unexpectedly as she looks down and continues, “*happiness*, just this like super high of wow, we did it!”

#### MARYA ON THE SEVENTH SKY ON THE SEVENTH FLOOR<sup>255</sup>

If Audrey was a part of my life beyond this research, it is even more the case for Marya, as already insinuated in previous chapters. After the CLASSE founding congress that we attended together in December 2011, Marya went on to be elected to the *Comité Luttes Sociales*<sup>256</sup> of the ASSÉ/CLASSE. Yet our formal interview focuses mostly on the beginning of her experience of the strike at Concordia, as the year-and-a-half leading up to the strike was much more positive and important for Marya than the course of the strike itself, at least when speaking about Concordia.<sup>257</sup>

In the years previous to the strike, within Concordia, Marya had been an elected representative for the Geography graduate student association (GEOGRADS), and the protagonist of GEOGRADS becoming ratified as a student association. She had also mobilized for the TRAC (the union for teaching and research assistants), and by 2010 she joined Free Education Montreal (FEM) and was elected as a student representative on the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) council.<sup>258</sup> She considers the work of escalating towards a strike to have started in December 2010.<sup>259</sup> “We were doing *events* and *all*,” recounts Marya, “but in my *mind* it was always clear that we are doing it *avec avec le but de* quelque chose plus *gros* plus *tard*, *genre*.” In part through her attendance at ASSÉ congresses and training camps that we would

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<sup>255</sup> After reading this section, Marya felt awkward because she felt that she comes across as too sure of herself or as “fetishizing” the experience, perhaps, she thinks, because it was the first time Concordia had experienced a strike. She also worried that it seemed too focused on her own involvement, which was not her intention in the interview, nor was it my intention to portray her this way. I have tried to clarify her intentions as much as possible throughout the text in this chapter, based on her feedback. Though arguably the questions were about her experience so it makes sense she would talk about herself, her discomfort perhaps echoes that of Gluck (2013) with regards to the inadequacy of individual interviews to study collective movements. We also decided that I should clarify that because of my dissertation’s focus on emotions, it will not be able to contain the full chronology or history of events at Concordia, nor of Marya’s strike trajectory, nor all of her comments and reactions to the first draft of my thesis.

<sup>256</sup> *Social Struggles Committee*

<sup>257</sup> Another reason for our interview’s focus on the beginning and Concordia component of her strike experience is that we did not have time to do a follow-up interview to include her later experiences during the strike.

<sup>258</sup> At that time I was also a GSA representative on its student council, so we worked alongside each other.

<sup>259</sup> On December 6, 2010, we went with fellow FEM members to demonstrate in Quebec City where the government was meeting with student associations to discuss the upcoming tuition hike. Before the end of the meeting, according to *Le Droit* newspaper, “Les associations étudiantes collégiales et universitaires, avec l’appui des grandes centrales syndicales, ont claqué la porte de la rencontre avec le gouvernement sur le financement des universités, hier après-midi, jugeant que les dés étaient pipés et les décisions déjà prises” (Richer, 7 décembre 2010).

sometimes attend as observers, Marya sensed something big was coming. Thus, I contend, already there was a sense of something historic in the works. Since in India, her country of origin, “there are strikes *all the time*,” says Marya, “for me I guess it was exciting to *hear* that there’ll be a strike and that I would be part of it.”<sup>260</sup> Like myself, Marya had never participated in a general unlimited student strike, and it had never happened before at Concordia.

So in the Concordia context, Marya insists it is important to recognize that FEM organized the *Wintry Hot Accessible Love-in for Education* (WHALE) on Valentine's Day in 2011, an “amazing mobilization,” the purpose of which was to reduce the quorum for CSU general assemblies in order to be able to hold them in the university's largest room, and to vote a formal position about the looming tuition increase. That day, both the CSU and the GSA general assemblies took a stance against the government's proposed tuition hike, and it “tremendously helped build momentum at Concordia.”<sup>261</sup> For Marya,<sup>262</sup> all of this previous movement-building had “a cumulative effect” for building “*people power*” and educating and involving students, constituting the “escalade de moyens de pression” at the Concordia level that helped to build the groundwork for the strike. Getting into the routine of “*systematic* class announcements, uh, the proper flyering, like having *posters* everywhere” built up to “a *huge* mobilization for November 10<sup>th</sup>,” the one-day province-wide strike and demonstration that took even students by surprise with its magnitude. If until then Marya was not sure “*exactly how* it will happen,” she had a destination in mind and she knew it would be big; thus Marya highlights, like others in this chapter, the emotional tenure of the beginnings of these strikes: seeped in the uncertainty of what will happen, yet the sense that something historic is happening alongside a sense of collective duty and possibility leads one to jump, vulnerably, into the uncertainty. “It will remain, um, une expérience *marquante* pour moi!” in part because of “the potential, of of what we could do as people, where we can, where it can *bring us!* Um, and and just I mean empowerment is a *really small* word I think for, for its is meaning, the ampleur that it can take, you know?” Marya describes November 10th as “*beautiful*, it was *amazing*, you know?”

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<sup>260</sup> Marya's life story will be told more fully in Chapter 4.

<sup>261</sup> Photographs and more information can be found at: <https://thelinknewspaper.ca/article/1200-turn-out-against-tuition-increases> and <http://theconcordian.com/2011/02/897-students-make-whale-motions-binding/>

<sup>262</sup> (As well as for Alex, as we will see in Chapter 4).

Indeed, it was around the end of November that Marya thinks she started to have more of a sense of how the strike would take place, due in part to the increased rapprochement since November 10 between francophone and anglophone students to organize together, and the help of a Concordia student who had experience in the francophone student movement. This sense of *how* it could be done was further concretized after a meeting on the seventh floor of the Hall building, where “we actually kind of you know uh operationalized it, y’know like *how* we are going to do it, we did the contacts of each department, uh, who’s contacting which department for a general assembly.” Since students were mobilized after November 10, the next step was to focus on “democratic deliberations and decision making about where we collectively take the ultimate step.” Reflecting the sense of a “magnetic quality” -to use Collins' (2001, p. 29) words- that collective gatherings such as November 10 and subsequent organizing meetings can inspire, alongside the concrete preparations for general assemblies within Concordia, soon Marya felt a sense that “we know how we’re doing it, everything is in place, and we just, it’s just matter of time and work, you know?”

These early days of preparation represented to her the broadening of the strike organizing beyond FEM, which was beautiful, she notes, because that’s the kind of democratization of the movement that she had been hoping for, and what had worked in the past at UQAM and elsewhere, notably departmental student associations were taking ownership.<sup>263</sup> It was the “essence of democracy,” and for Marya, it represented a “great leap for Concordia students to experience direct democracy.” So these simple decisions of who would talk to which department associations were key in Marya’s opinion, as without the general assemblies the strike would not have happened. This is why Marya felt an increasing sense that this inevitable historic force would come to Concordia, she explains. This sense was furthered by a training camp she co-organized during the holiday break to take place in January 2012, in collaboration with students from francophone universities, so that anglophone students could further discuss the logistics and meaning of direct democracy among other preparatory skills.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> On this topic, Marya and I co-authored a chapter about the power of collective deliberation and decision-making at the departmental level, as they have more of a chance to have a say at this level (Mehreen, Bonin, & Hausfather, 2014). On this note, Marya also co-authored the following article with Matt Brett: [http://www.studentstrike.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Creating-Departmental-or-Faculty-Associations\\_v1.0.1.pdf](http://www.studentstrike.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Creating-Departmental-or-Faculty-Associations_v1.0.1.pdf)

<sup>264</sup> The training camp included workshops by both francophone and anglophone students (all presented in English) about the history of the student movement, security concerns, and graphic design, how to implement a strike and

“That’s a sweet moment,” Marya explains.<sup>265</sup> “Thinking about those days,” she says, they still feel “surreal.” They were “really *empowering*, it was, it was very *positive*. It was *challenging* I think! But... we were together and we *dreamed* together... you know?” Of course I assume she meant as a collective, or as a province, or a student body. “I really mean you and me! He he,” she clarifies, giggling. “There were other people also,” she continues, “but uh..I don’t know they, they, they were nice *days*, beautiful *days*.” Marya highlights the pleasure of working and dreaming with a friend, and a gentle sense of making history, similar to that expressed by other interviewees, a sense that this strike was inevitably on its way. Thus even before the general assemblies erupted in democratic rumblings across Concordia's terrain, Marya expressed a sense of *agoraphilie* (Dupuis-Déri, 2016), more specifically a sense of love for direct democracy.

Then soon enough, what Marya -what we- had dreamed came to life. “It was just *beautiful* the number of general assemblies *happening*, like I have all the pictures,” says Marya with a giddy voice, “I look at them *all the time!*” Thinking of these photographs of the general assemblies, even towards the end of the interview when she is more tired, Marya’s voice suddenly becomes quick and ecstatic, as she describes that time when our dreams of direct democracy transformed into beauty, excitement, and amazement, echoing what I consider the ‘high’ collective-oriented feelings expressed by other participants in the pages above:

“It was *beautiful!* Um, at some point there was a general assembly ha-happening, uh-h, in the CSU *lounge*, and in the People’s Potato uh, uh *space*, um, and uh and before before that there was the geo- uh, GUSS<sup>266</sup> general assembly that happened in the *classroom*. It was, it was just *amazing!* And then people were literally *coming* to the [mobilization] table, and asking ‘How can I have my general assembly?’”

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general assembly, and practice debates about tuition increase. While there was a wonderful workshop about collective care, managing stress and avoiding burnout, it was not specific to the contentious dynamics of picket lines.

<sup>265</sup> During the interview, Marya highlights this moment in comparison to later, when things became more difficult emotionally for her, in part because of interpersonal relationships. She chose to leave these more difficult experiences out of the dissertation, with the exception of what is related in Chapter 6, because we did not have time to do a second interview to elaborate the full context of those experiences.

<sup>266</sup> GUSS is the Geography Undergraduate Student Society.



General assembly of the *Fine Arts Student Alliance* in the CSU lounge in 2012, photograph courtesy of Marya, original source unknown.

Marya would respond “Okay, so, what is it you have,” she says clapping once with her hands, “like which *department*? Okay so do you have an association? No! It’s okay if you don’t have an association! You can write a petition, you know? And if you get so many people we can have a general assembly! And then you can even *elect* your *execs* at the general assembly!’ Hehe, you know? Um, it was it was just *amazing!*” Recalling Collins' (2005) theorizations above, direct contact between students at assemblies but also in the hallways led to a sort of collective effervescence -“the excitement and energetic coordination of participants in their interaction”- that in a sense magnified *agoraphilie* to a 'high' state.



General assembly of the *Geography Undergraduate Student Society (GUSS)* in 2012, photo courtesy of Marya.

Marya's tone becomes slower and lower again as she steps back from the moment she is recounting and says: "so I think like *purely* from the perspective of *mobilization*, perspective of uh.. of uh direct *democracy*, like having the general *assembly*, like this *whole* um, you know th-th-that *culture* that got *built*, you know? Um.. it was it was just just amazing! I mean having a, a general assembly at, at Poli Sci! You know, like could you even have *imagined*, you know?"<sup>267</sup> As she continues to describe these surreal, beautiful moments and how 'pregnant' with happiness she felt, her voice is loud, fast-paced. "I was *really happy*, y'know, was, I was *happy* that it was happening." Then she adds: "This is going to sound *weird* but... you know uh.. it's a moment

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<sup>267</sup> I assume that Marya is referring to the reputation of the political science department at Concordia for being politically conservative in recent years.

when you know a *mother*, uhh, sees her *kid*, you know, be on its, his *own*. You know, uh, it's like just just *seeing*.. *so many different* general assemblies *happening*, was was just *beautiful*. It was, it was like, for *me* it was *almost* like a *dream come true*," she says, explaining that their recipe had been to have as many general assemblies as possible at the department level so that students themselves could decide and vote whether to strike.

Of course "it was important that the strike was voted!" she explained. "But just *seeing* that this collective *power* was building, people were *believing in that*, you know," continues Marya. "Everybody *owned* it," and "back *then* I was not really in a space of like, *feeling* like, *alone* or *alienated* or anything like that, it was, it was just a *really, really* good time," a "moment of effervescence." Thus Marya captures the essence of what many others experienced near these beginning times of the strikes: a sense of happiness and excitement at everything *happening* around her, a sense of the birthing of something new -having conceived it months ago-, a sense of beauty, togetherness, and collective empowerment. The provincial history, coupled with her own recent history of work in the student movement and her previous life "baggage," boiled over in this moment of collectivity to become something beyond happiness, a beautiful dream come true -perhaps, I am suggesting, what can be described as a sense of existential or spiritual meaning.

Indeed, a year after our interview, I call Marya to clarify something about it, and this period of the strike comes up again.<sup>268</sup> She tells me that she can't help but smile as she imagines again more than one general assembly happening on the lounge of the seventh floor of the Hall Building, and she re-emphasizes the sense of beauty and a "*dream coming true*," noting that there was "*energy everywhere and we were all going towards one direction, one aim, you know?*" It was a *feeling of extreme jubilation, I felt on the seventh sky, you know?*" Marya speaks to me with a passionate voice on the phone as I type her words furiously. "*It was incredible*," she says.

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<sup>268</sup> Since I was not expecting Marya to speak in so much detail, I did not have a tape recorder set up, thus I typed notes of our conversation while she spoke, as explained in the introduction chapter.



### Chapter 3

#### **Dialectics of vulnerability: From discomfort to despair**

*“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness. It was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity. It was the season of light, it was the season of darkness.”*

- Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

Of these words from Dickens, Alice Walker (2006) writes, “Perhaps they have been spoken, written, thought, an endless number of times throughout human history” (p. 1). I would add “felt” a number of times as well, for if the emotional ‘high’ near the beginnings of these strikes was intense for participants, so was the ‘low’ as time went on. Sometimes, these intense highs and lows occurred within the space of minutes from each other, or existed simultaneously. Alex, whose fuller story will be recounted in the next chapter, summarizes this well with the following sentence about her strike experience: “I feel like I could just give you like a dictionary of *every term* that describes an emotion.” Frustration, vulnerability, sadness, fear, euphoric, powerful, says Alex, “and *more*. Like *everything*.” Such intensities and dialectics of feeling followed these participants throughout their strike trajectory, for better or for worse. This chapter focuses on diverse forms of discomfort and despair -and a range of ‘difficult’ emotions in between- experienced by participants of these strikes, which I argue became more intense as time went on in part because of their dialectical dynamics. While Brené Brown (2012, 2015) does not employ the term ‘dialectics,’ I consider these the *dialectics of vulnerability*, because on an emotional level, “[v]ulnerability is not knowing victory or defeat, it’s understanding the necessity of both,” writes Brown (2012, p. 2).

Like Gene Fellner (2014), I am inspired by the Marxist-Hegelian notion of dialectics because it recognizes “the central importance of contradictions in social evolution, the interrelatedness of phenomena, the recursive and fluid interactions among social forces” (p. 1266), and more specifically that “contradictions saturate all aspects of social life and are the engine of the continuous transformative forces that characterize existence” (p. 1270). While in this chapter I focus on ‘contradictions,’ a later chapter (Chapter 6) will consider whether and what transformative forces were sparked from them. I consider participants’ more ‘difficult’ emotional experiences during these strikes, ranging from discomfort to despair, to have been

imbued with dialectical dynamics because they were laden with various seeming contradictions. Yet since I am further influenced by Fellner's critique of the restrictions of Marxist-Hegelian notion of dialectics,<sup>269</sup> in using the term 'dialectics' I do so with the acknowledgment that there can be multiple dialectics functioning at once, multiple forms power flowing within any situation, multiple forms of emotions within one moment or human being.<sup>270</sup> I refer to the emotional dynamics depicted from the stories in this chapter as 'dialectical' because they suggest that when so many 'contradictory,' diverse and intense feelings are intermingled and constantly changing, even the discomforts can end up feeling good, though sometimes confusing -perhaps especially so for a culture not habituated to the simultaneous experience of 'contradictory' emotions.<sup>271</sup> I also refer to these emotional dynamics as 'dialectical' because the very same sense of a historical moment and its related collective-oriented emotional highs that occurred near the beginning of these strikes (or that in the case of 2005, stayed as expectations for those who lived 2007) soon enough led to failed expectations, dashed hopes, and for some, increased ambivalence due to diverse and increasingly disappointing power dynamics internal and external to the movement. These tended to crush their new existentially-imbued collective-oriented feelings, in part because the associated sense of urgency left little time for building interpersonal support or 'emotional reflexivity.'

The concept of emotional reflexivity is proposed by Debra King (2005, p. 151-154) as an important consideration for activists. King fuses Alain Touraine and Arlie Hochschild's works to

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<sup>269</sup> More specifically, Fellner (2014) contends that in order to surpass the dualism, determinism, and lack of emotionality implied by Marxist dialectics, and "without abandoning the goal of a better world" (p. 1267), the concept of "dialectics" needs to be expanded to "multilectics" by fusing Marxist ontology with that of Norman Mailer's novel *The Executioner's Song*, notably a depiction of human beings who "are infused with multiple contradictions and irrationalities" who "struggle to make sense of a world that often seems devoid of reason" (p. 1266). In other words, he proposes a broader concept of dialectic that "recognizes the multiple and nuanced worlds in which we live and rejects dichotomies in favor of multiple interacting conditions of social life" (p. 1275), the "multidimensionality of social actors, and the many interlocking worlds that we all take part in" (p. 1273); Fellner even points to the existential realm and how awareness of death can affect us beyond our role within the means of production. By focusing in depth on the existential qualms, emotions, lives, and characters of my interviewees in this dissertation, I hope to have responded to some extent to Fellner's plea to fuse Marx and Mailer.

<sup>270</sup> Thus when speaking of 'contradictions' I am not necessarily suggesting that certain emotions are 'bad' or 'good' and thus objective opposites, but rather that certain emotions are generally perceived to be 'positive' or 'negative' by Western society and (sometimes) by participants. Later in chapter 6, by considering the possible transformation created by these dialectical dynamics in these interviewees after the strike, I seek to counter the idea that certain emotions are necessarily 'negative.'

<sup>271</sup> Interestingly, research suggests that some cultures tend to view emotions more dialectically, i.e. to view emotions considered to be opposites (e.g., sad, happy) as compatible with each other than other cultures (Schimmack, Shigehiro, & Diener, 2002).

highlight how activists are prone to go through a process of “deintegration” as they “separate out from society’s dominant norms and values.” Through their creative and reflective opposition to dominant ideologies activists can experience “a level of conflict or dissonance at both the emotional and cognitive levels” as they have to “constantly negate the hegemonic messages and norms that permeate society.” It is particularly complicated to do so at the emotional level, she adds, because the rules to manage feeling are “implicit in any ideological stance”<sup>272</sup> thus often “you are not even aware that you are acquiring the emotions associated with them.” King thus contends that “to achieve and sustain an activist identity, this dissonance needs to be overcome,” as such experiences among activists “often lead to burnout, withdrawal or cynicism.” King thus argues for the need for a greater emphasis on emotional reflexivity. She seeks to incorporate, on the one hand, Hochschild’s emphasis on the emotional work needed to feel differently than what is socially expected by dominant norms, and on the other hand, Touraine’s notion of deconstructing and problematizing the mainstream (emotional) framing. Specifically, King argues that to be able to sustain the work required to de-integrate both emotionally and ideologically from the mainstream (and thus to sustain long-term activism), activists need to reframe “messages, situations or emotions in ways that are not aligned to the dominant framing rules.” Therefore, activists need to “become skilled in practices of emotional reflexivity and have a supportive emotional culture within which to explore the emotional and cognitive aspects of the framing process,” through a community that is “external to their main activist social movement organizations.” King’s focus on emotional reflexivity can help to explain why even those who had an affinity group of close, like-minded friends with whom to share their emotions did not always sustain their desire to be involved in student activism, and why those who did not have any interpersonal support within the movement seemed to fare the worst, especially when ambivalence and dissonance set in.

Indeed, I suggest that the strike represents a moment during which such emotional reflexivity is particularly necessary, as the diversity of seemingly contradictory emotions makes them difficult to disentangle, and their intense nature during the strike particularly confusing and despairing. King’s (2005) focus on emotional reflexivity is helpful for explaining the more

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<sup>272</sup> Hochschild (1979, p. 566, cited in King, 2005, p. 154)

difficult emotional dynamics of these strikes.<sup>273</sup> Participants revealed insufficient (individual or collective) moments and structures during the strike to engage in emotional reflexivity, alongside disenchantment, anxiety, depression, sadness, burnout,<sup>274</sup> or regret bordering on shame (as seen with Simon in Chapter 1), to name a few of the uncomfortable or despairing emotions experienced, often alongside exhaustion. In comparison to the ample room for intellectual internal critique and collective sharing of positive emotions (during protests, for example), such despairing emotions tended to be processed in a more solitary and individualistic way (or with a small group or dyad), and there was little (especially collective) time to discuss or recover from the emotional impacts of disappointing power dynamics -thus little time for emotional reflexivity.

More specifically, I suggest that dialectical emotional dynamics of despair in particular were more intense for those who were active organizers before and during the strike, or who were very involved in the strike's actions, as these organizers had higher expectations, more to do, had invested more of themselves, were more often involved in tense situations on picket lines and protests, thus were more likely to encounter oppressive dynamics within and external to the movement, yet had even less time to reflect upon this complex and intense mix of emotions. King's (2005) focus on dissonance provides a possible lens to add that such organizers also had a greater likelihood for emotional and cognitive dissonance during the strike, because their ideologies were more dramatically different from the dominant ones.<sup>275</sup> I contend that the dialectical dynamics of despair became especially clear as the strike progressed, or as the years

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<sup>273</sup> I prefer this to Brown and Pickerill's (2009, p. 25) broader yet more individual-oriented conceptualization of emotional reflexivity: "to include being consciously aware of emotions, of paying attention to emotions (individually and collectively, such as during meetings)" as well as "skillful emotional self-management" and "practical acts such as constructing collective rituals as well as 'mindfulness' -drawing upon the work of Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh to develop particular skills (often with the help of meditation) of being consciously self-aware of the present moment and of our feelings, and to act non-judgementally [sic]. Emotional sustainability, in this context, is the ability to understand one's emotional responses and process them in order to continue to act effectively as an activist."

<sup>274</sup> Traditionally associated with professional fields in the human services or the for-profit industry, Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) describe burnout as "an overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment" (p. 399). Yet the term 'burnout' has recently been documented among activists, including those at the college level (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011; Renschler, 2008). As will be seen in this dissertation, the term is used in different ways by different participants. For example, Pierre below will speak of suicidal ideation yet will clearly negate any experience of 'burnout.' Such semantic distinctions are thus not the focus of this dissertation, since clearly participants interpreted labels in different ways; interesting for my purposes here is that with different varieties of words, many conveyed a general sentiment of discomfort or despair.

<sup>275</sup> Like Chatterton (2006, p. 260), I do not see the point of playing into "ontological divisions such as activist and non-activist" nor to make judgments of these; rather my purpose here is to point out patterns.

progressed in the case of those who participated in more than one strike. Indeed, one of the reasons I have left this more difficult aspect of emotional intensity to this second chapter is to give a sense of the general chronological emotional trajectories of the strike. Thus building on Bhéreur-Lagounaris et al. (2015)'s affective study of the 2012 strike, I propose not just that there was an important dosage of both positive and negative emotional experiences, but that these were tightly and dialectically related to each other and emerged differently through time.<sup>276</sup> In doing so, I am also complicating Collins' (2001) emphasis on the catharsis from negative to positive emotions during moments of collective effervescence, suggesting that sometimes positive emotions led to negative ones, or when experienced simultaneously and in such diversity, they were confusing, thus rather than catharsis, ensued despair.

#### JULIE: FROM "UN PETIT NUAGE" TO "VIOLENCE"

Julie's case is unique among the stories told in this chapter in that she was not a main organizer before the strike began, yet since 2004 she had been involved to some degree in mobilizing, and during the 2005 strike she lived at the CEGEP. Thus in her case, *despair* was not as strongly felt during the strike as others, though her feelings of *discomfort* were more pronounced. We left Julie in the previous chapter in the midst of her story about the fatigued morning in 2005 when the collective gently carried her ("portée") through her arrival at the demonstration at the Old Port, during which the most important feeling was "ce sentiment d'être ensemble, de vivre ensemble, de construire ensemble." What followed for Julie provides an evocative example of how such positive collective-oriented emotional experiences could be suddenly overridden by one negative experience -in this case, the most intense emotion for her both during the strike and the interview. Once Julie arrived at the Old Port with her boyfriend Marc-André, their exhaustion from the sleepless eve of cooking finally took its toll, so they spread their blanket out on the ground and laid on it to rest. "On a passé la journée je pense, une bonne partie de la journée au, au Port!" recounts Julie. "Les garçons, euh, qui étaient les plus jeunes au cégep, y'avaient commencé à se faire des boucliers, à se prendre des bâtons qui traînaient dans des matériaux de construction, pis à se faire des armes, pis faisaient comme des

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<sup>276</sup> However, it is difficult and nor is it my purpose here to clearly delineate a particular and unanimously shared point in time separating one more emotionally pleasurable phase of the strikes to a less pleasurable one.

jeux de rôles, là, des *Dungeons* pis tout!” adds Julie. “Mais en même temps éventuellement la police quand elle s’est resserrée, [ils] ont perçu ça comme des armes, faque là, y’ont comme répondu plus sévèrement!” continues Julie. “Pis les étudiants qui avaient ça [les bâtons] bein, considéraient que, eux, c’tait des armes défensives que y’avaient, pis ils se sont mis à confronter!”

Before Julie knew it, there was “toute une *zizanie* euhm, chaos total, on a commencé à, à se diriger vers le métro. Y’avait l’anti-émeute qui courait parfois, la foule qui courait, des gens qui disaient de *pas* courir, eum, des gens qui disaient de courir, pi-i-i-i-s bon on essayait de garder un certain calme pour qu’il y aille personne qui se fasse piétiner aussi au bout du compte!” Her boyfriend Marc-André had been making shields and sticks, “pis il s’est mis à, à confronter un policier!” recounts Julie. “Moi je courais avec des amis en avant!” At some point Julie turned around “pis j’ai vu que y’était par terre en train de se faire taper dessus à coup de matraque pis à coups de pied, de façon assez violente! Faque je me suis mis à pleurer, c’était... c’était atroce,” recalls Julie. “Je, je comprenais pas euhhh cette violence-là qu’il pouvait y avoir, pis je comprenais pas pourquoi euh y’était dans cette situation-là.” Julie was “en pleurs” with two friends holding her; the scene even attracted the attention of a journalist who filmed it. “Pis y’ont diffusé ça à la télévision, faque une heure après j’ai reçu un appel de ma mère qui était complètement paniquée,” she says. “Pis là j’étais comme « Ah oui mais.. non c’est correct maman, tout va bien, » mais moi j’étais absolument *traumatisée!*”

Julie had already seen confrontations with police at demonstrations over the course of the previous months, “mais jamais avec une aussi grande conscience,” she recounts. If she had been scared when the police were chasing them, what really overwhelmed her was her concern for her boyfriend and the others who were arrested. “Quand on est revenu au cégep ce soir-là, euhhh, lui y’était au poste de police, pis là moi je savais pas ce qui se passait quand t’allais au poste de police, je savais pas qu’est-ce que ça voulait *dire*, pis j-j-j-j-e trouvais ça absolument *terrible*,” says Julie scratching the side of her face -reminding me of Audrey, another interviewee who scratched her face when recounting uncomfortable moments. “Je pensais qu’il y avait une catastrophe qui venait de se, qui venait de se passer, là, en fait. J’arrivais pas à arrêter de pleurer pis j’étais complètement fatiguée parce que j’avais pas dormi la *veille*.” With tears and fatigue, Julie was in a panic and imagined: was everyone who was arrested getting beaten and tortured by

the police, as she had seen in the movies? She chuckles at herself during the interview when she says this.<sup>277</sup>

Luckily, at the CEGEP there were some older students “qui étaient des militants beaucoup plus *aguerris* aussi,” recounts Julie, “qui m’ont pris à part, qui m’ont calmée, qui m’ont expliqué qu'est-ce qui allait se passer, qui m’ont dit que-e-e les gens qui avaient été arrêté-e-s allaient être relâchés euh comme, après la nuit, pis ça, pis ça m’a calmé vraiment beaucoup!” These older students reassured her that many people had already been in prison, that the police weren’t necessarily nice, but they would not beat up the prisoners nor torture them. “Je pense que sans ces deux personnes-là, pis sans le fait que ces deux personnes-là aient eu *l’expérience*, j’aurais pas été capable de me calmer tant que j’aurais pas *revu* euh mon copain.” Julie’s experience was marked by the fact that she returned to a space where she was surrounded by other activists –the occupied space of the CEGEP- thus her interaction with other activists and the opportunities to express difficult emotions was perhaps greater than those who simply went home at the end of a long day.

Despite the calming effect of these supportive students, as she tells the story six years later during our interview Julie says she is re-experiencing the sadness of that day, albeit not as intensely as the actual event: “Je me souviens, comme, comment je me sentais petite et défaite.” From feeling that morning that together we can change the world, to feeling that evening small and unraveled, the episode in some ways reflects how violently, in the space of a few hours, in the intense and quick-moving cradle of a general unlimited strike, we can sway from feeling so high to so low, from feeling we can transcend our individual selves and change the world to suddenly feeling undone and smaller than we ever have been before, in other words, from what Dupuis-Déri (2016) distinguishes as the “pouvoir avec” of collective decision-making to the “pouvoir sur” of police force.

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<sup>277</sup> Indeed while recounting the scenes of the previous paragraphs, Julie often smiles and giggles, reminiscent of Alan Wong (2009, p. 250) when he catches himself using humour or laughing in an interview in order to hide his vulnerability. Indeed as mentioned in Chapter 1, I would often encounter such self-mocking from other my other interviewees, particularly female ones, which I suggest is partly because they were more likely to express intense emotions or self-deprecating comments than the male interviewees, yet also because they were more likely to suffer from breaking with the ‘masculine emotional habitus’ of the movement, and thus had to mock or lighten the tone of stories about traumatic or embarrassing experiences with laughter.

## Benefits of discomforts

Indeed, after that experience with the police, Julie's views about police violence were transformed;<sup>278</sup> it was just one of many norms that would thaw and unravel for Julie throughout the occupation, as winter slowly turned to spring, and as discomforting experiences transformed her -sometimes for the long haul, sometimes only in the short-term. "Je rencontrais des gens qui avaient des idées politiques avancées pis qui voulaient déconstruire euh la société bourgeoise comme elle se présentait." At the CEGEP, there were film projections, discussion nights, often from an anarchist libertarian perspective, "pour euh stimuler les réflexions euh sur les normes, justement," recounts Julie. But there were also "les queers, y'avaient les écolos [...] qui étaient toutes là avec leur grain de sel sur comment modifier ton, nos comportements!" During our interview, Julie often uses an expression I have never heard before, "je me suis faite violence à moi-même," to signify how during the strike she challenged herself with ideas and habits that she was not necessarily comfortable with, as they did not necessarily feel natural nor pleasant. This melting of norms that she had previously taken for granted meant "une confrontation constante de soi avec le groupe, là, je pense."

I am initially a bit surprised by Julie's use of the words 'confrontation' and 'violence,' but I soon realize it is not necessarily negative (and potentially related to her knowledge of Durkheim).<sup>279</sup> "Je trouvais que c'était absolument important! Parce que y'avait toute cette idéologie-là qui était autour," explains Julie. "Je me faisais violence pour transformer la *norme* qui est intériorisée depuis l'enfance, dans le fond." In other words, "c'tait tout le temps une réflexion, une tension, ah oui il faut que je sois, je veux m'intégrer au groupe, faque il faut que je change la façon que je le *fais*! Mais après, pourquoi je le fais, puis est-ce que je trouve ça vraiment mieux?" While there was a desire to fit into the group, there was also an internal intellectual process that fed her curiosity. Despite inner doubts and physical discomforts, these questions and reflections about the norms that had been inculcated in her through family and schooling -norms about education, eating, even how she blew her nose- motivated Julie to keep

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<sup>278</sup> In the interview Julie had not clarified how her view of the police changed, so in an email she later explained that she saw the police as more hostile after that event, and she also started questioning the difference between legitimacy and legality. "La notion de criminalité s'est relativisée dans mon esprit," she wrote in the email.

<sup>279</sup> Durkheim (1947) -borrowing once again from Mauss- writes that "a very intense social life always does a sort of *violence* to the organism, as well as to the individual consciousness, which interferes with its normal functioning. Therefore it can last only a limited length of time [*italics are mine*]" (p. 227). As mentioned in Chapter 2 as well as below, Julie cited Durkheim to explain (the short-lived nature of) her positive emotions during the strike.



going back to the occupation, she says. “La remise en question des normes” was in her strike experience “quelque chose de marquant,” explains Julie; it had a long-term impact on her life, and she saw this experience of “questionner notre rapport au monde” as a precursor to “transformer les choses.”<sup>280</sup> Her words echo those of Audre Lorde (1984), who writes: “To put myself on the line to do what had to be done at any place and time was so difficult, yet absolutely crucial, and not to do so was the most awful death. And putting yourself on the line is like killing a piece of yourself, in the sense that you have to kill, end, destroy something familiar and dependable, so that something new can come, in ourselves, in our world.”

Like other interviewees, Julie is able to remember traumatic or difficult experiences alongside the more idyllic ones, and to criticize elements of the strike while praising others. In this sense, Julie’s use of the term ‘me faire violence’ is a reflection of the dialectic experience the strike represented for her: a voluntary acculturation of sorts, simultaneously positive and negative, a complex experience in which the epiphanies of new norms came with the drawbacks of some physical and psychological discomforts; an honest reflection about how opening up to new ways of living is not necessarily always simply pleasurable in the short-term and that can open up a new way of interacting with the world in the long-term.<sup>281</sup> Maybe merely by attending CEGEP some of those experiences could have happened, she concedes, but “là je pense que y’a eu un *condensé*, comme un *mini-laboratoire* rapide des possibilités normatives, qu’on pouvait déplacer.” And sure, she might have met activist students if there hadn’t been a strike, “mais je pense pas que je les aurais autant rencontrés, pis je pense pas qu’il y aurait eu une *concentration* aussi grande de gens qui s’inter-influencent.” The strike and more specifically “the espace ouvert”, the collective living space that the occupation brought to life, “a clairement accentué la volonté, ou accéléré euhhm la découverte!” For example, “je me souviens d’avoir vécu au cégep, euhhh jusqu’à un point que ça nous apparaissait être à *nous!*” They took turns cleaning and making meals, and people who were not students lived there with them, recalls Julie. “On rencontrait beaucoup euh des *itinérants* aussi, des punks, y’avaient des punks qui restaient qui étaient venus habiter au cégep avec nous! [...] Ça me fascinait de voir à quel point euh ils semblaient plus responsables que nous!”

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<sup>280</sup> Keara introduced me to this quote in her diaries.

<sup>281</sup> The long-term will be discussed in a later chapter.

## The lows from the high

One homeless individual in particular soon became Julie's friend: his name was Jonathan. "C'tait un être plein d'amour," recalls Julie. Yet her fond feelings towards Jonathan did not persist beyond the borderlines of the strike. "Même je lui avais donné mon numéro de téléphone! Parce que-e il voulait pouvoir nous recontacter!" Yet when he did call her parents' house, "j'avais.. senti une violation de mon espace! Comme quoi que dans le fond c'tait pas devenu vraiment mon ami pis j'avais gardé un préjugé envers lui! Pis... bein des fois je le revoyais à l'école! Pis c'tait vraiment... bien! Mais qu'il m'ait appelé chez moi j'avais.. mal *réagi*." A similar event happened again one year after the strike, when Julie ran into Jonathan again, "pis j'tais vraiment contente de le revoir! Pis y'avait voulu me prendre dans ses bras! Je m'étais.. éloignée, pis il l'a vraiment mal pris, pis y'a juste faite comme... « Je [ne] te parle plus! » Pis y'est parti! Pis j'ai senti que je l'avais vraiment offensé!" Yet during the occupation, "c'tait une personne pour qui j'avais vraiment plein *d'amour*, si on veut! Plein d'amitié! Pis par la suite ça s'est euh.. estompé, effacé," says Julie, nodding. The limitations of Julie's friendship with Jonathan reveal again the dialectical and thus confusing dynamics of student strikes: they appear suddenly with full intensity, unveiling new ways of thinking and feeling, yet soon disappear into thin air, leaving behind discomforts and emotions that we can not always reproduce nor convey in words. Julie proposes an explanation for this: "J'peux utiliser un vocabulaire théorique?"

"Mais oui!" I answer.

"Si on pense à [Émile] Durkheim.. làà y'a le moment d'effervescence dans lequel y'a les normes qui sont [...] soit réaffirmées ou soit transcendées, dépassées, pis que y'a une modification qui se fait! Pis j'ai l'impression que ce moment de grève-là, c'est un moment d'effervescence.<sup>282</sup> C'est un moment où est-ce que l'espace public *s'ouvre*, pis qu'on va essayer de dépasser certaines normes!" says Julie. "Y'en a qui vont se réaffirmer [...] à l'intérieur de ce moment-là, mais qui pourront pas dépasser le moment aussi."<sup>283</sup> That's how Julie explains what happened with Jonathan: "C'tait dans un espace public, dans lequel y'avait plus les normes

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<sup>282</sup> At first I wondered if Julie's knowledge of sociological theorists such as Durkheim influenced her view of her own experiences, yet that is precisely what Buehler (2012) suggests is necessary: for scholars to participate in supposed experiences of effervescence in order to more adequately evaluate Durkheim's theory surrounding effervescence.

<sup>283</sup> Thus the subsequent disappointments, which I would argue is missing from both Collins' (2001) and Summers-Effler's theorizations.

habituelles, c'était beaucoup plus facile de, de faire le pont d'un à l'autre, je pense!" Yet disappointment followed for Julie when she could not keep up the same feelings towards Jonathan once the strike ended. While Julie interprets this experience through the sometimes temporary effect of Durkheim's notion of effervescence, other theorists have taken this further. Summers-Effler (2002) would argue that Julie's reaction to Jonathan might be explained by less emotional energy from her peer group once the strike was over to outweigh the emotional energy from the class privileges of the system; and the way that long-term interpersonal relations (or the lack thereof) can play such a key role in maintaining emotional energy. On a similar note, King (2005, p.154) notes that because "the dominant framing process is constantly being reinforced, reiterated and socially valued," individuals might not be aware that they are acquiring the emotions associated with that dominant frame, which could apply to Julie's case after the strike, especially since Julie did not maintain her same group of friends when it ended -a story for a later chapter.

As mentioned above, Julie is somewhat different than the other organizers I interviewed: She does not recall feeling any "grands moments de désespoir" during the strike. "Je n'me souviens pas d'avoir été démotivée, là, parce que j'tais juste vraiment trop excitée par le moment historique qui se passait devant moi!" she says, shaking her head to emphasize her dramatic tone, followed by a smile and a giggle. Maybe it was because she was not one of the organizers but rather still just observing and participating, she says –and still discovering and exploring her own political ideas- "que je portais pas le poids de la réussite de l'[assemblée générale], je portais pas le poids du fait qu'il fallait que telle proposition passe, ou que telle action passe pis fonctionne, je sentais pas autant de stress que *d'autres*, tsé." There was the exception, of course, of the day her boyfriend was beaten by the police, but she feels she got through it precisely thanks to "la motivation des autres, là. L'assurance que, qui peut être emmenée par.. le groupe." This presence and support of others, "le *lien* qu'il peut y avoir avec les autres, le fait de *pas* se sentir *seule*, m'a permis de passer à travers ce moment-là! Parce que si je m'étais sentie seule par exemple que j'aurais pas, j'étais pas retournée au cégep avec les autres, que j'avais pas eu des ami-e-s autour, j'pense queeee j'aurais passé une nuit absolument *atroce*, à me demander quelles choses terribles sont en train d'arriver!"

However, Julie did feel some anger and "déception" towards the end, after the famous 'entente' that the FEUQ and the FECQ signed with the government on April 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2005 without

the CASSÉE being present at the negotiating table.<sup>284</sup> According to Julie, “l’entente était pas convenable,” because the 2005 strike had a greater “puissance”<sup>285</sup> than previous strikes that achieved better agreements.<sup>286</sup> As a result, Julie recounts feeling that maybe they didn’t have the “prégnance” that she had thought. Her feeling of collective empowerment -in the sense of the ability to influence power -was waning:

“Ç’a été un moment de déception! Par rapport justement à ce que j’avais vu au début de l’année, de la puissance ou de la portée politique qu’on pouvait avoir en assemblée générale euh, dans cette instance-là, comme l’idéal que j’avais eu l’impression de voir au début de l’automne 2004! À la fin de la grève de 2005, euh il s’était un peu estompé.”

Now that the movement had died down across the province<sup>287</sup> the local dynamics were also changing. If throughout a large part of the strike, “on avait une entente de respect de ce qu’on faisait, avec l’administration,” now the CEGEP administration asked the fire department to come tell the students that the occupation constituted a fire hazard. It was probably the penultimate week of their strike when, recalls Julie, “il commençait à avoir des tensions plus... importantes avec la police.” Soon enough, there was “un autre assaut de la police, euh, sur l’occupation!” Julie names what happened next “les trois jours de guerre civile”: for three days in

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<sup>284</sup> According to *Le Devoir* newspaper, “L’entente intervenue entre le gouvernement et les deux fédérations prévoit le retour des 103 millions à partir de 2006-2007. L’année actuelle est complètement oubliée, tandis que 70 millions seront réinvestis l’an prochain” (Bourgault-Côté, 2005, 11 avril).

<sup>285</sup> Again I found my initial instinct to translate “puissance” into “strength” was not that accurate, so I decided to stay with the original term.

<sup>286</sup> Unlike Simon, but similar to Marie, at the time of the 2005 strike Julie did not understand why there was “cette opposition là qui était aussi forte” between the ASSÉ and the federations [the FECQ and the FEUQ]. “J’avais pas beaucoup de connaissance non plus des dynamiques politiques,” so at the time she had asked herself, “pourquoi on n’est pas uni face à un ennemi commun? Pourquoi faut qu’on, qu’on se déchire sur la place publique?” She had friends who were closer to the FECQ and she thought the two poles were complementary precisely because they had different tactics. So while Julie felt “déçue” by the agreement, “en même temps, je comprenais que y’a.. l’ASSÉ avait pas été inclus à la table à cause d’un move qui avait été fait... la journée où est-ce que l’ASSÉ devait siéger à la table,” she says, referring to the occupation of Minister of Education’s office just *before* one of the negotiation meetings with the government in early March (Chouinard & Chouinard, 2005, 10 mars). If initially she had been disappointed in the ASSÉ for organizing that occupation, when she later found out that it had been students from her CEGEP, “j’avais été vraiment fâchée”: They should have at least occupied the minister’s office *during* the negotiation to prolong it, but not *before*, she argues. “J’en voulais aux gens qui avaient fait ce move-là parce que je pensais qu’ils, je me suis dit qu’ils venaient de tirer dans le pied de l’ASSÉ!” -quickly realizing her mistake, she corrects herself- “de la CASSÉE en fait!”

<sup>287</sup> Only four days after the government agreement with the FEUQ and the FECQ, the number of strikers had been reduced by more than half, reported *Le Soleil* newspaper (Ballivy & Thériault, 2005, April 7).

a row, police and students threw projectiles at each other; the riot police were at the doors of the CEGEP taking down the barricade; then the students would rebuild an even-stronger barricade to compensate. Students threw various projectiles, such as beer bottles, chairs, and tables to respond when the police threw “des gaz, des balles de plastique, j’pense,” recalls Julie. So at the end of those three days, striking students at Cégep du Vieux-Montréal students started wondering if they should stop the occupation. “On n’a plus de légitimité, on n’a plus de poids, on n’a plus de puissance derrière nous,” Julie recalls the dialogue going. To complicate matters, the three student executives who were legally responsible for the decisions of the student association “étaient sommés légalement de mettre fin à l’occupation,” and if they didn’t they would face “des charges vraiment lourdes” and the student association could be prosecuted. The strike was dying across the province, with only a few CEGEPs still on strike, recalls Julie. “Quand on était seuls, ça valait plus la peine.”<sup>288</sup>

Yet homeless individuals who had previously been evicted from squats started to say, “Bein là c’est votre squat, il faut le garder, nous on s’est déjà fait évincé, euh la police a pas d’affaire à nous chasser d’ici, ils vont faire venir les pompiers.” Now that there were fewer students in the *Conseil de grève* meetings, these arguments were taking more and more space in the discussions. “Ç’a créé des tensions” and “un malaise, là, dans, dans le groupe” as some wanted to continue while others wanted to end it. Along with the falling numbers and withered feelings of collective empowerment came increased frustration for Julie. She felt it was time to just let it go, and she was “enragée” at those whom she felt were “alarmistes” and considered the occupation to be a squat of an abandoned building.

By April 11 2005, the media publicized that even the CASSÉE congress was inviting its “membres à considérer un repli stratégique.”<sup>289</sup> The next day, on April 12, 2005, *La Presse* newspaper stated: “Même les irréductibles qui résistaient à l’offre du ministre de l’Éducation Jean-Marc Fournier, comme le cégep du Vieux Montréal ou la faculté de sciences humaines de l’UQAM, ont voté hier en faveur d’un retour en classe.”<sup>290</sup> Julie recalls that her general assembly voted to end the strike because “les trois personnes qui étaient sommées légalement de mettre fin

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<sup>288</sup> Only the Collège Lionel-Groulx was still on strike, according to *La Presse* (Allard, 2005, 12 avril).

<sup>289</sup> In other words, despite rejecting the agreement that the FEUQ and the FECQ had signed with the government, they invited CASSÉE members to vote to end the strike (Bourgault-Côté, 2005, 11 avril)

<sup>290</sup> Allard (2005, 12 avril)

à l'occupation avaient quand-même des charges vraiment *lourdes!*" and "le mouvement s'tait essoufflée." Maybe if all the student associations that were members of the CASSÉE had decided to pursue the strike despite the agreement with the government, the strike would have continued at the Cégep du Vieux-Montréal, suggests Julie, but there was surely a feeling across the province that went something like: "Bein là, y'a une entente faque, pourquoi on continue à se battre?" Here the relevance of the way that the generalized and thus 'historic' feel of the strike motivated students, and the subsequent disillusionment when it was no longer generalized, suggests that the will to continue to strike (and the "pouvoir avec") within one assembly was no longer sufficient as a motor of effervescence and collective-oriented emotions, as it was no longer accompanied by other assemblies and student associations across the province. Things no longer felt the same as the Cégep du Vieux-Montréal went from being an avant-garde to being the last bastion standing.

When students finally started entering their CEGEP again, Julie and others who had occupied it had "l'impression que y'avait des *intrus chez nous* [...] c'tait redevenu un espace impersonnel en fait," recalls Julie. "Ça avait été *troublant*. Comme de revenir à la réalité." Thus in the space of weeks, the strike had gone from feeling "sur un petit nuage" to a troubling reality. Yet it was only after the strike that Julie experienced the most difficult post-strike emotions, when she was intimidated by the very people she had bonded with most -a story for a later chapter. Turning now to Élise's story, which also starts in 2005, allows us to contrast Julie's experience with the story of someone who experienced two strikes -the second one as a main organizer- and who maintained long-term friendships throughout.<sup>291</sup>

#### ÉLISE: FROM "UN VASTE RÊVE" TO "UN NUAGE NOIR"

We left Élise in the previous chapter in the midst of her first and only strike day in 2005, where she and others chained shut the doors of their high school after successfully mobilizing more than half of students in their high school to vote at their general assembly. Later that same day, they joined the 'national'<sup>292</sup> demonstration, "une des plus grosses manifs que j'ai jamais vues, là!" Yet in her diary, she soon highlights the physical and emotional fatigue that often accompanies the intensity of the strike:

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<sup>291</sup> Julie's story will continue in Chapter 6.

<sup>292</sup> In the context of Quebec, the word 'national' refers to Quebec.

*“Nous nous sommes rendus, morts de fatigue à la manif de la FECQ et de la FEUQ (avec finalement un assez immense contingent de la CASSÉE), d’une taille impressionnante. Nous avons chanté des chansons avant que la manif commence [... J’ai] passé le reste de la manif à m’obstiner ou à jaser de choses et d’autres avec [Francis]. Ce qui était bien intéressant, pas seulement pour la compagnie, mais le lendemain soir, il m’a fait brailler comme une conne devant mon ordi en me convainquant par MSN interposé<sup>293</sup> que toutes nos actions avaient été inutiles” (Élise’s diary, April 5 2005).*

This diary entry begins with a jovial affect then ends in tears, another example of the dialectical roller-coaster of striking emotions, as high expectations become quickly disappointed. Élise cried and wrote those words the day after her high school strike, *before* the agreement had been made with the government, suggesting the despair and emotional fatigue that was already entering the collective imagination. More disappointments were to come. In her diary she wrote that despite it being in the midst of the strike, her trip to Orlando:

*“a quand-même eu comme mérite de m’épargner la dramatique débâcle de la mobilisation à JFP la semaine dernière. J’aurais pleuré littéralement. Pour une raison obscure, une AG bordélique a voté deux jours de grève où personne ne s’est présenté [sic]” (Élise’s diary, April 5 2005).*

Indeed when Élise got back from Orlando, things had changed: she heard from others that only few students had showed up to picket, and she could see with her own eyes that the mobilization committee had become an exclusive ‘clique’ of sorts. During these last two weeks of strike mobilizing at her school “c’était beaucoup moins agréable dans le comité de mobilisation. Comme y’avait un petit noyau de 4-5 personnes que, qui étaient eux-mêmes comme déjà des ami-e-s vraiment proches *avant* euh avant la mobilisation, qui avaient un peu comme

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<sup>293</sup> For those who are too young to remember MSN chatting, Élise is likely here referring to the MSN messenger online chatting through Hotmail.com.

pris contrôle de qu'est-ce qui se passait," she says, "qui retenaient un peu les informations." Some students who had been in the *Comité de mobilisation* "depuis le début ou qui commençaient à s'impliquer, surtout du monde plus jeune" and who wanted to help "se faisaient dire « oh non, euh c'est correct, » euh « on s'en occupe, » ou bien « no-non y'a rien à faire, » alors que y'avait des tâches qu'y'auraient ben pu faire, tsé? pis ils se sentaient vraiment exclus de, de la dynamique, là!" Nonetheless for Élise the entire experience of 2005 was "relativement positif [sic] dans le sens que j'avais appris vraiment *pleins* de choses là-dedans, pis j'avais pas *vécu* la période.. où est-ce que.. ça l'a commencé à moins bien aller [...] Faque... c'est vraiment *plus* resté une période positive, pis quelque chose que je voulais *répéter*."

And repeat it she soon would in 2007, in but it would not turn out quite the same.

### **2005 inspires and intimidates**

By September 2005, Élise was enrolled as a student at the Cégep de Saint-Laurent, but she didn't get involved in the student association right away. She soon made friends with "une gang de geeks de jeux de rôle" and spent a lot of time with them. One of the students in that group had been very involved in the student association since the 2005 strike. Already, the student movement was "quelque chose qui m'intéressait *beaucoup*," says Élise, "en grande partie à cause de mon *implication* en 2005." The historical heritage of 2005 inspired Élise, yet it also *intimidated* her, because at the Cégep de Saint-Laurent, "y'avait une asso *forte*."

I am surprised that she felt this despite having already participated in a successful strike at her high school in 2005. So I ask: "Pourquoi ça t'intimidait?"

At first she answers "Je sais pas!" Then right after she adds, laughing, "J'suis une personne facilement intimidable!!!" Élise tries to explain in more detail why she felt so intimidated. "C'était toutes des gens qui avaient vécu la grève de 2005, euh, au complet, tsé, y'avaient été en grève pendant *deux mois*, là!" It seemed to Élise that those who had lived 2005 were "toutes super *proches* les uns des autres, à cause de cette expérience-là," and they had "une pensée politique super *développée* pis super *cohérente*." And "y'en avait beaucoup qui étaient très *éloquents* là-dedans, qui étaient capables de *bien* exprimer leurs idées," she continues, "pis, euh... qui étaient *gentils sociables, beaux*, euh, toute le kit, là!" We both laugh. "Je me trouvais vraiment *pas* assez, assez *cool*, euh, pour participer, euh, dans mon association étudiante." The intensity of and sense of 2005 as historic in this way held capacity to reproduce intense emotions during later strikes in a dialectic way: here, simultaneously inspiring and intimidating Élise,



highlighting in turn the human ability to feel a dialectical mix of emotions, and sometimes grow stronger from them or progress into new terrain. Indeed Élise's feelings would soon enough transform from intimidation to inspiration, then to friendship.

At the first CEGEP general assembly of the fall semester of 2006, some of Élise's friends from the "club du jeu de rôle" had nominated themselves to the student association's executive committees, and since no one was interested in the *Comité information*, Élise nominated herself and got elected.<sup>294</sup> The intimidation she felt would slowly be transformed into friendship and a sense of belonging. For after that first general assembly, "la première fois que j'suis rentrée dans le local de l'association" is described as one of the first "beaux moments" for Élise. Two 2005 strike veterans, Chloé and Fabienne, "m'avaient accueillie, euh, super gentiment, pis m'avaient donné des toasts au beurre de peanut, pis, euh, y'avaient commencé à m'expliquer comme, comment ça fonctionnait," and they "faisaient des *efforts* pour comme, pour m'inclure dans les discussions de groupe pis me demander qu'est-ce que j'en pensais," she recalls.<sup>295</sup> With this warm welcome, Élise got increasingly involved in her student association. As time progressed, she had many conversations with students who were involved in the association and "qui avaient des positions politiques auxquelles j'avais jamais vraiment été exposée avant!" The executives would read "pleins de textes d'analyse euh... politique, euh super intéressants," on topics like anti-imperialism. "Dans le fond, bein tsé, c'est un peu mes premières, euh, expositions à des idées anarchistes," says Élise, describing those days as "quand-même une belle période d'activité intellectuelle, mettons!"

### **Hopes amidst tension in 2007**

Soon enough, "le dégel a été annoncé"<sup>296</sup> and by the beginning of 2007, "le monde commençait à parler de la campagne de grève générale illimitée pour l'automne suivant!" In the midst of it all, in mid-March Élise was hired by the *Service de secrétariat, d'information*,

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<sup>294</sup> "Théoriquement," explains Élise, the entire student body could be members of a committee, thus of the executive team; if there were many students in one committee, one person would be elected as the coordinator of the committee. "Ça c'tait un fonctionnement que y'avaient établi pendant la grève de 2005, y'avaient comme toute changé leurs statuts et règlements, pour s'organiser comme ça," says Élise.

<sup>295</sup> The student association at the Cégep de Saint-Laurent is maybe one of the student associations that places the most importance on "les dynamiques de groupe, les rapports de pouvoir, euh... la communauté," adds Élise.

<sup>296</sup> Theurillat-Cloutier (2017) reports that "Durant la campagne électorale de février et mars 2007, le Parti libéral a annoncé qu'il procéderait à un dégel des frais de scolarité s'il était reporté au pouvoir" (p. 284-5). He was elected at the end of March 2007.

*d'archives et de messagerie* (SIAM) of her student association.<sup>297</sup> Thus she continued to be in the thick of the action, and this 2007 strike campaign raised hopes of living the general unlimited strike she had never lived in its entirety. So at its beginnings, Élise lived some of the excitement and stress of her 2005 experience. Her CEGEP student association "était tout aussi frétilante que moi à la session d'hiver 2007," which made her "très motivée."<sup>298</sup> The *preparation* for the general assembly to vote on whether to join a one-day provincial strike<sup>299</sup> that spring was "le premier moment euh vraiment euh, comme *stressant* pis *éprouvant* que j'avais vécu, comme depuis que je m'impliquais dans l'asso! Parce que... c'était vraiment quelque chose de *décisif*, tsé, vu que c'était comme la *première étape* d'une campagne de mobilisation... qui allait peut-être mener," she says, opening her hands in a widening gesture, "à la grève générale illimitée, tsé!" Similar to the beginning of the 2005 strike, the stress was overwhelmed by the excitement and the sense of a historic moment.

Yet the general assembly would have a different emotional atmosphere than the ecstatic and surprisingly unanimous one she had experienced in 2005. There was "quand-même une forte participation!"<sup>300</sup> But there were also "des débats, euh, assez houleux," recalls Élise. "Y'avait beaucoup de gens qui étaient *contre* la grève, euh y'avait eu comme des *gros* débats sur la gratuité scolaire." So it was her "première assemblée générale, euh « confrontationnelle » entre guillemets!" Before that, the general assemblies that Élise had witnessed at her CEGEP involved "une cinquantaine de personnes" who were "*pas mal* d'accord avec toutes les propositions qui étaient emmenées" and even when there had been disagreements, they were "toujours très respectueux, tsé?" Yet now "ça rejoignait pas mal *plus* de monde qui normalement se sentait pas concerné par les activités régulières de l'asso," notably those who brought all of their friends to vote against the strike. "C'était la première fois que je parlais devant *autant* de monde dans une

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<sup>297</sup> For the purposes of my dissertation, Élise allowed me to photocopy her SIAM exit report entitled "Mon bilan de Siamoise: un récit assez exhaustif et même plutôt excessif de mon année-et-quart au SIAM" that she presented to the SIAM on May 23, 2008. See: <http://www.cegepsl.qc.ca/vie-etudiante/association-etudiante/siam/>

<sup>298</sup> Also in her SIAM exit report, she notes that the executive team of the student association "était plein, fonctionnel et même efficace; le comité de mobilisation a réuni à certains moments une vingtaine de personnes; les assemblées générales étaient fréquentes et actives."

<sup>299</sup> "Une assemblée générale de grève" is the term for a GA explicitly called to vote on whether or not to strike, to ensure that everyone knows of the importance of the assembly.

<sup>300</sup> At her CEGEP, she recalls 600-700 students showed up out of a total of "3,000 [étudiants] et non sur 1,200" students, as it had been in high school says Élise.

assemblée générale, *déjà* j'étais pas *super* à l'aise à parler en public, mais là euh, là c'était devant cinq, six cent personnes, dont plusieurs étaient très *hostiles* à mes idées!" recounts Élise.

Even though "j'étais *très stressée*," she inhales, adding, "les autres personnes dans l'asso m'avaient beaucoup encouragée." And despite the stressful and hostile environment, "finalement la grève avait passée, avec comme une bonne majorité!" Élise proudly writes in her exit report that theirs was the first association to join the one-day strike and province-wide ASSÉ demonstration. "Faque, tsé on était fier de *nous*," she continues to recount, "pis ça l'a vraiment initié un *beau* moment pour l'asso, là, où-est-ce que y'avaient beaucoup de gens qui *s'impliquaient*, pis où-est-ce que y'avait beaucoup d'énergie."

The tension from the general assembly seemed to have produced the needed emotional energy to continue, facilitated by the collective pride from its success and the interpersonal support. On March 29, 2007, the day of the strike and province-wide demonstration, in the morning were "200 personnes le matin sur les lignes de picketage." After the pickets, "on était allés tout en groupe à la manifestation qui était à Montréal, pis... c'était super le *fun*, c'était plein d'énergie." After that day, "y'avait beaucoup de gens qui avaient *commencé* à s'impliquer dans l'asso à ce moment-là, faque on était rendu euh, on était rendu à moment donné j'pense dix-sept (personnes) sur *l'exécutif*," which included students who wanted to get involved and took on lots of tasks. So the student association "roulait vraiment bien! Pis c'était du monde *le fun* là, pis tsé c'était le fun d'avoir une nouvelle génération de monde dans l'asso aussi, là!" The demonstration also had an impact at the provincial level: it was "*l'amorce* de la campagne de grève (générale illimitée)."<sup>301</sup> Élise's personal archive of emotional expectations was growing from those of 2005 to include those from the spring of 2007, gearing towards a general unlimited strike in the fall.

### **From urgency to withdrawal**

"L'ambiance était donc fébrile," reads Élise directly from her SIAM report. At her student association, "nous étions toutes conscientes (pas d'hommes qui s'impliquaient activement à ce moment) de la nécessité de s'organiser rapidement, et de mobiliser et d'aller chercher des

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<sup>301</sup> Indeed, As Theurillat-Cloutier (2017) notes, this demonstration took place three days after the provincial elections, gathering 3,000 people in the streets, "alors que 47 000 étudiants et étudiantes étaient en grève" (p. 285). Soonafter on April 7, 2007, the ASSÉ called for a congress to discuss the possibility of a general unlimited strike against tuition increases -it was the ASSÉ congress with the highest attendance of its history- a peak that "a paradoxalement symbolisé le début d'une chute dont l'ASSÉ se remettra difficilement" (Ibid). Indeed, as is clear for most of the participants of 2007 interviewed for this dissertation regardless of their affiliation to the ASSÉ, the chute was difficult for them, yet not so *paradoxical* considering the thesis I advance in this dissertation.

nouveaux et nouvelles pour l'asso." The sense of urgency, that now or never is the time for a general unlimited strike had befallen again with its benefits and drawbacks. Élise pounds her fist on the table in an imitative way, explaining that "y'avait vraiment de la pression dans l'ASSÉ pour que la grève se fasse à l'automne, là! Pis que on clanche<sup>302</sup> notre mobilisation, pis que, les votes de grève se tiennent *rapidement*," she recounts, now doing a chopping motion with her hand, "pour pas se ramasser à tomber en grève en décembre, tsé!" Yet once September rolled around, "c'tait vraiment pas évident de réorganiser notre asso en début d'année, tsé de recruter des nouvelles personnes, de, de partir, euh, les budgets pour la vie étudiante, etcétera etcétera, pis en *même temps* être en campagne de grève, là!" Despite new students who got involved in the student association, they suffered from a "manque de formation" because Élise and others were too busy "à cause de la campagne de grève générale illimitée!"

At the first general assembly of the fall semester, even though it was not yet a general assembly to vote on the strike, some students who had heard mention of the strike campaign during the previous semester came to vote against it. "Faque ça a donné un peu le *ton* pour la session, là," laments Élise. Thereafter, "la gang vraiment mobilisée contre la grève qui était centrée autour de certaines personnes de génie mécanique, principalement, eum, ont décidé qu'ils voulaient avoir un vote par *Omnivox*," an online system provided by the administration for students to access their official student information.<sup>303</sup> These students "se sont mis à comploter avec l'administration," she continues, giggling in her joyful way despite the story she is telling, "pour voir si c'était possible!" So after learning about this, Élise and her student association's efforts were mostly oriented around that next general assembly, to convince students to vote against Omnivox and instead continue having "nos votes de grève *entre* les étudiants dans nos assemblées générales!" Thus they found themselves mobilizing not only to get the association started at the start of the school year, but also to inform new students, "parce que y'avaient pleins d'étudiants qui étaient nouveaux pis qui avaient *jamaïs* entendu parler de la plateforme de revendications!" Not to mention, informing students about how a strike works and why it is important, how a general assembly works and why it is preferable to vote in that way. "Faque ça faisait beaucoup!"

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<sup>302</sup> 'Clancher' is Quebec slang to signify doing something quickly (see <http://www.laparlure.com/terme/clancher/>)

<sup>303</sup> <https://cegep-st-laurent.omnivox.ca/intr/Module/Identification/Login/Login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fintr>

Soon enough, the time came for the general assembly to vote on the Omnivox. There were “peut-être 800 personnes,” recalls Élise, who decided “à majorité écrasante de tenir notre vote de grève par Omnivox,” she reads to me from her exit report. “En fait à partir de cette assemblée générale-là,” she tells me, “tout le monde était complètement démoralisé pis savait que la grève allait jamais jamais passer, tsé!” It was precisely to decrease the chances of a strike vote that was “l’objectif des gens contre la grève” by having the vote through Omnivox, argues Élise.

“À partir de ce moment là, y’a eu vraiment un *gros*, euh, une grosse démoralisation,” she says, inhaling then exhaling. And yet they still had to mobilize for and organize the Omnivox vote, but they were not very passionate about it, and they increasingly secluded themselves. “On lisait des livres ou on chialait sur la situation, tsé!” Élise reads from her SIAM exit report: “Le découragement est palpable et l’association étudiante se transforme en club social. L’ambiance est toujours fantastique au SIAM,” she reads, stopping to explain that the SIAM was also the physical “locale” of the student association, and continues:

“les [réunions] exécutifs sont assez populeux! On chante notre ‘hit,’ *Il fait beau à l’asso*, mais on ne fait pas grand chose, on ne sort pas beaucoup du périmètre du SIAM. À partir de ce moment, alors qu’au début de l’année, je donnais énormément de temps à l’asso et mobilisais beaucoup, je commence à me retirer dans les archives. C’est d’une certaine manière une bonne chose puisque j’avance davantage (dans mon travail), mais pour de mauvaises raisons puisque je cherche dans le passé ce que nous n’arrivons pas à créer dans le présent.”

I ask her: what exactly from the past?

“Au lieu de continuer à mobiliser pis de, d’essayer de se réorienter avec nos étudiants,” she says, “on s’est un peu replié-e-s sur nous-mêmes, pis.. pour moi ça a été.. vraiment un repli sur les archives, pis sur, tsé, lire pleins d’affaires sur les glorieuses mobilisations étudiantes du *passé*,” she smiles and pauses, continuing, “qui n’étaient pas en train de se répéter dans le présent.” Élise had put “vraiment beaucoup beaucoup d’énergie” into the possible strike, “pendant toute la session,” she says, as a big part of “la gang du monde de 2005” was no longer there, so “c’tait ma *génération*, euh, qui avait *repris*, euh.. repris le *flambeau* de l’asso.” She hadn’t gone to her classes during the weeks when mobilization was very intense; she was always

at the association putting a newspaper together, talking to people, going to mobilize students, there was always something to do! “Tsé dans le fond, moi j’avais mis d’l’énergie dans cette-mobilisation-là comme *si*.. presque comme *si* on était en grève, tsé?” So, “quand la campagne de grève a été finie, tsé, j’avais mis toute cette énergie-là.. comme *si* y’allait avoir une grève, mais... y’a pas *eu*, tsé, j’ai pas *reçu*..” -she gestures with her arms a gathering-type motion to signify something coming in her direction- “.d’énergie pis comme de, euh... bein de conséquences *positives* dans toute... cette implication-là.” She continues to explain : “si y’avait eu une grève” she might have felt “*épuisée*” afterwards, but at least “j’aurais eu des moments de joie vraiment *intenses* pour compenser avec ça, mais là,” she says, inhaling, “j’avais juste donné toute cette énergie-là, pis là... y’avait rien, tsé?” This whole time, Élise is clearly referring to a general unlimited strike, because there was a strike, but it was not the one she had expected.

### **From empowerment to trauma**

By mid-November, faculty student associations at UQAM managed to vote for a five-day strike,<sup>304</sup> and other student associations were joining with “un, deux, trois jours”<sup>305</sup> for “une semaine d’actions étudiantes,” recalls Élise. Her student association voted for a one-day strike to join the provincial demonstration that would take place that week. It ended up being “une semaine drôlement intense au niveau émotionnel” as Élise and others joined in on what was happening at other schools. If on the one hand this gave Élise a sense of what it felt like at school with an unlimited strike mandate, on the other hand it left her with even more negative experiences with which to deal.

Already at her CEGEP “on avait notre jeudi de grève à organiser!” alongside the “activités normales à l’asso,” and “nos *études*, car nous n’étions *pas* en grève le reste de la semaine!” So Monday, “genre après avoir fini notre réunion d’exec à neuf heures,” “*les assos de l’UQAM ont invité tout le monde à un bed-in.*” That occupation, for Élise, was “contre la volonté de l’administration” and “la première action *illégal*e que je faisais!” It involved feeling “stressées,” “angoissées” and “inquiètes” alongside the solace of her friends and other people around her, singing “L’anti-émeute arrive” composed on the spot by one of the band members of

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<sup>304</sup> Theurillat-Cloutier, 2017, p. 288-89.

<sup>305</sup> The cégep du Vieux-Montréal, for example, voted to strike for three days (Ibid, p. 287). The idea of a two-day strike had been the “plan B” in case the general unlimited strike did not succeed (Ibid).

the band *Mise en Demeure*<sup>306</sup> who was at the occupation. Yet perhaps because of the song, perhaps because Élise never ended up encountering the police that night, the discomfoting emotions and the ups and downs were nothing compared to those produced the next night.

*“Mardi soir, c’était le treize novembre, la tristement célèbre nuit du bed-in au Vieux-Montréal,”* states her diary. It became an occupation "parce que l’administration a refusé de négocier pour tenir un bed-in," she explains to me.<sup>307</sup> When she arrived at the Cégep du Vieux Montréal around 11pm, more than 100 people were outside on the balcony and the “parterre” of the CEGEP, Élise writes in her diary.<sup>308</sup> “Tout le monde courait *partout* pour comme, pour bloquer toutes les portes!” Her diary states: *“Une barricade bloquait la plus grande partie de l’escalier de manière à ce qu’une seule personne à la fois puisse monter ou descendre. Un siège de toilette avait été hissé sur la balustrade.”*



This and the following photograph of that night are courtesy of: <http://nefacmtl.blogspot.ca/2007/11/des-photos-de-la-nuit-dagitation-au.html>

<sup>306</sup> To hear the song as it was recorded by the group, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9EfKcSuYVQ>

<sup>307</sup> According to Theurillat-Cloutier (2017), this night is known as "mardi de la matraque" and saw "une répression policière sans précédent dans un établissement d'enseignement" after the CEGEP administration "avait alors ordonné l'éviction des occupants par la police antiémeute du Service de police de la Ville de Montréal" (p. 288-89).

<sup>308</sup> Of the two sets of diary entries that Élise lets me photocopy about 2007, that infamous Tuesday night is the event that Élise writes about the most: at least six pages out of a total of 13 hand-written pages. Élise tells me the story of this night while browsing through her diary, “ça me rappelle des trucs!” she explains.

There were already police officers “qui tournaient autour du cégep, pis euh, qui pognaient<sup>309</sup> le monde qu’ils trouvaient tous seuls.”



Soon, Élise ran into her friend Noémie and they entered the CEGEP, where “une centaine d’autres personnes étaient présentes.” Students were walking around “avec des gros meubles” for the barricades, “c’était vraiment impressionnant,” she recounts, eyeing her diary. Élise was helping others to gather furniture when “un message a été diffusé à l’interphone,” at which point:

*“Tout le monde a cessé ses activités pour tenter d’écouter, mais le son était si faible et lointain que je n’ai pu comprendre que deux mots : « cégep » et « l’anti-émeute ». Ce message a fait monter la tension d’un cran. La plupart des gens semblaient confiants en la possibilité de garder le cégep si nos protections étaient suffisantes; les efforts ont été redoublés.”*

As Élise built barricades, someone stopped to tell her she should stay with a group “pour ma sécurité en cas d’arrivée prochaine de l’anti-émeute.” She quickly found some friends and together they went to get some air on the balcony, where “les gens étaient énergiques et déterminés [...] nous sommes jointes à la foule qui tapait sur le sol et criait des

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<sup>309</sup> The verb 'pogner' in this context means to 'grab.'



slogans.” That’s when “*une troupe de personnes sont arrivées de derrière et ont annoncé que la police était entrée massivement dans le cégep par le sixième étage,*” she writes in her diary. What happened next, she describes in the interview, was “un moment super impressionnant.” Élise, Noémie and another friend, Boris, entered the CEGEP and upon approaching one of the doors, Boris said he could hear the police on the other side of it, trying to knock it down. Someone pointed them to a fire hose a few meters away, so they aimed it towards the door, when the door of the CEGEP's sports centre started to tremble. They called for help and

*“quelqu’un est arrivé et, voyant que nous ne savions pas tellement ce que nous faisons, m’a enlevé le tuyau des mains en criant qu’il fallait au moins trois personnes pour le tenir. À ce moment, la porte s’est ouvert [sic] et nous avons vu le dessus du casque des anti-émeute poindre au-dessus de la barricade. Je suis partie en courant chercher des renforts et une masse s’est dirigée vers la porte du centre sportif. Deux personnes sont accourues avec des extincteurs, sont montées dans la barricade et les ont actionnés pour repousser les policiers. Puis, les personnes en charge de la lance d’incendie ont fait dégager les quelques mètres devant la barricade et ont actionné les robinets. Le jet d’eau a heurté de plein fouet les anti-émeute par-dessus la barricade et la foule s’est mise à acclamer et à applaudir.”*

Soonafter, riot police “se sont débarqués sur la, sur euh, sur la mezzanine,” and even though the doors were barricaded and “y’avait pas de portes par lesquels ils pouvaient descendre,” it was “un moment vraiment épouvantable,” because “y’ont sortis leurs guns” and “ont mis en joue le monde,” recalls Élise. “Ça fait quand-même *crissement peur* avoir un gros policier anti-émeute qui pointe son gun *sur toi, tsé?* Pis là tout le monde s’est mis à courir pis à *capoter,*” she says smiling, reminiscent of other women who smiled even upon recalling difficult situations. Her diary states: “*Je ne sais pas si les policiers ont tiré des balles en plastique ou ont mis en joue les étudiants uniquement en comptant sur le sentiment de panique. Dans tous les cas, j’ai trouvé leur geste horrible et traumatisant.*” Those students who had successfully managed the hose now pointed it up towards the railing “*délogeant encore une fois l’anti-*

*émeute." By this point, [Noémie] et [Mathilde] étaient près de moi et nous avons décidé de rester ensemble, ne sachant plus où étaient [Boris] et [Sylvain]. La victoire a été de courte durée, car un instant plus tard, arrivée d'on ne sait où, l'anti-émeute était dans le hall et se précipitait sur les occupant-es, matraque au poing."*

This moment, says Élise, "faisait vraiment peur" but also came with a lot of adrenaline, so "tu ressens pas tant qu'est-ce qui arrive, c'est plus après que... que," she giggles, "j'ai eu des sentiments *intenses*, tsé?" And suddenly Élise's tone becomes more sober and quiet, and her pace slows as she explains to me that "la police est rentrée par une *porte que*, dont comme tout le monde avait oublié l'existence ou pensait qui était barrée, pis qui était pas débarrable de l'intérieur, pis finalement elle l'était." So "tout le monde a couru pour sortir du cégep," and:

*"C'est à ce moment que j'ai réellement paniqué, je suis partie à courir vers la sortie sans réfléchir une seconde. Sur le balcon, un entonnoir potentiellement dangereux était fourré par la masse de gens qui tentaient de descendre par le mince passage dans la barricade. Quelqu'un a exhorté tout le monde à se calmer et à former des lignes serrées face aux policiers, expliquant que ceux et celles qui s'échappaient seraient repris par la police de toute façon et que notre sécurité était mieux assurée si nous restions groupées. Cela m'a fait un peu reprendre mes esprits, je me suis calmée et suis allée trouver [Noémie] et [Mathilde], auprès qui je me suis excusée d'avoir agi comme une poule sans tête."*

In our interview, Élise only mentions that "y'a du monde qui s'est fait tabasser à ce moment-là, euh nous-autres on était relativement en avant faque on a pu... on a pu se sauver... sur le balcon! Mais la police encerclait toute le, bein toute l'entrée du cégep." Her diary continues :

*"Une première ligne d'anti-émeute est arrivée dans les cadres de portes, jetant par terre et frappant les derniers fugitifs. Nous nous sommes rapprochés tenant nos voisins par les coudes, avons formé des lignes face à la police. Une personne masquée a réussi à délivrer un autre occupant des*

main d'un policier. Quelques autres anti-émeutes sont arrivés [sic] pointant devant eux trois ou quatre dernières personnes mais sans les toucher. Elles ont rejoint notre groupe. Il y a eu une petite période de confusion où les blessés appelaient les médecins et les gens anxieux tentaient de traverser les lignes compactes pour rejoindre leurs amis. J'étais une personne anxieuse, mais [Noémie] était à ma droite, ce qui me rassurait un peu. Un des policiers, qui semblait être le « chef », s'est avancé et nous a ordonné de nous asseoir par terre. Un petit groupe devant moi et à ma droite s'est assis immédiatement. Nous avons tous continué à scander des slogans relatifs à la police, enterrant leurs ordres subséquents. Finalement, le même policier a crié ou utilisé un porte-voix pour nous dire : « Soit vous vous assoyez, soit vous restez debout pis on vous fait coucher à terre! » De plus en plus de policiers sortaient du cégep [by the balcony where Élise was] et leur ligne s'est rapprochée de nous, donnant suite aux menaces d'agression en cas de non obéissance. D'autres personnes se sont assises, dont [Noémie] et moi, par peur. Quelques dizaines de personnes étaient encore debout, derrière et à ma gauche. Je ne voyais pas tout le monde, mais nous devions être au moins 50-60, max 90. La ligne de policiers devant nous en incluait de 15 à 20, sans compter ceux derrière nous que je savais présents sans les voir. Deux personnes ont amené une bannière qui a été installée juste devant la ligne de policiers. [Norman] et [Sylvie] du [Cégep du Vieux-Montréal] l'ont prise en charge et se sont mis à crier plus fort."

It was "à partir de, à ce moment-là, la police a fini par, euh... par comme par arrêter tout le monde, pis à sortir tout le monde un par un, euh.. du balcon.. pis mettre des tie-wraps, pis euh... faire leur processus de, de bétail (laughing), là, d'arrestation de masse, là." The police arrested 107 people that night,<sup>310</sup> says Élise, and released them in the early hours of the next morning. Once it was over and they were all "à terre pis qu'on attendait de se faire arrêté, c'était *stressant* mais c'était plus tant *épeurant*," she says exhaling.

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<sup>310</sup> Theurillat-Cloutier (2017) similarly reports "une centaine d'arrestations" (p. 288).

“Mais tsé tu *perds vraiment* quelque *chose* de positif aussi, tsé? Parce que tu.. te retrouves d’une situation où est-ce que, bein t’as vraiment un *contrôle* sur qu’est-ce qui se *pass*e, pis comme.. t’agis pis t’essaie de garder le contrôle sur qu’est-ce qui se passe justement... à une situation où est-ce que t’es *complètement* sans pouvoir pis que t’es à la merci de des gros gars avec des guns qui te crient après, pis qui te disent des bêtises, tsé? Pis tu peux pas y faire grand chose!” she says, inhaling then exhaling. “C’est vraiment une *perte* de pouvoir euh *soudaine* pis c’est *déprimant*” -the only time during our interview that she uses this word. It was also “quand-même angoissant comme situation, y’avait plein de monde qui avait *mal*, qui était *blessé*,” continues Élise.

Because we were almost at the three-hour mark of the interview I try to change the topic, but Élise surprises me yet again by insisting: “Mais je finirais juste de raconter la, la soirée du Vieux-Montréal.” Then she adds, “Parce que c’est ça, dans le *fond*, les émotions j’les ai plus ressenti plus *tard*, là!” Élise wants to finish her story about that night, but also the story of its emotional repercussions. “Là finalement toute le *processing* était fini,” she continues, “ils nous ont tout [sic] embarqués dans des paniers à salade différents, pis ils nous ont dispersé dans la ville,” continues Élise. Luckily, “j’étais dans le même, panier à salade que [Noémie], pis aussi que [Fabienne], une des autres filles de St-Lô!” Fabienne lived near to where they had been dropped off, so invited Élise to sleep at her house. When they arrived, they still were waiting up for “une autre personne qui habitait avec elle qui, qui allait à St-Lô aussi! Qui était pas encore rentrée! Faque là on était inquiets mais finalement moi j’suis allée me coucher parce que j’étais complètement crevée, pis comme, j’m suis couchée pis, j’étais *super* fatiguée, y’était genre cinq heures et demi du matin pis j’avais pas dormi la veille, tsé. Mais là j’étais comme, j’étais *incapable* de m’endormir, aussitôt que je fermais les yeux, y’avait comme des images de police anti-émeute pis des affaires pendant la soirée,” she laughs, “je *capotais*, là!” She was in an apartment where Fabienne was the only person she knew, “j’étais toute seule sur mon divan pis j’m sentais p’tite pis j’m sentais tout seule, là [sic]!” Then the house cat “*est venu ronronner dans mes oreilles et se coucher sur mon ventre, ça m’a réconfortée et calmée assez pour que ma fatigue écrasante prenne finalement le dessus*,” she writes in her diary. “[J]e n’avais jamais vraiment été témoin de violence physique auparavant, j’ai eu peur et j’ai été vraiment bouleversée, quoique les impacts psychologiques se sont plus fait sentir dans les jours suivants, pas sur le champ.”

It wasn't over yet. "*Je me suis réveillée tard dans la matinée, peut-être cinq heures plus tard,*" her diary continues, and "j'avais juste le goût de courir jusqu'à mon cégep pis comme, tsé d'aller voir le monde pis... d'être avec mes amis," she tells me, because, "*j'avais hâte d'être dans mon univers rassurant, familial et compréhensif du SIAM, et j'avais bien raison.*" Chloé and another friend "*m'ont accueillie très chaleureusement,*" she writes, and screamed "« Ahhhhh Élise!! Ça va??? » Genre, «Comment ça s'est passééé? »" Élise imitates with squeaking voices and laughter.

At this point I cut Élise off, by asking a question that makes me wonder if I am biased towards hearing negative experiences of the strike -as she is clearly in the midst of recounting an intensely positive emotional experience. "Mais pourquoi t'avais la difficulté à dormir? Quand tu disais que tu te sentais comme, toute seule, qu'est-ce que tu voulais dire?"

"J'avais tout le backlash de *stress*, là," she explains, willing to go with my interruption. "Ç'a été quand-même *traumatisant* comme expérience, là! C'tait, tsé, c'était vraiment épouvantable!" It was the first time she was "*témoin directement de violence physique, là! Que je voyais du monde se faire taper... se faire battre, comme.. se faire, bein... pis, en tout cas, c'est toute une situation violente psychologiquement aussi, là, ce qu'on parlait tantôt, de plus avoir aucun pouvoir sur ce qui se passe.*" If Élise hadn't had a good opinion of the police "en tant qu'institution," seeing police violence in front of her eyes for the first time, "c'est sûr que... si c'est pas, euh, si c'est pas euh *rationnellement*, comme *émotionnellement* ça l'a changé ma perception de la police, là!"

Luckily, rescuing the story from my interruption, Élise's diary continues the flow of her story upon going back to CEGEP, emphasizing once again the importance of interpersonal support: "*j'ai pu voir les autres gens qui étaient à l'occupation et décompresser. J'ai dormi un peu sur le divan en après-midi, je me suis réveillée pour assister à notre dernière réunion de préparation de la grève du lendemain [...] [Gabriel] est venu coucher chez moi, j'ai apprécié la présence d'un autre dans mon lit, mais j'ai encore eu beaucoup de difficulté à m'endormir.*" Once again that night, "j'voyais des policiers anti-émeute partout aussitôt que je fermais les yeux," she says, laughing.

*"Je savais bien que ce n'était pas le temps, mais je faisais dans ma tête un compte-rendu détaillé de la nuit de la veille. En plus, Sylvie avait invité des*

*gens de l'asso de [Cégep] Maisonneuve et ils rigolaient et parlaient bruyamment. Je suis allée leur demander de se taire, après [Gabriel] a pu dormir mais pas moi, les bruits les plus vivaces et dérangeants étaient dans ma tête, des échos des échanges entre les manifestants, des réflexions de [Noémie], de l'indignation de Sylvain et des discours haineux des policiers. J'ai regardé l'heure pour la dernière fois passé 2h, et nous nous levions à 5h30."*

### **“Vidées et déprimées”**

The following day, carried out with minimal sleep from the night before, “c’était notre journée de grève.” That morning, “*Nous avons titubé jusqu’au métro dans le noir, et même en ressortant, vers 6h30-6h45, nous marchions dans la pénombre. Tout le monde était là, il me semble, mais moi et plusieurs autres personnes ayant participé ou non aux actions des journées précédentes étions affligées d’une motivation frôlant le zéro.*” This day was “comme un peu une reprise de la journée de grève de l’hiver, mais en moins le fun avec moins de monde.” She adds :

*“La matinée fut un calque, en plus pâle, plus gris et moins convaincant, de la journée du 29 mars. Le 29 mars, « ce n’était qu’un début, » le comité mob se replissait, l’énergie affluait, on parlait de grève avec un grand G, **la vie était devant nous.** Huit mois plus tard, le 15 novembre, force était d’admettre que la Grève n’avait pas eu lieu, que tout le monde était épuisé et démoralisé et que c’était avec nos dernières énergies que nous tenions cette action insignifiante - nous étions en train de **clouer notre cercueil.**”*

If in the interview Élise remembers that she spent half of the one-day strike “couchée genre sur un divan dans un local,” her diary reveals that the day was busy even after the morning pickets:

*“il y a eu un conseil de grève où quelques personnes étaient motivées et quelques autres avaient de l’expérience et du leadership, mais personne n’avait les deux et tout le monde s’est rapidement éparpillé. [Fabienne] a*

*lancé l'idée de tenir un méga-comité-mob pour discuter des lendemains (qui existaient encore pour elle, la chanceuse), et il aurait fallu reprendre et pousser l'idée, mais personne n'en avait l'énergie."*

In Élise's last sentence, she implies that the "lendemains" no longer existed for her -a hint that Élise had already lost any collective hope, meaning, and energy related to the strike. Indeed when Élise finally went back to her classes, she found them "*longs et... peu significants, tsé?*" So she decided to "lâcher l'école." She writes in her SIAM exit report: "Au début, je n'ai pas l'intention de rester au cégep à l'hiver, j'ai l'impression suite à la campagne de grève **avortée** d'avoir donné tout ce que je pouvais donner à cet endroit et, inversement, qu'il ne m'apporterait plus rien." Yet since two of the four SIAM employees had quit and one had just been hired, "et comme j'aime encore les archives comme une folle, je prends la décision de rester en prenant un seul cours pour la frime," she writes.

Surprisingly -considering her disappointed depiction of the fall strike campaign- Élise adds: "Nous avons fini la session d'automne en nous demandant si nous voulions relancer la campagne de grève à l'hiver [2008]."<sup>311</sup> Yet with the beginning of winter, Élise's perseverance as a staffperson lands her in a similarly worn out position as other participants who remained involved as executives or staff members beyond the strike, with motivation slowly petering out. As she writes in the SIAM report, she and her fellow co-workers stopped doing their tasks and were badly organized:

"[T]out s'écroule lentement [...] Tout retombe, au final, sur les épaules des Siamois [...] Le reste de la session suit le même *pattern* : l'asso est un rafioteur qui se fait balloter entre assemblées générales moroses au quorum chancelant, exécutifs déserts où les quatre personnes présentes trouvent le moyen de se diviser, tâches qui ne se font jamais, mandats abandonnés et déprime générale. Dans le fond du bateau, on peut trouver [Noémie], [Marianne] et moi en train d'écoper sans enthousiasme et d'essayer de boucher avec nos doigts les trous dans la coque. Je regrette parfois d'être restée au cégep pour l'hiver, je

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<sup>311</sup> Indeed at the December 2007 ASSÉ congress, students tried to "relancer la campagne de grève" without much luck, though some university student associations went on strike for a few days in the winter 2008 semester (Theurillat-Cloutier, 2017, p. 289).

n'ai envie que de m'enfermer avec mes archives en faisant un *bras d'honneur*<sup>312</sup> à tout ce qui se passait – ou ne passait pas – dans le mouvement étudiant.”

Noémie was hired to work at the SIAM that winter and “les deux on était *aussi*, euh, *aussi démotivées* et comme, et, et *vidées et déprimées* de qu'est-ce qui s'était passé à l'automne! Mais on n'avait comme pas le choix de continuer à faire les tâches pour faire rouler l'association parce que y'avait personne d'autre qui les faisait, pis nous-autres c'tait notre job, tsé.” She concludes in her SIAM exit report: “Je sais aussi que la patience et l'ouverture que je considérais compter parmi mes qualités ont quelque peu pris le bord, avalés [sic ] par ma démotivation, mes frustrations et ma mauvaise humeur permanente.”<sup>313</sup>

#### PHILIPPE: FROM LIFE MEANING TO AMBIVALENCE

Similar to Élise, as recounted in Chapter 2, Philippe's strike and student movement experience began in 2005 and continued until 2008, then fizzled out. Their stories about 2005 are similar in that they started out on a more positive and even 'high' emotional note, then as time went on things became more complicated and tense, especially so towards the end of 2007. For at the beginning of the 2005 strike, Philippe describes the general assemblies as “très consensuelles.” Then as time progressed in 2005 the general assemblies became “vraiment intense,” including “les larmes aux yeux” and an increased concern that “le gouvernement va pas reculer!” and that their session would be canceled. “Ça allait chercher les émotions beaucoup!” recounts Philippe, because those in “techniques infirmières” would say: “Mes stages, je pourrais pas rentrer dedans!” Some would protest, “Moi j'suis étudiante internationale! Genre, ça va me coûter hyper cher [si je perds ma session]!” Some students who were initially convinced about the strike now started to feel that the strike had lasted long enough, recounts Philippe. He suddenly felt “confronté” by individuals “qui s'exprimaient par rapport à ce qu'ils vivaient!” This brought Philippe to start confronting himself “intérieurement” and he felt “la nécessité de, d'auto-argumenter avec soi-même!” He would tell himself, “Bei-i-i-n, *rationnellement*, cette personne-là

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<sup>312</sup> At this point in her SIAM report, she has a footnote that explains that this expression means: “Fuck you”

<sup>313</sup> Élise's story will continue in Chapter 6.



par exemple, euh, je la *comprends*, tsé. Mai-i-i-s ça veut pas dire que à cause que *elle* il se passe ça dans sa vie, bein qu'il faut comme euh, qu'il faut comme arrêter le mouvement, tsé!”

He started to have doubts about the general direction of the movement. “À [un] moment donné t'es porté par le mouvement! Mais à [un] moment donné aussi, tu te sens que le mouvement s'essouffle! Pis c'est là que, c'est là que ça devient questionnant, tsé,” explains Philippe. “Tu te dis bein, là est-ce queeee, est-ce que ç'a encore du sens, tsé? [...] Est-ce que j'y crois vraiment tsé, ou je l'le fais parce que les autres le font?” Despite these doubts, when the FEUQ sat down to negotiate the government, “on n'avait pas arrêter!” recalls Philippe. “On trouvait que c'tait pas euh, c'tait pas assez, tsé?” But when the media started to report that an agreement had been settled, students started wondering, “ça sert à quoi de continuer la grève, tsé les gens reprenaient un peu ce discours-là, de l'entente!” These kinds of doubts towards the end of the 2005 strike would echo those that would grow over time as Philippe continued in the student movement, especially during the 2007 and 2008 strike campaigns.<sup>314</sup>

### **2005 overwhelms, haunts**

Just as 2005 led both Julie and Élise to be elected as student representatives of their CEGEP, Philippe also went from participating “de façon touristique” in the 2005 strike to becoming an executive of his CEGEP's student association after the strike. And yet, despite his exponentially increasing involvement in student politics after the 2005 strike, when it comes to the 2007 strike, it almost does not exist in Philippe's memory. At first, Philippe can not remember whether he was in CEGEP or in university during the latter strike: he has trouble remembering dates, he says, because he experienced so many strikes. So he asks me for hints, “peux-tu me rappeler c'tait.. c'tait quoi les revendications, genre?” Wondering if it is strange for me to answer, I nonetheless tell him: “Bein y'allaient augmenter les frais de scolarité par cent dollars par année.” With that information, Philippe suddenly remembers ASSÉ's “argumentaire” for free education in response to the tuition increase and the ensuing debates about whether that was an effective position for ASSÉ to take. Since he associates those debates with being at UQAM, Philippe assumes that he participated in the 2007 strike when he got to UQAM; yet my research of online archives later reveals that Philippe was still in CEGEP in 2007. So what he

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<sup>314</sup> The latter was not a general unlimited strike campaign as it was limited to UQAM, yet is nonetheless relevant here as it forms an inextricable part of Philippe's overall experience with strikes.

describes throughout the rest of his interview as ‘2007’ is in fact the 2008 UQAM-specific unlimited strike. “Parce qu’on n’a pas refaite d’autre *grève* de même,” says Philippe referring to 2005, as he tries to explain why initially he does not remember 2007. Indeed, at a few different points during Philippe’s interview when describing the 2008 strike, his comparison point ends up being 2005. Thus similar to Élise, the rest of his story is haunted by a constant comparison to 2005 and its dialectical legacy of inspiration alongside the comparison point for disappointment, hinting at how nostalgia can breed both hope and discouragement (Glazer, 2005).

Philippe’s working-class personal history also continued to haunt him; when he became a student at UQAM in the winter of 2008, “l’université ça me faisait *peur*, là,” he explains, as “j’ai fini mon cégep déjà c’est un miracle, là, tsé,” so “je voulais pas manquer ma *shot* tsé!” And yet, student activism “donnait du sens un peu à mon parcours scolaire, tsé” (Philippe mentions the movement giving “sens à ma vie” at least three times during his interview). So, soon enough, students who knew him from CEGEP convinced him to get involved by telling him: “Bein là, tsé, tu t’es déjà impliqué, tu sais comment ça marche un peu, euh, pourquoi tu t’impliques pas?” So Philippe decided to run for the position of treasurer on the *Association facultaire étudiante des sciences humaines* (AFESH): he figured at least he could help by filling a position that no one else wanted to fill. Thus in his first semester at university in 2008, Philippe found himself in the midst of an UQAM-centred unlimited strike campaign, with executives of the AFESH who all knew each other and “qui étaient comme, encore, tsé, plus politisé-e-s, tsé, au niveau du mouvement étudiant.”

Unfortunately however, in 2008 it was always a minority of people doing too much of the work, says Philippe. “Tsé, on venait de voter la grève, tsé. Pis y’avait des gens qui votaient *pour*, mais qu’on voyait *jamais*, tsé!” recalls Philippe. “P-i-i-s l’idée, tsé, c’est d’être le plus possible pour faire *vivre* la grève aussi tsé, pis d’organiser des, des trucs autour de d’ça, pis pas juste prendre des vacances, tsé, mais de faire du travail, d’apprendre des choses pis tout ça.” In comparison, in 2005 “on voyait qu’on, on n’était pas une minorité à porter la grève, tsé! Y’avait comme... beaucoup de monde, tsé! Pis ça, c’est encourageant! Tsé, c’est, ça faisait partie de l’euphorie!” For example when they went to demonstrate in Quebec City in 2005, “y’avait quoi, genre, euh, tsé, des milliers là!” That was “la première fois” que je voyais ça, tsé, un mouvement de masse comme ça,” and this contributed “à maintenir *l’espoir*, tsé, que j’ai parlé un peu au début que, que je sentais que je faisais partie de quelque chose qui, qui me donnait la possibilité

de, d'entrevoir de l'espoir de changer, genre, les conditions!" Thus the historic feeling of the 2005 strike had been different because it was something that would change his rapport to the world through "la prise de conscience" that it is possible to change things when you do things *as a group*; whereas in 2008, he wondered, "Y'est où le *groupe*, tsé?" When you see that the movement "fonctionne pas! Bein là c'est, ça enlève de l'espoir aussi de la possibilité de transformer les choses parce que tu dis, « Bein qu'est-ce qu'ils veulent réellement les gens, tsé? »" You thus feel that "t'es un peu dans une logique *froide*, euhh, tsé des fois c'est très bureaucratique, tsé?" There was a sense already that the "pouvoir avec" was fading.

Indeed, another difference from 2005 was that in 2007-2008 Philippe was not just an organizer, but an elected student representative with a different relationship to the student populace. Participating in a protest is "supeeer," continues Philippe, but when you're a student executive organizing the protest attending meetings to deal with the "logique d'organisation en arrière" and "tu *parles* de *comment* organiser un truc," explains Philippe, "bein, ça enlève un peu de la magie de l'effervescence!" It became "un petit peu plus, euh... *stagnant*, tsé" with "la paperasse *plate*." Philippe's comment alludes to how the 'high' of collective-oriented emotions can wane over time, as external dynamics such as the breadth of the movement, as well as disappointing internal power dynamics, can lead to disenchantment. "Des fois ça devient une fatigue psychologique, aussi là, parce que c'est épuisant, là, tsé, comme, de, d'essayer d'organiser par exemple, tsé, un mouvement" and "tu sens qu'y'a comme un *poids* qui est comme *trop* pesant, tsé, pis tu sens pas que t'as *l'appui* tant des gens, tsé?" Indeed, "je m'impliquais *beaucoup*!" Since there was a small "clique" of students doing a lot of the work, Philippe had many "tâches à faire," for example "être present au local" and "assister aux réunions," among other things. So if at the beginning "t'es comme, *porté*" and there is always effervescence, the effect of work over time was all the more "épuisant" because of the internal questioning that started seeping in.

### **Ambivalence of internal power dynamics**

Indeed, Philippe started to have doubts about the internal dynamics of the movement. If 2005 "*révolutionnait* complètement mon mode de, de penser le monde, mon rapport au monde," by the time he got to university, "j'ai commencé à davantage réfléchir la logique interne, disons, du mouvement." Philippe now had questions that were "peut-être plus théoriques?" If a sense of collective empowerment thanks to a "pouvoir avec" had led him to where he was, the inevitable

inequalities within that "pouvoir avec" (Dupuis-Déri, 2016) accumulated into an increased ambivalence.<sup>315</sup> The efforts that Philippe had made over the previous years to *acculturate* himself to the procedures of general assemblies and ASSÉ congresses, brought him to be increasingly aware of, and to "problématiser" the "rapports de pouvoir" that could be "inégalitaires" and "hiérarchiques" inside the movement despite its structures grounded in participatory and direct democracy. These included, at times, the reproduction of societal "rapports" in which some make decisions but others carry them out (notably him, as an elected executive), or in which only those who understand the procedure or are used to speaking up are able to speak convincingly in general assemblies, thus constituting a "barrière culturelle." Those who are politicized, in other words, tend to be more organized in these instances, and thus they can unwillingly take "trop de place, tsé" or "limiter, euh, l'expression des gens, tsé!" And it is not always obvious to those who don't know procedure to ask those who know it, says Philippe.

"Quand tu vois quelqu'un est *trop politisé* pis toi tu l'es pas,<sup>316</sup> bein ça peut faire peur, tsé? Bein en même temps tu dis, « Bein là, tsé, y'ont raison, tsé, que je vais y aller pour la *vertu*, tsé? Pis la vertu c'est d'y aller avec, euh, avec le *groupe*, pour quelque chose de plus *grand*, tsé, pis qui nous dépasse, pis toute ça! »" He was increasingly torn between his desire to sacrifice himself for the collective -between what I will call here his collective-oriented emotions- and his increasing doubts about the power dynamics within the movement -surely in part because he had himself also felt excluded at some point due to cultural barriers. Thus in 2008 he started asking himself, "Ça va-tu vraiment marcher ou est-ce qu'on fait ça genre, est-ce qu'on fait du *mal* genre pour rien tsé," or :

« Est-ce que je prends la bonne décision, tsé! » Pis en même temps tu dis, « Bein là, c'est c'est, c'est un projet commun, genre! Mais là quand tu *vois pas* c'te commun là, tsé, tu les vois pas ces gens-là, tu les vois à l'assemblée mais tu les vois pas pour vrai *s'impliquer* concrètement, tsé! Mais là c'est aussi euh, décourageant."

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<sup>315</sup> Indeed, Philippe underlines here that those who live and support direct democracy do not live an "idéalisation ni naïveté face à l'agoraphilie" as they know "que des rapports de force et des relations inégalitaires se produisent à l'agora" (p. 58).

<sup>316</sup> Philippe often spoke in the second or third person, even in cases when he was clearly speaking about his own feelings.

## Discouragement, stress, fatigue

Alongside his related internal questionings and ambivalence, the particular nature of picketing without enough support started to tire Philippe, leading to even more doubts -similar to many other participants' stress about picketing.<sup>317</sup> Indeed for Philippe, waking up early in the morning every day to picket classes and “voir que y'avait *pas tant de monde que ça*” alongside his increasing doubts about the strike was the most difficult and “peut-être le plus stressant,” he says. “Parce que là des fois on arrivait on n'était pas beaucoup, on arrivait dans un cours, pis qu'on se sentait *pas fort* tsé.” There was always the exception that if one of the picketers had “un super bon argumentaire,” it could go well, as they could convince students to leave class. Yet generally “on savait pas, euh, à quoi s'attendre”: What if students wouldn't want to leave class? What if security officers came? What if they called the police? If only three or four people wake up to “lever un cours tough,” especially “un cours problématique, bein, tsé, c'est, tu te sens pas gros dans tes shorts, là!”<sup>318</sup> Alternatively, when you know there are people to support you, explains Philippe, “tout le monde est motivé, là!” It became especially difficult to manage “quand tu te retrouves devant des gens genre euh, physiquement, qui sont prêts à se battre tsé.. tsé qui sont prêts à, à te mettre dehors mettons du cours genre physiquement tsé, ou à des profs qui sont vraiment acharnés pis qui veulent euh, ils veulent *pas* sortir de leurs cours, tsé.” The previous feelings of collective empowerment thus easily turned to fear and stress as Philippe saw that they did not have sufficient numbers -new feelings that he was mostly experiencing alone.

“Surtout vers la *fin* des grèves là, ça c'est, c'est ce qui devient des fois le plus euh, le plus stressant,” as it became pretty “tense” when you show up to stop a class and “y'a des gens qui te disent que y'ont *payé* pour avoir leurs cours, pis que y'ont le droit d'avoir leurs cours,” and you have to explain to them, “Ouais, bein on a pris une décision collective, tsé! Pis c'est en assemblée générale!” And then students answer “Bein oui, mais l'assemblée générale, moi, euh, je travaille, moi, durant les assemblées générales, je peux même pas venir voter!” And so Philippe would suggest to them ways to be able to attend the assemblies. Then other students would ask, “Bein pourquoi vous faites pas un vote par internet, tsé?” Philippe suddenly seems a bit more riled up upon recounting his typical response to this last question: “Non, tsé! Ç'a pas de sens! Il faut qu'il

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<sup>317</sup> The particularities of pickets will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>318</sup> This expression, sometimes also said “je me sentais *petit* dans mes shorts,” basically refers not feeling very comfortable.

[y] aille des débats qui se passent entre gens réels, tsé! Si t'assistes pas à l'assemblée générale t'as pas vu les *débats*, tu peux pas être influencé, ta position va jamais changer!" Then again, says Philippe in his pensive, concerned and soft tone, speaking in the present tense even though describing the past, "y'a d'autres questionnements aussi qui naissent" within him, which are pretty similar in each strike, he clarifies, and "tu poses des questions sur la légitimité que t'as, tsé?" Because some students "veulent avoir leurs cours, tsé!" And yet "toi il faut que tu te tiennes à ta position," because "qu'est-ce qui légitime ta position présentement c'est une assemblée générale." You start feeling "ambivalent," explains Philippe. On the one hand you want to convince people that "y'a pas tout que leurs intérêts personnels dans la vie, mais que y'a quelque chose justement là qui est plus grand qu'eux," while on the other hand "tu te sens un peu *mal*" to make them leave class "si le mouvement est mort," and "si on n'a plus l'espoir que ça peut fonctionner encore, tsé?"

Philippe clarifies that "j'suis encore quelqu'un d'assez *stressé*, là, par rapport aux exigences de la vie en général!" to frame the tenor of what he will say next. "Mais, euh, tsé, je, je l'ai jamais été *autant* que quand je me suis impliqué par exemple dans le mouvement étudiant, là, où est-ce que là, tsé, j'tais vraiment un peu *overloadé* partout là, tsé!" Always having something to do and knowing that "y'a des *gens* qui comptent sur toi, tsé" it gives "un *sens* à la vie" but at the same time it's stressful. "Y'en a qui ont des tempéraments qui sont *pas* stressés, mais moi, j'suis quelqu'un que... sentir que y'a une *pression*, tsé, sur moi, pis que j'ai un *rôle* à jouer, bein," he says clearing his throat, "ça me stresse, tsé." Sure, being involved in something that surpasses yourself is fun and gives life meaning, but "à moment donné ça, ça fait son *temps*, tsé." Without an "équilibre dans ta vie," it takes its toll: if it's too intense and you're too stressed and you have too many things to do, you feel your "sommeil est pas réparateur" and "tu sens que t'es, t'es plus facilement, euh, *irritable*" and "plus, euh, *colérique*," and "on se met à avoir des raisonnements plus euh coupés, carrés," and you tend to "porter moins attention à ce que les autres vivent autour de toi, tsé," and ironically "à recentrer sur *toi* alors que tu voudrais recentrer sur les autres." Reminiscent of Élise's self-critiques at the closure of the 2007 strike, "si t'as plus la *flamme* par exemple de t'impliquer," you might become a student activist "qui peut *démotiver* les autres, là, bein là il faut que tu t'en ailles, là," because everytime new people want to get involved this activist discourages them with his "*blasé*" attitude because "y'est comme *déçu*, euh, des choses qui ont pas marché."

Similar to Élise, as the sense of historic momentum and a generalized movement dissipated, as stress and work took over many months of their lives, without signs of success, collective hope slowly dissipated too, and Philippe got “épuisé.” With few people involved, those who are involved get “épuisé assez rapidement” and that’s why the student movement “brûle des militants, là, tsé” and “y’arrêtent de s’impliquer, tsé, complètement.” It would be more effective if everyone was involved “*moyennement, un peu, tsé!*” Even though he had always balanced his involvement with other activities “parascolaires, genre, j’faisais de l’aide aux devoirs,” and he was “*Grand Frère avec un jeune,*” Philippe admits that perhaps compared to others, “je pouvais passer pour quelqu’un qui était comme, trop impliqué” as he never had “temps libre vraiment pour moi, tsé.” Because at some point, even though you don’t have classes during the strike and you have things to do outside of the student movement, it still asks *more* of you, precisely because “les gens s’impliquent pas assez,” says Philippe. Yet quite differently than Élise, Philippe adds: “Tu te *sens* tout *seul* à [un] moment donné.”<sup>319</sup>

### **Lack of interpersonal support**

Indeed, in the face of such disillusionment and ambivalence, Philippe did not have the interpersonal support within the movement that Élise did, neither in CEGEP nor in university. When he was at Cégep St-Jérôme, even though “j’essayais de faire *partie* du groupe, tsé, qui était un peu, euh, ceux qui étaient les leaders, un peu, du mouvement” and even though he met “plein de monde,” he still felt there was a cultural clash as most student activists seemed to be from a different social background than him. “Ces gens-là *aussi* étaient fâché-e-s! Mais c’est juste que, je sentais *pas* qu’on était comme sur la même longueur d’onde, quand-même, tsé?”<sup>320</sup> Thus he felt “timide” around them as they were “des gens qui avaient jonglé avec ça pendant très longtemps, tsé,” and “qui ont été comme plus *socialisé-e-s* euh à travers euh, une culture *politique*.” Philippe might have “tissé des liens avec des gens,” but it was “des liens euhhh, genre de camaraderie” or “des connaissances davantage que des amis proches!”<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> I also think of Anas, a Fine Arts student representative who spoke alongside Marya at a public presentation in January 2015 about the 2012 strike at Concordia, who recalls being at his office until late hours of the night “tired and alone.”

<sup>320</sup> Perhaps another way to say this is that, if they were united in anger, their anger did not necessarily have the same life history, a theme I will return to in a later chapter.

<sup>321</sup> The fact that neither Philippe nor Pierre had close friends during strike perhaps reflects why they were more willing to talk to a complete stranger about their emotions, as considering gendered expectations around emotions they perhaps had never been able to vent these emotions with others.

Philippe attributes this in part to the fact that he did not drink alcohol throughout his CEGEP and university years. He was still at the parties and "j'voulais fêter, pis toute ça mais, mais c'tait pas euh, j'tais pas dans le même *rapport* tsé que des gens qui se connaissent que ça fait *longtemps*." This is maybe a characteristic of activist ways of relating, says Philippe, because "tu vois la cause avant de voir la relation interpersonnelle, tsé?" They wouldn't necessarily call each other after school to go do something together, he explains; and yet with his other friends who were not involved in the movement, "on peut avoir d'autres types de rapports qui sont plus profonds, tsé!" So apart from his Catholic friend who we would protest with, "J'tais quand-même assez solitaire, genre, dans cette foule-là, là," as he would oscillate entre deux mondes, those who were "*hyper* conscientisés et *hyper* politisés," and those "qui étaient pas en faveur du mouvement, que tsé que, qui faisaient voir un peu l'autre réalité -qui était comme euh, qui était comme *différente* euh, différente de la mienne, là." Philippe realizes he had been missing out on that interpersonal dimension, "une forme de socialisation," he calls it "qui se passe au *quotidien*, tsé, dans la vie des *gens*," as people often discuss decisions at these kinds of informal meetings, often with alcohol. "J'pense j'ai quand-même coupé avec mes émotions à ce moment-là" reflects Philippe; and it was only after 2008, maybe, "que j'ai commencé à m'ouvrir un peu plus, genre, à d'autres formes de relations."

By 2011, Philippe no longer defines himself as a "militant étudiant." He doesn't read the ASSÉ-support email list, nor the student newspaper, nor does he try to attend every demonstration. "J'suis un peu démotivé, tsé," he explains, "à moment donné j'ai comme eu une écoeurantite, là, de," he corrects himself, "bein pas une écoeurantite mais.. j'tais un peu tanné de m'impliquer genre sur un exécutif, pas j'avais envie de passer à d'autres choses dans ma vie, là, faire autre chose!" Maybe it was time to let others get involved and to take care of himself, "pis d'avoir un meilleur équilibre dans ta vie," he says. Sure, once in a while he gets the "envie" to do more for the student movement, but he contents himself by going to actions or demonstrations once in a while. If the strike initially was "le sens de ma vie," as time went on, even during CEGEP he started to wonder, "qu'est-ce que je fais dans ma vie à moi, là, tsé, euh.. Je suis en train comme de, de *rallonger* euh, comme euh, mon cégep de genre un an parce que je m'implique," recounts Philippe; and then in university, "ah j'suis déjà rendu à, à 25 ans. Est-ce que je rallonge *encore*, genre, pour m'impliquer?" These questions about his own life "peuvent être épuisants aussi, là!" His academic marks had already suffered and he hadn't been able to take



more than four courses per session, but finally in his last two semesters, “j’suis allé à cinq cours, tsé.” Now, at the dawn of 2012, his priorities have changed, “c’est rendu plus important pour moi de faire mes cours que... que de m’impliquer dans la grève.”<sup>322</sup>

#### THEY MISSED 2005 AND LOST 2007: BACK TO PIERRE AND AUDREY

While the interpersonal situation of Élise and Philippe was different, both experienced high, collective-oriented emotions in 2005 and then were disappointed when 2007 did not compare. On a similar note, while Pierre and Audrey did not experience the 2005 strike, they lived a sense of euphoria during the build-up to the failed 2007 strike in part because of the ‘historic’ collective discourse around 2005, and then experienced the downfall of failing to live up to it, in addition to disappointing power dynamics and little interpersonal support within the movement.

#### **Pierre: from “sens de ma vie” to “le néant”**

Like Philippe, Pierre also participated in both the 2007 and 2008 strikes at UQAM, thus his emotions about them are sometimes intermingled when he talks about the effects of the strike years on his life, as both were unsuccessful in his eyes. If, as mentioned in Chapter 2, these strike years were the most intense years of his life and instilled his life with meaning, once faced with the more difficult aspects of the strikes and their relative failure, the loss of meaning quickly converted itself into depression. “Le mouvement de grève serait genre un ‘rush’ pis euh, pis après t’aurais le down quand la grève est finie,” says Pierre.

Pierre recounts the build-up to the 2007 strike as one imbued with a sense of **urgency**. “À l’époque où est-ce que je militais, y’avait les « Old Timers, »” he says gesturing quotation marks with his hands to refer to those ASSÉ activists who had been active in the 1990s (some would call them “les Belles-mères,” he says). They would tell them how “géniale” the mobilization had been in 2005 and about the “*trahison* des fédérations étudiantes qui avaient négocié avec le gouvernement.” Pierre agreed with this discourse, thus he hoped then that the student federations (FECQ, FEUQ) would be dismantled. Such discourse also fueled the sense of urgency. “Là ils nous disaient il faut faire la grève le plus vite possible pour *bypasser* les fédérations étudiantes” and “*entraîner* les membres des fédérations étudiantes [FEUQ, FECQ] dans notre grève.”

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<sup>322</sup> Philippe’s story will be mentioned again briefly in Chapter 6.

When the “plancher” for the general unlimited strike was not met and most student associations around various faculty associations at UQAM nonetheless voted for a five-day strike,<sup>323</sup> like Élise, Pierre found himself on Monday at the occupation at UQAM. That day, he experienced an intense range of positive and negative emotions. Earlier in the day, he had been “vraiment fâché” when police arrested a student who alongside others was trying to follow the university principal out of the building in order to express their disagreement with the *Ilot Voyageur*.<sup>324</sup> Later that evening at the occupation of the pavillon Hubert Aquin at UQAM, “j’étais vraiment stressé parce que c’était ma-a, ma première occupation!” Pierre thought the riot police would come “faque, j’avais peur.” The police scares him in general, he says, “j’suis pas quelqu’un qui va aller devant là,” because “j’ai peut-être peur de souffrir dans l’fond,” he says.<sup>325</sup> “Faque une journée de rage, de colère, de stress, de peur,” Pierre inhales, “d’engouement collectif, euh d’espoir, euh, un beau *melting pot*,” he says nodding. Even though the “sentiment d’injustice était très là dans le fond, de subir une injustice, pis que pour ça il fallait se révolter,” Pierre clarifies that “y’avait peut-être pas nécessairement l’exaltation qu’il y avait comme au début de l’automne,” because “on n’était pas en grève générale illimitée” as they had expected, so “y’a eu beaucoup de déception.” But at that moment that Monday, “au moins on faisait la grève pendant une semaine,” he giggles. “Ça a comme fait du bien de faire ça, parce que pendant toute l’automne on a voulu faire la grève.”

Then when the Thursday ASSÉ provincial demonstration regrouped only around 2,000 people compared to the 5,000 Pierre recalls had showed up earlier that year in the spring, “quand j’analysais froidement ce qui se passait, euh, ça me décevait pis ça me démoralisait un peu!” But once he was “dans l’action” and “dans la mobilization, tsé, j’oubliais un peu ces affaires-là pis je me concentrais sur euh, bein la GGI<sup>326</sup> on va la faire un jour!” Similar to Élise and Philippe, Pierre recounts the particular emotionality of the general assemblies, and the increased tensions between the FEUQ and the ASSÉ. He remembers a particularly tense yelling match between him and another executive because that executive supported the FEUQ, which had publicly

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<sup>323</sup> Theurillat-Cloutier, 2017

<sup>324</sup> Pierre describes this issue in Chapter 2.

<sup>325</sup> This is reminiscent of Simon’s similar revelation in Chapter 1.

<sup>326</sup> Grève Générale Illimitée (general unlimited strike)

denounced the actions of students involved in the *Mardi de la matraque* at the Cégep du Vieux-Montréal.

Yet the tension didn't seem to bother him as much as the despair. When the 2007 strike did not happen, "j'me rappelle que, à l'hiver je commençais déjà à être un peu euh, tsé un peu *depressed*, là." He remembers one particular day being in the metro and thinking to himself, "c'est de la marde c'te société là," he says as he leans his chin down on his hand. "Si euh, si je vivrais pus ça me déran.. tsé bof, tsé, ça me, tsé sans jamais penser vraiment réellement ou à faire des tentatives, tsé je me disais, bah! L'existence finalement euh, j'y tiens plus ou moins," and "les gens votent contre la grève, euh, les gouvernements peuvent faire qu'est-ce qu'ils veulent euh, les gens s'impliquent pas, les gens magasinent," he thought to himself that day. "Ça me faisait mal" yet "en militant ça ça me permettait de pas penser à ces choses-là.. trop. Pis j'tais comme okay non j'suis dans la lutte, on y va," because "quand t'es démotivé," clarifies Pierre, "tsé, tu vas voir des gens qui sont motivés pis là ils te remotivent, ils te recrinent." Through its failed expectations, the call for a strike birthed an existential despair, yet it simultaneously quelled it.

Then the 2008 UQAM strike happened. Pierre often spoke about the 2007 and 2008 strikes interchangeably, as it was only at the end of the latter that Pierre started to experience the more difficult emotions that he had been too busy to experience sooner. Again in 2008, even though there was no general unlimited strike as he had hoped, when the unlimited strike spread throughout UQAM to other departments Pierre's expectations were raised again that this time "la grève allait être efficace" and that they would manage to "faire reculer eu-u-h.. l'administration de l'UQAM sur le plan de redressement. Pis euh ils voulaient nous faire payer à peu près une centaine de dollars de plus de frais afférents!"

After three weeks, around half of UQAM students were on strike, recounts Pierre. Even though it was a small core of only 100 to 150 students organizing, by March 13 "on a une manifestation en après-midi de 1000 personnes, c'est notre plus grosse manif!" he says, comparing it to other UQAM protests around that time. "Ça a été le sommet d'la grève en fait, c'te journée-là!" A few days later, recounts Pierre, "l'administration de l'UQAM a demandé une injonction pour nous empêcher de faire des levées d'cours, pour nous empêcher d'manifester à moins de 100 mètres, faque là ça l'a scié carrément euhhh les jambes du mouvement de grève." Pierre notes that "c'tait rendu comme un [sic] espèce d'espoir suicidaire presque à la fin, là!"

They voted to end the strike and avoided losing their semester, yet “ç’a été très difficile,” because “la grève avait absolument rien donné finalement” or at least that’s how it felt “sur le coup.” Pierre had put so much of himself into the strike over the last few years that he could not get himself to vote to end the strike, so he abstained:

“Parce que c’était comme voter contre le mouvement que j’ai tellement comme..... bein que j’ai mis beaucoup d’implication dedans, pis que j’ai tellement cru que c’est comme si dans le fond, voter pour l’arrêt de là grève quand on a aucune proposition de l’administration sur la table là, en fait on arrête la grève parce qu’on se rend compte que, elle donnait rien, qu’elle nous a pas rien emmené! J’trouvais que c’tait comme euh, en fait euh.. dire que toute qu’est-ce que j’ai fait c’tait, c’tait d’la marde dans l’fond, tsé! Que ça vallait rien, euh... pis euh, ouais c’est ça, c’était un peu triste... cette époque-là! (sort of snickering, inhales).”

Regardless, Pierre had become “une sorte d’étoile montante à l’ASSÉ.” As “externe de l’AEMSP, j’tais comme à toutes le congrès, pis à toutes les CRAMs,<sup>327</sup> pis euhhh, tsé l’exécutif de l’ASSÉ c’tait, tsé c’tait du monde que je connaissais.” So by the end of the 2008 strike, the ASSÉ executive approached him to see if he was interested in nominating himself to be elected to the ASSÉ executive,<sup>328</sup> but Pierre was torn because he saw it as a lot of responsibility and had already been involved for two years, and he didn’t know if he was ready to devote 40 hours a week. He decided instead to get involved in the CRAM, but he ended up finding it “vraiment plate” and “pas très passionnant” and “moins le fun que quand j’étais à l’AEMSP tsé au local.” In any case he was finishing his degree in December of 2008, so he decided to stop being involved:

“Je me suis éloigné de l’UQAM... euhh, j’ai repensé beaucoup à la grève, j’ai commencé à être un peu euhh un peu plus euuhh cynique, très cynique en fait envers la société euh, avant j’pensais que c’tait possible euh, que la société *change* rapidement euh *intensément* pis radicalement. (inhales) Pis là j’ai commencé à, comme... tsé ààà à m’apercevoir

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<sup>327</sup> Coalition Régionale de l’ASSÉ à Montréal

<sup>328</sup> Voted at ASSÉ congresses.

finalement que les idées que j'avais y'étaient pas en contact avec la réalité de la société  
 pis que finalement cette société là (inhales) [...] j'la refusais énormément, j'la refuse  
 toujours mais... j-j-j'avais comme, j'ai perdu espoir dans comme sa possible  
 transformation pendant un certain temps.”

I want to highlight here how the lack of strong interpersonal relationships during the strike meant that a detachment from the student movement more easily led to a detachment from activism in general, similar to Philippe, and quite differently from Élise. Sure, Pierre knew lots of people in the movement and had become quite confident to speak to people since he had started activism, yet “c'tait pas des amis proches nécessairement.” Even though he describes himself as part of a “clique de militants, militantes vraiment convaincus pis même à tendance plus anarchiste,” it was against his view of syndicalism to mix politics too closely with friendship nor the expression of emotions.<sup>329</sup> Thus he had few avenues for emotional reflexivity. During our interview, he says he realizes his life was missing that interpersonal aspect during the strike. He experienced “moments de camaraderie” singing activist songs at parties, but these contributed to “un sentiment euh, d'appartenance collective” or to help “évacuer une certaine... rage,” rather than foment long-term, supportive interpersonal relationships:

“C'est rare euh, c'est rare aussi que j'ai parlé personnellement avec des militants militantes euuh, de qu'est-ce que notre implication, euhhhh dans le fond, c'tait quoi le *poids* de notre implication dans notre vie tsé j'ai... J'en ai eu à moment donné avec un exécutant de l'ASSÉ euh, avec qui j'avais plus d'affinité euh, comme ami tsé! Euh, mais que c'est pas vraiment un ami j'vois pas euh régulièrement là! Euhhh pis tsé le-e-e, cette personne là tsé euh, euhhh mangeait *mal*, euh, était toujours avait aucun temps libre, euhhh tsé euh, pis, tsé c'tait, c'tait, tsé ç'a, tsé on dirait que pour cette personne là ça faisait vraiment un gros poids tsé, c'tait énorme, la personne avait de l'air euh, à cette époque là tsé elle me semblait un peu dépressive la personne, pis euh... pis j'pense que ça

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<sup>329</sup> “Faut qu'il y aille plusieurs tendances qui soient représentées, pis faut pas nécessairement que les gens sur le conseil exécutif avec qui qu'on est soient nos amis,” says Pierre during the interview, because of the possibility of excluding different ideas and the need for a union to represent its members and thus different ideological tendencies, not to mention it could bring interpersonal frictions into the executive team.

a frappé pas mal de monde aussi dans, dans le milieu étudiant y'a eu beaucoup de dépression."

For Pierre, such depression was linked to a loss of meaning, a void.

"C'est peut-être ça que j'ai vécu aussi, une genre de dépression euh, par rapport euh, c'est ça au.. le militantisme qui était un peu le sens de ma *vie*! Lutter finalement pour améliorer les choses! Que finalement ça améliorerait *pas* les choses! Bein là ça a comme... comme toute, comme toute comme détruit un peu euuuuuh, le *sens* que y'avait à mon existence. Euuuuhhh, parce que bon euh, je crois pas en *dieu* faque, je crois pas en une vie éternelle euh, j'crois pas non plus que le système actuel est bon, tsé! J'suis, j'suis pas un gros *consommateur*, j'aime pas euh, ben je, on consomme toutes quand-même tsé, mais jveux dire, jsuis pas un *hyper-consommateur*, tsé moi m'acheter une BMW pis un condo ça.. ça me rend pas heureux tsé. C'est, c'est pas là qu'y'a le *sens*, c'est pas là que y'a un sens à la vie! Mais finalement si la *religion* me plait pas, le le système actuel me plait pas, pis même dans le fond, la *critique* du système, j'trouve qu'elle fait plus de sens ou qu'elle, là c'tait comme, là c'est le *néant* genre j'crois plus en rien, pis euh, bah!!! (He laughs)"<sup>330</sup>

Without close friendships or any other source of meaning, the reliance on student activism as the meaning of his life meant that once he left that milieu, an emptiness settled in. It was around that time that Pierre met his current girlfriend, which was meaningful because "à l'époque quand j'tais militant j'tais célibataire" with the exception of a young woman he had fallen in love with during the 2008 strike but which did not last beyond the strike. "Faque y'avait comme un vide un peu

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<sup>330</sup> Pierre's mention of the "néant" reminds me of the following entry written by a student during a 'free-writing' exercise about emotions during the CLASSE training camp in January 2012: "Je ne me sens plus à ma place au sein du mouvement étudiant. J'ai aussi l'impression de ne pas être aimé. Le fait que personne ne me parle. J'ai été méchant avec d'autres personnes et j'en suit les contre-coups. Mais à l'heure actuelle je me sens seul. Sinon j'ai de l'espoir envers l'avenir. Le vide: Le vide systémique/Le vide intériorisé /Le vide social /Le vide spécial /Spécialement vide. le vide/Particulièrement seul, le vide/Je suis le vide/Tu me regarde vide/Vide dans ton regard/Ton regard vide de vide/Car ton vide est plein/De ton jugement sur mon vide/Alors le bide vide/J'avale ce vide vide/Pour crier dans le vide/Substance!" It also eerily reminds me of my own diary entry in July 2013: "Existential angst. The strike over, my mandate as VP-External of the Graduate Students' Association completed, and everything that I fought for during the past four years seems to no longer mean anything."

dans ma vie à quelque part,” he says. While he would have felt “gêné” to talk about his personal issues to students he saw at ASSÉ congresses, he recognizes “j’aurais peut-être pu, dans le fond inviter plus de gens qui militaient avec moi, certaines personnes avec qui je me sentais plus d’affinité, dans des moments non-militants, pis de discuter avec ces gens-là” in an informal setting.

However like Élise, when I ask Pierre if he thinks he burnt out, he insists: “Non pas moi. Non parce que j’ai jamais euh, j’m suis jamais *défoncé à mort* dans le militantisme,” adding “j’ai quand-même réussi tsé à faire une frontière entre ma vie privée.. pis le le militantisme euh, j’ai j’ai toujours poursuivi mes études euh, j’ai jamais lâché un cours tsé.” And “ça m’a apporté au plan humain beaucoup beaucoup, pis y’a une expérience même que si des fois était difficile, beiin je pense que c’est bien tsé d’en vivre!” These experiences weren’t so difficult during that time in part because “y’avait beaucoup *d’illusions* là-dedans!” and “je m’avais vraiment construit quelque chose dans ma tête pour, pour comme aussi me garder motivé tout le temps là, à continuer, même si euh,” he snickers, “c’était d’échec en échec euh, en 2007, pis après en 2008 la grève avait pas tellement levé tsé! On dirait que, je m’avais construit une *carapace* pour *m’empêcher* de *penser* que ça pouvait pas marcher.” Rather “c’est *l’après* qui a été difficile,” because that is when there was “la perte de sens.” Because during it all :

“y’avait un sens à ma vie pis c’tait ça tsé. À quelque part tsé qu’est-ce que je faisais, dans mon implication bénévole [dans le mouvement étudiant], ça répondait à mes idéaux. Ça répondait aussi à ma critique que j’avais de la société, j’faisais pas juste *critiquer* la société, j’faisais quelque chose pour la *changer*. Sauf que... c’est ça, là, qu’est-ce que *après* qui m’a un peu eu-u-u-h *fucké*, c’est de me rendre compte que maintenant, je critiquais encore la société mais.. je faisais rien pour la changer! Mais *en plus* de ça c’est que je croyais même *plus* que essayer de la changer ça pouvait marcher. Faque c’est ça qui m’a conduit à une forme de.. de perte de sens, là!”

### **Audrey: from the purpose of life to nausea**

Audrey’s story is similar to Pierre’s, albeit without any interaction with police: she had an image of the historic nature of the 2005 strike, which motivated her yet then led to disappointment when 2007 did not match it. Compared to Pierre, though, Audrey more

consciously relates her depression to interpersonal relationships during the strike. We left Audrey's story in Chapter 1 when she was ecstatic about the turn-out in the general assembly where Dawson College<sup>331</sup> students voted for a three-day strike. Already by the end of that very same assembly, Audrey was feeling a slew of less pleasurable emotions, typical of the dialectical intensity of others' striking experiences. "After the VOTE, it was like *exhilaration*... and then... *FEAR*... like really like" -she inhales dramatically, still speaking ecstatically as if reliving the high of the initial exhilaration- "oh my god... now we actually have to organize like a picket line!" She clarifies: "we didn't even think we would *have* the strike, so it was just like this *panic* of like, Oh my god we won, now what do you we do, you know?" One benefit of interviewing my friend is that I can tell that Audrey is no longer performing as I felt she had been before: she is merely being her passionate, evocative self.

### ***The stress of hope and power***

Similar to Philippe, being an elected representative meant that the downside of collective empowerment was pressure and stress to carry out the mandates appropriately: "Now that we have all this power in our hands of like, we're gonna *do* this, and then how do we funnel that." Yet the anxiety wasn't new for Audrey; it had been creeping in the back of Audrey's mind since she had met Harry, who had stopped her in the corridor and convinced her to get involved in student politics. Indeed, Audrey recounts that an emotion

"that was very *present* during the whole thing was like, well stress, anxiety, that like oh my god what if this doesn't work, what is gonna happen, cuz like I put *all* my emotional, all my *self* into it that if... it wasn't about the issues anymore in a way, it was like 'Okay, if this doesn't work then I'm a failure or something,' you know? Just this kind of attitude. And just like I put so much on the *line* I guess of my *hopes* and my.."

... Audrey stops to exhale and then laughs. This underlying stress -alongside associating one's entire sense of self and meaning with the strike- can be seen as the downside of the sense of urgency and excitement created by a strike context: in Audrey's case, it would lead to increasing fatigue and then burnout. She was caught up in the sense of historic urgency of a strike leading to

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<sup>331</sup> Dawson College is an anglophone CEGEP in downtown Montreal.



an intense rush against time, but also unsupportive interpersonal dynamics within her student union that were laden with the typical gendered division of labour and the insecurities it inspires, as mentioned in chapter 1 of this dissertation. She recounts: “I spent so much time *organizing*, like getting people to *meetings* and organizing *things and events*, that like I never had the time to even do the *research* about the *issues* [...] I mean I knew the basic stuff but I hadn't done in-depth research on what was going on, which made me doubt myself I guess.” She was scared that if it would not succeed, that she would be embarrassed:

“because it was my first political experience, like the person that got me involved, um, was very like, very knowledgeable and knew a lot of stuff and was very *well-read* and was totally on top of the issues and I think I kind of relied on that person to know more the facts more than I did, like I didn't really *do* my own research, I just kind of relied on what he was *telling* me all the time.”

Audrey clarifies: “Obviously I cared about the issues,” yet she was “so *worried*” about saying the wrong thing, “I didn't trust in myself at all, like I didn't trust in my own opinion,” she recalls.

This doubt crept up into everything Audrey did, even the general assembly. Some people argued that general assemblies are “very *emotional*” and the “*contestation around the strike*” made Audrey wonder, “Wow, is this the right decision? Did we do this the right way?” For the three days of the picket Audrey was “*so-o* stressed,” and because she was the main organizer, she “felt like I had to be there *every single second*. So I remember waking up at 5:30 am to get to school at 6:00 am to like create a picket line with like *ten people*, cuz nobody, I mean, people voted for it but they didn't really understand what that *meant*, they thought that they just *didn't have to come to school*.” The twenty-five picketing students with signs were insufficient to block all the doors at Dawson, so “a lot of people got in *anyway*.”

### ***Sickness, burnout, depression***

When the three days of picketing ended, Audrey was “*super sick* for two weeks, and then I was just like *burnt out*,” she recalls. She was “so depressed” and still doubting, “did we even do the right thing? We didn't even accomplish anything.” If she was already concerned about what her fellow Dawson students thought about her, she felt that students from the ASSÉ were also critical, questioning whether it was a “real strike” if they did not have enough picketers showing

up to block the school. She felt like she was “constantly having to defend myself” to representatives from “these other francophone schools who were like way more experienced.” No one was replacing her at ASSÉ meetings, since “everybody just kinda... was relying on me to do stuff I guess, so when I burnt out everything just like kind of died,” and she felt embarrassed whenever she bumped into ASSÉ representatives, she says as she looks at the floor.

Yet perhaps the biggest issue was her relationship with Harry. “I kind of got involved cuz I was like interested in the guy,” she says. So “that was kind of like a *theme* throughout the whole political experience *too*, was that like I kinda was like half in love with this *person* who I was also *really depending* on because he was like my... *all* my source of information,” she recalls. “In retrospect I wasn’t *in love with him*, I was just like *very dependent on him*, and very like (scratches face), I mean... he... paid a lot of attention to me, you know?” She realized by the end that he paid attention to her because “I was such a good organizer,” not because he was interested in her. “Maybe because *he* was so politically *conscious* of everything and had so much *information*, I wanted to prove that like, the organizational aspect was my *forte* and that I could do that, *at least* I could do that better than *him*.” So “I think I threw myself into it too far in the beginning, like I just like *bla-a-h*,” she says imitating a vomiting gesture. “I just put everything into the student work. And like I would be at Dawson from like 8am to 8pm every day, like flyering and like talking to people and trying to get people to come out for the general assembly that we had.” Nearly echoing Élise’s words, Audrey explains that she put all her “strong emotions over *there*” leaving “nothing for myself and I left myself weak, ya know?”

If holidays provided Audrey with a good break, when she returned in the spring, she had another semester of tumultuous student political activity relating to the *Canadian Federation of Students* (CFS), unrelated to the strike. Suffice to say that by the time that was over:

“for like the last two months of my mandate at school I just like didn’t show up to any meetings, I just wasn’t... I’d always tell them that I was coming and then never show up... I was just like totally flaky, I was like I don’t wanna do this anymore. Like I was *trying* to do it, but my heart just wasn’t in it anymore and it was just like I can’t, I was just so disillusioned by all the CFS stuff, and um.. and also the burnout from the strike.”

She would organize meetings without “really putting the effort into it” that she had before, and felt depression and “*revulsion, actually, to like being involved in anything.*” Suddenly, Audrey looks like she wants to cry. “It’s like when you’re really depressed, and like [...] trying to go through the motions but you’re just super sad... I guess... I would call it depression actually, I think I was very depressed,” she says with a reflective look, scratching her eye. Even after a summer of travelling, she could hardly set foot in Dawson anymore. “Even *now*, if I go back to Dawson like I *smell* it and I’m like uh-h-h-h,” she says with a gesture to depict nausea, “and I feel like vomiting. Like I had been so stressed and like associated it with so many *bad* emotions. I mean it wasn’t all bad, right? But it was just so much stress and anxiety that I’m just like uh-h-h, like I just feel panicky when I walk in there almost.”

At the time of our interview, Audrey still has not been involved in any political endeavours, even though she feels the need to be politically involved. “I feel now that I’m fully healed from that whole experience I feel like now is a good time for me.. to be re-involved in stuff, like I really think this year is gonna be really big, she says, referring to the strike planned for 2012.” She was right.

## VICTORIA AT VICTORIAVILLE

Like most of the participants above, Victoria’s story in 2012 is an illustrative example of how a sudden sense of disempowerment due to encounters with police -or the “*pouvoir sur*”- combined with the lack of close interpersonal relationships and emotional reflexivity within the movement, helped to pave the way to despair. She had been involved in organizing the strike for a while before it became generalized across the province, and had participated in many demonstrations and actions since then. Yet at her interview, what occupies the most space in her memory is her anxiety about Victoriaville, the location of the demonstration on May 4 of 2012, when 2,000 to 3,000 people answered the call of the *Coalition opposée à la tarification et à la privatisation des services publics* to gather outside the *Conseil général du Parti libéral du Québec* (PLQ) (Savard & Cyr, 2014). Afterwards, she was charged with riot and mischief merely for being present.

If Victoria had already been arrested during the demonstrations against the G20 Summit, after 36 hours of “*la pire expérience*” in jail in Toronto alone, she thereafter told herself that if she got arrested again, she wanted it to be for a good cause and a well-organized action, which

unfortunately in her opinion did not end up being the case for the Victoriaville event. While it did not end her up in jail, she felt that the experience was even worse than the G20 experience for her: it was “désorganisé” and unclear whether the purpose had been to block the *Liberal Party* meeting or not. She remembers a surreal mix of helicopters, a guy playing a snare drum, a CTV news van; and that despite bandanas on their faces, the teargas was so strong and thick that it was hard to breathe. In hindsight she considers the organization of the Victoriaville protests “stupide” and “naïve”: so many people traveled on buses as if it were a field trip, parked in the Walmart parking lot, and then “sont juste remontés sur l’autobus [sic]” to go back home, not realizing this could put them easily at prey by police on the road. It was “horrible” and “la pire chose que j’ai vue,” she recalls, in part because of the tear gas, the rubber bullets, rock-throwing, people passing out, and activists trying to stop police from arresting protestors.

Victoria was arrested that day. Because the charges of riot and mischief were serious, she worried that they would result in jail time, that she would be brought before a judge and accused of throwing rocks, even though she didn’t throw any. “Lancer des roches c’est pas correct,” she says, then hesitates perhaps as she feels she sounds patronizing and clarifies, “je ne ferais pas ça personnellement.” She experienced a lot of anxiety afterwards related to Victoriaville and as a result, her participation in protests declined dramatically. Even though she knows that the arrest was arbitrary and illegal, that the Crown dropped it and the police didn’t even give the arrest files to the Crown, the anxiety remained high enough for her to want this part of our interview to remain anonymous. She is anxious that if someone ever finds out that she is still anxious about it, that they would think that she threw rocks. She still finds the sound of helicopters disturbing and maintains great distrust towards the legal system, and even judges and lawyers to this day, because it seemed clear to her that the legal system and police were complicit. When she sees police, even at the time of our interview, her first reaction is to avoid them.

Making things worse, the support group for arrested students was from mostly Anglophone universities and was not that well-organized. At their meetings, Victoria complains that they weren’t able to work towards consensus despite their attempts. In comparison, after her arrest at the G20 protests years earlier, the *Convergence des luttes anticapitalistes* (CLAC) had provided a great degree of support, and at their meetings managed to achieve consensus -of course, it had been messy, she notes, as it always is- but it was very deliberative. Even people who hadn’t gone to the G20 had been supportive of her! Yet after Victoriaville, “j’ai pas reçu de

l'appui de personne!" she recounts. Anglophone students seemed more scared than the more Francophone community she had met through the CLAC, perhaps because Anglophones tend to have "moins de couilles," she says, and I laugh as I hear this. Then again, she notes, she didn't ask for help either, "j'aurais peut-être pu demander de l'aide à la CLAC." Yet what was perhaps particularly disappointing and isolating that "aucun des militants de mon université est venu voir comment j'allais."

#### TANIA (AND ME): FROM LOVING HOPE TO SADNESS

I have known Tania since 2010 when she joined *Free Education Montreal* (FEM). Even though Tania was an undergraduate student, FEM was open to all students so together we had organized events around Concordia to mobilize students in the lead-up to the strike. Like many others, Tania had experienced the beginnings of the strike at Concordia around the first week of March as exciting and even emanating love.<sup>332</sup> "The more difficult moments probably came like right after," she notes. "It wasn't really *sequential* but [...] towards like mid-March, it was just, um, people were just really *tired*."

Tania never picketed classes herself, as her student association had not held a vote, and the one elective Women' Studies course she was taking that semester did not need to be picketed.<sup>333</sup> So Tania felt a "disconnect" from the strike, because she felt it was "weird" to picket other classes that were not of her main program of study. In that way, Tania was in a similar situation as me during the strike: I had always been involved in the GSA, so it was my home base for organizing, and as Tania describes of both of us, "We were really officially *tied* to the central structures, you know? You were [elected] director [at the GSA]. And then became [GSA VP-] External and I was [CSU] councillor and.. um, and we were both in FEM so [...] it didn't make sense at the time to let go of those centralized structures either because there was a lot of resources and potential that you could *do* with access to that."<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> This was in the specific case of her witnessing the female-dominated assembly of the *Fine Arts Student Alliance* (the student association representing undergraduate students in the Fine Arts faculty at Concordia -see photograph on p. 134). She notes: "I didn't feel like it was like your typical like sort of like *aggressive*, um oppositional sort of revolutionary kind of atmosphere, you know? People were there out of like *hope* and like, um, I dunno, maybe *love* or something cheesy," she says, putting her hands up in the air again to indicate she doesn't know how to describe it. The disparagement of the word 'love' makes sense in the context of a masculine emotional habitus.

<sup>333</sup> The Women's Studies Student Association was indeed on strike.

<sup>334</sup> To be clear, FEM was like a mobilization committee and did not function according to a top-down structure (decision-making was generally by consensus), yet it was closely tied to GSA funding. Despite having worked

So “it’s just weird when you’re not a member of [a departmental or faculty student] association,” says Tania, “you’re just completely left out, you know? It’s like really difficult to navigate how you’re gonna participate [in the strike].” Since Tania had access and know-how from her work with FEM and the GSA, she found herself booking rooms for general assemblies, digging up departmental association by-laws to analyze their potential for organizing strike general assemblies, buying necessary materials for different department associations, and attending meetings where different departmental student association representatives would meet to coordinate the strike across Concordia. Tania remembers “trying to run around and trying to keep up with everything that was happening which obviously wasn’t..” -she smiles- “feasible.” Indeed, Tania relates the sense of intensity and urgency during the strike, that we needed to give it our all now, “weren’t thinking in the *long-term*.” Tania was “just going ‘Go go go,’ like, I didn’t think the strike was gonna last that long [...] I thought the strike was gonna last uh eight weeks! Like 2005!” she says, giggling.<sup>335</sup>

Alongside the sense of urgency and physical exhaustion there was psychological exhaustion. “There was [...] a lot of like, um, political or philosophical or often like, you know like, *disagreements* and critiques” about “the big things and the small things,” within friend groups and within organizing groups like the *Concordia Mob Squad*,<sup>336</sup> or within a certain

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alongside Tania and Marya in FEM since 2010, once the strike came along I did not work alongside them at all - perhaps why I started to feel more lonely during the strike, as I was not active with my own departmental student association. Instead I was spending time supporting the *Engineering and Computer Science Graduate Students’ Association* (ECSGA) to organize general assemblies to vote on the strike and then to picket their classrooms.

<sup>335</sup> Indeed Savard and Cyr (2014) note that at the dawn of the 2012 strike, Quebec students “n’avaient sans doute pas conscience de l’intransigeance qu’ils allaient devoir affronter. Les grévistes pensaient peut-être que le scénario de la grève de 2005 allait se reproduire: quelques semaines de grève et de mobilisation, une période de négociations et un accord plus ou moins satisfaisant pour les deux parties” (p. 85).

<sup>336</sup> Short for the *Concordia Mobilization Squad*, this was a committee formed in the aftermath of the WHALE event as early as March 1, 2011 -at least that is the date that it was decided to create the email listserve for the group- mostly to organize challenges to the tuition hike among Concordia students. That first meeting of the *Mob Squad* was composed of FEM members (including graduate students), CSU elected representatives (some of who continued the following year as elected representatives), other interested student activists, and even a FEUQ executive. Soonafter however, some undergraduate students involved in the organization of the WHALE publicly criticized the CSU for taking advantage of the mobilization started by students without enough effort from elected CSU officials (see <http://theconcordian.com/2011/03/csu-‘inactive’-in-tuition-fight-student-activists/>). By September, the newly elected CSU (including some of those who had been at that first Mob Squad meeting) reaffirmed that it could support the group with resources, and that the group would not be used by CSU executives to find people to do their work, but rather would be a space for everyone’s voice. Thus a gentle and fragile balance was experimented between autonomy (and the inclusion of graduate students and GSA elected representatives) and institutionalization (CSU backing and funding). Even though the Mob Squad’s activities were also attended and supported by the GSA, the student media sometimes described it as the ‘CSU-led mob squad’ (see: <https://thelinknewspaper.ca/article/csu-mob-squad-gets-serious>). The Mob Squad worked to organize the successful November 10th strike and protest at Concordia (Ibid),

department, or “like the entire, like, *movement*. There was *so* many, so much of that going on,” she says, “which I think is really important and it's really *healthy*. But I think also, um, people, and myself included definitely, didn't really frame it in the most constructive way possible, um, always!” she reflects. This led to her feeling “exhausted just from *that*” and “*inadequate* or something?” Indeed, part of my argument in this chapter is that such an “exhausting” culture of critique within the movement was magnified by the intensity of emotional experiences and the sense of historical urgency; in turn, this culture of critique contributed to the intensity of strike emotional experiences; and ironically if there was time for constant critique, there was little or less time for emotional reflexivity.<sup>337</sup> Such a lacking, I argue, made it more difficult to deal with gendered dynamics and other external and internal dynamics experienced throughout the strikes.<sup>338</sup>

### **Intensity of internal power dynamics**

For example, Tania considers the particular frustrations of being a woman within the strike, even though she had more experience with student organizing than others around her at Concordia. “Especially with women,” she says, “if you don't *actively* like *assert* yourself as having authority on a particular subject then, it's very easy for [women] to be just completely disregarded and not respected at all!” Other power dynamics that increased the intensity of Tania's emotional experiences related to the CSU, as the CSU was affiliated to the FEUQ at that point: Since Tania was an elected representative on the CSU council, she spent a lot of time worrying about how best to use the power and responsibility she had to sway council to change FEUQ policies and decisions.<sup>339</sup> This distrust of the FEUQ led to tension between students at

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yet some students continued to feel that it was a hierarchical structure led by the CSU, and felt limited by what they saw as CSU's desire to maintain its image and protect itself legally, notably how the CSU did not want to print Mob Squad posters inviting students to picket on November 10 (Concordia Mob Squad, 2011). By December 2011, members of the Mob Squad voted to be officially independent from the CSU, and started speaking more clearly about the organization of a general unlimited strike at Concordia (see: <http://theconcordian.com/2011/12/fighting-fees-in-2012/>).

<sup>337</sup> This is in line with my unexpected thoughts and feelings at the CLASSE founding congress in December 2011: that it could be unproductive for the movement to engage in ‘emotional’ debates because it would take time away from the important ‘intellectual’ and logistical debates urgently needed to ensure the success of the strike.

<sup>338</sup> On this topic, as early as January 13, 2012, I wrote in my diary: “it's like I'm relegated to the women's traditional position: Doing unpaid work that goes unrecognized, especially because it's rarely intellectual work that I end up doing [...] just tired of feeling stupid, feeling like I'm the busboy who runs around doing stuff, who people don't take very seriously [...] After talking to Tania, I cried. I think because I feel so lonely. That there is no one I can talk to about this stuff without getting them upset or more burnt out.”

<sup>339</sup> Like other interviewees, Tania was initially mistrustful of the FEUQ in part because its congress did not officially endorse the ‘minimal agreement’ -an initiative on behalf of local student associations motivated in part to prevent a

Concordia, including between herself and the CSU president, who greatly disappointed her for catering to FEUQ's more moderate line on the strike.

There were also tensions between centralized levels of power (CSU) and decentralized ones (departmental or faculty student associations): The two levels of organizing had already been working separately since the beginning of the strike, explains Tania. Whereas on the one hand, the small *Strike Committee* of the *Concordia Mob Squad* had been looking at by-laws of departmental student associations and meeting with their executive teams to discuss how to organize general assemblies to vote for the strike, on the other hand, the CSU merely wanted those departments to vote for a one-week strike in conjunction with the CSU, opines Tania. She was not sure it was feasible to shut down the entire university even for one week with a centralized student union and she considered it "hurtful" to the general strike movement to have a strike that would not stop classes from taking place. Meanwhile, for those departmental student associations that had been maintaining an unlimited general strike, they "wanted to try to shut down the school" to give them a break from the constant picketing; but that was never the CSU executives' intention, she argues. The motion for the strike basically excluded picket lines, and the entire assembly was not participatory, she recalls; CSU executives would even attend meetings to discourage people from picketing saying "we have a different climate here;" and when speaking to the media the CSU executives would say something to the effect of, "That's not the culture at Concordia, like you know, yeah, we're *civil*, or something, you know?" These dynamics made Tania "really *angry*" as she felt "censored." Yet the constant "sense of urgency" stemming from the 2005 "formula" -that lasted only two months- meant that oppressive dynamics within organizing groups went unaddressed, according to Tania, as there was a sense that the strike would end any day, so there was no time for conversing about internal power dynamics.

The already distressing and disappointing power dynamics between more centralized student associations or groups (CSU, GSA, FEM) and departmental student associations, in addition to gender dynamics within groups like the *Concordia Mob Squad*, helped contribute to

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repetition of FEUQ's past public criticisms of certain elements of the strike movement and FEUQ's agreement with the government without the presence of the CASSÉE in 2005 (for more details about the 'entente minimale,' see Theurillat-Cloutier, 2017, p. 305-306). Initially put forth during the *Rassemblement national étudiant*, the minimal agreement was signed by the ASSÉ and the FECQ by the end of 2011, but not by the FEUQ. Interestingly, however, as the strike took flight, notes Theurillat-Cloutier, the FECQ president soon defied the minimal agreement, while the FEUQ president "a fait preuve d'une extraordinaire solidarité" by refusing "l'exclusion de la CLASSE de la table de négociations" and by avoiding "de condamner explicitement les actions directes" (p. 307).



intense emotional experiences of all kinds all at once, “you just experience *so much* constantly! You *grow* a lot and you *learn* a lot and.. you’re *frustrated* a lot and you’re *happy* a lot and you just, there’s just, everything is really *intense*.” And hidden under other emotions was a “lingering feeling,” suggests Tania, “fear” of basically everything, “of consequences,” of “the strike falling apart,” of a general assembly failing, of her friends getting hurt, of making a bad decision, of the strike ending without gains.

### **Interpersonal support, emotional reflexivity**

Luckily, Tania had a fair amount of interpersonal support. She had supportive parents who were proud of her involvement as “they were doing similar things at my age.” And she made close friends during the strike; since most of them were involved to the same extent as her, she was often organizing protests or events *with* them, as basically almost everyone she knew in the city was going to protests, too, which made it literally possible for her to ‘share her feelings’:

“It was just really cool to um, have people that are close to you that you care about, um, that *feel* the same or a really similar way about the events that are happening and following the things that are important to you, whether a particular *comment* the government, um, like spokesperson had *said* or *made* or a particular like article in um, you know, some regional like newspaper that was great or *horrible* [...] So to be able to like *talk* to them about the most important things happening, in my life at that moment, and seeing that they shared a lot of my, a lot of feelings that I had, um, that was really cool... Whereas like when you talk to people that aren’t necessarily involved they can *empathize* with you but they don’t necessarily share the same feelings.”

Unfortunately this wasn't the case for Tania at home. One of Tania's roommates was not involved in the strike thus was not understanding. Tania experienced a lot of tension with her. Tania was often not home to do house chores, and when she did miss hangouts with strike friends in order to be home, she was often coming home physically exhausted or angry or excited or hopeful and wanted to share her feelings. Audrey, her other roommate and interviewee for this dissertation, despite also being involved in the 2012 strike, was still dealing with her own burnout from 2007, and was not necessarily ready to relive the negative parts of it through Tania. In her self-reflective way, Tania acknowledges that she should have tried to have a conversation with

her housemates, yet it might not have been the right time for Tania to do that as during the strike she was often "on edge" and not dealing well with criticism generally, she reflects. So she stayed over at friends' houses instead of going home. Even though it was "just more difficult to find like, the right time" to talk to even her strike friends about her more difficult feelings during the strike, she had the chance to talk about her daily experiences with her one friend -whose downtown apartment couch she would sleep on regularly especially by the end of the strike, when both were trying to make up for the academic work they hadn't done all semester.

Indeed, for Tania, part of the strike's intensity is related to relationships, as "there are simply so many *people* that you're interacting with and you're, interacting with them about *so many* different things!" Quite differently from "spending hours on end in *class* where you're not really interacting with anyone," during the strike "you're just *constantly* [...] interacting with people in different environments whether they're at protests or whether they're at general assemblies or (inhales) at an *organizing* meeting." Thus, during the strike, Tania learned how "relationships are *naturally* difficult and hard to navigate and, and take a lot of effort and work!" Thus she considers that:

“We need to make *those* [relationships] solid and work on *those*.. as much as we work on, um, on building a *movement*. ‘Cause I think at the end of the day the thing that brings people *down more* than anything else isn't so much being like *physically* tired or (inhales)... *hopeless* about the situation getting better, but I think it's just about interpersonal relationships having bumps in the road or just kind of falling apart. And conflicts. I think that probably is like the more serious cause of burnout.”

For her, during the strike “it was always like 'There's always more *urgent* important things that need to focused on as opposed to a particular relationship or.. emotion....' And I think that's probably the exact kind of thing that destroys movements.”

If Tania feels that it is important to focus on people treating others “in a human way,” it is also important to treat one's self in this way, she smiles and then says, giggling: "I think we just have *way* too high expectations of ourselves!" During the strike Tania “just wanted to do everything. And be everywhere. And it wasn't possible. Like I was expecting too *much* of myself and I just wasn't saying *no* to things and coming up with *new* things to do.” And yet it seems

clear for Tania that if sacrificing emotional and relational well-being is not justifiable, physical sacrifice is justifiable on a short-term basis, pointing once again to the intense involvement that the strike is felt to necessitate because of the historic circumstances and related sense of urgency. "Social change takes sacrifice," she notes, "especially in the middle of like an actual *strike*, and, there just *isn't*, like balance is not really feasible."

### **Everyday dialectical intensities**

Once the Concordia semester ended in April, the strike turned to the streets for most Concordia students. Power dynamics related to the "pouvoir sur" outside of Concordia during the strike were no less intense for Tania on an emotional level, boiling up confusing concoctions of emotions every day. After being "*harassed* walking down the street for wearing a red square" by a random person or by the police, Tania would often leave the metro "*hiding* my red square or like trying to appear as normal as possible, so I wouldn't be harassed by cops. And then this like weird like, I don't know like cognitive dissonance or something," she says, recognizing the irony of wearing a conflictual symbol and then trying to hide it, reminiscent of King's (2005) concept of cognitive dissonance and its often forgotten link to emotion. Some of Tania's friends "were *overwhelmed* by all those feelings and.." she inhales, "a few of them just kind of like, just disappeared.. for a while" during the strike; she doesn't know why and she didn't want to "harass them about *why* they're not participating or something, you know?" So "we didn't really talk about.. because um..... I'm assuming it's because they were just like overwhelmed and, couldn't really deal with what was happening and just.. needed to be, needed to lock themselves in their house for a little while." Again, there were no structures or practices in place that could allow for or encourage emotional reflexivity.

"Everything that you see in streets, or in the media," being harassed in the street with "horrible *comments*" and the "great divide" in the general public produced an atmosphere that was emotionally intense in a simultaneously positive and negative way. "Just the every day experience of like the strike," whether good or bad, "encourages you to kind of resist and whatever emotions that come with that." This included feeling:

"more *hopeful* and [...] really *determined*.. to wanna keep *going* and, um, having like that attitude of like 'Go go go,' like, you know if something else was thrown our way, like the government would like accept ASSÉ into the negotiations and then kick them *out* [...]"

offer something that was essentially a tuition increase or something (inhales), and kick [ASSÉ] out of the negotiations again, it's like this like back-and-forth, that just like made me, you know, it just makes you *fight harder* and feel like, um, like what's happening is really *important* [...] And you have to make the most of every moment!"

Tania was motivated, energized, inspired simply by seeing other people continue to protest, while simultaneously outraged and stressed. "Especially towards.. in in April, I think, is when the police violence got really, just really intensified and," Tania inhales, "that was really stressful." She found herself feeling "*amazed* that there are people that, um.. you know, are fed up and brave enough to kind of *counter* that and to oppose it," even something as simple as "cops like trying to push a protest on a sidewalk or something and people say *no*." Or when the police would charge "people would *not* panic!" They would just say to each other "Be calm and just continue marching." In those moments Tania felt a mix of "fear" and "awe" and "outrage, also!"

Two particular moments in May stick out in Tania's memory as being particularly difficult emotionally. The first was the infamous May 4 protest in Victoriaville<sup>340</sup> "I didn't really know what was *happening*," she was "*totally* disoriented," she recalls of that protest. On the one hand "I think there was like a *confrontation* with cops, on the other hand there was like *clowns and music* and, it was like *really* chaotic!" she says, giggling. Tania's memory of Victoriaville represents in this sense a caricature of the strike's emotions in the space of one hour, holding in its geography the intensely potent seeds of joy and sadness, excitement and trauma that confused each other and fed into each other throughout the strike:

"All of a sudden there's this person that's, I realize is on the *ground*, is completely passed out and his head's bleeding, and, and there's riot cops, SQ<sup>341</sup> like, coming forward and [protesters], um, formed like a circle around the person. Um, because he was completely passed out and he couldn't be *moved* and so we were just like, you know, trying to like, form a physical *barrier* between like, you know *more*; teargas or whatever, batons."

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<sup>340</sup> When she talks about this, she suddenly becomes very serious and hesitant, her lips flat. Since Tania knows that she can take it off the record later if she so chooses, she continues to tell me, albeit seeming uncomfortable. She confirms later that she indeed felt uncomfortable speaking about this.

<sup>341</sup> Sûreté du Québec, the provincial police.

The volume of Tania's voice is now very low. "I think he was one of the people that lost his eye, um, or had a concussion at the very least." Her volume starts increasing. On the one hand she remembers from that day "some level of *excitement* or something, I don't know," maybe because Victoriaville "was the first point where I really saw people like *resisting*," she clarifies, "I don't mean like *physically*, just like, you know.. And um, and I remember just that being *really inspiring*," that "there are people that are.. willing to like put.. their selves, their like own like, um, well-being sort of, in harm's way." They just kept protesting "in that same *area* even though it was like *filled* with tear gas, and, you couldn't *see* anything. You know? And cops were like swinging their batons at you and they just were like 'No I'm going to protest.'" Here was another example of Tania feeling "*really* amazed" and "really um.. *excited* about that level of resistance" and then "later it kinda hit me and I was just like whooa. Like that was actually a really traumatizing experience."

### **Shock slowly sinks in**

The second moment Tania recalls was probably "the first night, um, of the casseroles,"<sup>342</sup> the same night when she noticed "there was this like family of four just banging on their pots, um, and a cop car came and you know, there was like two cops, they were like, uh, kinda started harassing them, and it was just this like, couple and their two young kids," she recounts. "A friend of mine and I were on our way to bike downtown and so we kinda stopped, and I started filming them on my phone and then, you know, so the cop comes and tells me that what I'm doing is, like illegal or something like that!" When her and her friend finally made it downtown, "the protest had already started and it, and I think it was already being like violently dispersed," she says, clearing her throat. "I was just trying to find where my friends were and.. being really worried about you know, like, where everybody was and if they were safe!" By now it was late May, so "the adrenaline had like worn off, 'cause there's also like this adrenaline that keeps you *going* during the strike." As she biked around the Berri-UQAM area, she could see "just like police violence like as far as the eyes could see, in like all different directions! Um, and I just

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<sup>342</sup> "Casseroles" means "pots," so the term is often used even by anglophones to refer to the "casserole movement" consisting of the banging of pots and pans by a mostly non-student populace on their balconies, doorsteps, or during neighbourhood demonstrations that spread through many municipalities in opposition to Bill 78, adopted on May 18, 2012 by Quebec's National Assembly (Savard & Cyr, 2014).

remember just *crying* as I was biking and just being, feeling really um, devastated and just really helpless,” she says as the tone of her voice changes. “I think it was like the first time that that the *shock* really hit me too.”

It took a while for the shock of police violence to kick in, recounts Tania, precisely because “there's like excitement about like having *so many* people participate and people really standing *up* for themselves and, um, and sometimes you know seeing people kinda like, um, *resist* the police as well, which is, you know, to *me* like being really, like *wow* like that's, you know, being really *impressed* by *seeing* that.” But then she vividly remembers that moment that night when “the extent of what was happening, in terms of the violence actually like sinking in. Um on a more *emotional* level ‘cause I think intellectually like I could *see* that it was *wrong* and is, you know criminal, morally wrong or something, but just like *emotionally*, like it hadn't sunk in.” Prior to that moment she had been mostly feeling “a lot of rage!”<sup>343</sup> and “this *weird* like adrenaline that just kept me going for a really long time,” so she had not stopped “to *think* about really what was happening or analyzing, um, what was going on. I wasn't being very like, introspective either! It was just kinda like, Go go go! And there's always something to do, you know like, like quite literally like every morning for a while when you wake up, there's like, you know, um, there's like a meet-up in the mornings, and there's night demos and,” she inhales, “there's always something in between during the *day*,” she says, pausing. Not to mention that when police violence happens “it's just so *shocking* and, um, and I think the focus on trying to like *escape* that situation,” and “the instinct is to think about what to do, how to ensure people are safer at protests,” “have like text loops or something to get in *touch* with everyone to make sure *they're* okay and, um, or.. maybe there needs to be some kind of a *press release* about something that happened.. Um, you know, the information needs to go out *there* so people *know* about it, and, there needs to be like, y-you, you know, every *moment* needs to be productive.” The urgency of the strike thus created a time-limited logic that means that there is less time to deal with the more difficult emotions. Thus “you don't *give* yourself the opportunity to like talk to your close friend about, um, you know, seeing someone knocked unconscious on the ground with their head bleeding at a protest, um, and how that affected you..”

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<sup>343</sup> What Tania recounts is eerily reminiscent of Gould's (2009) insight that in the long run, the emotion culture of anger allowed grief to go uncared for.

### When sadness surfaces to the burnout of summer

Unlike Élise and Julie during the aftermath of the shock of police violence, Tania did not quite feel powerless; rather, both her affect and words reveal that what she felt was sadness:

“Um... (stares off into distance looking up as her head is leaning back on couch, long pause) mmm (long pause) what did I feel (exhales quickly)..... (long pause) I don't know just.. um.....(long pause) just sadness. I don't know. Just becoming more aware that, y'know people were being physically injured and.. um and just being really *upset*. Um... (pause) I don't know. And I wasn't quite feeling *powerless* either, it was just.. letting myself just feel.. *sad*. You know? cause I think up until that point I'd just been *outraged* or *angered* or .. something and just.. hadn't really been just *sad*.”

Yet like the slow heat of that summer, it took a while for sadness to reluctantly sink in. With the good weather, Tania also remembers there being more family-friendly protests, so "towards the summer I just.. thought about my friend's daughter a lot," with whom she was living alongside her mom at the time of the interview:

"By *that* point I just felt like everybody, um, that was around me had just been like, *abused* to such a degree that it was too late for all of us! [...] *abused* by like, whatever the media was saying, or just by like that incredibly like harsh just *experience* of being on strike, of being, of opposing like the status quo, just *psychologically* and *physically* and just like, being *tired*, and, and, you know? So it was just like 'Ah well it's too late for us, but you know this is for like, the next generation or something' and just like really thinking about my friend's daughter, and... and, um, feeling excited for hopefully.. uh making the world a little bit better for her."

Tania felt a strange mix of despair about the present ("it was too late for us") alongside renewed hope for the future generation. Her emotions were oriented towards a collective beyond the present generation. "I was becoming more *hopeful* for the future and that's probably what she represented."

Then the Grand Prix happened. “I feel like the strike like *ended* after the Grand Prix,”<sup>344</sup> says Tania, because that was the “protest that was kettled before it *began*. Um, which is so common place now.” There were fewer people attending protests, so the outcome of protests

“wasn’t.. as high as people had, they had thought of and-or *hoped*, and probably ‘cause at that *point* a lot of students had like gone back *home* or were *working*, you know it was *clear* that, you know, that the strike had been suspended essentially until August! Um.. so things really [were] just like dying down, and I think like, those two months [were for me] just being really able to.. let everything sink in. ‘Cause yeah.. I wasn’t as active.”

Expectations that had been raised were lowered, Tania became less involved, and suddenly she seemed to be increasingly processing her feelings alone. With the arrival of summer she had “*time* to like sit down and think” thus was more “*physically prepared*” to accept what had occurred, “and just kinda like, um... I don’t know, feel that the full *scope* of the entire, you know, movement, and.. all the different emotions, and all the different, um experiences that I’d had and everything that I’d learned.” There wasn’t time to process the feelings of shock from the strike until June 2012, which she is still processing “until *now*,” the time of the interview one year later in the summer of 2013. She experienced a burnout, albeit not a serious one, she says, but it lasted for around six months. “I think I just felt... *really* upset that everything was dying down in the summer,” she says, “after [Bill] 78 was put into effect.” Night demonstrations were getting smaller, “and there was just not much happening!” recalls Tania. “We all sort of thought that it would start up again! Or at least, you know, my friends and I did,” in August when students “would be forced back to school that things would start up again at same speed. Um and then of course like the elections were called,” she says frowning. She experienced burnout around that time because “the movement sort of wasn’t *there*, um to *inspire* me and to give me energy and keep me *going*. And so I was just feeling really *tired*, um and just the *weight* of everything, just kind of started hitting me at that point.” Tania highlights here how the collective inspired (and oriented) certain emotions, which were harder to sustain and led to disappointment when those collective situations disappeared. It was “almost like a sort of depression but about *one*

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<sup>344</sup> The Grand Prix took place on June 10, 2012



particular issue, in this case strike activism.” She didn’t really feel any emotions and wasn’t excited about doing nor talking about strike-related activities anymore.

On the bright side, her desire to distract herself from the strike meant that she was able to focus on “*relationships* that I had *neglected* for months” due to the previous intensity of the strike. She started dating someone, which kept her “*distracted* from the fact I was really burnt out.” Tania was eating better and “just generally trying to take care of myself more” and “living a more balanced life.” Luckily she was still working at the GSA, she adds, because if not she might have completely dropped out of everything. Then in September, after the strike was over, “I just found it demotivating cuz I, there wasn’t, cuz I kind of felt *alone*, you know? It wasn’t the same people. All the people that were *so* involved in the strike just *disappeared* I don’t even know where they went.” Some of her friends graduated, others needed breaks, were burnt out, or “doing different kinds of activism.” So “it was just really demotivating to like do something *alone* that like, you know a few months ago you’d been, um, working on with like hundreds of thousands of people!”

Indeed, I have sought to argue in this chapter that if the sense of historical urgency that these strikes engendered initially contributed to intensely ‘high’ existentially-imbued collective-oriented emotions, this same sense of urgency and these same ‘high’ emotions simultaneously contributed to discomforts, disappointed hopes, and different forms of despair that were mostly processed by individuals alone as time went on -due to the lack of time, space, and long-term mechanisms for emotional reflexivity and interpersonal support to deal with the disappointing power dynamics increasingly encountered, both internal (gender dynamics, centralized versus decentralized student associations, different levels of knowledge at general assemblies) and external (police harassment, harassment from public, waning of strike, agreement without the ASSÉ) to the strike movement. Considering Fellner’s (2014) characterization of the ontological stance of dialectical thinking, notably that “contradictions saturate all aspects of social life and are the engine of the continuous transformative forces that characterize existence” (p. 1270), this chapter has been limited by its focus on the multiple forms of ‘contradictions’ in which these striking emotional experiences were interwoven; a later chapter will consider whether transformative forces were sparked from them months or years after the strike ended.

Yet before heading forward to that aftermath, continuing with the spirit of multiple dialectics -in his words “multilectics”- that incorporates the multidimensionality of human beings

that Fellner proposes, I now move backwards in time to explore the idiosyncrasies of the life stories of certain interviewees (Marie, Marya, and Alex) *before* the strike, to examine how their individual histories influenced their entrance into the history and world of strikes and the dialectical intensities of their particular emotional experiences.

## Chapter 4

### Life stories of striking emotions

*"Emotions are biographical: primed by evolution, to be sure; shaped by culture; constrained by subject position; but given personal relevance and intensity by individual history."*

- Andrew Beatty (2014, p. 552).

*"A life story approach [...] finds meaning in the context of a life lived [...] This expanded frame tells us more about what was lost and how this event shaped the interviewees' subsequent lives -the silences, absences, activism, and memories."*

- Steven High (2014, p. 42-43)

I had not initially planned to consider life stories for this dissertation, yet in some cases the interviewees and their stories made their decision for me, when the intensity of the striking emotions they described appeared to derive their meaning precisely from the context of their broader histories. Indeed, once I started hearing participants offer up their life stories before the strike as relevant pieces of their emotional puzzles, or their post-strike stories, without me asking, I increasingly started to view a person's emotions related to the strike as inextricably related to the fuller context of their lives (Beatty, 2014). Since none of my interviews were designed to be as long and detailed as life story interviews, they will not be as rich as the entire manuscripts that have been dedicated to the story of one person (e.g. James, 2000; Behar, 1993). Yet I contend that the life stories of strike participants in this chapter provide an additional layer of context for explaining their emotional experiences during the strikes. By attempting to view emotions in their more longitudinal frame, I am not proposing the sense of an emotion as a reified independent entity with a life of its own, as Hochschild (1983) warns against. Rather I am positing that for some participants, the existential tenor of their striking emotional experiences had an idiosyncratic meaning because of the story that led up to them; and thus the emotional downfall was, I argue, more intense.

Philippe's working-class history as recounted in Chapter 2 already reflects the impact of life history on his later striking emotional experiences; these stories further contribute to illustrating the ways in which life histories affected their striking emotional experiences. Thus

they contribute to further elucidating the inextricable background and history -sometimes far from the location of the urbanity highlighted by Bhéreur-Lagounaris and colleagues (2015)- rather than the spontaneity of the strike highlighted by these latter authors. In all cases, they point to these individuals' ability to transform their personal experiences into a collective issue, through collective-oriented emotions. And in some cases, they point to how the idiosyncratic history of these emotional experiences sometimes made the downfall more difficult to deal with.

I start with Marie –who was already introduced in Chapter 1- as her interview was one of my first, thus the life story theme simply emerged without me expecting it. Since Marya's strike story is already introduced in Chapter 2, here I only tell the story she told me about when she lived in her country of origin, which emerged partly on her own as she told her story of the strike, and then partly with my probing about it. Finally, I tell Alex 's full story about 2012, which emerged because by the time I did her interview I was more clear about the relevance of asking about interviewees' life stories. It is interesting to note that if Philippe's life story was the first topic that he brought up in his interview, and if Alex was comfortable talking about her life story, Marya and Marie brought it up on the periphery of their stories and both insisted that their life stories were unnecessary, irrelevant information. While Alex and Marya were organizers during the 2012 strike, Marie's experience with strikes covered many years, including 2005, 2007, and 2012.

#### MARIE: ENTERING A NEW BEGINNING AT ITS END

“Pour commencer *vraiment* du début,” explains Marie -referring to the beginning of her strike story- it all started when she and her parents escaped British weather to take their Christmas vacation “dans le sud,” the Dominican Republic. “Pis là j'ai rencontré un Québécois, tsé.” Breezing quickly through her recollection of their encounter, in her gently ironic, self-mocking way, shaking her head for emphasis, Marie continues: “On était sur la plage pis c'était cute pis tsé, bon, c'est comme devenu mon chum.” She smiles, then chuckles heartily at the seeming lack of relevance of her story, adding, “tu vas comprendre que y'a un lien après avec la grève!” When their beach vacation was over, her new boyfriend returned to Québec and Marie went back to England. Some months later, it was Easter break, and they were chatting together through the internet: he sent her a message which she recalls went something like, “J'suis en grève en ce moment! Est-ce que euh tu veux venir au Québec, tsé, pis me rendre visite?”

So off she went to Québec. It was the spring of 2005: Marie arrived at the Montreal airport to meet him only a couple of days before the Cégep de Sherbrooke was to have its general assembly to decide whether to end their general unlimited strike. “Donc là euh je suis arrivée là, pis je me suis retrouvée dans cette espèce de mouvement,” she recalls :

“Tsé, *moi*, fin, le collège où j’allais en Angleterre c’était quand-même assez calme, y’avait pas grand chose qui se passait, euh, j’étais pas trop au courant de ce qui se passait non plus, pis bon. Et là là, j’suis arrivé dans ce ce, c’était... je sais pas y’avait vraiment une *effervescence* tsé euh, à Sherbrooke en fait parce que le cégep était en grève, l’université était en grève, mais mon chum était au cégep, tsé?”

After a couple of days of winter sports and late nights with her boyfriend and his friends, the dawn of the Cégep de Sherbrooke general assembly broke. Already Marie's story is interesting, because without experiencing the face-to-face collective ritual that Collins claims is necessary for emotional energy, without being a student, without ever having seen a general assembly, and being surrounded by her boyfriend and friends who were not that motivated to strike, she nonetheless felt a sense of effervescence, hinting already at the power of her particular life history. “Après ce que mon chum m’avait raconté, je trouvais que c’était majeur qu’on vote de *poursuivre* la grève, tsé?” So the morning of the assembly, despite a late night partying Marie woke up at seven in the morning, exclaiming “ON VA VOTER!!” Amidst their groggy protestations, Marie managed to get her boyfriend and his friends to her first student general assembly.

“C’était énorme, là!” she recounts. It took place in an arena, yet it was also ‘cold’ in an emotional way, says Marie, gesturing with her hands as if feeling the texture of the air. “Je sais pas comment dire,” says Marie, “c’était pas vraiment un *safe space*,” recalls Marie, referring to the term that she surely learned from her later involvement. “Quelqu’un s’exprimait au micro pis là «OHHHH » pis, euh, « OUAIS!!! »,” Marie imitates heckling voices. “Moi je ne serais jamais allée au micro[phone]... à cette assemblée générale là, jamais jamais jamais, ” says Marie. “J’aurais trouvé ça vraiment, vraiment intimidant.” She wonders to herself, even if she had the experience in the student movement that she has now, would she have gone to the microphone? “Tsé, je sais pas. Parce que c’était... c’était froid, c’était super *tendu*, les étudiants étaient *tanné-e-*

s d'être en grève, que ça *bouge* pas, pis on sentait vraiment une espèce d'écoeurantite tsé? Euhh, d'épuisement du mouvement, tsé?" Some were saying "De toute façon, euh, ça sert à rien, ils vont mettre fin à notre session" while others were saying that they wouldn't really be able to cancel the session.

Yet the cold atmosphere didn't describe Marie's internal climate, as she went through many different emotions and "à travers vraiment différentes, différents stades," as if her body had become a microcosm of the dialectical intensity of the entire strike experience, during that one assembly. "Tsé j'ai été *super* fâchée tsé. À moment donné j'étais, je m'en rappelle j'étais vraiment en criss, tsé?" explains Marie, putting her fist in the air. "Mais ils pensent juste à leur *session*, ils sont tellement individualistes," she thought to herself, "pis là c'était plus fort que moi," even though she was not at all affected by the loans and bursaries, she explains. "J'étais *vraiment* solidaire tsé des étudiants qui avaient *pas d'argent*, pis qui avaient comme *besoin* de cette aide financière-là, pis qui se voyaient couper l'herbe sous les pieds."

Then, discounting the meaning of her experience with a sudden proclamation of ageism, as other female participants in this thesis have done, Marie adds, "mais en même temps j'étais tellement jeune tsé, mais je voyais vraiment les eum, les personnes qui-qui-qui votaient, les *briseurs de grève* tsé, que je les appelais tsé, je les voyais comme *vraiment* comme des des espèces de bourgeois qui venaient comme, qui se qui se foutaient de tout, tsé pis, faque j'étais vraiment fâchée tsé?" More than angry even, "j'étais *folle* comme de la marde là, c'était comme 'Ahh!'" Marie then puts her reactions into context, adding, "Mais moi je suis comme ça en, mes émotions eum, *transparaissent vraiment*, tsé comme, pis à ce moment j'étais la *plus intense* de ma gang."

Despite or perhaps because of the frustration it created for Marie, the assembly left its trace of hope and motivation in her, which would unexpectedly change the course of her life. "Finalement on a voté pis on a perdu tsé euh, le vote de grève!" continues Marie. "Et la grève s'est arrêtée, tsé?" Considering she had woken everyone up early after a late night, "là c'était *grosse déception*," recalls Marie, "mais en même temps **beaucoup d'espoir**, par rapport à comme, au fait que, c'est pas grave c'est pas fini on peut continuer pis tsé, les autres universités ailleurs au Québec sont encore en grève." When it was all over, Marie recounts, they went back home "**super démotivés, super déçus**, pis là j'étais comme 'Okay bein, moi je viens vivre au Québec tsé, pis je vais poursuivre ce mouvement-là!'"

We both laugh when she says this, maybe because I make a face of surprise to express my disbelief that this *one general assembly* in 2005 had been responsible for her decision to move across the ocean. I ask, “C’est pas vrai?”

She nods, and once she stops laughing -in her passionate yet casual style that signals she doesn’t take herself too seriously and can poke fun at herself when needed- she nods fervently. “Je sais pas pourquoi tsé peut-être parce que, j’étais en Angleterre où il se passait pas grand-chose,” whereas at this general assembly “je trouvais ça tellement stimulant, pis, je connaissais pas encore *tous*, euh les côtés *sombres*, de, du du mouvement étudiant tsé j’étais vraiment comme, je trouvais ça super *beau*, tsé.”

At that point I remember that Julie had used the term 'beau' in our interview a few weeks prior, so I ask: “Pourquoi tu trouvais ça beau?” As if to think more intensely about this question, Marie looks up into the air: “Je, je, ça, ça me donnait l’impression que.... eum... y’avait *vraiment quelque chose qui se passait, quelque chose de fort*, une grande solidarité, tsé eum, euhh entre les gens, tsé, je trouvais comme, comme si le mouvement, les étudiants étaient unis en *une seule voix*,” she says, reminding me as I write this of Julie’s feeling of ‘tous ensemble’ - and yet Marie had only heard stories from her boyfriend and attended one general assembly. Again the idea of beauty related to new collective-oriented emotions. Marie adds that what also contributed to her finding the assembly “beau” was her realization that the students in "sciences humaines" who -in contrast to the "infirmières pis les médecins pis tout ça qui voulaient retourner euh au travail pour pas perdre leur session"- were arguing "Ben *non*, on a une société à bâtir!” tsé pis euh, faque là je me suis vraiment *reconnue* là-dedans tsé, je me suis dit bein tsé ces gens-là sont prêts d’aller jusqu’au *bout* pour obtenir comme leurs *revendications*.”

Further explaining Marie's sudden decision to move to Quebec was how everything about the assembly and the movement was new and stimulating, not to mention, “j’étais tellement amoureuse [de mon copain] que j’tais comme « Ah wow! Le Québec tsé! »” she says, imitating an infatuated tone and giggling at herself. Soon enough, that same feeling of being ‘amoureuse’ both with her boyfriend, and with the strike, led Marie to disappointment, when she realized that her boyfriend’s reaction to the strike was not as strong as she had imagined. Back then, Marie recounts, “j’pense que je me rendais pas compte à quel point euh, il était *pas* engagé dans le mouvement étudiant.” She had just assumed that he was involved, and she didn’t know anyone else in the student movement to know what being on strike looked like, Marie explains to me.

The morning she had tried to wake everyone up, “quand je me suis rendu compte que tout le monde s’en crissait, tsé! Là j’ai, j’ai vécu un peu un désenchantement, tsé.” She asked herself: “Mais attends euh, mais dans le fond on est, vous êtes en grève pourquoi là, tsé? Pour rester chez vous?” When she confronted him about it, she expected him to tell her that he was on strike because “je porte un projet de société pis je vais aller sur les lignes de piquetage pis toute ça,” but that’s not what he answered, Marie recounts, with a sigh. “Faque dans le fond ç’a été euhh, ç’a été, c’est un conflit qui est né en 2005 et qui se poursuit de nos jours,” Marie says laughing. “Parce que moi j’suis très impliquée actuellement dans le mouvement étudiant pis, c’est encore eum, vraiment à l’ordre du jour pis c’est encore, eumm, c’est très présent dans nos chicanes.” “Okay,” I can’t help but say, “c’est ironique parce que c’est *lui* qui t’a apportée au mouvement étudiant.”

“Ouais ouais ouais,” she answers, smiling, as if she has already accepted the irony that two quite distinct forces – her boyfriend (now her husband) and the strike – brought her where she is today. She has perhaps accepted it because, like others whom I interviewed, Marie’s intense feelings of commitment to a societal vision and project were since the beginning nuanced by her sympathy for those around her and her attempt to comprehend different realities. Because after the general assembly, where “on sentait *vraiment* que tout le monde était un peu *tanné* tsé,” she says, inhaling then exhaling, “c’est à ce moment-là que je me suis plus positionnée en tant qu’observatrice.” She would tell herself that she wasn’t the one missing school, so “qui suis-je pour juger, euh, les Québécois qui sont en grève depuis X temps tsé?”; or, “Bon Marie, prends du recul, euh, après tout, tu le vis pas *vraiment*,” she told herself, whereas her boyfriend had been on strike for months already, so, “je l’ai un peu excusé.” She then decided that once she would be registered as a student, she could get more involved. “Je me rappelle qu’un jour euhh mon copain m’a dit euhh : « Tsé ça fait trois mois, là, que je suis en grève, tsé? »” and “« Tu te rends pas compte, tsé, que, pis c’est l’hiver pis qu’est ce je fais, pis tsé je travaille, pis j’ai pas le goût de travailler, je veux poursuivre mes études. »” Marie tries to understand him, even during the time of the interview, telling me: “Bon c’est vrai que quand on est étudiant on est là pour une raison, là! On, on n’est pas là pour faire la grève pis rester chez nous, pis tsé on, on, on est là parce qu’on aime ce qu’on fait, on a le goût d’étudier.” Marie understood his side of the story, she continues to explain, “mais en même temps mon côté militant, tsé, me ramenait toujours à: ‘Ouais mais



*bon*; y'a autre chose de plus important! Y'a la lutte! Tsé!" she says, both hands in the air to emphasize how strongly she argued the point with her boyfriend.

I suddenly interrupt Marie: "Est-ce que t'étais militante avant?" as by that point I'm rather perplexed at how one general assembly could so quickly transform someone into a 'militante,'<sup>345</sup> one who so confidently managed to move a bunch of hungover young adults from their beds to a cold arena, despite being a visitor. Marie suddenly exhales, as if puzzled by my question. "Est-ce que j'étais militante avant?" she asks herself, wondering out loud, and then she answers hesitantly while sounding surprised by her own answer: "J'étais *pas* vraiment militante avant en fait!"

I continue to probe, "Donc c'est quoi qui est arrivé quand t'es arrivée ici, que tout-à-coup tu te considérais..."

Marie is now biting her nails as if she is perplexed and from time to time she stares up into the air, with a pensive look. "Je me suis jamais posé la question...."

Silence.

Marie looks up to the ceiling. "Je me suis *jama-a-a-is* posé la question," she says, again deep in thought.

I continue digging: "Parce que ça me surprend quand-même que, tsé euh, *même* entourée de gens qui étaient déjà dans le mouvement étudiant québécois qui est quand-même assez radical et militant, que, même à ça tu te, tsé, t'avais quand-même une conscience *plus* militante que .. des gens qui te côtoyaient."<sup>346</sup>

Marie continues to look surprised and deep in thought, and I feel excited that I brought something up about her life that she had never thought about. "Mais je hmmm, je me suis *jamais* posé la question mais j'ai, eumm," she pauses and inhales, tucks her hair behind her ear as she stares towards the ground, and then, with a slower, more serious tone, she answers. "Moi, j'ai une histoire de *vie*.. aussi.. qui fait que, tsé, euh, j'ai vécu des *choses* comme j'ai habité en *Afrique*, pendant une guerre civile, tsé. Euh, j'ai déménagé *beaucoup*, j'ai, etcétera, tsé. Faque

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<sup>345</sup> which in English translates into 'activist.'

<sup>346</sup> Years later while writing this, I wonder, did I dig too much? When Marie read a draft of her story, she did not seem to mind. While Anderson and Jack (1991) propose that it is best not to intrude when a narrator is reticent, in this case if I had not insisted on the relevance of Marie's life story, similar to Marya, it would not have made it to this thesis.

j'ai, j'ai une histoire de *vie* qui fait que j'ai souvent été *critique*," she says, her two hands gesturing to emphasize just how 'critique' she was. "Pis quand je suis arrivée en Angleterre," she says, suddenly pausing, then, "Ah oui je *sais*, je sais ce qui s'est passé. Quand j'suis arrivé en *Angleterre*, j'ai..." She interrupts her story suddenly to tell me, "en fait, il s'est passé plein d'affaires, ça c'est pas obligé d'être, comme, euh, sur la caméra mais c'est important de comprendre." In England, Marie proceeds to tell me, "j'ai été renvoyée de l'école, tsé," and she was having trouble getting accepted into *any* other school after that. "Ah mon dieu," Marie remembers feeling in those days, imitating her demotivated state back then, "les écoles me donnent plus ma chance parce que j'suis trop *poche* pour aller à l'école."

Finally, she found "une école qui m'a acceptée, et là, euhh, je me suis rendu compte dans cette école-là que finalement toute ma jeunesse j'étais dans des, des établissements très élitistes, tsé." At that school, Marie started to read the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and slowly she started to make links between what she was reading and her own life. But Marie was alone in these epiphanies: others at her school in England were not as affected or inspired. "J'ai commencé à me révolter vraiment beaucoup euhh, contre ma famille, euhh, contre eum, euh le système d'éducation que je trouvais comme, très élitiste pis euh, faque mais tranquillement c'était plus une révolte euh, *individuelle*, comme, parce que je 'fit' pas dans *ce* système, vous allez m'exclure de ce système," says Marie, taking a breath.

"Et en faite, en arrivant *ici*," she continues, "pis en voyant cette, cette *énorme* euh inégalité entre euh les étudiants qui ont les moyens d'étudier pis les étudiants qui ont *pas* les moyens d'étudier pis, que finalement la grève soit *battue* parce que des étudiants qui ont les moyens d'étudier euh, les moyens financiers de payer leurs études tsé," continues Marie, "je sais pas ça m'a, ça m'a *parlé*, tsé." In that big arena where the general assembly took place, as she heard heated discussions and pointed arguments from students with different types of dress and backgrounds, Marie thought "Ah, euhh, ok! tsé! Je suis pas toute seule à, à pas forcément '*fitter*' dans, dans dans dans le *cadre* parfait de l'étudiante euh... pis là je me suis dit, peut-être c'est le Québec qui va me donner ma, ma dernière chance, tse?" She soon after applied to an undergraduate program in social work at Université de Sherbrooke, and was accepted. "C'était une lutte *individuelle* qui s'est... qui s'est un peu transformée en... pis qu'aujourd'hui en 2011 est carrément eum... euhmmm... *plus du tout* individuelle pis très très très collective, tsé?" The idea

that in Quebec she could belong to a collective of students in which she would not feel alienated had particular meaning considering her life story until that point.

### **Interlude: Marie beyond the interview**

Years later, as I type up this story, I find my curiosity about Marie growing, perhaps because I am still so surprised by how one general assembly could so quickly transform a student with such a previously troubled relationship to the education system. Why was her relationship with the education system so troubled? Why did she have so much trouble getting accepted into other schools? How was the education system in England elitist? By emailing Marie these questions, some might argue that I broke the silence she was purposely upholding during the interview (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Layman, 2009); or perhaps her ‘silences’ on these topics merely reflected her general concern about the intimidating ‘male gaze’ of the camera that she admits to have felt at the end of our interview, as described in Chapter 1. So in March 2015, I decide to email Marie a draft of the story I wrote about her 2005 experience, asking her if she would be willing to answer a few clarification questions about her life story for me, “(mais pas de pression encore une fois si tu ne préfères pas répondre!)” I wrote.

Marie responds to my emailed follow-up questions rather quickly, despite it now being more than three years after our interview together, and surprisingly, she answers in English. When her family moved to England, she explains in the email response, Marie had been attending an upper middle-class private school, she clarifies, “the kind of schools where you get sons of sultans, daughter of Madonna etc...” She had been kicked out of school because of her “bad grades and behavior,” and it was very difficult to find a new school that would accept her for that very reason. Because she did not yet speak English, she failed “any tests schools would make me take.” Finally, Marie writes, she “had a meeting with a school principal in Henley on Thames (1h30 of train away from my home) that saw my motivation and decided to give me one last chance; I was 16. It took 6 months of research, exams, running around, fighting with my parents....”

At her new school, Marie failed her first year there, as she was studying “CEGEP level in a language that I didn’t understand.” The email continues with even more unexpected details, and I understand, to some extent, why she may not have wanted to bring them up. And yet they allow me to understand a bit more the meaning of Marie’s empowered feeling through the Quebec student strike, in the context of her own life experience. She adds:

“Also I was living with a very mean foster family and I was taking different drugs to make life more enjoyable. I however showed a lot of motivation (and tears) at school, so teachers fought for me and helped me as much as they could. The year that followed my grades were all very good. I ran away from the foster home to find myself a room to rent (I was just about 17) and contacted my parents to tell them where I was and that I decided to take care of myself and either they trusted me and I told them where I was, or they didn’t and they would never see me again. From this moment everything changed and got better.”

Marie adds one last clarification: Thanks to the Sociology class where she learned about Bourdieu, “not only did I understand the elite system but I realized that I wasn’t the only victim of it, and that explained why I had been angry all these years, why I took drugs and alcohol to make life easier.” Thus before arriving in Quebec, sociology –or perhaps particularly Bourdieu– had laid the theoretical groundwork that her 2005 strike experience would put into practice.<sup>347</sup>

### **After-effects of 2005**

Despite her life-changing experience at the very end of the 2005 strike, Marie’s later acquaintance with female students who participated in the 2005 strike led her to consider it as an ‘échec’.<sup>348</sup> “Je l’ai vraiment vu comme... un mouvement qui est comme monté tsé,” she says, her hand moving upwards, “pis pffffff! Qui a stagné pis qui s’est juste éteint, tsé. Moi j’vois pas de gains vraiment.” She shakes her head and continues, “les gens qui se sont mobilisés en 2005 que je *connais*, se mobilisent *plus du tout* maintenant. Parce que y’ont été vraiment dégouté-e-s par 2005, tsé? *Tant* de mobilisation pis *tant* d’action pour *rien* tsé?” Sure, she acknowledges, “en même temps les gens *exagèrent* souvent là! Mais, mais, mais s’ils le vivent comme ça,” she argues with her hands in the air, “c’est *ça* leurs émotions on peut pas... les juger pour ça!” Echoing the story of previous chapters, through others she learned about initial hopes were soon

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<sup>347</sup> Interestingly, Philippe also brought up Bourdieu as an influence in his life. Both Philippe and Marie’s reference to Bourdieu could be due to the fact that he is considered to be the most cited sociologist in the world, because he brings useful conceptual tools to understanding society, and because by the 1990s he was already considered “the primary public intellectual of major social scientific status at the head of the anti-globalization movement that emerged in French and other Western European countries” (Swartz, 2003, p. 791).

<sup>348</sup> It is important to keep in mind that Marie had been involved in the student movement for six years by the time I interviewed her –just like Élise, Jeff, and Philippe– so technically, everything she tells me is inevitably influenced by what she lived during later years (more on the issue of time in Chapter 6).

dashed and met by burnout, in part because of internal power dynamics. She knows many women in particular who, “je veux pas comme utiliser des mots trop *gros*, mais en même temps c'est ça tsé, elles ont tellement vécu de de *violence* de la part de certains militants,” that they “*refusent* d’être aussi *actives* dans le mouvement étudiant *maintenant* parce qu'elles sont juste découragées à cause de 2005, pis du reste, tsé?” Similar to Julie, Marie surprises me with the use of the word ‘violence,’ and I am starting to understand that the usage in French might be different than in English.<sup>349</sup> Examples of ‘violence’ that women experienced at general assemblies that Marie had heard took place in 2005 included when “l’alternance homme-femme” was not respected, when they were interrupted, or when men would roll their eyes or whisper between themselves just as a woman stepped up to the microphone. “Pis ça c’est encore *super* d'actualité, là!” says Marie, about 2011. “Pis moi j’ai *invité* les filles à venir te voir justement pour cette recherche, j’ai dit « les filles, c'est le moment ou jamais tsé d'aller *exprimer* ce que vous avez ressenti pendant 2005. » Pis tsé les réactions c’est comme, « Ah non, tsé, ça me tente pas. » Pis faque, c’est que y’a quelque chose quand-même qui a été très *marquant* tsé, dans cette grève-là!”

I am shocked by Marie's last words. For one, I’m surprised these women wouldn’t want to talk about their experiences, vent, get it off their chest,<sup>350</sup> then again, such reticence and silences can speak volumes (Sheftel, 2013; Layman, 2009). I am also surprised that despite her own story of the strike, Marie could claim that there was not one single gain from the 2005 strike, not even in emotional realm. So I ask what some may be considered a leading question about 2005: “ce que j’ai compris c’est que d’une manière ça t’a, ça t’a changé un peu tes sentiments sur l’éducation dans ta vie?”

Shaking her head for emphasis, Marie answers, nodding: “Eummmm *carrément*, tsé. Vraiment.” Yet this time her experience in France, not England, comes up as the point of comparison to Quebec. “Parce que.. en tant que Française, je viens d’un système eum... d’éducation très euh... bein très *elitiste*, très euh ... très fermé, très tout ce que tu veux,” she says.

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<sup>349</sup> The meaning of ‘violence’ in this case, differently from Julie's earlier clear reference to Durkheim's notion of violence, is akin to Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence, notably: "the experience of feeling out of place, anxious, awkward, shamed, stupid and so on because those who experience symbolic violence are both objectively unable to construct appropriate actions (because the resources necessary to do so are unavailable to them) and subjectively committed to, in the sense of recognizing, the very rules of distinction by which they are excluded and dominated" (Samuel, 2013, p. 402).

<sup>350</sup> But partly because I was still unaware then of how talking about things can get people even more upset, as I would soon find out with some of my dissertation participants, especially if there aren’t the proper channels to deal with it after.

“Mais,” inhaling, she says, “là, je... arrivée dans cette *assemblée générale* là où est-ce que les gens s’exprimaient et *tout*, je me disais... « Oh mais, attends mais... est-ce que ça ça veut dire que les *étudiants* ont du *pouvoir* sur leur vie, sur leurs, leurs études sur les *choix* de de de, les choix de société! »” she says with a swift clap, her eyes wide open as if in disbelief. “Et là pour moi ça a vraiment fait miroiter quelque chose de vraiment nouveau! Tsé pis, pis peut-être que c’est *con* mais je... j’avais 19 ans, pis là j’étais comme” – she gasps to express shock - “« *J’ai du pouvoir sur ma vie*, tsé! J’ai le pouvoir de *choisir* d’être en grève ou *non*, j’ai le *pouvoir* de choisir de, de payer des frais de scolarité ou non!» Tsé, pis, faque moi ça m’a ... je sais *pas*, ça m’a.. emmenée *vraiment* à, à me dire bon bein...” Marie pauses suddenly, shakes her head and adds, “J’ai plus jamais été à l’école de la *même façon* après, tsé. J’ai, j’ai vraiment... euh je sais pas, je me, euh... actuellement et, je pense que c’est un peu en lien avec ça tsé, je me sens vraiment, euhm... *souveraine* de mon éducation, tsé. De dire bon, bein « J’étudie là-dedans pis je veux que ce soit de *telle* façon, » je sais pas trop comment l’expliquer. Je sens que j’ai un *pouvoir*, pis j’ai le pouvoir d’aller voir mon prof et dire « Je suis pas sûre que je suis d’accord avec ce que tu dis, » alors que j’ai jamais senti ce, le pouvoir de faire ça avant, tsé. Donc, si on peut sortir quelque chose de positif ça peut être *ça*. Peut-être aussi j’ai tout simplement *vieilli*, pis que ç’a pas rapport, tsé,” she says with a gentle smile, and I laugh at her sudden doubt after her passionate speech. “Mais je pense pas, tsé. Je pense qu’il y a *quelque chose* quand-même au *Québec* de *particulier*, tsé.” Marie stops talking but is still nodding silently, which I take as a sign that saying those words had a particular impact on her, and that she felt her answer was complete, to that question, or at least to that episode of her life.

The tail end of the 2005 strike instilled in Marie a ‘high’ feeling of collective empowerment and belonging particularly related to the education system, despite the dialectical intensity of emotions that she experienced at that first assembly of her life, and despite her consideration of her past as irrelevant to the interview. Her emotions related to the strike, and their existential resonance, were "given personal relevance and intensity" by her individual history (Beatty, 2014, p. 552) and would continue to do so.

### **Joining with high hopes**

Like others who participated in or heard about 2005, what followed for Marie were high hopes, marred by disappointments and difficult emotional experiences. “C’est sûr que l’implication émotionnelle était vraiment plus intense en 2007. Parce que là *j’étais* une étudiante,

à temps plein, tsé” at the Université de Sherbrooke, and she was active in the student movement. “Je trouvais que les étudiants étaient tellement *pas* mobilisés! Pis je me disais « Mon dieu! » Pis je passais, euh, des semaines à faire des grands discours devant la classe à dire, « Ç’a pas de sens, euh, vous étudiants, étudiantes de Travail social vous êtes pas mobilisé-es » pis tout ça, pis, pis les gens me trouvaient fatigante, mais moi c’était mon cœur qui parlait!” Marie found it “tellement incroyable” that students of social work were *not* be mobilized around issues of free education and the idea of education as an essential service, because the *clientele* discussed in social work classes would be the first to be affected by tuition increases. “Pis les étudiants s’en foutaient pis y’en a plein qui disaient, « Ouais bein là, c’est pas si cher que ça ».” Marie “avait l’impression d’être tout le temps en train de les *juger*, pis c’est ce que je faisais, tsé?” Because of this, adds Marie, “j’étais tout le temps tout le temps en criss! Et c’était *très* demandant tsé?”

Anger wasn’t the only strong emotion Marie felt when she started mobilizing students at her new university post-2005; she felt “de la déception, de la tristesse, de l’incompréhension, de la, de la colère,” says Marie, explaining “je me sentais pas incluse dans le mouvement, *j’essayais* de m’inclure dans le mouvement, je *voulais* être élue sur le comité exécutif de l’AGEFLESH,<sup>351</sup> tsé?” To my surprise, considering how confident she appears to me, Marie says, “j’ai jamais eu la *force* d’en parler, parce que j’ai toujours senti que j’étais pas la bienvenue.” Those already involved in the AGEFLESH, the student association of which she was a member, “parlaient dans un jargon que *eux, eux* y’avaient l’air de s’comprendre entre eux, tsé!” The assemblies were always presided by the same people, and Marie didn’t have the impression that just anyone could be elected, “je pensais qu’il fallait une formation *spéciale* pour être sur l’exécutif de l’AGEFLESH,” she says, at which I giggle. “Je te jure,” she adds, aware of how silly it might sound, especially after my giggle. When she would go to the AGEFLESH premises, Marie often felt there was no room for discussion. If she disagreed with “casser j’sais plus trop quoi” because “ça fait partie du bien commun,” she felt that the message was “j’étais *dont une bourgeoise*,” Marie says with an imitative voice. She was not upset because they wanted to break things, explains Marie, but that they weren’t “prêts à écouter ce que j’ai à dire, tsé.”

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<sup>351</sup> Association générale des étudiants de la faculté des lettres et sciences humaines

## Hitting the wall of burnout

I try to paraphrase her feelings mobilizing at the *Université de Sherbrooke* and, so I say “Okay, donc c’est surtout la désillusion que tu te rappelles, durant ce temps-là?”

Marie answers yes, but she doesn’t seem convinced, and after a bit of hesitation she adds: “l’épuisement aussi” and then she blurts out: “Moi j’ai fait un burnout quand j’avais 22 ans.” Unlike other interviews in which I sometimes specifically ask about burnout, Marie brings it up by herself. She thinks that her burnout was “en lien avec ma *vie*, mais *aussi* avec le, le mouvement étudiant, tsé, parce que je mettais *beaucoup, beaucoup, beaucoup* d’énergie,” while also doing internships as part of her social work program. “Pis en même temps je sentais que j’avais pas d’appui, tant que ça, tsé?” She continued to be involved in the student movement, “je continuais, je continuais,” but “je faisais toujours face à des murs,” she says, slapping her hands together to give the sense of hitting a wall. “Il a pas été diagnostiqué ni à cause de mon travail, ni à cause de ma lutte, ni à cause des études, j’pense que c’était un trop plein de *tout* tsé. Pis euh, je me suis comme un peu démobilisée.” It had already been a year-and-a-half since she’d been at university, and “que j’arrêtais pas de *chialer*” sur mon programme, tsé, que je trouvais que les gens étaient *démobilisés* pis que, pis je, je critiquais *tout le temps tout le temps tout le temps* mes camarades de *classe*,” so at one point her boyfriend said “j’suis pus capable de t’endurer tu chiales *tout le temps, tout le temps, tout le temps, tsé?*” The eve of each new university semester, she couldn’t sleep, her stomach hurt and she would say to her boyfriend, “Ahh, je veux pas y aller, j’aurai pas d’amis, pis là, en plus, euh, je vais les trouver cons!” she says, with a whining voice and facial gesture to imitate herself back then. It wasn’t just the student movement, it was also that she generally felt out of place in her Social Work program, as everyone had a very clinical perspective and focused on “comment soigner *l’individu*.” Marie was the only one whose internship was political rather than clinical, so she felt the other students did not understand her.

The 2005 strike in this way had a dialectical effect on her life: it led her to feel empowered in the education system, move to Quebec and start a bachelor’s degree, and yet the expectations and hopes derived from 2005 led her to putting energy into mobilizing students without much support or response, leading to her eventual burnout. “Brrrrr,” she says, imitating the dying noise of a battery, as burnout for Marie felt like she had her batteries removed. She had no more energy, she was tired and always wanted to sleep, “j’avais toujours des grosses migraines.” She didn’t have any desire to work, go to school, do her schoolwork, “j’avais pas le



goût de voir mon *chum*, j'avais le goût de rien faire, tsé?" It wasn't long, but it was "vraiment un pavé dans la *mare*." It made her realize that "faut que je mette des moyens en place pour pas que ça réarrive," she says with a sad but reflective look.

### **The motivation of the 2007 strike?**

What partly remotivated Marie after the disappointment of 2005 was the tuition increase announced for September 2007: together we laugh at this irony. "Quand on a commencé à entendre parler de la hausse des frais de scolarité, là on était juste comme.. non. Non. C'est pas vrai, tsé," says Marie, "il faut se battre." Marie's use of "on" instead of "je" in the latter sentence reveals a hint of her more collective approach since 2005. "Nous on était solidaires, on entendait beaucoup parler de l'UQAM, tsé? Je sais qu'à Montréal c'était vraiment plus intense." She mobilized for the strike, without much success: "le souvenir que j'en ai là, c'était pas fort, tsé." Nonetheless she recalls being very enthusiastic at the general assembly to vote whether or not to strike, "j'trouvais ça cool, tsé, je me disais, « Wow, la démocratie! »" Again, she was impressed or enamoured by the democracy of the assembly -what Dupuis-Déri (2016) calls *agoraphilie*- despite the fact that she was scared to speak at the microphone, thus underlining how the fear of public speaking can co-exist with *agoraphilie*. For example, when they were voting to strike, she remembers a quite enormous tension between the ASSÉ and the FEUQ, which they talked about "beaucoup beaucoup beaucoup," and yet she did not know *why* that tension existed, and even at the time of the interview she remains confused about it. "Le débat dans l'assemblée générale c'est, « Est-ce qu'on participe à la manif ou *pas* parce que c'est organisé par l'ASSÉ pis nous on est avec la FEUQ. »" No one explained what the ASSÉ and the FEUQ were, so Marie remained confused: "Pis on n'osait pas non plus lever la main pour demander c'était quoi, parce que là tsé, euh, on se faisait regarder genre, « Ah, vous savez pas c'est quoi, pis vous militez? » tsé? Y'a un côté un peu comme ça dans le mouvement étudiant, là!" Even though Marie knew she was at a disadvantage, because she had recently arrived in Quebec, "c'était plus fort que moi, j'osais pas, j'étais trop gênée, j'avais pas envie de passer pour une nounounne." Because there was no explanation of such terms, and also because it seemed to be always the same people talking, Marie says it is possible that she never said one word at the microphone during the 2007 strike vote.

She recalls that they voted to strike for a few days, "auxquels on a participé surtout pour faire des manifestations" against the tuition increase, in other words "des journées symboliques

pour manifester à Montréal, à Québec aussi.”<sup>352</sup> Marie describes herself in those days as “ce que les gens appellent la *chair à canon*,” a term used to refer to people who attend the general assemblies but who don’t participate much in making decisions in other instances – like the mobilization committee or an executive team. “Le matin, on faisait des lignes de piquetage,” yet she clarifies “ç’a été vraiment des p’tites euh, des p’tites grèves, tsé, y’a pas eu, euh.. de gros mouvements de masse, là.” Nonetheless, because of their effervescence, “j’ai toujours *aimé* les journées de grève,” says Marie. “Y’a quelque chose de festif, les gens sont... y’a quelque chose de festif, les gens sont *joyeux*, les gens sont *contents* d’être là, les gens sont, se se réunissent pour *lutter* contre quelque chose, tsé, ou *pour* quelque chose, ça dépend, tsé? Pis, je, je moi, j’ai *beaucoup* de plaisir à, à militer dans ces moments-là, tsé.” The picket lines then were “*bon enfant*.”<sup>353</sup> She “*bloquais*, euh, ma *fac(ulté)* -tsé donc lettres et sciences humaines- pis les gens venaient pis là on leur expliquait, « Bein là on est en grève! » mais tsé c’était, c’était super souriant, c’était super agréable.” Picketers would tell students with a smile, “Brisez la ligne de piquetage, c’est pas grave, vous vous sentirez coupables après!” says Marie with an exaggerated singsong nicety in her tone as she imitates herself back then. Even the students crossing the picket lines were smiling and if they did go to their classes Marie and others would say “Allez-y, on va venir lever votre cours de toute façon, tsé!” There was no aggressiveness, she says, though she wonders if maybe she just happened to be on a particularly easy picket line.

After picketing in the early morning, Marie would jump on the buses that left at 9 am towards Montreal or Quebec, to return back to Sherbrooke at 6:00 pm; meanwhile, “y’a des militants qui étaient restés sur place pour piqueter toute la journée, tsé? Ou-u-u faire des levées de cours ou.. Mais moi j’tais toujours euh, en manifs.” In Marie’s memory, “c’tait des belles manifs,” and she was feeling better after her burnout, going to the protests with her neighbour. These demonstrations were “trippantes,” she recalls -though it was nothing in comparison to what she was witnessing during the time of our interview at the eve of the 2012 strike, she kept saying.

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<sup>352</sup> According to *La Tribune*, the AGEFLESH voted to strike on November 15 and November 22, 2007: “Ces débrayages auront lieu alors que le mouvement étudiant convergera vers Montréal [...] dans le cadre de manifestations nationales” (Pion, 2007, 15 novembre). Unfortunately, AGEFLESH’s online archives of general assembly minutes only go back to 2009: <https://doc.feus.usherbrooke.ca/docushare/dsweb/View/Collection-12936>

<sup>353</sup> 'Bonenfant' means easy-going, accommodating (see: [http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/bon\\_enfant/10140](http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/bon_enfant/10140))

If the sense of something large happening at the time of our interview certainly made pale 2007 pale in comparison, it was the timing of Marie's burnout that had me perplexed. Just like the strike, sometimes she remembered it taking place during the *same* semester as the 2007 strike and other times the semester *before* that strike. Could it be that her burnout thus was not caused by the 2007 strike but rather alleviated by its existence? My obsessive desire to understand the sequence made me realize that I *wanted* Marie's burnout to be *after* 2007, so that I could make some kind of packaged conclusion that the 2007 strike led to burnout to fit in the pattern that others experienced. Memory is a strange thing, and it is possible that I will never find out the sequence and that there is no 'accurate' answer since it is difficult to objectively trace the historical existence of emotions, the ebb and flow of burnout. What is relevant is that she went through a burnout and remembers the strike as taking place afterwards. Interestingly then, Marie's story points to how, despite the less 'historic' feel of 2007, that strike was a high point of sorts in her experiences, at least in comparison to 2005 -when she arrived too late to be really involved- and what followed from it. It is possible that 2007 lifted her spirits because it represented the euphoria that she sensed at the 2005 general assembly, but never experienced as a first-hand participant -and anything was more inspiring than the demobilized context she had been experiencing after 2005.

### **Personal baggage, interpersonal support**

If the 2007 strike helped somewhat revive Marie from her burnout, it was certainly not the only factor that helped. “Je me suis remobilisée parce que j’ai fait mon Stage 2 à la *Table ronde des organismes volontaires d’éducation populaire*,” where one of her mandates was to chair general assemblies. Her supervisor during her internship was so effective at chairing meetings, “en plus c’était un homme tout-à-fait pro-féministe.” Upon seeing him chair an assembly for the first time, “il donnait la parole équitablement, pis il faisait *taire* les personnes qui, qui parlaient juste trop, ou qui étaient, euh... qui étaient hors d’ordre.” Thus Marie thought to herself, “OH OKAY, c’est *possible*, tsé? On PEUT *encore faire quelque chose* avec la démocratie, tsé?” Her use of the term “encore” implicitly refers back to her comparison point of 2005, when she had acquired hope about democracy, yet then through time did not see that hope fulfilled as she had hoped.

What also helped her through the burnout was her rich relationship with that internship supervisor, which was “*très* professionnelle mais tellement *forte* en même temps tsé, parce que je

pense qu'il voyait en moi, je pense que j'ai fait naître en lui un *espoir* de, de, dans la relève, tsé? J'pense qu'il a vu en moi une, une femme comme, qui avait le goût de s'impliquer, qui avait le *goût* de changer le monde," she explains. "Il m'emmenait toujours à réfléchir" and to ask herself introspective about questions like "Qu'est-ce qui fait que ça vient jouer *autant* dans tes émotions, tsé?" Since Marie saw the student executives as if they were on a higher level than her and since she didn't question the power they held, her supervisor would ask her, "qu'est-ce qui fait que tu te mets en position *subordonnée*... sans questionner le pouvoir en place tsé?"

I ask her how she had answered her supervisor's questions.

"C'est mes bibittes euh, à moi tsé, c'est... le fait que je, j'ai tellement *vécu* ça euh dans l'histoire de mon éducation, tsé? À l'école, euh, j'ai toujours eu des personnes qui étaient comme « Tais-toi, tu as tort, » she says imitating a low voice. "Pis que j'ai pris l'habitude de me fermer, parce que quand j'ouvrais ma gueule j'me faisais vraiment virer de bord, faque je pense que j'ai gardé ce réflexe-là, tsé, de, de *hiérarchie*." While the 2005 experience was an especially empowering and life-changing one for Marie, her old patterns of relating to authority within the education system got in the way, mediating her new sense of empowerment and then her dashed hopes about the movement. The "expanded frame" of the life story approach (High, 2014) in this way allows for a deeper understanding of her burnout: if it was inextricably related to the strike, it was also inextricably related to her life experiences previous to the strike.

In 2008, Marie finished her degree at the Université de Sherbrooke in 2008. When her boyfriend applied to study at UQAM, since Marie had heard about UQAM during the 2007 strike, "j'tais comme « Moi je vais étudier à l'UQAM! »" There, she experienced more disappointments in relation to the student movement, though she also found yet another form of interpersonal support to deal with the hierarchies she would continue to experience at the heart of the movement, at the dawn of the third general strike campaign she would witness since 2005. That 'ending' to her story has already been recounted in Chapter 1, where her experience working with the *Centre des Femmes de l'UQAM* and the *Comité Femmes GGI* "m'a emmenée à *refaire*, à me *réconcilier* avec le mouvement étudiant."

## UNPACKING MARYA'S VISCERAL BAGGAGE

Similar to Marie, if Marya's life story is not brought up initially, it slowly creeps into her recollection of her emotional experiences related to the strike, shedding light on how such

previous experiences grant “personal relevance and intensity” to her later strike-related emotions (Beatty, 2014, p. 552). At the beginning of her interview, I ask her “Do you want to tell me the story of your involvement in the 2012 strike?” As she starts recounting the story of the strike, noting that “the strike was a reality since a long time” as early as 2010, she adds that the concept of a strike was not necessarily something shocking for her, since in India, her country of origin, “there are strikes *all the time*,” says Marya, “for me I guess it was exciting to *hear* that there’ll be a strike and that I would be part of it.” Yet like Marie, she seems hesitant at the prospect of delving too much into her life story, as if it were irrelevant or separate from the strike.

Yet a bit later, her life in India returns on its own to our conversation: “I mean, the story can go a long time back,” she says, because in India “there are *two states* that are communist!” So “the strike and everything like it’s almost in my blood in a way. I shouldn’t say it like that but you see what I’m saying uh.. so like those things for me was, was natural and normal, you know?” Then she adds, there is “another long story” regarding how tuition affected her life: “Y’know it’s just kind of my own background uh, the socioeconomic situation where I come from.” A bit later again in the interview, as Marya is discussing how she sees it as “our *devoir*, it’s our *duty*” to stop tuition hikes because tuition increase can affect the quality of education through increased privatization and commodification and the closing of certain departments, she explains:

“also because like personally *me* I have struggled a *lot* for education, like for my sisters’ education, my brother’s education, uhm... I, I stopped at some point studying and started working so my sister can, can get *good quality* education, uh, so it’s like, like I have this whole personal history about education!”

She continues: “So I think there was a lot of my personal, uh, background there, so very emotional for me, you know? To fight for this [the strike against tuition increase] it’s like, y’know,” she says, swallowing.

In a twist of irony, Marya's personal difficulties accessing education meant that for the strike, her Master's thesis “didn't matter, like I didn't care,” she laughs, surely acknowledging the irony, “I'll finish it, but this is more important.” It is ironic because, as Marya says in her subsequent sentence, her parents did not necessarily have “the *means* nor the *time to think* so

much about our *education!*” So, she adds, “that was kind of one of, one of my driving forces,” because free education or accessible education is “*so important..* for emancipation” in her experience, it is almost “black and white” how education creates “certain opportunities for you.”

Later in the interview I come back to this again, as at that point I have already heard stories like that of Marie and Philippe, so I know there can be a long idiosyncratic history to striking emotions. I ask: “You said that ummm, that you were going maybe too *meta*, and that you have like lots of *long* stories” related to your life in India. “Do you feel like elaborating?”

She says that she doesn’t mind, but “it’s kind of a *tangent* I guess. Or *too deep*, I don’t know,” she adds, and just like Marie, she wonders if this part would need to be public, despite the clearly key role this previous experience plays in her affective motivation to be involved in student politics, and to strike. “I guess I was thinking a *lot* about the background, about, about what, what made me... think about getting involved,” she says. “I come from a family of five daughters,” Marya says, herself being the fourth to be born, and “our *youngest* sibling, uh, is a brother.” The fact that she finally had a brother is relevant to Marya and her mother, we will understand later, because “boys are valorized more in India than girls” as “even now, women are not the principal bread-earners.”

Since Marya’s grandfather had died when Marya’s mother was young, Marya’s mother was orphaned and grew up in a “very, very, very poor environment.” Marya’s father was “a wonderful guy” who “*also* didn’t have a chance to educate himself;” while her father’s siblings had been able to educate themselves, her dad was the youngest and when he was growing up his family did not have a good financial situation, “there were *famines* and all, so my dad almost never had enough to eat.” Her father had told them stories of “counting.. *roti* when they were making and all,” she continues, her voice quite serious, perhaps sad, I wonder, because her father recently passed away. “He didn’t even finish his high school, but y’know he was like this artist, he was taking pictures he was doing paintings, he was doing all kinds of things. And then he started working in a restaurant when he got married, um, and that’s what he did all his life,” she says swallowing. “Really bad jobs basically, he did a lot of night shift.”

So when Marya’s mom was pregnant, “she was *hoping* that she would have a son! She was *hoping* that she would have somebody finally who can take care of her, in a way! Like her dad was not *there* and her husband was *gone* most of the time. I mean he was *earning*, but y’know, not *much* and, y’know my dad was a sincere guy, he was doing what he can.” So Marya

has “a feeling that when I was born my mom thought I was a *boy*. And for a *long* time she called me, you are my *son*.” At one point her mom started working in a primary school, in addition to taking care of the six children, not to mention the many people who lived in her house. “My mom was taking care of 25 people and all. She was cooking and she was like working hard in the house,” so every day “make the fire *run* the whole time she’s *cooking* and all, like it was *tough* her life,” she says, inhaling then exhaling. At this point of the transcription, I suddenly feel bad that I have probed into this topic, as I wonder, from her inhalation and exhalation, whether this topic may be especially tough for her, as I know she often worries about her mom in India now that her father passed away.

“I guess I’m telling *all of this* to say that,” she continues, “when it was time for our education, one, my dad for *sure* didn’t have enough, enough salary, like we, we would hardly get by and my mom would, I was helping my mom with the finances, like I became this person who’s helping my mom y’know like I, for, for at a very early age I decided that I was helping her.” Marya would make small creations and sell them to friends and extended family; later, she had a job doing door-to-door sales, so that she would be able to buy what her mom needed for the kitchen or for cooking, even though in India “*women* don’t necessarily do things outside of the house!” Marya was “doing *all* the tasks of a guy, um, because my brother was young,” she says giggling. “Well I didn’t have a brother and then when I had a brother but he was young so, so I did uh, like until the age of like 14-15, I was doing a lot of *work*, uh, um.. like doing, going to do grocery, this *that*,” she recounts, and she tutored “to have more money for the house basically for the household finances.” Marya managed to get the highest grade in her high school and an award for her grade in math. So when she was studying at the *Inter* level (the equivalent of CEGEP or junior college in India), there were “charity organizations who were giving funding to students who, who had good grades,” so Marya would go monthly and “I was *literally* standing in line for half the day” to receive “like *fifty* rupees. It’s like nothing” -but it still allowed her to buy notebooks for class, she explains.

During the strike, Marya “remembered those things you know, how uh, how tough it *was!*” Because the quality of education was poor, says Marya, but also because her older sisters were surely distracted by everything that was going on in their household, her older sisters failed their *Inter* (the equivalent of CEGEP or junior college in India) the first time around. So “I didn’t want my sister, my younger sister” to go to low quality college, nor did Marya want her to have

to struggle like Marya had “to be able to, to survive and excel.” So Marya took a year off of her own studies to work as a primary school teacher, to pay for a better-quality college for her sister: “it was expensive.” She ended up also paying, alongside one of her older sisters, for her brother to attend a good-quality school and college; Marya even attended her brother's parent-teacher meetings to support his progress. Her brother eventually became a chartered accountant, and her other siblings all eventually obtained either an undergraduate or master's degree.

When Marya finally went for her own undergraduate degree, she “applied for *funding* and y’know like it was *difficult* and I, and I got *money* to be able to do further studies.” She was further supported by her cousin, whose kids she had been tutoring, as he was then a taxi driver in Chicago. His support was important as “it’s like almost unaffordable” for the good quality education that she was going for in India. Still helping with her family’s subsistence, during her undergraduate studies her day was longer even than a typical strike day: “I was tutoring in the *morning*, I was leaving home at around 5:30 [am], and um, tutoring from like 6:30 to 8:30 [am]!” Then she went to her college, “and then on the way back, at some point I was doing [tutoring in] two houses, uh, later I just did one house. So I would come back home around 7, 7:30 [pm], sometimes later. That was my my my day, six days a week.” She knew that if one day she decided to do an MBA, “it was coming again from *charity* organizations. So, so like y’know I have this kind of visceral relationship with, uh, fighting to be able to educate *yourself*, one's self,” she explains, “just the overall *struggle*, like you know, like, I feel that I, I went through!” She continues, “it’s a *baggage* but ya know, uh, eh.. it’s uh... I guess I... I *knew* what the value was of of of *free* education or *accessible* education, like how *important* it is. And and how.. not having that access *can, can* cause so much *trouble*, you know? Like I knew it *a lot* from my own experience,” she says, and then -as if to conclude this conversation about her past and move on to the strike- she adds “so like nobody really *mobbed*<sup>354</sup> [mobilized] me [for the strike], you know?”

Rather her past had mobilized her in a visceral way. Her emotional experiences of the strike were inevitably filtered by the emotional and physical colours, fragrances and labouring of the life she lived before even stepping foot in Quebec. Her emotional experiences in this way can be seen not merely in the context of the present moment of the strike, but as also deeply embedded in her past emotions and experiences (Beatty, 2014). Like Marie, her idiosyncratic past

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<sup>354</sup> In the francophone student movement, it is common to use the verb 'mobber' to indicate mobilizing students.



was one of many factors giving birth to the high, collective-oriented emotions that she experienced during the strike.

## UNVEILING ALEX'S HISTORY

On the other side of the continent, a different yet similar life story can be told for Alex. Like Marya and Philippe, Alex's strike experience was inextricably linked to her socioeconomic background. She and her brother were raised by their mom in "a very low-income household," in Edmonton, Alberta. "Like we had no savings or like *anything* so, like *getting* to university, um, like and even *going*, like it was, it was *hard* to go through university and it like really did *suck* to have to work, like, pretty much full-time." By that time, Alex already hated money and capitalism, and she was getting politicized, so it was becoming "*awkward* for everyone around me!" Her circle of friends was apathetic, the general culture was conservative, and she was tired of always feeling "like the *weird* one, who had the *politics!*" Unless you have "the right community," if you are both "queer" and a "leftie," says Alex about herself, "Alberta is a weird place to be!"

She eventually moved to Montreal, which worked out for Alex because "*nobody* knew me," she says. "I sort of erased part of my life and just like started again," says Alex, inhaling, "it allowed me to like explore politics and activism.. in a way that I didn't *really* have space to before!" Something else was different now, too: for the first time, her mom started working in "a government job and she was making a lot more money" so her mom offered to pay Alex's tuition for one year: It meant that Alex would just have to pay for her food and rent with her savings from tree-planting. Thus her first year at Concordia University "was *so formative* to me," says Alex, "because I was *able* to just do *so many things!* Not having to work!" She was finally able to explore "things I was interested in outside of my classes, to like really, like, explore knowledge in so many different ways."

At first she got involved with *Tap Thirst* at Concordia, a group against the privatization of water; yet soon enough, Alex found that she wasn't "clicking" with other people who were doing that work, because she kept seeing problematic dynamics reinforced in those groups. So she "ended up *leaving* a lot of groups, even ones that I started *myself.*" In 2011, Alex got interested in the politics of the university itself, and soon after the Charest government announced it would be raising tuition.

## Striking a personal chord

“The idea of universities as accessible struck a really personal.. chord,” says Alex, “like, the issue of education and stuff, like I had paid my way through university, I had acquired a bunch of debt.” Some difficult situations had hit her family early on that unveiled to her the systematic barriers that exclude people, and how the “government, the police, universities under capitalist, sexist, racist, and other ‘ist’ frameworks “perpetuate a certain kind of society,” she adds. “It is *awful* to feel oppressed by things and feel helpless to them!” For Alex, the tuition and accessibility issue was also connected more broadly to the government austerity and neoliberal agenda, and it reminded her how difficult it was to get to where she is, “and how other people I knew will *never* be able to get there!”

So she got involved in the organization of the WHALE (Wintry Hot Accessible Love-in for Education).<sup>355</sup> Alex remembers that everyone voted: “Wooo! Yeah! We’re gonna have a day of action,” recalls Alex. “And then they were like, ‘Okay great! That’s it.’ And I was like, ‘Really? Is this like, *that’s it?*’ People seemed to be making the gesture to leave, “I just remember taking the mic[rophone],” and the CSU president at the time “very reluctantly giving it to me” probably because she thought Alex was going to make an announcement for People’s Potato. With her hands on the microphone, Alex “kind of like riled the crowd up” and screamed “let’s go for a march!” And so, despite the fact that it was “*sleeting*, kind of, it was really gross *weather*,” students marched “around campus and through the like *buildings*, and just made a bunch of noise,” holding a banner that said something like ‘Fight for Your Right to Education,’ she recalls, “it was the entire width of the road!”<sup>356</sup> That was the moment for Alex “when I felt like the WHALE was really im-important in like showing people that it is *possible* to do those things at Concordia,” says Alex. It “got the ball rolling at Concordia” and it showed that even students who were not in official positions could take action without getting permission from anyone. “And that, like, I think went to shape people’s confidence in the strike. Even just organizers.”

Alex continued to organize with some of the students who had been involved in the WHALE, including some of us who were involved in *Free Education Montreal* and the *Concordia Mob Squad* that emerged soon after the WHALE event, as already described in

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<sup>355</sup> For more information, see: <https://thelinknewspaper.ca/article/all-you-need-is-whale>

<sup>356</sup> Alex interrupts herself to clarify, “it wasn’t just *me* who did that, like we had, had a small, like a *plan* that we would *try* to do that, if it felt right!”

previous chapters. By September 2011, because of frustration with the limitations of the CSU, organizers in the Concordia Mob Squad tried to make that group more autonomous from the CSU, recounts Alex. Because of that, and also because she did not speak French so she could not organize at the city-wide or provincial level, and because she preferred working at a more intimate level, “to follow in the heels of what was happening in francophone universities,” Alex and others were gearing up to starting general assemblies at the departmental level. She recalls working for months alongside other student associations, like that of *Women’s Studies* and *Philosophy*. Alex never “*actually* believed that a strike would happen at Concordia!” yet she “thought that it was worth trying anyway!” as maybe at least students would get used to participating and voting in general assemblies, she hoped.

Since Alex did not know the politics of the elected student executives of her student association, the *Geography Undergraduate Students’ Society* (GUSS), with fellow strike organizers they decided that the best way to start would be to ask for a department discussion on the topic of the strike. So, in January 2012, Alex went to the GUSS Annual General Meeting, where only a few members had showed up. She remembers feeling “really...*funny*. I felt like such an *instigator*, in Geography,” at least “in the beginning!” She waited until the end of the AGM for the ‘Varia’ point to tell them that “murmurs of a strike are happening in francophone *institutions* and I think we should have a department-wide discussion about whether this is something we’re interested in having,” recalls Alex. They agreed to it, and the story of the Concordia geography students' particular strike experience will be the subject of the next chapter. For my purposes here, the rest of this chapter will focus on Alex's experiences of the strike beyond Concordia, and how these experiences were more emotionally intense in part due to her previous life experiences and positioning.

### **Reclaiming power on the streets**

Alex often spoke about her two different strike ‘lives’: her “strike day job” at the university as opposed to her “strike nightlife,” or her “Concordia life and my other general Montreal strike life, and they were happening at the same time but different.” On a city-wide scale, Alex participated in the week of economic disruptions called for by the CLASSE, including an action to block the headquarters for a major bank. She recalls of that day:

“somehow I ended up in the group of people that were stationed to block the parking lot! the like underground parkade! [...] A few people tried to drive through us and at one point I remember, this guy in a motorcycle literally tried to drive through it and [...] we were *all women*, um, except for like maybe two dudes. (swallows) We physically *held* the (does gesture) motorcycle *back*, (inhales) because like, something about the adrenaline, like gives you a certain amount of strength. [...] And that was really intense. And there was like police (swallows) just standing and watching it happen. (inhales)”

Alex considered the state's violent reaction to peaceful civil disobedience to be a clear message that the riot police prioritize protecting banks over and above the bodies of activists. This engendered positive and negative feelings: Despite such economic disruptions being “*upsetting* and *troubling*, because of all the violence,” for Alex “*every* economic disruption just made me feel, for the most part, *empowered!* Like, I felt good about doing it.” Because “what started as like an issue of tuition evolved into this *huge*, like, interconnected *thing* about racism and capitalism and sexism and... classism.” And when you or those you know experience “micro-aggressions” and are excluded from those systems on a daily basis, “when you *feel*... at the *mercy* of those systems all the *time*, and like powerless to banks and bureaucracy and people who have money and power,” these:

“*build up* in people and that’s why something like the strike happens and it’s just like a floodgate that opens! And so, it, at least in those moments, like when we were blocking say the *bank* or like the *highway* or whatever, like all different things, it was like at *least* for the first time, we were *doing* something! Um, to sort of like give *back* to the world all the things (inhales) that we have, we had like *faced* (inhales, swallows) in our lives that were barriers to *us*. We were like *able* to like *dish* it out, for once! And there was like *enough* collective *support* that you could do that. Like I can’t just go and block a bank.. myself. You like *need* a safety net. And there was enough (inhales), the strike was so powerful ‘cause there were somehow, ended up being enough support.”

The historic moment and collective possibility of the strike combined with her personal experience of disempowerment and oppression to make disempowering experiences (“helpless”)

simultaneously empowering. Blocking city buildings also felt really good at some points, because “you’re having conversations with people” and “that’s where, like change really gets made on a personal level” through these types of confrontations, whether blocking a class or a building. “I loved the ability (inhales) to like engage with someone,” says Alex, “when it actually was a conversation, even, even if it was *heated*, it felt good.”

### **Breaking veils of reality: night demonstrations**

Demonstrations produced a similar rollercoaster of emotions for Alex, because “one second you’re just like at this thing and you’re like hanging out with your friends” because “a *lot* of the demo was *just* socializing. You’re like *walking* around and socializing.” So these demonstrations were:

“always emotionally *charged*, but it was like, also just *nice*, sometimes! And um, it like felt *good*, *really* good to be like reclaiming the streets. Like when’s the last time you just like *walked* around with your friends in the middle of the streets? And cars couldn’t go there. And like, there was something that felt really good about it! But then like, suddenly something would, like the riot cops would come or they would *grab* someone randomly out of the crowd and things would change, and you’d be *running* and things would be *scary*.”

When night demonstrations “became like *every single* night just like thousands of people would go out,” the like police repression “was just escalating more and more,” and “the *sound* of those sound grenades, like they’re just *sound* but it was *made* to, to make you feel terrified!” Simply “*facing off* against police is *terrifying*,” noted Alex. The level of police presence, violence, and repression was more intense than “a lot of us have *ever* witnessed!” It was the first time for Alex that “that it really was made *personal* that like, the police are not there to protect you. They are there to *enforce*, like, to protect the powerful and the rich. And like, the government isn’t there to protect you. Like [representative] democracy is not a real thing.” By seeing the police actions take place in front of their eyes, their illusions about those institutions, or “this *veil* or something of reality was like *broken* on so many levels of my life,” recounts Alex. “So that is obviously emotional!”

And the fact that people marginalized by poverty protesting against government proposal “was *met* with such police force” reminded Alex “of other ways in which the state, like, um... excludes or represses or whatever, like people who come from marginalized positions.” So, for Alex, the personal connection to her own life experience “was like *there* in every moment,” which is “why I say it was such an emotionally intense time.” Yet that was only her experience on the streets; the polarization and tension due to the strike “was like *happening* on so many different *levels* emotionally,” explains Alex, referring on the one hand to the level of city life during the strike, and on the other hand to the more interpersonal or micro-level that included family and friends, but also teachers and fellow students, at the university level -the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 5

### **Within these walls: The place of (be)longing, anger, power**

If Alex's emotional experiences during the 2012 strike, as recounted in the previous chapter, were coloured by her particular life story, they also held commonalities with other geography students at Concordia University: a particular relation to *place* -more specifically, the local campus and department. In this chapter I focus on how geography participants' experiences taken together<sup>357</sup> highlight the idiosyncrasies of a particular campus and department as the locus of emotional experiences and styles during the strike. In this way, if previous chapters have illustrated the role of emotional habitus, 'high' collective-oriented emotions, vulnerability to discomfort and despair, and life stories, this chapter continues to make allusion to all of the above yet focuses on the role of place therein. Indeed Andrea Muehlebach (2017, p. 99) underlines the “long line of social theorists who have emphasized that materiality and material forms” (such as places) influence ideologies and feelings, including Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, Émile Durkheim and more recently, Italian autonomist Marxist Bifo Berardi. She points to Marx’s insistence that “the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse” of people, and that the history of the subject is that of its relations with things (Marx and Engels, 1978 [1844], p. 154 cited in Muehlebach, p. 99). On a similar note, through the lenses of geography and oral history, Jon Anderson (2004, p. 258) notes how “emotive connections” are prompted “by the interconnections between the individuals and the place itself”; Toby Butler underlines the “affective bond between people and place” (Tuan cited in Butler, 2007, p. 366); and Mick Smith and colleagues (2009, p. 3) comment that “emotional responses de-limit places as much as people.” Specifically relating to labour, Lars Meier (2012, p. 478) documents workers' strong emotional reactions upon visiting

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<sup>357</sup> The fact that of the participants from Concordia, this dissertation includes mostly geography students, is partly coincidental and partly not. Out of the four Concordia students I interviewed personally, three were geography students: One was Marya, and the other two were geography students whom I was more regularly in touch with than others. Surely, I was motivated to interview geography students as I knew about their particular effectiveness picketing nearly every class, and the difficulties they experienced -some of which I had witnessed first-hand. Since I had been in touch with Alex since the before the strike, I interviewed her as she had been involved for longer than most geography students. Tony, on the other hand, had not gotten involved until the very end, so provided a different perspective. When two geography students organized a Concordia strike reunion, I observed that meeting, which was mostly composed of geography students; there, I was informed by two people present that day that they had been interviewed by Leyla Ayad about emotions during the strike, thus I was able to get access to their interviews.

the industrial ruins of their former workplace in Bavaria Germany, noting that "by sharing their common memories within their conversation, together they awake the haunts of walls and buildings."

Yet when it comes to student strikes, the only study focusing on affect (Bhéreur-Lagounaris et al., 2015) focuses on the city ("l'urbanité") as the impetus for affectivity, while dichotomizing the actions of student associations from other types of student actions, and characterizing on-campus conflicts amongst students and professors as 'interpersonal' rather than institutional.<sup>358</sup> What is missing from such a focus is the affective relationship that student participants of the strike had to the *place* where initial rumblings of democracy and strike happened: their local campus and educational institution. In this way, my interviews about participants' full strike experience from beginning to end help to fill that gap. Thus in contrast to Bhéreur-Lagounaris et al.'s focus on urbanity and the dichotomization of institutions from actions that pertains to one aspect of the strike (its street-related actions), geography students' stories from the beginning to the end of the strike are particularly insightful for highlighting the *campus* in its role as educational institution, and the emotional benefits and disappointments that come with it -regardless of whether in an urban centre or not. More specifically, I will argue that that these geography students' sense of belonging to this place (the geography department, at Concordia University) alongside their daily disappointments related to their expectations of the university setting and its actors, allowed them to experience particularly confusing and despairing emotions, alongside a particular emotional style. While this emotional style and reflexivity (King, 2005) helped in turn to build belonging and alleviate difficult emotions, it was nonetheless problematic and insufficient, especially for students from marginalized groups, confirming previous scholarship that points to how emotions related to activism (Srivastava, 2006; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011) and belonging (Lahdsemaki et al., 2016) can be particularly complex and difficult for people of colour and queer individuals, especially those navigating multiple minority identities at once.

I will start by providing a brief context of the geography strike at Concordia, then I will move on to illustrating how place (the campus), and the resulting sense of belonging and

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<sup>358</sup> Interestingly, from their report one might assume that picket lines play a minor role in a student strike, which was clearly not the case for geography students.



emotional style, affected geography student interviewees' emotional experiences; thereafter I will look at how this differed for the queer participants and students of colour within the geography group.

## THE CASE OF GEOGRAPHY<sup>359</sup> AT CONCORDIA

At the university level, strikes in Quebec have been organized by university-wide student associations as well as by faculty or departmental student associations. As already reflected by Alex and Tania in previous chapters, at Concordia University there was tension between the two styles of organizing -centralized student unions versus departmental or faculty student unions-, at least at the undergraduate level.<sup>360</sup> As Alex described in the previous chapter, with the support of the Concordia Mob Squad's *Strike Committee*, she had already taken the steps to go to a *Geography Undergraduate Student Society* (GUSS) AGM, which resulted in a first department-wide discussion about the strike being scheduled. “Quite a few people came out” to the department-wide discussion and talked for a “long *time*.” Despite being a “really *heated*” meeting, Alex says the reason the discussion was so powerful was because “there was *so much space* for us to actually *debate*” and “it was small enough” to “have a back and forth between people” which “made people feel *safe!*” Alex explains: Geography general assemblies were a place to “*explore things!*” because people felt safe to say, “I don’t understand why a tuition hike is *bad*” and then talk about it. After an informal vote during that discussion, they decided that they would like to bring the strike to a formal vote through a formal general assembly, and basically everyone in the room agreed.

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<sup>359</sup> To be clear, there are two student associations representing undergraduate students in the Bachelor of Arts programs in the Geography, Planning & Environment department: the GUSS (Geography Undergraduate Student Society) and the UPA (Urban Planning Association). However, this chapter will mostly focus on the experience of the GUSS members interviewed for this dissertation (see the list of participants in Appendix F).

<sup>360</sup> There were certainly also criticisms and doubts -from myself, Marya, and Tania, for example- about the ability of the GSA to effectively strike, as it represented thousands of students from various faculties. One important example of the disagreement and lack of communication among the centralized versus the departmental student unions is the following letter on the part of the CSU and the GSA, which misrepresented and oversimplified the diverse levels of democratic decision-making on campus -such as departmental student associations like the GUSS that had decided to engage in hard pickets- contributing to even further misunderstanding among the CUPFA leadership: see <http://www.cupfa.org/cupfa-responds-to-joint-csugsa-statement-march-5-2012/>. Luckily, the GSA and CSU executives later stood by students when the administration sought to charge students who were on picket lines: <https://geographyonstrike.wordpress.com/2012/03/24/students-will-not-be-intimidated-gsa-csu-statement/>.

Then at the GUSS strike general assembly on February 29, the group of 38 students present nearly unanimously<sup>361</sup> voted for "an open-ended strike within two (2) working days of the condition being met that the province-wide floor of students reaches 50,000 with a strike mandate, which must include 3 student associations within Concordia University also with a strike mandate" (GUSS, 2012). The latter mandate was inspired by a similar motion passed by the geography graduate students a few weeks earlier (GEOGRADS, 2012).<sup>362</sup> The undergraduate geography general assembly also voted that students should "individually commit to taking part in actively maintaining picket lines" and "that a committee be created to coordinate all Geography and Environment related strike activities and that participation in this committee be open to all Undergraduate Geography and Environment students as well." Thus they laid the foundation of what would be one of the most effectively picketed strikes at Concordia. Like most student associations, they voted to have weekly general assemblies to decide whether or not to continue striking. Finally, they voted to "commit to liaising with the faculty within the Geography and Environment department with the goal of minimizing any potential negative impact on students resulting from a strike." By March 7, 2012, a statement from 14 faculty members of the Geography, Planning & Environment department circulated:

"In our role as teachers, we seek to inspire students and to support them as they realize themselves as individuals and as active members of the society. In this context and when confronted with students who are exercising their right to civil disobedience we refuse to call security or to notify authorities who will penalize the students. Furthermore, if and as the strike continues, we will seek to accommodate the students in our classes who participate in the strike. We will accommodate these students according to our best judgment and without rancor."

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<sup>361</sup> Two students voted against it, and one abstained (GUSS, 2012).

<sup>362</sup> On February 16, GEOGRADS had voted for the exact same mandate, however their vote was to be done by referendum, and their strike to take place three business days after the floor was met, which ended up being March 5 (the list of Concordia student associations on strike by that day can be seen at the bottom of this site: <http://rushdia.virtualstack.com/concordiastudentsjo/>). In fact, the final mandate of GEOGRADS required GUSS to have a strike mandate in order to go on strike. While their strike was inextricably connected to the undergraduate strike -as some courses were cross-listed, and they often helped each other picket- this chapter will mostly focus on the undergraduate experience, as graduate students did not have as many classes that needed to be picketed, and because most geography interviewees of this dissertation were undergraduate students.

Despite what might seem like a supportive environment and successful preventative attempts on the part of geography students to liaise with faculty, the institutional locus would affect their emotional experiences in a way that they never expected.

Of course the first week, “I would say in Geography it was *easy* and kind of funny! People were like *happy* to not go to class,” says Alex, clarifying that “they were like perturbed,” especially professors, “but I don’t think anyone like *fathomed* that, that, that they *literally* would not finish, they would *not* go to another class for the rest of the *semester*.” Now that they were on strike, “*most* of my life became.. the *daily.. picketing..* at Concordia!” explains Alex. “Because it was like a full-time, even more than a full-time job.” That first month, “we had to have like a *line* of people, of people there, at every door.” The climate soon changed, as people got “more and more aggressive” towards Alex and other picketers, she recounts. “I suddenly found myself... in these really awkward situations with people I had been in school with for three years, with professors that I, like, respected and like, maybe looked up to before that, where like, it really brought out horrible sides of people!”

While some professors were very supportive or diffused a lot of situations in order to prevent students from being harmed, several other professors “should be *fired!*” says Alex. They “should never be an authority figure ever!” because, recounts Alex, “they just acted *so horrifically* during these times, where they would like actually *egg* on their more aggressive, like, especially like big dude -whatever- but like *aggressive* students to be *more* aggressive.” One particular professor “got his students all worked up about how if they missed this class they were gonna fail and they weren’t gonna be able to get their degrees.” He “worked them up to the state of anger and then was like, ‘I’m gonna go away, and when I come back I want this line to be gone, basically. And... um, it was very, it was like *really scary*.” Luckily the picketers “managed to talk security into diffusing the situation. Cuz they came basically to break our line and we were like ‘Look we’re not gonna move but this, a physical brawl is about to break out because these people are so amped up.’ So how about you diffuse this group? And then we can talk. And in the end they did that.” Those students who were very angry ended up leaving, the professor returned and was “really angry,” recalls Alex. “So that was also just like *obviously* very intense and sort of traumatic!” The next time they had to block that class, recounts Alex, “people *chained* the door shut, so we didn’t have to be physically present at every door.”

## THE PLACE OF STRIKING EMOTIONS

Before and beyond Alex's stories, we might have already assessed that educational institutions were often the physical location for emotional habitus, styles, and experiences during strikes: (ASSÉ/CASSÉE/CLASSE) congresses, occupations, general assemblies, and picket lines generally took place in educational institutions; indeed, both Audrey and I have expressed feeling haunted upon being in certain places on campus after the strike. While I have already explored in Chapter 1 the particularities of a social movement that is born in the womb of academia and the effects this might have on this movement's emotional habitus, geography students' stories from the midst of a strike make this relationship to the physical location of the academic campus more explicit and specific, highlighting how each educational institution, department, and student association, interacted with the movement's habitus. While Alex spoke in the previous chapter about her strike experiences during direct actions and protests throughout the city, she clearly recounts an equal if not greater number of stories and emotions related to the campus. Indeed, Concordia geography students' stories provide an interesting case study highlighting to what extent the walls, doorways, and corridors of the local campus held emotional resonance during the strike, to the same degree as, if not more than, the streets. The local campus, and often geography classrooms, is the place where picket lines were drawn, assemblies gathered, insults hurled and student muscles flexed (against picketers), professorial integrity questioned, administrative authority abused, security officers and riot police called, and finally on the first day of final exams, pepper sprayed. Quite differently from labour strikes, there were multiple, moving picket lines, as these snaked across university spaces, often making the classroom itself the front line of the conflict, often leaving departmental figures (administrators, professors) caught in the daily picket actions, rather than university-level administrators or governors. Without the biometric indicators used by Bhéreur-Lagounaris and colleagues (2015), these geography students' interviews alone were enough to bring out how, for quite some time after the strike, these places still instinctively made their bodies react,<sup>363</sup> highlighting how their emotions related to the strike were hooked to the halls and veins of Concordia University.

If for Alex, the “really awful, awful experiences” of pickets that neared physical violence “were like pretty *scarring*, in a way!” they were also carved into the landscape of the university,

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<sup>363</sup> In any case, such indicators might not necessarily have revealed their previous reactions to such places.

which was the “home base” or “day job” of sorts for Alex during the strike, so that Concordia University is now “such a hard place for me to go to.” Even one year after the strike, Alex is still unwilling to apply for a job at her alma mater, because “emotion stays with you for so long” and:

“everything from like outside of the Hall building, and all around Mackay and Bishop and whatever is like *laced* with feelings that are really l-l-l-like negative and loaded! (inhales) And then also a lot of the *hallways* that were like *where* I was for all of my degree, were then laced with these memories that were like pretty awful! And there were some really good ones, too! I had some really *favourite* moments of the strike that were awesome! But um, just the negative ones just make it *really* hard to like go back there, and feel, like I *always* feel bad in that space.”

Shaun’s story is another vivid example of this.

### **Shaun’s feel for the place**

Shaun was a graduate student in geography. If his student association had voted to strike, he still had work to do as a teaching assistant,<sup>364</sup> yet he often had difficulty “to focus on *anything* during that *time*,” so he would often help geography undergraduate students picket their classes - at least the ones that he was not TAing. One particular experience reflects the relevance of place to emotions -more specifically, how emotions can mark the landscape, which in turn can mark emotions. It was a picket line in front of the “amphitheater on the main floor of John Molson (building),” but they did not have enough picketers. So Shaun walked into the classroom, wearing his red square, “to sort of see what was going *on*” and to scope “the classroom to see who was there and,” he starts laughing, “where the doors were!” It must have been obvious that he was a picketer, he says, as one student in the class “immediately he started kind of yelling at me,” Shaun inhales. “And like doing it in a really.. intense *way*. Uh, and the like, threatening violence.. uh, explicitly!” Shaun is quite generous in his understanding of others’ anger, “like, you know, I understand the *reason* why people are angry. (Inhales). Um.. so I like gave some credit maybe, I don’t know maybe I shouldn’t,” he says. Nonetheless Shaun felt that he had to

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<sup>364</sup> Teaching assistants at Concordia University were members of a different union, TRAC, which did not have a strike mandate.

address the violent comments that this student was making, “I like, *decided* really quickly that I *wasn't* going to.. [...] *let* a room full of *people* see this person like *yell* at *somebody*, and have them walk *out!*” So Shaun waited until the person yelling quieted down a bit, then asked him: “Why do you think it’s okay to *say* these things to somebody? In the meantime,” continues Shaun, “other people who were picketing had come in,” but since Shaun thought that they did not have enough students to block the class, he said out loud: “I’m not gonna block this class, but I want you to know you can’t say this, like this is like, this sort of language and the way that you’re approaching this is like *really.. horrible!* Um, and really *violent.*” Shaun inhales twice very quickly, the kind of thing people tend to do when they have been crying, or are about to. “Anyway,” continues Shaun, “he sort of calmed down and I sort of talked, and like, it created a really weird situation where he was *never* gonna be okay with that, and was still *angry*, and other people like jumped in” and also screamed at Shaun, ““He’s fucking right man! Get the fuck out of here!””

It turned out that, unbeknownst to Shaun, there were sufficient picketers to block every door of the classroom; but upon discussion him and his fellow picketers agreed that since Shaun had already told the class that it wasn’t going to be blocked, the picketers thought it was best to respect Shaun’s word. Yet when the professor arrived, it turned out that Shaun knew him and the professor said: “I’m not going into a classroom after somebody’s been *yelling* like that, like I can’t.” So Shaun filed an accident report about the yelling incident, and the class didn’t take place. The following semester, Shaun had to TA that class, for that same professor. “That was just like a nightmare!” explains Shaun, because “every time I *went* to it for a while I was just like, *eughh!* (Inhales) John Molson School of Business [JMSB] you are the *worst* place on *earth*, (laughing tone) like I *hated* it!” Indeed, this particular classroom had been the site for other difficult encounters for geography students: in a previous picket of a Geology class, Shaun recounts they were only “*four* people to picket *four* doors,” in part because it was a 6pm class, but also because picketers were “burnt out,” and because the CSU general assembly was happening at the same time. This put them “in a very vulnerable situation to *begin with*”: yet here he was not vulnerable to fellow students, nor security guards, but rather to a professor from his department. The class was “taught by somebody who is *staunchly* anti-strike.” Shaun was picketing a door by himself and when students came by he would explain why they only barred entry to class to the professor not to students, and what the strike was about. Shaun “was having a conversation

actually with someone who was a part-time student who had *never*, had no *knowledge* of the strike and was like really *interested*,” so Shaun was encouraging him to go vote at the CSU general assembly when “the professor approached the door and uh, she.. like had a pretty..” he hesitates, “like an aggressive stance, but she was just like, like, are you gonna let me through?”

Shaun answered to her: “No, I can’t!”

Imitating a raspy, angry voice, Shaun recalls that the professor then said “YES YOU CAN!” Shaun acknowledges that despite picketers trying “*really hard* to be really positive,” there was “an aggressiveness” to the tactic of blocking a door, but he “wasn’t *used* to professors, uh being so, so aggressive! Um, in their demeanor!” The professor asked Shaun for his ID card, and “this was around the time where... there was like a *whole bunch* of people got their student IDs taken,” he inhales, and with a laughing tone says, “I was just like, well if they’re going *down*, like I’m gonna go down with them!”<sup>365</sup> Since the professor did not have a pen to write his ID number down, “I offered her a pen, to write it down, heh! And she *refused my pen* and called me the enemy,” he inhales, continuing:

“And then she went down [to the other door] and did something very similar. And actually kind of in some ways more dramatic with.. the students who were *downstairs*, which I didn’t know at the time, but was kind of like, we talked about it *afterwards* [..] There had been a group of students who had *gathered* around at that point. (Inhales) [..] She’d, like *claimed* that [the picketers] didn’t have the *right* to talk.. *to* the students or to *her!* (Inhales).. about what they’re doing, and [the professor] basically like.. like, yeah dirtied just the names of these people in front of, in front of these students.”

As is clear with Shaun, expressions of vulnerability and surprise at the reactions of geography professors, administration, and fellow students were commonly mentioned by geography students, thus many of their intense emotional memories of the strike are closely tied to difficult, surprising interactions with them. Thus the place of the strike, the university campus, provides

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<sup>365</sup> This event would later lead to Shaun to be charged under the university’s Code of Rights and Responsibilities; while the university ended up dropping the charges that it had filed against students, Shaun was among two charges that the “university didn’t drop because they were filed by.. a *professor*,” and he would have to attend a tribunal “*many* months later.”

the background for the expectations that are disappointed and the emotions that flared up as a result, reflecting the relevance of place (university grounds, a geography class) in the confusing emotions stirred up by the strike, as this professor's power over their classroom was suddenly threatened.

### **Tony's failed expectations on campus**

Tony, an undergraduate student in geography, similarly talks about feeling disappointed by fellow geography students, professors, and administrators during the strike. While at the beginning, Tony was not sure about voting for the strike, when he finally did it “launched me into a whole world of interesting friendships” as well as “major conflicts, there was huge amounts of tension, stress, anxiety.” One week, it had grown to such an extent that he had to share “one plate of food with a friend of mine because we were both so anxious we couldn't, we hadn't eaten in days but we decided we were going to finish a plate of food between the two of us. And we did it, it took us about two hours to eat one plate of food but we did it.” The context for that anxiety-ridden meal? “The same week that the administration came out hard against the student strike.”

I know that Tony is referring here to the March 23 notice by Concordia Provost Graham and Vice-President Freedman (“Obstruction of campus facilities and classrooms”) stating that the university administration would begin to lay charges under Concordia's Code of Rights and Responsibilities against students blocking or disrupting classes or university facilities, and encouraging fellow students to contact security.<sup>366</sup> Tony recounts that when he first read the email from the Concordia administration, “it felt like being punched in the stomach.” Yet this wasn't so new for geography students, he explains, as the chair of the Geography, Planning and

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<sup>366</sup> “Individual members also retain the right to file a complaint should they believe that their rights under the Code have been violated,” the notice stated. “Those unable or refusing to identify themselves will be photographed and charged once they have been identified” (<http://www.concordia.ca/cunews/main/stories/2012/03/23/notice-obstruction-of-campus-facilities-and-classrooms.html>; see also: <http://montreal.ctvnews.ca/disrupt-class-you-may-be-charged-concordia-1.786429>). In response, a joint statement by the Women's Studies Students' Association and members of the Simone de Beauvoir Institute stated: “We believe that encouraging students to file complaints against other students or security personnel to photograph and charge students as offenders under Concordia's Code of Rights and Responsibilities is an inappropriate response to the actions of our students on strike” (see <https://www.facebook.com/notes/concordia-community-solidarity-co-op-bookstore/joint-statement-wssa-simone-de-beauvoir-institute-regarding-concordia-university/10151473898125085/>). The statement also noted that “As feminists, we note that what Concordians commonly call the “Code” is typically used in complaints of sexual harassment and assault on campus. We find disconcerting that some would consider using the Code for the purpose of repressing students' “freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression” (a right promoted and protected by the Code) thus diverting much-needed resources away from serious cases where harm has been experienced and where Code offenses must be dealt with.”



Environment (GPE) department had already previously sent out “a very harshly worded note saying the strike wasn’t democratic.”<sup>367</sup> So the administration notice “was almost word for word what our chair had said to us and now it was just coming from a bigger administration body.” The new notice was nonetheless “it was a slap in the face of student democracy as far as we were concerned.”

The week immediately following the administration’s notice was “the worst week” of the strike for Tony: It was the same week when “Dr. Patterson was the interim chair” and “the same week the men in black [security guards hired by Concordia who were dressed in black] showed up.” Tony felt particularly shocked and intimidated the day he witnessed a total of 13 to 15 “men in black” arrive at a classroom where there were 6 or 7 picketers. At that picket, Tony recounts seeing an unlicensed security guard on Concordia grounds push a student’s video camera away and inadvertently hitting her face as the “camera went fluttering to the ground.” This event was “surreal” to Tony, as “I would not have thought that a security guard would ever lay a hand on a student” -but also because of the “intimidation factor” from the multiple security guards who “were bigger than I am” and “I’m a pretty big guy, I stand 6 foot 1.”

Yet there was another incident that was “actually more shocking to me,” he recounts, involving professor Judith Patterson while she was interim chair. “There was a [part-time] professor who is a PhD student, who is an immigrant to Canada” and whom Tony describes as “a very, very, very gentle man.” They were “somewhere around eight of us blocking his classroom and we very politely were like sorry, sir, we’re not gonna let you through. That was the general tone of the [geography] students blocking was always very respectful, never raise your voice. If they’re yelling or swearing at you, you don’t yell, [don’t] swear back, you don’t rise up.” As usual, picketers were letting students through but not the professors, he recounts. “Dr Judith Patterson came down the stairs and she started taking all of our pictures, saying she would individually file complaints against us as soon as she identified us.” Then, continues Tony, she “took the [part-time] professor by the shoulder,” and Tony was close enough that he overheard her say to him, “Remember we pay, we sign your paychecks” and she basically “pushed him through the line,” he recounts. “He was so stressed out, he looked like he was about to cry,” he

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<sup>367</sup> Though when high numbers of students voted in the general assembly, the GPE chair “was like, I can’t do anything, this was democratic,” adds Tony.

adds. “I don’t have words for how..... [I am] trying to figure out how to say despicable human being politely,” says Tony. “Like there was no empathy,” he continues. Tony was:

“*shocked* in that moment to hear someone in a position of power threaten a man’s job if he did not cross a picket line. You could tell by his demeanor that he was *extremely* uncomfortable. Um, yeah. And, I was absolutely stunned that that would happen in... an institute of higher education! And I would phrase it that way because it was bullying. There’s no *other* way to describe it.”

The part-time professor had not called security, but Dr. Patterson did, and “7 or 8 security guards arrived.” When security came, “I remember the security guard went and started moving us gently out of the way,” he says, as he glues his hands together in a straight line to imitate the security guard trying to make a path through students. And Dr. Patterson “kept her hand on [the part-time professor’s] shoulder all the way until he was in the classroom.” In addition to feeling outraged, upset, and intimidated by both professor and security guards, Tony felt “really sad that a man was put in that position,” and he felt “empathy: I’d been bullied a *lot* through high school and just seeing it again was *awful*” and especially surprising at the university level, he says. “I honestly considered withdrawing from Concordia because of this professor,” because:

“We were always polite, always respectful. Um, but, that respect wasn’t returned. And I understand [picketing] is an aggressive stance, you can never expect respect. But, in an academic institution, coming from a professor, I *at least* expected some amount of [...] decency. Um, that you don’t yell at students, you don’t need to raise your voice. You’re standing, at that point she was less than two feet away from us. Don’t need to yell at us, don’t need to get in our faces. Uh, we can have a conversation, we’re five feet apart, we’re having a conversation. You don’t need to be standing right here (puts hand in front of his face), you don’t need to be in my face.”

The day after that event, Tony had drafted a letter calling for her immediate dismissal as the interim chair of the GPE department, because of various incidents in which she had acted “in a

manner unbefitting the chair” and stated that “as Chair of the department, she should be working towards attaining harmony within the department, not furthering the divide.”

As can already be seen, many of the emotions that Tony was experiencing were based on previous emotional expectations from the particular place they were in: an academic setting, and the roles associated with it. “She scared me to an extent,” says Tony, “which is not an emotion I ever expected to feel at a university.” He wasn’t afraid that she would hurt him physically as “I’m a big person, but I was afraid of what she would do because ultimately, in that scenario, in that situation, she was the one with power over us,” notably the power to charge them under the university’s Code of Rights and Responsibilities.<sup>368</sup>

Other times, Tony was shocked at students’ reactions within a university setting. Most professors in the department were not abusive on picket lines nor did they call security, yet students opposed to the strike would stand behind the professor “yelling at us. That sort of abuse, where you just have to stand your ground and repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly, day in day out submitting yourself to that is difficult.” Students would call Tony “some of the most hurtful names I’ve ever been called in my life and I’ve been called a lot of names.” With repetitive abuse, geography students were “stressed, tired, exhausted,” says Tony: “that was the general consensus among all people that were striking, it’s that we don’t want this to go on any longer.” At one picket line in which students wanted to get into class, Tony remembers:

“being on a soap box moment in front of [students who wanted to get into class] being like, I just want to go back to class, I just wanna be a student again. Like, I want this to be over, probably more than you do. Like, yes you wanna go back to class, you have not been here from like 8:45 am to 8:00 pm every single day for the last three weeks. *I have*. I want this to be over [...] It was just, it was really, really hard.”

Those days wore them out physically, because entire days were spent “running around campus. And I kid you not, your entire day running from the Faubourg [Building two blocks away] to the

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<sup>368</sup> Tony was later charged by the university under the Code of Rights and Responsibilities, which the university ended up dismissing. Interviewees considered students and professors opposed to the strike to be privileged by the administration’s encouragement that individuals file complaints under the Code of Rights and Responsibilities, as strikers would not contact security because it was clear that security would be biased towards their employer.

7<sup>th</sup> floor of the Hall Building to JMSB [Building] and back to the 12<sup>th</sup> floor of the Hall Building,” he recalls. “Like, I get to sit down for 20 minutes? Awesome.” So “you’re physically worn out and then it’s dealing with the emotional, uh, abuse by other students. Like, people always getting in your face. Um, angry, uh, just people who were upset with you” and who “went personal, very fast” even though picketers were always trying “to keep it on an academic level.” What is crystal clear from both Shaun and Tony’s stories until now is the relevance of the academic context, in terms of its buildings but also expectations: that the administration would respect student democracy, and that professors and students would act respectfully towards fellow professors and students. Towards the end of the strike, it started to taint Tony’s desire to get near the university:

“You’re so worn out by the abuse that you can’t even go to school. Like, there were days where just walking into the building made me nauseous cuz it was just like here again, damn it. Why am I doing this to myself? Like, is it worth it? Um, my belief that uh, I voted for it so I have to be there is kind of what got me through. But there were weeks where I was like I don’t know if I can do this again. [...] Like, just really, awful weeks. But then, I don’t, I try not to look at those too much because remembering those is upsetting. Because I remember how awful a time at university it was.”

When courses ended, it still wasn’t over, as there were the “discussions about blocking final exams,” which was experienced as "major stress" because of the possibility that students against the strike would be increasingly violent against picketers, says Tony. At the geography general assembly to decide whether the strike would continue during exams, Tony was “genuinely upset about the missing class time” and having to go straight into exams:

“I wrote finals after missing three-quarters of my class time and the university didn't deal with anything [...], ‘business as usual.’ So that to me was the most insulting, I guess, is one way of looking at it. That our class time literally means nothing to the university as long as they are getting their checkmarks and they're getting their... they need to keep people through going on the production line. And I think that was a wake-up call, was that that's all that matters to this university. This university, all that matters is that they keep pushing people through on the production line. Very sad, if you ask me, that product is

more important than the quality of education. Um, we've got amazing teachers. I know, I love almost all my teachers. I pushed myself to do this, I pushed myself to excel in their classes. Um, and then, the university is like well, your class time doesn't matter. There aren't words for how disappointing that is.”<sup>369</sup>

Tony's disappointment with the place of learning echoes to some degree that of the firefighter on strike interviewed by Brunsdon and Hill (2014), who despite his “continuing desire to assist the public” (p. 105) no longer seemed to express as much pride about his job as a firefighter, in part because of “shattered expectations of support” and a sense of betrayal on the part of his co-workers, union leadership, and employers (p. 106), a sense that “it's a big game” for the employers, and feeling like “management are rubbing our noses in it... in the dirt” (p. 107).

On a similar note, if Tony views himself as someone who tries “to see the best in everyone,” due to the strike he became somewhat disenchanted with humanity: “People as a general rule are not very nice.” Yet, adds Tony, “the amazing people were the people who made it worthwhile. They're the people who um, who, we became like a giant family, the strikers” -or perhaps more specifically, those who showed up to picket. This brings me to the next part of my argument: how the academic context and place (the geography department at Concordia), including both the disappointment and pride experienced therein, inspired a sense of belonging to geography that was further affirmed thanks to geography students' particular emotional style both during and outside of general assemblies.

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<sup>369</sup> All exams and papers were due despite missed classes. Unlike the extensions (of either the semester and thus class time, or the deadline to submit marks, or both) instituted at other universities and colleges during previous general unlimited student strikes as well as in 2012 as early as April (<http://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/education/2012/04/03/01-4512267-droits-de-scolarite-la-date-butoir-approche.php>), Concordia University's academic senate (including student senators) did not bring the possibility to the table to extend the semester for those departments whose students had voted to strike. As early as March 2012, the university had set the tone by stating that it had no intention of extending the semester, and insisted that it was a 'boycott' not a 'strike' (Concordia University, 2012). By April 4, GEOGRADS, GUSS, and the UPA had released a co-written statement decrying Concordia's reaction: <https://geograds.wordpress.com/2012/04/04/student-strike-concordia-in-denial/>. As a means of comparison, the reaction of faculty unions at other universities to the issue of semester extensions during strikes will be discussed briefly in the conclusion.

## BELONGING AND EMOTIONAL STYLE IN GEOGRAPHY

Belonging has been described as a more personal sense of ‘feeling at home’ (Yuval-Davis, 2011),<sup>370</sup> a definition that clearly incorporates Tony’s above reference to the picketers as “a giant family.” Yet belonging is also considered to play “a role in connecting individuals to the social” and as involving “a process of creating a sense of identification with one’s social, relational and material surroundings” (May, 2011, p. 368) “based on the meanings we give our environment by moving through and engaging with it” (Ibid, p. 371). As Tilley (1994) notes:

“[P]eople routinely draw on their stocks of knowledge of the landscape and the locales in which they act to give meaning, assurance and significance to their lives. The place acts dialectically so as to create the people who are of that place. These qualities of locales and landscapes give rise to a feeling of belonging and rootedness and a familiarity, which is not born just out of knowledge, but of *concern* that provides ontological security. They give rise to a power to act and a power to relate that is both liberating and productive” (p. 26).

If various participants have already conveyed different experiences of collective-oriented belonging in previous chapters of this dissertation,<sup>371</sup> geography students' sense of belonging also took on a very specific form pertaining to place, notably the geography department at Concordia, whether it was fellow geography students, professors, or the discipline of geography as a whole. In human geography “there’s a lot of analysis about power systems,” says Alex, “so I think people were more critical.. than maybe in other departments.” Kris, also an undergraduate student in geography during 2012, highlights the confusing mix of proud belonging to geography amidst anger from other students:

“By the *end*, you know, the students were quite polarized. And so there was a lot of *anger* towards us as *well*. So we were dealing with *that*. So I’d say by the *end* like *all* of the

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<sup>370</sup> Yuval-Davis also refers to the more political side of belonging and its exclusions and boundaries as “the politics of belonging” – these aspects of belonging will be addressed further below.

<sup>371</sup> For example, belonging to her student association in the case of Élise; to the realm of higher education in the case of Philippe and Marie; belonging to a larger cause or collective for Julie and Pierre; belonging to the city or province for Jeff and Julian as will be seen in future chapters.

emotions, all of the *good* emotions [were heightened], like the *pride* in my, in my *fellows* and the *pride* of, of being in *geography* where the teachers were *very* uh, you know *understanding*. But also the *frustration* and the.. and the *fatigue*. Also very *heightened*.”

Part of my argument has been that such feelings of belonging in relation to place contributed to confusing emotions when met with anger or disappointing actions from within the geography community. In addition to engendering a confusing mix of emotions, these common experiences of constant conflict on the picket lines and the clear sense of belonging to geography contributed to a particular emotional style. One characteristic of this emotional style was the open expression of feelings during general assemblies, as well as outside of general assemblies to debrief about difficult common experiences, and even enjoy pleasurable and cathartic moments together. Muehlebach’s (2017, p. 100) “materialist conception of solidarity” as it relates to organized labour is relevant here, as it accounts “for bodies and embodiment, rhythm and refrain, as well as for the built environment and infrastructure that allow for the generation of proximities, coordination, and likeness across difference.”<sup>372</sup> Indeed, I suggest that geography students' experiences point to how the smaller scale of departmental organizing and general assemblies, the common concrete experience of place and a related sense of belonging allowed for greater “proximities, coordination and likeness across difference,” including *emotional* proximities.

Alex felt that the geography general assemblies were powerful because they allowed for “like a, a *human* conversation,” because as opposed to shoving a pamphlet in someone’s face to push dogma, at a general assembly there was space for people to “really try to *understand* where, where you’re coming from!” Of course, sometimes people simply did not agree, notes Alex. “Having a space like that, where people felt safe to question, to ask questions, to talk about things, to *disagree*, um, where there was no, like, it didn’t matter what language, like you didn’t have to *know* the rules or the language to articulate yourself so probably more people participated than would have, *otherwise!*” Then, seeing the way that people would change their positions by

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<sup>372</sup> Muehlebach’s argument is based on “the largest abandoned factory area in Europe” (p. 97) in the town of Sesto, Italy, which was “home to one of Italy’s largest concentrations of organized labor, thus exhibiting unusual levels of strike activity” (p. 101-102). In the late sixties and early seventies, this included “some of the most massive, coordinated, and continuous workers’ strikes that Western Europe had ever seen” (p. 102).

the end of the assembly, “I feel like.. like dissecting that like right-wing rhetoric is so much about engaging people *emotionally* and like, reaching an understanding as like individuals *together* or something?” It helped that geography general assemblies did not use Robert’s Rules to conduct their meetings, in part because Alex put the geography student representatives in touch with someone from QPIRG whom she felt “has a style of facilitation that is rooted in anti-oppressive politics,” and:

“that really *set* this casual sort of like *serious* but *casual* or something, or like *accessible tone* to the GAs, that I think was *v-v-vital* in geography being as radical and progressive as it was because it was like an environment where people didn’t feel *attacked* or oppressed by things they didn’t understand or manipulated by people who *knew* the rules better than *them*.”

Alex continues:

“it really *diffused* a lot of *anger*, and you could like *see* it happen. Where people would get really *angry* and then we would be like it’s *fine*, like *voice* your thing, like there’s space for you to like talk about these things, and people would just like calm down. And so that always felt.. *really* good. And, really, like, in those moments, I remember feeling like um... uhm, really hopeful that we were like building something worthwhile.”

Alex also thought that the process of the general assembly made those geography students who were against the strike to be *less* aggressive at picket lines: “there was a *counter-strike* group that was formed within geography” and they would come to every single GA and speak against it. Yet at the picket lines, when they came to enter classes, those same students “*weren’t* the people who were the most aggressive,” Alex argues “I think part of it was because they had like spent all this time in the *room* with these people *talking!* That like there was some emotional *connection*, like some *personal* connection between people so they didn’t just feel okay like.. being super aggressive and intimidating. *One* person is the exception to that, who shall remain nameless.”

On a similar note, beyond the space of the general assembly, simply through seeing and supporting fellow geography students on a regular basis through classroom pickets, Shaun felt



“*inspired*” throughout the strike “by what was going on around me,” more specifically he “felt a *really strong* sense of *solidarity*” and he “felt *compelled* to participate with other people who were *putting themselves* in these positions that were har- that are *hard* positions to be in.” On this note, Muehlebach (2017, p. 99) points to how Marx “specifically described workers’ solidarity” as a process emerging out of the “common assembly and gathering of communist workers as they smoked, drank and ate together”; in the case of geography students, the first-ever point of ‘common assembly’ was their common classes and professors, but also the general assembly, and then once the strike started, also the picket lines, the regular meetings to debrief about their shared picketing experiences, and protests where they would often march as a geography contingent. For Marx, continues Muehlebach, solidarity was “generated out of this concrete assembly and reflected in, and on, workers’ “work-hardened bodies”” (Marx and Engels 1978 [1844], p. 99-100 cited in Muehlebach, p. 99);<sup>373</sup> similarly we can consider the concrete assembly of students whose bodies are ‘hardened’ -or put in ‘hard positions’ to use Shaun’s above words- from daily picketing within a common department. Shaun sacrificed time, energy, and emotional well-being, yet he emphasized the common sacrifice of others around him, particularly undergraduate students who were in university for the first time. “What these people are doing is *huge*, and like, if it wasn’t for *them*.. doing this *with* me, I couldn’t be doing it. And, like, feeling like a *part* of that whole *thing*, is part of what like *gave*, yeah, is part of what.. *helped* me and also.. *pushed* me towards.. doing, yeah, doing the actions I did.”

If the sense of belonging to a particular place (within a larger movement) nurtured these geography students’ sense of solidarity, it also nurtured a particular emotional style; and in turn that emotional style further nurtured a sense of belonging to and solidarity with geography -at least to fellow geography picketers and supportive professors. After Shaun’s difficult above-mentioned experience picketing the classroom in the JMSB Building, he recounts that picketers went back to the seventh floor of the Hall Building -what he refers to as “the central headquarters” of the geography strike. “The general assembly for the CSU had *just* voted,” he inhales, “to go on a week-long strike! And uh.. this was like, this moment like, celebrating, it was

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<sup>373</sup> Muehlebach (p. 99-100) also points to Gramsci’s argument “that working-class solidarity was fostered from within the infrastructures and rhythms of the factory and its proletarian world,” thus in Gramsci’s words, “the institutions of social life of the working class” were the practical sites through which revolutionary solidarity was generated.”

like a *really* celebratory moment for a lot of people. I was *exhausted* from that *day* and from like *confrontation*, I think!” So a big group of geography students -undergraduate<sup>374</sup> and graduate- went up to another floor of the Hall building, “where there are like lots of big *couches*,” he says inhaling, “and got *pizza*, and like *sat*, and [...] we talked about how we *felt* after this like, *week* that had been really *intense*.” Sitting there, recounts Shaun,

“I remember just being like, (inhales) really *inspired* by.. all of the *people* (clears throat) around me. [...] People who are *willing* to do something that is actually quite like, puts you in like a vulnerable situation both like *physically* in some cases and *emotionally*, (inhales) uh as well as like, *could* have, yeah, *caused* like, academic.. repercussions, it’s pretty *serious* when you’re doing, like especially, like, (inhales) it’s your first *degree* and it feels *big* like, especially like when young, like I’m a bit older so I felt like, and I didn’t *care*, I don’t like *care* about this degree *that much*. (Inhales) And I felt, I feel like when, like people there were like, (low, intriguing voice) you know, 17, oh maybe not 17 but like, 18, 19, 20 [years old]! (Inhales) Not all of those people have *had* that many life experiences, (inhales) and it seems like, it *is* really important, your, like a degree is really *important*. And to me to like *sacrifice that*.. uh.. is a pretty *serious* statement [...] and to see everybody *there*, and like talking about how they’re feeling and being really like, really *trying* to like, um... to show *support*!”

The seventh floor of the Hall Building soon “became a space for people.. who were able to like air their frustrations, um.. talk about how they were *feeling* about it, like *decompress*, *cry*, uh, *laugh*, um... or like get re-energized or re-motivated too!”

Tony similarly expressed a sense of belonging within geography that turned into a strong desire to provide interpersonal support. For example, he explains that if at the beginning of the strike he had initially abstained during the GUSS (Geography Undergraduate Student Society)<sup>375</sup> general assemblies, eventually “what hit me” was listening to a geography graduate student speak

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<sup>374</sup> This included both members of the GUSS (Geography Undergraduate Student Society) and the UPA (Urban Planning Association), the two student associations representing undergraduate students in the Bachelor of Arts (as opposed to Science) programs in the Geography, Planning & Environment department.

<sup>375</sup> This student association regroups undergraduate students in the Human Environment BA program.

about the dismantling of geography departments elsewhere. So “it wasn’t a class struggle, at least not *yet*, it was we’re fighting for the future of our department.” Tony’s feeling of duty and responsibility to current and future geography students -and to the environment- held special importance for him. He thought about how “unbelievably sad” it would be if others did not have the chance to study what he loves and is passionate about, and to be able to have the “deeper bonds” and friendships he had made in his program because “we’re all geographers, we’re all environmentalists.”

This sense of belonging related to the place of Concordia and its geography department then extended to the streets. Starkingly different from some participants' memories of loneliness at protests, Tony recalls that “protests were the highlight of the month” because “at GUSS we had a, we had a sustainable drumline,” as “some people found like 10-gallon plastic pickle tubs and turned them into drums,” says Tony, which upon hearing I explode into happy laughter during the interview, and then I tear up upon reading again later. “We made banners, we walked with them, we clearly identified ourselves as GUSS” and “we had weird like geography, um, funny posters that no one else understood but we thought it was really funny,” like “a map of Canada with the provinces and everything delineated, Quebec and a big red square and then it said ‘Making our mark on the Canadian landscape,’ he says and I laugh again. “It’s really funny if you’re in geography cuz we make maps! We make our mark on everything!”

In short, “we got each other through it,” says Tony. “It was a very emotionally stressful time. But, we did it. And we did it as a group.” More specifically, “we did a lot to try and help ourselves,” recalls Tony. “If ever we had like a half hour off, we’d do, we called it check-in. So we’d sit in a circle and just how are you doing today? Anything you want to talk about? Cuz we all knew we were going through the exact same things, more or less.” At the check-ins, “you knew the people there actually wanted an answer, it wasn’t a ‘I’m fine,’ you knew there was more expected, because we all knew we weren’t fine.” Because:

“continually putting yourself in a position where there’s animosity, those stress levels are going to go up. We all knew it. And we’d all been on picket lines together so we all knew, this was like, you see the people getting yelled at. You see each other getting yelled at, you get yelled at. You know that’s going to take a -like there’s a price.”

Indeed, there were times when Tony felt he was on the edge of burnout. “I definitely got depressed at one point,” he says, laughing. “I came really, really, really, really close to burnout. I’ve burnt out in the past so I know the feeling. Um, and I know when to pull back,” so he also knew “how to keep myself on that edge for a while” -like when he stopped eating for days- knowing that “if I pushed a little bit harder, I’d be done.” He kept going because “other people were burning out” so he felt a “sense of need to be there, at least to be a body on the line.” Because there was always the question, “do we have the bodies?” Since some students would vote to strike but then “never show up” to picket and since “there was a lot of like paperwork that went into it that we didn’t think of, like just organizing, okay it’s Tuesday, what classes are there? How many doors are there in each class? How many people do you need to block each door? Um, is it a one-person door, is it like a three-person door? Like, um, who’s the prof? Is it going to be easy? Is there likely to be conflict? Like, all of these things went into how many people do you need per classroom.”

This sense that the geography group “all entirely understood” and depended on each other for strength when having a bad day was, for Tony, nearly “spiritual,” a term he uses in the secular sense of the “human aspect of spirit.” There was a “common knowledge” among strikers about how they were feeling, “we all knew we were stressed out” and “like when you say I had a really hard picket, we’re like ‘Ooooh. We, we get that.’” So “there was a big, a very large amount of um, interdependence, um leaning on each other in a, not physical sense but a spiritual sense. And that, uh, if you knew that person was having a really bad day, they could lean on you for strength. Like, emotional strength. Like, uh if you knew someone had had a really, really hard picket and then they were scheduled to go do a picket, uh, when you had your break, you switched. You’ll be like, look, you, you need a break, I’ll go do your picket. And then you might not get a break that day but you knew you did right by that person cuz they just really needed it.”

### **A lingering emotional style**

Exactly two years after the momentous March 22<sup>nd</sup> demonstration of 2012 that various geography students attended together,<sup>376</sup> we find ourselves at *Café Artère* for a “Concordia Strike Reunion/Meet-up.” If geography students’ place of assembly ceased to gather them once the

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<sup>376</sup> A narrated slide show of photographs, “Love Song for March 22,” made by a Concordia geography student can be found at: <https://geoggingclub.wordpress.com/2012/05/02/love-song-for-march-22-2012/>.

academic semester -and pickets- ended in April 2012, leading to the end of the emotional style and the emotional community that sustained it, it was rekindled albeit temporarily at this meeting. A few weeks earlier, Kiley, an undergraduate student in geography during the strike, had written an email that would implicitly spark it:

*“Remember that sunny day in March, 2012?”*

*The streets were filled with red squares, drums and chants! [Italics in original]”*

The fact that I was invited, alongside other non-geography students, is indicative of how geography students' emotional style was not exclusive -and easily contagious. “I thought it would be nice to have a relaxed meet up with strike folks....to honour the bonds we built during that kind of important moment in our lives,” Kiley wrote in the email. She<sup>377</sup> had originally envisioned the event for students from her Geography/Planning/Environment department<sup>378</sup> at Concordia, but “there are many people who I got to know during the strike who were from different departments and schools,” her email stated. “So, I extend the invitation to whoever thinks that this meet-up feels right for them!”

At the time it felt right to me, not just as an opportunity to ask about emotional experiences for this dissertation, but because there were many people at Concordia whom I got to know during the strike to whom I could relate because of our common experience. On my way to the meeting that March 22, I initially felt very stressed because of the awkwardness of explaining and requesting consent for my research from a large group, and perhaps because I was still hesitant to talk about my own strike-related feelings. Yet after a few steps inside *Café Artère*, I see Kiley and Keara, another former geography undergraduate student, and I'm surprised to find myself immediately feeling relieved to see everyone, especially Marya, who jumps up from her seat to give me a hug. *If Marya were not here, I would surely feel more out of place*, I think to myself. In hindsight, I wonder if I also felt comfortable because of the more open, expressive

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<sup>377</sup> I later find out that Kiley had come up for the idea of the reunion with Marya; that story will be told below.

<sup>378</sup> The full name is the Department of Geography, Planning & Environment.

emotional style particular to these geography students, which I perhaps could not yet name, but that perhaps I subconsciously could feel.<sup>379</sup>

There is chit-chat amongst us, until Marya says something that steers the conversation towards the strike. *“For seven or eight months I left the house at 7:00 am and came back at 11:00pm,”* she says, *“and working with people, always making sure I was not hurting people made me grow so much as an individual, as now I take other people’s perspective into consideration in what I do.”* She adds: *“The strike was more people-oriented than studying in the library, just say.”*

I pitch in: *“I associate activism with stress now. And ironically I feel the opposite of Marya, as I remember feeling so lonely at protests, maybe because I wasn’t active with my department and was more active with the GSA.”*<sup>380</sup>

*“But I was in GUSS,”* intervenes J-F, *“and I also felt lonely because I was torn between friends who were for, and friends who were against the strike.”*

Despite the serious tone of the conversation, one after the other, feelings about the strike start to come out of the woodwork, reflecting their previous open emotional style. *“It’s weird, after six months of complete anxiety at the idea of meetings, now it’s the complete opposite,”* says Shaun, *“now I love meetings and part of it has to do with negotiating and being with lots of people.”*

*“I remember two distinct parts of burnout during the strike,”* says J-F at some point, bringing back the particular geography experience of disappointment with people within the department. *“One of them was when [professor] Patterson was at the picket lines.”* In a later follow-up email, J-F explains what he meant in more detail, highlighting the confusing emotions resulting in part from relationships of admiration and respect -and love of geography- in the context of the university setting of Concordia:

*“It was the first day of [professor] Patterson being present at picket lines. I had about*

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<sup>379</sup> Indeed it is interesting to compare just how comfortable I felt at this meeting -composed of a total of four men and five women, all from geography with the exception of myself and one person- in comparison to the Concordia strike reunion on May 18, 2017 -composed of 12 people in which there were two geography students and in which men outnumbered women. However it could also be because the *Café Artère* meeting was more informal, whereas the 2017 meeting took place on university premises with a go-around for each person to speak in turn.

<sup>380</sup> Graduate Students’ Association of Concordia University

three run-ins with her and she had a pretty venomous tongue. Not great for my mental health [...] Her demeanor and way of interacting with students was downright disrespectful and for the week that she had assumed 'Interim chair of GPE' (a title that wasn't formally assigned to her, as our department had taken no decision to do so) she was usually hurling insults at us and taking photos, saying that we were committing ourselves to failing the semester [...] Very upsetting stuff for me as prior to the strike, she taught some of my favourite subjects like geology/geological survey. [Professor] Patterson even went so far as to verbally attack me at a meeting of Arts and Science Faculty Council, accusing me of leading an "Afghani Fascist Regime." I remember the room gasped when she said that and me and her had a heated exchange with then-dean Brian Lewis at a loss for what to do. I feel I did my best to convince those in attendance that our practices were as democratic as possible, with high turnouts for GAs and that we as students have democratic structures to ensure everyone is represented. My only regret was that I didn't come back at her with "in Athens, they used rocks to vote." As a Geology prof, that would have been great."

Hinting already at geography students' propensity towards burnout and compassion alongside their subtly reluctant relationship to anger that I will address next, it is interesting to note that both J-F and Shaun express empathy for professor Patterson. "*I think she felt hard done by,*" says Shaun, who had to attend a university tribunal due to the charge that Dr. Patterson filed against him for breaching the Code of Rights and Responsibilities. "*At the tribunal thing she very much exploded the story and made everything a much bigger thing than what happened,*" he recounts. Even though he was completely surprised by her false allegations, "*I felt like she believed it, I feel like she wasn't lying... literally my interaction up to the tribunal was nothing but cordial with her, and she wouldn't talk to me.*"

"*Who wouldn't want to talk to Shaun?*" someone from geography says.

Shaun humbly ignores the compliment and continues, "*I just didn't get why, but from somewhere she's got some deep dark anger, it's funny.*"

### **Against anger?**

Speaking of anger, at the meeting that day, if the geography-dominated group showed clear signs of their previous emotional style's allowance for comfortably sharing emotions, there

was little mention of their group's peculiar relationship to anger on picket lines that emerged from some of the interviews. In his interview, for example, Shaun says:

“There were some times I felt anger but I, like I, I'm *tempted* to say anger but I don't, like I think partly because I was, I tried so hard like to be *understanding enough* that I wouldn't let the sort of anger *well up*. (Inhales) Anger at, yeah, I guess (inhales).. but no, definitely like anger at, anger directed more towards like, the administration (inhales), uh and the use of *security*, um, and, like the, the, the police violence.”

Shaun easily admits anger towards systems of power yet is more ambivalent about having felt and expressed anger towards fellow students or professors. Already clear here are the confusing dynamics particular to general strikes, in which various levels of power (government and its use of police, administrators and their use of security guards, and professors and fellow students empowered by an administrative notice encouraging charges under the Code of Rights and Responsibilities) end up combined, thus it is not always clear who is the source of power -nor of one's anger. Indeed, notes Gould (2009, p. 91), "[f]eeling anger is sometimes an achievement, and not always easily accomplished." More specifically, Gould points to "the difficulties that hated and oppressed groups face when confronting the state" -and here I would add, their academic institutions- for "[t]hey have to navigate their own contradictory status as both members [of the geography department and university] and outsiders [soon accused and charged for violating the space as if their actions do not represent decisions of student associations within the university's locus], and that entails a navigation of their own sentiments about self and society [including the educational institution], which are often contradictory as a result of that [contradictory] status" (p. 101). Indeed, while Shaun's anger towards the administration and police violence is clear, anger towards professors and students caught in the middle is not so clear. He discusses the attempt of geography picketers to be 'rational' when they were picketing classrooms, almost as if to bond with students on the other side of the picket lines. There was:

“a strong... impulse on both sides.. but, even maybe *more* on the side of the picketers, um, to *rationalize* what they were doing. And the *reasons* why they were doing it were like *more important* (inhales, then exhales).. like there was this *idea* that you could, if you



just showed the really good reasons *why* the tuition increase was bad and *why* we were on strike, (inhales) then the people on the other *end* would.. *get* it! [...] And I often found people.. picketers being, expressing frustration with being like, ‘We’re giving good arguments and they’re still like, *mad* at us!’”

In these moments, the veil of reason and attempts to repress anger and emotion on the picket lines were ineffective, in Shaun’s opinion, as inevitably:

“it’s an emotional situation to be (inhales) in front of a *door*, and be like, ‘You can’t come in!’ (Inhales) And the reaction was *anger* and frustration! And if you were *ignoring* the anger and frustration and just giving rational arguments, you *can’t* really expect to *reach* those people. [...] And it was something that like, I started to think about *a lot*, (inhales) after the first week or whatever, of picketing [...] Whatever I *say* in terms of rationale is *not* going to (exhale) make that person on the other end feel *better* about this, make them wanna *join*, uhh or like *de-escalate* the situation. In fact it probably just escalates it by giving them a reason to yell *their* reason back and like, we’re both like shouting these reasons that don’t.. really get to the fact that like we’re, we just like.. are doing something that is like.. *u-upsetting* these other people!”

“We *tried* really hard, or most people I know tried *really hard* to be really positive,” explains Shaun. “Those were like these weird, like, weird emotional spaces that were never, it was never *acknowledged* that it was (inhales).. *emotions*? I felt! like, it was like, we acknowledged it *afterwards* or like with *each other*, and like, in the ways of like [picketers] trying to take *care of each other* (inhales).” Then eventually, picketers started to acknowledge out loud on the picket lines: “I *know* you’re upset, and I know like, this is an upsetting situation. And and I *recognize* that, like what I’m doing is like upsetting to you.. (inhales) But I’m still doing it!” It was “a *weird* dilemma!” says Shaun.

The “weirdness” of this emotional dilemma, I am arguing, stems in part from the confusing dynamics particular to general strikes, in which conflicts occur with various actors who were not initially expected as targets of anger. There are certainly similarities to labour strikes in this regard. Brunsden and Hill (2009)’s above-mentioned phenomenological analysis of

interviews with a firefighter who had participated in a strike found that experiences of peer bonding and a sense of community spirit and solidarity with other firefighters were experienced alongside feelings of anger and bitterness, and betrayal from a variety of unexpected levels (particularly the media and the union leadership, but also from the general public, employers, and firefighters who were not for the strike). The feeling of betrayal by fellow workers, generally conveyed in the use of the term ‘scab’ (I have used the term and heard friends use it during student strikes) certainly exists in the realm of these student strikes as well, as does internal criticism of student union leadership. Yet the *general* student strike is particular, because of the particular expectations related to the academic setting as described by Shaun and Tony above; it is also particular because professors, the department and even university (or CEGEP or high school) administrators are caught up in the daily logistics of the strike, despite the fact that they are not the target of student demands (the provincial policies and government).

The university (or faculty- or department-level) administration in this context *could* theoretically choose to ally with students to increase pressure on the government; yet at Concordia University, this was clearly not the case. Full-time and particularly part-time professors were then put in a position in which in order to fully support students, they could be at odds with their employer -as was the case with the part-time professor whom Tony claims was pushed by the department chair. This points to the particularities of each campus: it was the first time Concordia University had experienced a general unlimited strike, thus faculty were arguably not as acquainted with the modus operandi of student strikes as other faculty and teachers’ unions across Quebec; and yet arguably many students who were organizing and voting on the strike had expectations based on the experience of other students and institutions across Quebec. Thus the alignment of power and antagonism within the university itself -from department administrators, professors, and fellow students- was surely not expected by geography students to such an extent.

I am arguing that since geography students had to spend so much time picketing, they ended up facing the most constant aggression and oppression from within their academic institution, rendered more confusing because of the small size of the department and the sense of belonging they expressed towards it, leading to "weird dilemmas," in Shaun’s words. Considering that “the sense of belonging to a place” is often considered to be “a temporal process that combines experiences from the past, notions from the present, and expectations for the future” (Lahdesmaki, 2016, p. 236), it is not surprising that dashed expectations of respectful conduct

from professors and students would lead to confusion with regards to how to respond to anger, and whom to share one's anger with.

While geography students' apparent disavowal of emotions -in particular anger- on picket lines is surely influenced by the unexpected and confusing conflicts and displays of power within university walls<sup>381</sup> from a diverse set of actors during the university's first-ever general unlimited strike, it is also relevant here to re-emphasize that it took place within a Western Anglo-Saxon academic environment (an anglophone university) with a historical tendency to prioritize reason over emotion, as explored in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Indeed, Shaun hints at the possibility that their stance towards anger on picket lines could be influenced by the un-emotional culture of academia when he adds: "the classroom is supposed to be a rational space, right, like *not* an emotional space. I don't know if the whole *institution* is supposed to be that. But it's certainly not set up for... like you know (hesitates) ahh I don't know, like academia is not *set up* for emotions, it's set up for *ra-reason*, right? The *whole point* is to be *reasonable*." And as Tony mentions, "you know when you wake up in the morning that it's going to be the same thing again. That it's just going to be the stream of abuse, name-calling, uh, I personally tried to maintain it as an academic level."

And even beyond the academe, historians Carol and Peter Stearns (1986) and anthropologist Catherine Lutz (1986, 1998) contend that currently, "the dominant American attitude toward anger is that it should be controlled" (Gould, 2009, p. 106).<sup>382</sup> Considering the cultural context<sup>383</sup> reinforced by the academic context, the already dim view that the public held of Quebec's student strikes in mainstream media (Lacombe, 2013), and the confused understandings that Concordia student and faculty union representatives held of hard picket

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<sup>381</sup> Other students who had to picket faced similar dilemmas of feeling empathy and the desire for kindness towards fellow professors and students who wanted to cross the picket lines, alongside the full-hearted understanding of the need to picket, for example Marie when she picketed at Université de Sherbrooke, and Philippe when he picketed at UQAM.

<sup>382</sup> Gould notes that Lutz adds that the expression of anger nonetheless remains more acceptable on the part of men than women.

<sup>383</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 1, the "Western discouragement of anger" dominant since the Victorian era has been particularly aimed at oppressed groups, notes Holmes (2004), and emotions more generally have historically been associated with women and people of color, as well as other marginalized groups, crowds, and masses (Goodwin & Jasper, 2006; Harding & Pribram, 2009; Jaggar, 1989). Such an association of emotions with the 'irrational,' 'private' and 'subjective' realms and the 'Other' -alongside the idea of 'the dispassionate investigator'- has served as a rationale for the dominance of certain groups, notably white males, notes Jaggar (1989), who can thus more readily discredit the 'Other' and justify their political authority.

lines,<sup>384</sup> it is possible -as Gould suggests was the case with lesbians and gay men during early AIDS activism in the United States- that geography students, were “influenced by this hegemonic emotional habitus.” Engaging in their institution's first-ever general unlimited strike within that context, a hesitancy to portray anger in order to protect both their image but also their safety on already tense picket lines, is understandable.<sup>385</sup> “Activists and nonactivists alike are complicated emotional beings,” notes Gould (2009), “influenced by our nonconscious affects, by our emotions, and by the emotional habitus of the different worlds in which we live” (p. 165). Indeed, it has been noted that “while members of social justice movements often encourage the expression of anger in private, they frequently feel the need to repress anger in public for fear that it would delegitimize the cause” (Henderson, 2008, p. 35).

Interestingly, upon emailing Alex mentioning my observation that geography students avoided anger on picket lines, she writes: “I don't think this was ever something we decided as a group in a GA - I don't actually remember but I know I would have had some strong opposition to the idea.”<sup>386</sup> It is very well possible that it was a feeling rule discussed at informal meetings rather than at a general assembly; or that some geography students started acting on it and a few others simply modeled them; or that it was simply an unspoken, unconscious rule of their emotional style. The concept of ‘emotional habitus’ as described in Chapter 1, as well as Arlie Hochschild’s (1979, p. 563) definition of ‘feeling rules’ as “a set of socially shared, albeit often latent (not thought about unless probed at), rules” is helpful here because it points to how such rules can be undiscussed or unconscious in the moment. Indeed there were variations even within those who mentioned the ‘feeling rule’ about anger: Tony, unlike Shaun, felt that sticking to rational discourse was effective. “My style was not to try to get people angry” and “you kind of let them, the words flow over you, in one ear out the other. You don’t process it.” He would also explain to students why they were picketing their class, which he feels “did end up changing a lot of opinions.” There were a few times, however, when Tony could not deny the anger building up

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<sup>384</sup> See <http://www.cupfa.org/cupfa-responds-to-joint-csugsa-statement-march-5-2012/>.

<sup>385</sup> Though, as these participants explain, this did not protect them from feeling unsafe on picket lines.

<sup>386</sup> Interestingly, Alex’s comment here brings out a dimension of ‘belonging’ that May (2011, p. 368) considers to be missing from Bourdieu’s ‘habitus,’ notably not just mastering the rules of the game but also “a sense of where these collective rules come from, or how they develop,” requiring not merely “the existence of a collectively shared culture” but also “the right to participate in the development of the ‘living tradition’ or the reflexive arguments of that society.” In this way, Alex’s comment could be considered as affirming her sense of belonging to geography despite her clear disappointments with it as reflected below and in the previous chapter.

inside him, like when Dr. Paterson “was yelling at us comparing us to some of the uh, like historical dictators” or the time when “a guy got up in my face,” he says, “it had been a person that I’d seen a couple times and I think he enjoyed getting in my face.” In that last instance, since part of Tony’s work is teaching kids techniques to fend off bullies, he ended up using such techniques: whereas usually “I try to be as relaxed as possible on a picket line,” he says, in this case “I stood up which instantly gives me another inch. Um, like you just get bigger and then you go, look, and you drop the tone of your voice, there’s certain things and a lot of people do this unconsciously, I’ve taught it enough that I know what uh, what to look for, what the signals are. And uh, he just backed down.”

Yet for Keara, a queer woman of colour, more petite than Tony, who was also geography undergraduate student in 2012, the emotional process behind the scenes of this anger management were more complex and long-lasting, longing for some form of intense release. Leaping out of the pages of her April 2013 diary are the gymnastics of emotions involved in serving the desire to appear ‘rational’ or to please others:

“I remember that evening, after the giddy thrill of the day had left, I cried.

I cried in frustration and isolation: because we were taunted and scorned as immature fools, idiotic dreamers [...]

I cried from exhaustion: because day after day in front of classroom doors we were met with hostility and rage, pushed and shoved, called thieves by the people I now must sit next to. When the usual logic dictating that the right course of action will of course please all (or at least the majority) proves to be the most useless of litmus tests, we are mostly abandoned as we proceed [...] Pleasing everyone in our quest to dissolve the roles many of us with privilege happily inhabit is an absurd prerequisite for strategizing.”

Like Shaun, Keara questions geography students' seemingly unwritten policy of expressing no anger, and her desperate need to unleash it. She writes:

**“On requests made of anger:** [bold in original]

Be patient!

Be generous!

Be open, be listening!

I am told, over and over.

The picket line creates space to, is a place to:

Educate and inform, dialogue and discuss.

But to be demanded this endlessly, to always be receptive  
is simply not possible.

To be required to always keep calm, to remain cool and collected,  
prevent hot flares of anger they'd point to while whining *Danger! We're threatened!*  
While facing constant provocation of pushing and shoving, misguided word hurling,  
is simply not possible.

So there reaches a time when my anger and frustration cannot be contained, when  
I grow sharp claws and snarling jaws, when I need the release of fast moving feet, seas of  
singing shoulders surrounding me, an orchestra of cacophony; we come together in anger.  
[underlining in original]"

For Keara, demonstrations appear to have provided the necessary "release" to let some of the  
"anger" that inevitably derives in part from "constant provocation of pushing and shoving,  
misguided word hurling." Shaun speaks similarly about the cathartic release from protests,  
specifying that such euphoria was intimately connected with the emotional style of geography as  
it was:

"a euphoria that's often tied with this *catharsis* of being like in these like, really, uh,  
stressful situations [...] in these like mini-conflicts all the time! And like.. also being like  
having, like all this adrenaline, and all this emotion, like *wrapped* up in those sort of  
things. And then, also then getting to express like joy and solidar- like, joy and solidarity  
*through* like these big like demos, or through like.. even just like *having a drink* with  
friends *after* and being like *holy shit* this is what happened. (inhales) [...] There was this  
like *euphoric* sense where you're like, 'We're all in this together and this is AMAZING!  
Look at what we can *do*.'"

Other times, the anger management and the negative emotional experiences were not caressed by simultaneously positive ones, as if the intensity had produced an intolerance to feeling. “There were times when I just felt just like totally *sapped* of energy and emotion too,” says Shaun, as his tone and volume lower. “Like, I feel like often... I just had *nothing left to give?*” he says, explaining, “like.. (inhales) *sapped!* of emotions. I felt emotion-*less* almost at times where I was like, I’ve been *feeling* all this, (inhales) um.. and now.. now I can’t *feel* anymore.” Shaun explains that “in a lot of cases I-I suppressed my emotions to try to be able to *do* something that was really *hard* to do [...] I don’t think I expressed some of the emotions I was feeling *enough*.. in a way to *make myself okay*.” Even though Shaun had the support network of geography students at certain moments, “I didn’t like *call* on my support network *enough*, to like do self-care! And there was a lot of things that, like I was going through *something*, and it like actually had like *pretty brutal effects* on my personal life! Heh. Like for this next, the *year after it!* Like I’ve just, my personal life in some ways has been a *shambles!* Um and a lot of it has to do with *that*, like being (inhales).. in this really emotional situation and *not* being able to reach out to people for a number of reasons!” For if in a group setting they had together shared their “strong sense of solidarity” and the resulting euphoria and catharsis, it was perhaps less the case when it came to expressing feelings related to the physical and emotional exhaustion of being involved in high-conflict and intense, urgent situations and decisions.

“*All* those things are really.. emotionally *exhausting* and I don’t think that I.. (inhales) uh, found a way to like.. uh, let that *out* or *express* that in like a *space* that was *not* the space. I feel like there are certain things where you, I like need to *leave*, you got to get *out* and like do something *else* and talk about it and let it *out*, and (inhales) uh, not always *be* in the sort of situation, I don’t think I did *that*.”

Despite having interpersonal support and a sense of belonging from fellow geography students, the fact that Shaun did not reach out enough to his support network outside of the strike meant that it was nonetheless very difficult for him, echoing King’s (2005) suggestion that emotional reflexivity ideally should take place outside of the main activist group, as elaborated in Chapter 3.

Considering Keara and Shaun’s expressions of continual suffering after the strike, I can’t help but wonder what effects this might have had on others managing their anger and other

emotions during the strike. Of course, important to keep in mind here is Hochschild's (1983) clarification that: "Some managing of feeling promotes the social good" (p. 573). The attempt to obfuscate emotionality and anger in order to convince students at the picket lines was clearly an attempt to make the strike more effective -for the social good that Hochschild mentions, clearly different from the alienating emotional management of the profit-oriented workplace on which her infamous work focuses. And such is clearly the intention of the various social movements that similarly engage in "reshaping certain emotions into other emotions that are more adequate for the social movement activity at hand; it can, therefore, be a crucial factor in movement success" (Ruiz-Junco, 2013, p. 47). In this sense clearly for both Shaun and Keara, protests helped to then channel their anger into something else. Yet the doubt remains in my head: did their anger dissipate into the soft air of protest chants and the euphoria of collective-oriented emotions, as Collins (2001) suggests? Or if the anger simultaneously grew sharper and more defined, as Collins also suggests, did it leave them to deal with the remaining festering sores of such anger on their own once the strike came to its end? Similar to Gould (2009)'s thesis about the ACT UP movement, I wonder if the pattern of anger soothed by collective-oriented catharsis at protests further contributed to an emotional habitus that could easily hide the despair that continued to rumble and erupt once the strike died. These are the questions missing from Collins and Summers-Effler's theorizations, as are the questions of the internal rumblings of power.

#### POWER IN THE PLACE OF BELONGING

Indeed, for geography students, the power of domination ("pouvoir sur") was encountered not just in the form of government policies and laws, police violence, nor just by departmental administrators and professors or aggressive geography students backed by administration policies: it was also soon found within the folds of the group of students most dedicated to the strike. Echoing Gould's (2009) note about individuals' particular histories in relation to a habitus (and by extension an emotional style), as well as Srivastava's (2006) depiction of different levels of marginalization even within emotionally expressive feminist groups, each geography student interviewee's idiosyncratic story and baggage interacted with the accumulated anger from the strike and with any sense of belonging to geography. The experience of students from more



marginalized groups, such as Alex and Keara, suggests that internal and intersectional<sup>387</sup> power dynamics complicated the emotional experiences of the most involved strike participants, despite the interpersonal and emotional support some students provided each other.

### **Keara's lingering anger**

Keara clarifies to me by email after sending me her diaries that she now thinks that her anger during the strike was also driven in part by implicit memories and triggers related to her feelings of powerlessness and victimization in her family history. She mentions Gabor Maté's (1999) argument that activism in these cases is often reactive, less strategic, and more alienating - that is what Keara was writing about when she wrote these next words, she tells me:

“I witness myself projecting grand injustices, old hurts, salt stinging wounds,  
onto administrators and police,  
onto the men behind the glass doors,  
onto students pushing through picketlines,  
onto apathetic, apolitical faces,  
and it feels good.

It feels good to have an object for my anger, a face on which to focus my accusatory glare. It feels good to have somewhere to direct my frustration within this ephemeral entity of ever hungry destruction, to point a finger, to lay blame. It feels good.

At first.

But it does not stop at the picketline or at the manif. I feel increasingly isolated as the continual process of my politicization drives me ideologically further and further from many of the people that surround me – friends from other eras, family. I stare with judgement at students who walk hallways. I become resentful if you cannot keep pace as I obsessively hack at walls built within me, around me. I am angry with you if you cannot see the urgency and importance of What Needs To Be Done. I can't close my eyes to

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<sup>387</sup> The term 'intersectionality' is attributed to Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), who sought to underline how Black women were oppressed by more than one social location or identity, notably their oppression due to both racism and sexism. It has since been used to consider the various ways that (women's) experiences and oppression can differ, depending not just on their gender and race, but also including and not limited to their sexuality, disability, caste, age, religion, or a combination thereof.

cages, why do you? But what is the use of a personal revolution that drives me deeper and deeper into some purity that also entails political isolation verging on separatism?”

Reading these last words I wonder whether the repetitive strain of daily-repressed anger played a role in sharpening the other edge of the existential dagger that wounded students at the strike’s end, or in King’s (2005) words, contributed to the ‘dissonance’ that remained. Furthermore my suspicion grows about whether the repression of anger at the picket lines allowed it to leap out like a ghost at later times for those with more difficult life histories. As Keara writes, a “screaming tempest” remained much after the strike’s end:

“After leaving Montreal abruptly in May I abruptly realized that I was, in fact, unable to leave. A smooth slick plane had quickly whisked the flesh of me to far away trees, but my heart and mind were unable to leave what had consumed and fed me for months. I dealt with the dissonance of that emotional lag by shutting out that inside me faraway call and restricting the mind to present physicalities, because even cautiously crawling towards thoughts of the strike and peeking under that carefully constructed lid unleashed a screaming tempest I had no way of dissipating.”

Keara herself reflects on how anger has affected her life, again illustrating the deep ability of various participants of this dissertation to analyze their striking emotions self-reflectively and critically with new eyes to new possibilities: “while no one has the moral authority to tell me to reign in, to make palatable and unthreatening, my anger, it is my responsibility to consciously tend to it.” Incorporating the wisdom of women of colour, she continues to write:

“Pain and anger are objectifying as they are reactions to things done to us, Patricia Monture-Angus explains, so “we must begin to be subjects to the extent that we can be...[by] gaining control over your experience” (29).<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Monture-Angus (1995); Lorde (1984)

Audre Lorde: We have had to learn to orchestrate those furies so that they do not tear us apart. We have had to learn to move through them and use them for strength and force and insight within our daily lives. Those of us who did not learn this difficult lesson did not survive. (1984:129)”

Indeed that day at the two-year strike reunion at *Café Artère*, Keara says in her passionate way that makes you feel she is speaking from her gut: “*There is some serious mental health stuff that I’m still trying to deal with, I dropped out of school multiple times, it’s so hard to go back to school and sit next to people who called the cops on me.*” In addition to the life experiences preceding the strike that continued to anger her, and in addition to the anger and confusion related to feeling betrayed by fellow classmates, Keara felt hurt by subsequent interactions at the university, due to the fact that she is a woman of colour. At *Café Artère* that day, Keara tells us how the semester following the strike, she really wanted to take a 400-level geography class called ‘Militarism & the City’; but when she asked if she could take the class, the department’s undergraduate program assistant angrily responded by email, that “*she had already told me I couldn’t set foot in that class because it was full.*” Yet the program assistant had confused Keara with her friend [Stephanie], explains Keara, later clarifying for me in a follow-up email:

“Over the years I spent at Concordia it was common to an absurd degree for [fellow strike participant Stephanie] and I to be mistaken for each other... we are both mixed white/east-asian and at the time had sommmeeeeeewhat similar gender presentation, though [Stephanie] is more femme. I definitely perceive people’s (in this case the department assistant’s) inability to differentiate [Stephanie] and I as racism (i.e. she can distinguish all the white hippies from each other in the department but all asian people look alike), as well as just plain lazy and insulting.”

In addition to the particular difficulties Keara faced returning to take classes in the place of the strike, racism interacted to make the situation all that more painful and ridden with power’s subtle micro-aggressions.

The intersectionality of different forms of oppression was something she felt during the strike as well; in her April 2012 diary about the “spontaneous occupation of then interim

president Frederick Lowy's office"<sup>389</sup> Keara explores how the strike for her was about those many forms:

“April 2<sup>nd</sup> bang bang fists pound boots kick on the other side of the wall fifteen stories about the ground [...] We disrupt the panoptic vision of administration, peace of mind fed by probing tentacles of surveillance cameras, security guards, intimidating department chairs [...] This is pure thuggery! yells David Graham [former university Provost]. You standing in picket lines, violently take my lecture from me, yell students still trying to get into class. Pull apart this vague idea constantly hurled at us. Accusations of violence function as an attack on our morality, try to deny us integrity, legitimacy. To call picket lines and peaceful occupations violent seems to me an indication of magnificent entitlement. Privilege breeds blindness to the context of these actions. Privilege enables us to call the denial of a morning in the office violent while simultaneously remaining silent about the imperialism, classism, sexism, racism, ableism, environmental destruction on which everyday access to this office (holding such positions of privilege) depends.

She also experienced the intersectional hues of power within general assemblies and the group of picketers during the strike, when GUSS general assembly members were unreceptive to a motion recognizing how tuition increase adversely affects women and people of colour. Keara writes:

“I have the right to be apathetic,” says some fucking white boy at a GUSS general assembly sometime in March and my screaming fury rips him limb from limb. If you insist on explicit complicity then I want to make sure that you are aware of the pain upon which you smugly lounge [...]

Alex was similarly disheartened by the discussion around that motion, as it generated an “*awful* discussion where people said *really* horrible things, about like how that wasn't actually

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<sup>389</sup> Keara writes that the occupation was meant to decry how “up until this action the president had made no response to the growing unrest on campus (several student associations had been on strike since the end of February).” *The Concordian* newspaper covered the event: <http://theconcordian.com/2012/04/students-hold-sit-in-outside-conu-presidents-office/>

relevant,” recalls Alex. She felt a lot of her “general man-hate being validated! By really sucky comments from especially, from like white middle or upper-class white dudes telling us that this thing wasn’t relevant! So obviously [I felt] like.. anger.. disappointment, um *frustration*,” recalls Alex. Even though the motion ended up passing, it was “one of those moments that *polarized* things” and Alex lost trust in some of her fellow strikers. Now not just picket lines, but general assemblies were sites of tension and oppression, reminding Alex of the dynamics that had affected her own life and upbringing as a white, queer woman from a socioeconomically marginalized background. Thus it became “very personally emotional! Like very loaded for me! When, for instance like, like cis[gendered] white rich dude is telling me that it’s, like, not relevant that women are affected more by the strike.”<sup>390</sup> In a zine that Alex publishes in November 2012 about the strike called “What kind of allies are these? Reflections on power and politics within the 2012 student strike at Concordia University”,<sup>391</sup> Alex writes more about the “group of primarily cisgender white men” who were against the motion: “it was hard not to feel alienated or vulnerable to the political will of a group of people whose gendered and white privilege was setting limits to what they could see as the political possibilities of this collective body.”

#### **Alex: walking sensitive, confusing lines**

Indeed, Alex's experience on picket lines also points to her particular vulnerability as a queer woman therein. Some students were “*so* aggressive and also like *racist* and homophobic and *sexist* and just like doing and saying anything to lash out at the people who were blocking them,” she recalls. She felt targeted as a queer woman in these situations, thus enraged, but also confused. Because the picket lines were “a sensitive line to walk! Sometimes I felt weird about it!” Alex's personal connection to the issues around the strike made her sympathetic to some students who were angry because of their own economic situation. Because “some people were *so* upset about the strike and about pickets and classes being blocked *because* they were like poor

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<sup>390</sup> The site of the general assembly and of direct democracy in the strike thus provides a context where common negative emotions -tension- does not necessarily translate into effervescence because of the inevitable disagreements in the room that might not be resolved in a way that pleases everyone, even if the desired position ends up being voted. We might say then that the deliberative complex dialectical process of direct democracy provides a different image than that provided by Collins (2001) -not a clear passage from negative to positive emotions, but rather an underlying commitment, a fragile emotional connection based on the faith in a democratic process that allows difficult topics to emerge, slowly and sometimes most painfully for those who are most marginalized, sometimes allowing positive collective-oriented emotions to flourish, other times not.

<sup>391</sup> This was an abridged version of her undergraduate Honours thesis.

people, who were just trying to get through university. And they were just like, trying to *survive* in a system that was really oppressive.” And “often also people were like racialized people!” For example: “At this really one intense picket line, there was like an older, like maybe 40-year-old black woman who was like, just *very vocal* about how we were oppressing her, basically. And it was really, some pretty awkward feelings!” Alex would discuss with those students, saying “I’m also a poor student, like I come from a poor family, like I know this is hard! We’re doing this so that it will be *better!*”

As for various other participants, as the strike progressed, it brought with it increasingly tense situations laden with the intersectional and dialectical qualities of all aspects of life, and thus moments of ambivalence, intensified for Alex because of her personal background. Those feelings were “tricky” as they forced her to grapple with her “*own position in the world*” and her politics and convictions; yet they still “didn’t feel as *negative*” as the:

“obvious rich entitled people... who didn’t actually care, didn’t care about school at *all*, didn’t care about, like whatever, at all, just *hated* the fact that we, that they weren’t sort of *getting* what they want. And those were some of the *worst* interactions ‘cause they weren’t interested in *talking*. They had *nothing* to talk about.”

With those students, recounts Alex, the argument ended with them saying, “Get out of my way,” and picketers answering “No,” and then students replying something like “I don’t care what the fuck you have to say you fucking *dyke*, get out of my way!”

In those moments, “I just felt so much *rage*, people just came to *embody* like entire systems that I hated so much. Which probably wasn’t fair to them, but I’m sure I was representing something to them as well,” she says in her self-reflective way, as she crosses her arms.

It might not be surprising, considering Alex’s disappointment regarding her fellow members' reaction to the motion about women and people of colour, her experiences of sexism and homophobia on the picket lines, and her continuing critiques of the more traditional ways of doing student politics such as the more centralized CSU and its associated *Mob Squad*, that she

“started getting involved with just like affinity groups”<sup>392</sup> of mostly queer women who were anti-capitalist. Since “we were *all*, were on that same level, so the things that we *planned* were, like, I didn’t feel like I had to compromise,” says Alex. With them, she planned a few disruptions on campus. That new affinity group would end up being one of the most significant elements of the strike for Alex.

Indeed, that group organized “one of the m-m-most powerful moments” of the strike for her. At first, Alex was not sure this part of her interview should be confidential, yet a few years later she decided that it didn’t need to be. As mentioned above, the geography general assembly had voted by a margin of few votes *not* to block exams; this meant that if students wanted to pass the semester, they would have to write exams after having missed a substantial number of the semester’s classes -as the administration had not recognized the need for an extension to recover missed class time. So when Alex came up with an idea to block exams, everyone in the affinity group soon agreed. During the preparation for this action, Alex remembers feeling:

“really *excited* that people were, like especially after working so much with the CSU or with other people who were more interested in complying with that sort of system.. It felt really liberating and *awesome* to me to be with people (inhales) who were kind of like, screw that, like let’s do something radical!”

Yet this initial excitement soon turned into drama and trauma. “It went *really* badly,” remembers Alex. “We blocked every single access point to the Hall Building in the morning before exams started.” They were well-prepared, and some of them even had walkie-talkies to coordinate “with each point-person” at the different entrance points of the building, recounts Alex. Some of the doors that we were blocking “were *really* tense and awful” she adds. “I was stationed at the door where things got really *crazy*,” she recalls, it was “was *very* scary.” There was a “*huge mob* of mainly dudes, bros, not exclusively, but they were like at the forefront doing the physical stuff!” In order to effectively get through the line, these men were “*targeting* small, smaller women” or people they assumed “identified as women” and “*using* their like *masculine*

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<sup>392</sup> "Affinity groups are made up of between 5 and 15 people, who know each other and act together," writes McDonald (2002, p. 116), "based on a form of connection and a shared action objective." I briefly will come back to a discussion about affinity groups in the conclusion.

*presence* to like physically intimidate and harass people.” At one point, one of the non-striking students got into the Hall building and forced open the doors from the inside, grabbed one of the picketers, “pulled them in and just like beat them *up*.” People were screaming.

“And um... the whole thing just, like, it ended really violently an-n-d-d.. it was pretty traumatic,” says Alex. When it “started to get *violent* and there was nothing I could do,” says Alex, “I just felt so-o-o *afraid*. Like I had *no idea* what was gonna happen! And I also felt s-o-o-o guilty, that like, *I* had done this. And that’s like a feeling that stuck with me, and that I’ve had to like process out with other people. Um, this feeling of like this was my idea, like people are getting *hurt* everywhere around me!” Alex felt “frozen” and like there was “*nothing* I could do. And that was the first time I had felt really powerless in the strike.” The scene on De Maisonneuve Boulevard, in front of the university entrance, was “terrifying” in a different way than big demonstrations, because now the “sense of unity” was not as clear. Now, “it just really felt like we were *so few* and they were *so many*.” The collective empowerment and emotional connection of the general assembly was countered by a sense of disempowerment, as the outside world watched and cheered.

“People were like physically *beaten* and like windows were *broken*. And in the end the riot police came and dispersed the people who were blocking.” Meanwhile, “on either side of the street,” angry people who wanted to get into the Hall building “*cheered* as the riot police brutally dispersed the people who were blocking.”<sup>393</sup> In typical dialectical fashion, in the midst of recounting this “horrible” experience, in practically the same sentence Alex comments on the positive feelings:

“But also like the organizing of that was really *powerful* cuz it was just like a... handful of people who got together and pulled this thing off! (inhales) And it felt really good to not have to *explain* certain things and to have *trust* between each other. (inhales) And so that felt really amazing. It felt amazing to know those same people were there *after*, (inhales) to like decompress, and that there was support after in those same *people*, was

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<sup>393</sup> The following videos depict part of what Alex describes, including riot police on campus, however a trigger warning is due here for those who think it might upset them as there is some police brutality: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w64AnJDY0SU#t=525.290561> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5oI9KNnqQF8> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVOyq7joHX0>



really powerful! But then, it went *so badly* that I feel that moment really sticks out in my mind! And it sort of like um, (inhales) involved so many of the elements that were happening [throughout the strike], like the security guards (inhales) egging on, um, people to like physically beat up people in front of the door to get in. Like, talking them up (circular motion with fingers) so that they would do it.”

Having a support system made a powerful experience from one that was completely negative to one that had some positive to it. Yet the negative seemed to nonetheless overwhelm her memories, at least of this event. As Alex and others were leaving in the direction on De Maisonneuve Boulevard where the police were pushing them to go, amidst the booing and insults flying at them from both sides, it was “so *horrifying* to me, to like, *see...* it felt like such a *bad glimpse* of humanity. Um, cuz it was like people of all *ages* that were like, saying the most hateful things to us, and urging the police to be *violent* to us, *more* violent than they were. And then that’s what happened was that they, they became more violent. And started to like physically pepper spray and beat people... while people *cheered*. When, when they shot the first things of pepper spray, people *cheered*.”

Two years after the fact, Alex is still dealing with the guilt that all of the above was her fault, the worry that everyone was going to be traumatized afterwards, that the francophones who had joined were upset that it had not been the economic disruption they expected; but now, she has rationalized to herself that it was not her fault, that people agreed to do it because it was a good idea. But “that was like a *huge* feeling that I have and it, I *still* have it.”

Alex does not mention it specifically, but once the event was over, those who had been involved in the blocking met to debrief. Surely the support felt from this group of people that made the ordeal more positive for Alex, but also a smaller group of friends whom she would soon after get close to. She and some of the others with whom she had organized the event “just ended up being there, like, seeking out the same kinds of support from each other and then, once we had like kind of found each other, um, we just like, kept having ideas,” and kept organizing. That group would soon call themselves “the Glitter Dogs.” Yet when their efforts to stop exams from happening at Concordia failed, “it was kind of um-m-m-m frustrating because in the end we couldn’t stop exams from happening and people had to finish. So like I, I had to sit down beside all those people that I had blocked for eight weeks and write a final exam, otherwise flunk the

class! and have to do it again and pay for it again!” So the way things ended at Concordia was “really bittersweet.. and frustrating!”

The Glitter Dogs soon became “pivotal emotionally” for Alex throughout and beyond the strike. They were “all people who didn’t identify as men” and at demonstrations they constantly kept tabs on each other and had their own “text line” for the group, “even if we weren’t there together.” She realized the importance to her “of organizing with other queer people *against* state systems,” and how “emotional” that experience was for her; and she realized that groups like the Concordia Mob Squad -where “a bunch of manarchists”<sup>394</sup> insisted that gender wasn’t relevant- were “not relevant to the politics I want to be enacting.” It was “so important” for Alex to have that support from a group who were “*all* sort of riding the same wave together! Like the highs and lows” of pickets and protests. It helped Alex “make it *through* that time.”

They soon became each other’s “main social group,” as Alex talked to them all the time and they would support each other through even things that had nothing to do with the strike. “I’d *never had* such... like an intensely intimate connection with, with people in that way!” Indeed, her current partner and two best friends were part of the Glitter Dogs. “It was so *powerful* and upsetting,” that it “really *changed* what I saw as like *important* political affinity.” It “affected me in a *long-term* way about how I view relationships with people and support and... like after *feeling* that, I was like, Wow I can’t believe I was *ever* involved in organizing that *didn’t* feel like that. And I won’t ever again.”<sup>395</sup> It made Alex realize:

“how many of the groups I was part of were, like, replicating really awful things! And like I like couldn’t, like, there’s a reason I, I like never went to another *Mob Squad* meeting pretty much after... organizing with [Glitter Dogs] and being friends with them and... because I recognized how there was *no space* for, for like addressing emotions or trauma [in other groups], or just like supporting each other.”

There was no space in other circles, in other words, for emotional reflexivity or friendship.

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<sup>394</sup> The term 'manarchist' generally refers to an anarchist man who behaves in 'macho' ways, for example taking a lot of space in meetings and being unaware of how they perpetuate their gender (and other types of) privilege.

<sup>395</sup> This is similar to what Tania experiences when in 2015 she participates in the strike with Women’s Studies student association.

## **Longing for affinity, equality**

On this note, Benson (2014, p. 3110) argues that belonging can be “a messy and uncertain process, fractured along a range of axes and social fields.” Vanessa May notes (2011, p. 369) that “because shared cultures and values, or understandings of who ‘we’ are and what ‘we’ stand for, are the result of struggles over representation and membership, they tend to reflect power structures and serve the interests of those in power.” She adds: “belonging is therefore more than just an individual feeling -it is also a hotly contested political issue with collective consequences.”

In fact, neither Alex nor Keara mention the way that geography students provided support to one another; rather, Alex rather focuses on the Glitter Dogs, and in her zine she writes about power dynamics not just within the general assembly, but also on the picket lines and between picketers themselves. “These picket lines can be seen as important spaces of struggle between students and administration [...] At the same time however, they also became sites of intense struggle over power between those students participating in the strike themselves,” she writes, because “there are also underlying dimensions of power to how the picket line spaces continued to take form.” In other words, many voted without being committed to picketing, thus:

“sacrificing the bodies and mental health of those who consistently took on the role of maintaining these “front line” positions. For, as it occurred, certain people were continuously made vulnerable to both the overt aggressions of those they were blocking from the class, as well as security and faculty sent to intimidate them, and eventually by the disciplinary action taken by the university administration afterwards.”

The frustration that Simon and Tony express about students voting to strike without taking subsequent action, here takes on a different hue with an intersectional analysis and experience of diverse forms of power provided by Alex and Keara. Indeed, this was “further problematized,” writes Alex, “by the fact that women on the picket lines faced a specific type of gendered aggression, as it was often large men (or groups of men) who would specifically seek out women to intimidate or harass in order to break picket lines.”

Alex is careful at this point in her zine not to play into an idea of “correct ways” to strike as this would “play into misogynistic notions of “activism” that ignore the ways that experiences

of oppression” could lead international students, women, and people of colour to want to avoid these picket lines for fear of increased likelihood of intimidation. And yet she considers it important to consider “how these boundaries can at times result in the ability for some to only amplify already existing levels of privilege” when men end up taking time off for self-care while those “with most at stake and the most to lose (i.e. Women, queers, people of colour, the poor)” continue to bear the burden of picket line work and thus “place their physical and emotional well being on the line.”

With these latter words Alex helps to question the *masculine* emotional habitus mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that engages in guilt or shaming people that they are not doing enough, yet she also complicates it with the question of power. In other words, it is not that guilt *per se* is problematic, but who incurs it on whom, and who benefits and suffers from it most in the face of persistent power differences (Srivastava, 2006).<sup>396</sup> Alex suggests that those with privilege could own up to it and be more involved in sharing the emotional traumas that those more marginalized students bore:

“I was called a faggot and dyke by classmates as I stood between them and their class. I was told that I was infringing on their freedom, that I was single-handedly ruining everyone else’s life, that they would find out where I lived and kill me. I became terrified to be in stair cases or other dark nooks of campus alone, especially with my red square on. Then, like so many others, I had to sit beside these same people and write exams and finish all my school work like a good, responsible student as if my classes had not been blocked for 8 weeks.”

If geography students built an emotional style during the strike that despite its denial of anger on picket lines provided room for interpersonal support and emotional expression amongst themselves, with the exception of the *Café Artère* two-year reunion it seems that their emotional

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<sup>396</sup> On the note of how feelings of hurt can (albeit unconsciously) be manipulated by those with privilege and power to guilt others, I am reminded of a meeting we had with the CSU executives in 2012 in which one executive complained of feeling hurt and alienated by the treatment she faced by Concordia activists; yet she did not acknowledge the considerable power and influence that she also held as a white person paid to represent students, who had connections with and possibly influence on the FEUQ, and whose actions could potentially affect Concordia students sacrificing themselves on picket lines.

style and community did not last beyond the strike, when emptiness slowly sank its teeth in. If Alex was lucky to find an affinity and friend group (the Glitter Dogs), she nonetheless writes in her zine that “grappling with the aftermath of this movement has been extremely difficult,” as “it’s hard not to feel bitter or disheartened by the ways in which those of us once entrenched in this strike have been left to “deal with” the consequences of our involvement in this movement, largely alone.” Such consequences are rife with the diverse lines of power that intersect at every moment, including in what is considered adequate enough to be ‘history.’ Alex writes:

“the school year has continued with virtually no indication that the strike ever occurred. Aside from a few now seriously outdated posters announcing General Assemblies, there are virtually no signs that such a serious disruption ever happened. No sign that classes were blocked for up to 8 weeks, that riot police and unnamed security personnel had a violent presence on campus, or that event after event was shut down by protestors [...] I am not trying to suggest that we live forever in the shadow of this one moment in history. At the same time, we should be extremely critical of the swiftness of the University administration and certain student and faculty associations to ensure that “business as usual” continue, and that all memory of the strike be wiped from the minds of students. We need to ask ourselves: whose interests does it serve to pretend that this never happened?”

It is clearly not in the interest of Alex, who still longed for more collective forms of debriefing about the strike once it ended, as did Keara and Shaun. The same can be said for Kiley and Marya that day at *Café Artère*; in fact at the end of said meeting, Marya reveals to me that her and Kiley had thought of the idea for the reunion one day upon meeting for breakfast to talk about the strike, when both got unexpectedly very emotional, and Kiley cried a lot. They decided “*it would be good to all sit together to talk about it more*” to talk about how it changed them, how their lives are different now. “*I didn’t speak about strike in a long time,*” Marya tells me, so talking about it as a group helped because “*hearing the details made me realize I could say more about how I felt too.*” Yet she is also concerned that she was too emotional during the meeting, and that maybe she is “*holding onto the strike too much*” in comparison to the others, many of whom seemed to have moved on and to be “*over it*” -pointing to the need for more in-depth, long-term,

and diversified collective spaces to more specifically focus on healing and mourning in the case of those who suffered most, discussed further in the next chapter.

The combination of the above stories support King's (2005) proposal for the long-term need for emotional reflexivity for strike participants, alongside Srivastava's (2009, p. 55) caution that the "let's talk" approach common to feminist organizations be treaded carefully by "re-thinking not only the practices of emotion in organizations, but also the historical relations of power that prompt emotional resistance to discussions of race." In the case of the 2012 strike, the way that the strike experience affected individuals marginalized on many levels, or living with "multiple minority identity explorations" (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011, p. 339) and different levels of belonging despite being within the same group, begs the question as to whether one group could feasibly be sufficient for such an endeavour -a question I explore a bit further in the next chapter. Indeed, the case of geography is illustrative of the role of diverse degrees of power in emotional experiences during strikes, within the same place. Even though all students lived through similar disappointments and confusions related to the actions and exertions of power of administrators, professors, and students from their department, and of course of the university administration, and despite an expressive emotional style, the strike led to considerable despair, for some persisting years beyond the strike, particularly for those participants who were already more marginalized before the strike.

Thus we might consider that those who were less involved as organizers benefited from the privilege of avoiding such disappointments, a privilege built on the backs of organizers who were often doubly or triply marginalized. Those who were less involved were also more likely than the above students to reap the harvest of collective-oriented structures of feeling inherited from these strikes, I argue, thanks to the efforts of organizers: such legacies are the topic of the next chapter.

## Chapter 6

### Collectively ever after? Vulnerable legacies

*“Bringing about social change is a mammoth undertaking. It requires both personal and systemic change; it is multi-dimensional and long-term; it involves small wins, many setbacks and few groundbreaking shifts; it is a risky venture. While it is a venture that continually attracts people, it is also one that burns them out, making them ‘lose heart’ [...] become sick, apathetic or even cynical. Indeed, it is somewhat surprising that so many activists manage to sustain their activism over long periods, even lifetimes.”*

- Debra King (2005, p. 150)

*"But the emotions that we reject and suppress can become dark in an altogether different sense: like a rich, fertile soil from which unexpected flowers can bloom."*  
- Miriam Greenspan, *Healing through the dark emotions*<sup>397</sup>

In this chapter, I compare and contrast the legacies of these strikes in the lives of all participants of this dissertation, continuing the stories shared in the previous pages and introducing participants whose stories will be new to the reader. I will depict how despite the emotional ups and downs of these strikes, some participants continued to be involved in activism beyond them, or at least to have the desire to work with the collective in some way; to use King's words, they hinted at not only a 'groundbreaking shift' in their lives, but at their generation's 'structure of feeling'<sup>398</sup> -one of sacrifice and fighting spirit for the collective. If some such stories so clearly ended 'collectively ever after,' others were more vulnerable to long-lasting difficult emotions, disappointed by the 'small wins' and 'many setbacks,' to use King's words again: some burnt out and ceased any type of activism, while for others, the dialectics of collective-oriented existential emotions intertwined with subsequent disillusionment nonetheless emerged into a long-term involvement, sustained by interpersonal support.

I consider that through the lens of vulnerability (Brown, 2015; 2012), such dialectical and difficult emotions were inevitable, even for those who were involved on the periphery. For "If we are brave enough often enough, we will fall; this is the physics of vulnerability," writes Brené

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<sup>397</sup> (2003, p. 1)

<sup>398</sup> This term, coined by Raymond Williams, will be explained in detail below.

Brown (2015, p. 5). "When we commit to showing up and *risking* falling, we are actually committing to falling" -such are the dialectics of vulnerability to which I have alluded, sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, throughout this dissertation. And yet "Vulnerability is not weakness; it's our greatest measure of courage" (Ibid, p. 4). Those who went in with greater physical and emotional investments had the most to lose, and yet "To foreclose on our emotional life out of a fear that the costs will be too high is to walk away from the very thing that gives purpose and meaning to living" (Brown, 2012, p. 33). In other words, they had more to lose, but also more to gain, even though the gains might be more difficult to notice. Thus translating Brown's words to the sociological and social movement realm and imbuing them with a power analysis, the stories told in the pages of this dissertation illustrate how participants were brave to jump into the strike and embrace wholeheartedly the existential collective-oriented emotions it stirred, despite fear and uncertainty. In this chapter I thus reaffirm the main argument of this dissertation: that vulnerability was necessary to experience the 'high' of collective-oriented, existential emotional experiences, and that while interpersonal support helped to soothe the disappointments that followed, difficult emotional experiences were always an inevitable part of such vulnerability.

I will also illustrate, where relevant, how the legacies of the strike in each participant's life were also 'vulnerable' to change, depending on the time they were assessed. Indeed, any conclusion about legacies will be limited to the time of the interview or to the last point of contact between myself and interviewee, and could very well be changing the instant the interviewee leaves the interview setting. On this note, Alessandro Portelli (1991, p. vii) points to "the sense of fluidity, of unfinishedness, of an inexhaustible work in progress, which is inherent to the fascination and frustration of oral history -floating as it does in time between the present and an ever-changing past, oscillating in the dialogue between the narrator and the interviewer [...]" If such 'unfinishedness' has until now been a ghost of sorts in this dissertation, this chapter unveils more explicitly the role of the timing of the interview, and the events that happened between the interview and the past recounted strike, all of which limit any determination of a legacy. In unearthing the question of the timing of the interview, I thus must consider that every memory recounted in the previous pages of this dissertation was also a legacy, as these memories were located in the present of their telling. In other words, we can consider every memory a



haunting of the present by the past, but also as a haunting of the past by the present.<sup>399</sup> On this note, Clifford (2012) argues that oral history allows us to be painfully aware of how interviews about emotions “tell us as much about the emotional state of the interviewee in the present –and how she sees herself, how she wishes to be seen, how she situates herself within broader social and political contexts, and so on – as they do about her past emotional experiences.” These are “emotions mediated by memory” and thus interviews may reveal more about how events have “reverberated down and through the trajectories of activists’ lives” (p. 211) than about the initial emotions themselves. In this case, it is difficult for me to make a generalized statement about the present context of the interviews considered for this dissertation, as they took place at different times from 2011 to 2016. Nonetheless, where relevant throughout the exploration of legacies that follows, guided by oral historians I address how experiences *succeeding* each strike, up to and including the present tense of particular interviews, influenced the memories and the legacies of such strikes.

In speaking of ‘emotional legacies’ at the individual level, I consider how the strike impacted interviewees’ emotional lives in the longer-term, but also how their emotional experiences influenced social movement exit -whether participants continued or not to be involved in student movement or other social justice-oriented activity. As Sharon Erickson Nepstad (2004) argues, “[t]here is a need for more systematic attention to the question of how movement commitment endures over time, fostering persistence among some protestors” (p. 43), echoing previous concerns that “[a]part from some studies of prominent leaders of movements,” scholars “know relatively little about the continuing participation of activists once they join” (Downton & Wehr, 1998, p. 532). The case of the student movement is somewhat particular in that a student’s attendance at a particular college or university can be very transient, even if they pursue graduate studies. I thus considered it important to look both at participants’ continued involvement within the movement as well as involvement in other types of activism.

Even though I am limited by this dissertation's focus on individuals' experiences, where possible I also seek to assess long-term collective legacies. Indeed, James Jasper (2011) notes that regardless of a movement’s success there can be emotional successes such as “a way of

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<sup>399</sup> This might also be said for any written work, such as a diary or ethnography: As Clifford and Marcus’ (2010) suggest in *Writing Culture*, every ethnography is modified by the author at the time of writing.

feeling about the world that later movements can build upon,” which are “one of the most lasting accomplishments of social movements” (p. 14.13). Similarly, Collins (2001) refers to “emotion-laden symbolic capital” that “reverberates from one movement mobilization to the next” (p. 43). Indeed, the stories recounted in chapters 2 to 4 of this dissertation as well as below suggest that the emotion-laden symbolic capital of the 2005 strike influenced not only those who lived through the 2005 strike itself, but also those who lived through the 2007 and 2012 strikes, as they sought to revive the ghosts of 2005. Yet the use of the term ‘structure of feeling’ allows me to go beyond the effect merely on future movements, to theorize the potential effects on a generation.

#### NOTICING EMERGENT STRUCTURES OF FEELING

Ron Eyerman (2005, p. 42) pushes the notion of a collective emotional legacy further by highlighting how movements can affect not only future movements, but can “articulate structures of feeling, as Raymond Williams (1977) called those deeply rooted dispositions and sensibilities which organize and define a way of life.” With the term ‘structure of feeling,’ throughout his writing career Williams sought to grasp at the common *feel* or felt experience of a generation. In his own words: “The most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period, is this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living,” in other words, “the actual experience through which these were lived” (Williams, 2009 (1961), p. 36). It is clear here that Williams’s concept incorporated both thinking and feeling, transcending the traditional dichotomy (Matthews, 2001). Indeed Williams (1977, p. 132) writes that a ‘structure of feeling’ includes:

“characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity.”

Unsurprisingly perhaps, scholars have pointed to the similarities and differences between ‘structure of feeling’ and ‘habitus’ (e.g. Kirk & Wall, 2011; Hetherington, 2000; Neary, 2017). Already similarities to the concept of ‘habitus’ as described in Chapter 1 of this dissertation are

clear: the common reference to the subtle and bodily experience of the expectations and totality of a society. Indeed Williams (2009 (1961), p. 36) writes that a structure of feeling is: "as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity". Despite myriad existing critiques of both 'habitus' and 'structure of feeling' for leaving no room for agency and difference (e.g. Kirk & Wall, 2011), I agree with those who contend that both terms allow for an interplay between agency and structure (Matthews, 2001; Wetherell, 2012). On this note, if the structure of feeling is "the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization," Williams does *not* mean to say that it "is possessed in the same way by the many individuals in the community. But I think it is a very deep and very wide possession, in all communities" (2009 (1961), p. 36). Again in his 1977 work, Williams refers to this dialectic between the whole and its parts, or between stasis and process, defining the elements of 'structure of feeling' as:

"a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. Yet we are also defining a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies. These are more often recognizable at a later stage, when they have been (as often happens) formalized, classified, and in many cases built into institutions and formations. By that time the case is different; a new structure of feeling will usually already have begun to form, in the true social present" (p. 132).

It is this latter focus on the potential *newness* and *emergent nature* of 'structure of feeling' that is different from 'habitus' and relevant to my interest in this chapter. "Unlike habitus," notes Neary (2017, p. 83), "the concept of a structure of feeling privileges lived experience and feeling over structures, whilst acknowledging that lived experience and feeling are, of course, shaped by structures."<sup>400</sup> As Wetherell (2012, p. 104) notes, Williams considered that structures of feelings

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<sup>400</sup> Concerns that the 'habitus' concept is overly determined by class (Hetherington, 2000), by social field (Butler 2007a, cited in Neary, 2017 p. 83) or simply by structure (Kirk & Wall, 2011) are addressed to some extent by Gould's concept of 'emotional habitus' borrowed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation: Gould (2009, p. 36) specifies that if Bourdieu developed the 'habitus' concept to explain social reproduction, her research nonetheless considers "how a habitus might be instrumental in generating social change. Social movements, for example, generate schemas of

(or affective patterns) "effervesce and are difficult to detect. Affective solidifications are slippery, first, because social and personal life flows on and is endlessly evolving, so that it is often only when a structure or pattern is changing and disappearing that its grip becomes evident." Yet these are also slippery because "they are embedded in practical consciousness and usual streams of activity. Feeling routines are simply what people do," whether consciously or unconsciously (Ibid). Indeed, I argue that the 'grip' of apathy and individualism of the teenage generation was becoming evident as participants of the strikes -particularly 2005 and 2012- started to directly experience and thus understand life in a more collective manner through their involvement in the strike's activities. 'Structure of feeling' as a concept also works better for my purposes here than 'habitus' because it extends more clearly beyond the social field (beyond the particular social movement constituting the social field in both this dissertation and Gould's work) to a broader generational outlook. As such it also has the potential to theorize what lasts beyond the momentary 'high' initially associated with the collective-oriented emotions described in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Williams writes (2009 [1961], p. 36) that "We are usually most aware of this when we notice the contrast between generations, who never quite talk "the same language,"" adding:

"what is particularly interesting is that [the structure of feeling] does not seem to be, in any formal sense, learned. One generation may train its successor, with reasonable success, in the social character or the general cultural pattern, but the new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have come 'from' anywhere.

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perception, ways of understanding the world, sentiments -habitus- that dispose participants to question the status quo and to engage in specific forms of activism and other movement practices that can lead to social transformation." It remains, argues Wetherell (2012, p. 106-107), that ultimately "Bourdieu saw emotion and affect as mainly conservative forces" as they "force the individual back into established practice, and reinforce the power of past practice" as they are condemned to the unconscious, biological and thus passive realm, and if not then culturally conditioned. "For Bourdieu, emotions more than anything seem to carry the unreflective or non-conscious aspects of habitus," Wetherell suggests (Ibid). Thus I consider Williams' term 'structure of feeling' to allow for more possibility in what I am illustrating in this chapter: a quicker emergence of new patterns of feeling; in contrast, 'habitus' was helpful in chapter 1 of this dissertation for portraying the stickiness of sorts of the student movement habitus despite efforts within that have been slowly modifying it. To be clear, as mentioned in Chapter 1, like Gould I acknowledge the potential malleability of a habitus and how the 2005 strike sparked the desire for different emotional styles to mark larger dents in the student movement's emotional habitus, which they have to some extent by 2012. However this dissertation does not focus on the transformation of the student movement's emotional habitus over many years, as does Gould's important study of the ACT UP movement, thus unlike Gould while I note certain emotional styles taking more place in the movement, I do not suggest that the movement's habitus has changed; I hope, however, that the current dissertation, can inspire such long-term analyses and reflections.

For here, most distinctly, the changing organization is enacted in the organism: the new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many continuities, that can be traced, and reproducing many aspects of the organization, which can be separately described, yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling."<sup>401</sup>

It may not be surprising then that Neary (2017, p. 84) reports that "[i]t is within these emergent, unfinished relations" that Williams "sees the potential for subversion of social order and dominant norms."

Indeed, taking Williams' concept back to the realm of social movement theorization, Eyerman (2005, p. 42) notes that "with its focus on rationality and institutionalization and its underlying model of the actor, much of contemporary sociology has failed to sufficiently recognize that modern societies are composed around conflicting values and alternative structures of feeling." Because social movements have a "capacity for collective articulation" and are "social forces grounded in values" -rather than merely organizations or networks as previous theories implied- Eyerman suggests that social movements "can be said to be emerging cultures, transforming as well as articulating values, and in the process, creating new and alternative structures of feeling." In such a conception, emotions "are the feeling side of values," suggests Eyerman.<sup>402</sup> On a similar note, Neary (2017, p. 83) writes that "A structure of feeling is how the meanings and values of a particular cultural period *feel*." Interestingly, such explicit tying of values and meaning to 'structures of feeling' is reminiscent of Solomon's (2007, p. 1) existential argument that our emotional life is most relevant to "ethics, to values, to living happily, healthily, and well." In other words, if "it is our emotions that give our lives meaning" (Ibid), then arguably a 'structure of feeling' must have some existential weight on its respective generation. Indeed there is an eerie similarity between Solomon's definition of spiritual meaning as appreciating "the

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<sup>401</sup> Williams (2009 [1979], p. 43) later became more explicit about the potential for different 'structures of feeling' depending on social class. As Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen (2017) notes, "Structures of feeling may change over generations, they may take on different forms in different segments in society, and there may be several structures of feelings in a society at the same time." When questioned about his notion of 'generation' in an interview, Williams (2009 [1979], p. 45-46) initially refers to a generation of work of writers in their thirties, yet when later questioned about such a specific concept of 'generation,' he suggests that perhaps it makes more sense to refer to a "generation of work rather than a generation of birth." Here I consider 'generation' as it corresponds to my data, notably the generation of students from high school to university, in a manner that extends beyond the time of the strike itself.

<sup>402</sup> He thus suggests that "emotions are an important link between values and actions" (p. 42).

beauty of the whole" (Solomon, p. 270) and Williams' above insistence on the whole or general pattern ("the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization"). Furthermore Williams' difficulty in pinning down words for the lived and felt "experience" he is seeking to describe (2009 [1979], p. 49) highlights an attempt to grasp at the essence of what it feels like to be alive in a certain time. I take such insinuations a step further here to explicitly propose that the 'structure of feeling' can be seen as a form of collective sense of existential meaning. If in Chapter 2, I focused on how the particular 'high' of collective-oriented emotions infused participants' lives with a sense of existential meaning, here I continue that analysis and push it further, suggesting that this common experience potentiated a 'structure of feeling' that implied a sense of existential meaning shared and sensed, albeit fleetingly, by a generation: notably the importance of the collectivity in contrast to the individualistic ethos pervading society, and the willingness to fight and sacrifice for it. Both the above quality of Williams' notion of a 'structure of feeling', and the particular character of that structure that I am describing flourished in these strikes, while still broader in its collective reach, hold similarities to Dupuis-Déri's (2016) *agoraphilie*. In his book's closing statement, he describes agoraphilie "comme tout à la fois une histoire, une expérience, un projet, une disposition politique, un désir, une nécessité et même une essence. Il s'agit de la seule possibilité de concilier nos émotions et nos raisons d'être et d'exprimer et d'incarner notre volonté d'être sur le mode de la liberté, de l'égalité, de la diversité et de la solidarité" (p. 362).

To be clear, just like Dupuis-Déri (Ibid), I am not implying that this structure of feeling - and its associated values and existential meaning- never existed in Quebec previously, but rather that these strikes continuously revive, resuscitate them, in recurring cycles since the sixties. As Katz (2015) suggests, if "over decades, the commercialist revolution of the ruling classes had slowly whittled away the collectivist foundations of Québec society," such "communitarian principles nonetheless remained deeply engrained in Québec's national psyche and acted as a buffer against the dismantling of the commons" (p. 5) in part because the ideal of public education has been deeply embedded since the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, when tuition was instituted as a short-term compromise on the path to free university education" (p. 6).<sup>403</sup> Then by

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<sup>403</sup> Pottie (1987) suggests that an "esprit communautaire" dates even farther back to the fifties in French-Canadian Quebec, though back then it was tainted by a "caractère oppressif qui l'avait rendu odieux" due to the influence of the Catholic church (p. 20).

the 1980s, Piotte considers that "le néo-libéralisme domine partout; chaque dirigeant rend hommage au culte de la compétitivité, de la productivité, de l'excellence, de l'initiative privée, de l'individu; les Bourassa, les Johnson, les Mulrone, les Turner, les Reagan se distinguent par des nuances au sein d'une même vision sociale." Yet he argues that "[l]e cours de l'histoire n'est pas linéaire: il ressemble beaucoup plus à celui d'une rivière qu'à celui d'une autoroute. La contestation fonctionne par vagues: à une période de remontée des luttes succède une période de reflux" (p. 26). As already hinted at in Chapter 2 in terms of how 2005 later inspired expectations and collective-oriented feelings in 2007 and 2012, here I propose that the student movement, through its 21st strikes (particularly 2005 and 2012) allowed for two 'périodes de remontée,' each time renewing, unearthing, a latent collective 'structure of feeling.'

While I am limited by my focus on a small number of participants of the strike, I hope that this initial exploration can incite future researchers to continue analyzing how student strikes engaged -or renewed- new structures of feeling and their related values. Since I did not analyze newspapers nor elements of general culture to assess the existence of new structures of feeling, my argument is based on the idea that the seeds of new structures of feeling are slowly implanted in subtle, barely visible ways, within individuals' lives -in Williams' above words, "still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics."

I will illustrate in what follows how for those who were very involved in the organizing of the strike, or who did not have support from like-minded others,<sup>404</sup> this collective-oriented structure of feeling was more fleeting, more difficult to acknowledge, submerged in the darkness of difficult emotions and the fear of vulnerability. Yet before venturing into those stories, I will depict how such a structure of feeling was easier to fully notice and embrace in the case of those students who played a peripheral role in the strike and thus were not as overwhelmed by its emotional investments and inevitable disappointments with power, not to mention less exposed to the student movement's masculine emotional habitus. This was the case, for example, with 2012 strike participants interviewed for the Dawson Oral History Project (DOHP), whose stories kick

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<sup>404</sup> Similarly, Downton & Wehr (1998) note that Colorado activists who persisted in the peace movement had support from friends and family.

off this chapter: they tended not to be core strike organizers and to participate in fewer strike activities than other participants of this dissertation;<sup>405</sup> and since most of them were CEGEP or high school students at the time of the interview, it is possible that they had fewer expectations about strikes, having been too young during the 2005 strike to remember it, thus experienced fewer disappointments. Furthermore, the students interviewed for the DOHP were somewhat randomly selected,<sup>406</sup> thus they could be said to potentially reflect the experiences of a much wider group, and the structure of feeling of a generation.

### **Alexandre and the renewal of the sixties**

Alexandre's story is a great example of this. He was a high school student at Royal West Academy in 2012. For him, the strike “*really* flared up in *February*” but at his school they “wouldn’t *really* wanna talk about it” as they generally had “strong opinions *against* the strikes, so because of that originally I just didn’t *really* wanna dabble in it.” Yet considering what appeared to be a historic moment, “it was hard to avoid for a couple of months, to have, maybe not necessarily an opinion but at least be *aware* of it in any *form*.” Recognizing the issue was complicated, Alexandre decided to ask “people who are either *involved* in it or have a *strong* opinion on it, you know, just explain, explain it to me.” If he initially saw the strike as “just being vandalism in the streets, after talking to a friend about it, “I thought, Okay, this is valid.” So Alex decided he should get involved, “but I wouldn’t *really* tell too many of my friends, cuz one of my closest friends had a *strong* prejudice against it.” So one night, Alexandre went to:

“a casserole, a pots and pans rally, in uh, on *Monkland* actually. So I went there, I brought pots and *pans*, I *banged* them all the way up the streets, we pfff, I wouldn’t know the number but eeyeah it would you know, say 300, 400 [people], we covered quite a deal of *Monkland* street, and *that* really energized me. I thought it was *really exciting*, cuz there’s never really any *community*-based project or gathering that ever happens in Montreal West or even NDG *really* for that matter. So I thought ‘Oh! This is a way of bringing you know, the community *together*, which sounds sort of lame, but that was one of the main

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<sup>405</sup> From what I could tell from the interviews, most of these participants were involved in protests and general assemblies more than pickets or direct actions, and most were not involved in organizing nor participating on a regular basis.

<sup>406</sup> See Appendix E for DOHP assignment guidelines.



first incentives I had to join the movement. So I did *that*. Then I read up about it. So... what I *did*, is I *then* decided, at a rally, *another* pots and pans rally, to pick up a red square, and I wore it! And I mean, I would take it off when I went to school cuz I felt like that would be *somewhat* inappropriate.”

Already here we can see that Alexandre is implicitly comparing the collective sentiment of the red square to the apathy of his schoolmates. The energy and excitement he felt were in part due to the number of people and the sense of community, one of his main incentives to join. What he did not reveal until the very last minutes of his interview was that this sense of community in the form of a social movement -what I would call here the collective-oriented ‘structure of feeling’ of another era- was consciously missing from his life. “I’ve always.. loved the *sixties*, which may seem out of nowhere *but* I’ve always loved the idea of, you know social movements, and I’ve always wanted to see one in my *own* turf, my own *time*, because I couldn’t always live thinking about the *sixties*.” Instead of fixating on the past, by April 2013 -the time of our interview- the strike movement had given Alexandre a clearer connection to the collective. More specifically it:

“brought me and introduced me to today’s politics, and just today’s, uh, issues. And I think that without this, well I *know* without this I would not have been active in politics, nor would I have *tried* to you know help others as much, just because my mind wasn’t as *politically motivated*. I had seen the issues of the *past* more so. So at least for *me*, this movement has *politicized* me to a *great* extent, and I think that that has helped me *re-align*, in a sense, as to where I wanna go with my life, what sort of *jobs* I wanna see in my *future*. So, that was essentially, I would say a *crucial part* of my *growing up*, if I can put it like that. So, thank you, Montreal students.”

### **Celine's generational pride**

Celine had also gone to Royal West Academy for high school, but by 2012 she was already enrolled at Dawson College. Alongside the sense that something big was happening and the sense of historicity and urgency, came collective-oriented feelings: a sense of unity and mutuality linked to a sense of common concern for the common good, a sense of collective

empowerment, and pride hope arising from all of the above. Celine referred to it as a sense of “insurgency in the air,” noting that the strike gave Montreal:

“a different *feel*, um.. people are definitely.. more *antsy* but at the same time, um, there’s this feeling of *unity* especially among the youth, and the people our age. Well, I guess me being *for* the strike (inhales), there’s a feeling of being *united* with everyone else and all the other students who are like fighting towards the same goal. And um, I thought it was a pretty *great* feeling. There was of course the hostility, um, from everyone else! From the older generations, from the police. But um, then there’s this like great *unity* from everyone around you and everyone supporting the strike. Um, it was cool, it was like a huge *family* in Montreal (whisper chuckle).”

Celine mentioned a sense of family and friendship, and mutual feelings of happiness and belonging, always intertwined with a sense of common purpose:

“just *being* in a protest in general, you feel a friendship towards *everyone* (inhales). There’s *no one* who’s *not* gonna talk to you, when you’re in a protest, you know? There’s (inhales) this huge *amicable* feeling, everyone hugs, everyone like holds hands (inhales), you make human walls, and you’re just friends with everyone during the protests... (almost whispers the next word) Yeah! It’s great, it’s sort of.. Because you’re *all* focused on the same *goal* [...] protesting for the same *reason*, this *common feeling* just *spreads* into this feeling of friendship, and this feeling of mutual *happiness* and mutual *attainment* of the same thing, mutual purpose.”

Indeed for Celine the strike was not about belonging to her group of friends, it was belonging to a larger set of people -what I am calling here a gradual recognition of a different 'structure of feeling' emerging. “A lot of my friends are among the ones who are really *against* it! Um, I think coming from a high school like Royal West, a lot of people *value* their education to the point that missing a few semesters to umm, go on strike, wasn’t um, like didn’t seem like a good idea *at all*. So for that reason I think a lot of them chose to vote against it when Dawson had the vote.” But

Celine and some of her other friends “thought that, you know, it’s worth the *sacrifice*, it’s worth to go on strike if it means that our kids or like younger generations will have free education.” For Celine, all of the above glided alongside a sense of collective empowerment. “It’s the idea that getting *together* as a *group*, these freedoms can’t be suppressed. I think that’s what the strike was about!” says Celine. Because:

“when you get everyone *together*, I think that, um, it’s *motivating*, you know? It shows that, despite *not* being, *despite not* having that *power*, when you’re all together, it *surpasses* that. And um, that’s definitely what I learned through the strike.. and um, through the student protests in *general*. Just.. seeing everyone get together and go for the same *goal*, um, you know, seeing how much power you have as an *individual* (inhales) when you don’t go by yourself, but when you go *together*.”

This sense of belonging and empowerment was linked to a sense of both pride and hope related to the collectivity, and to other collective-oriented feelings mentioned above, such as belonging, connection, and solidarity:

“I don’t think you could look up to anyone, I don’t think the strike was an *individual* thing. (Inhales) It was more about just.. the *body* in general. So I didn’t look up to one person, I looked up to our *generation* as a *whole*, and the fact that *our* generation of students were able to *get together*, and make such a huge *impact* on the city, on the government, on, like, political decisions. I think that was amazing. So I, I looked up to *that*... and um, no definitely it was *great* to feel a *part* of that. It *still is* good to feel a part of that. Everytime you see someone wearing the same (inhales) carré rouge, red square, as you are, you know? (inhales) there’s a feeling of *unity* between you two, whether you *say* something or you don’t, you know, you still feel *connected* with that person, you still feel a *friendship* with that person. And um, that’s all through the strike, it’s all through this mutual feeling of *wanting*, um, *wanting* general freedoms. And *wanting*, um, like education to be universal.”

The collective feelings of unity and connection persevered beyond the moment of protest, to be symbolized in the red square.

All of the above helped to reverse Celine's previous sense of hopelessness regarding her generation. She was amazed at the democratic potential of her generation and hopeful for the future. Even though at Dawson College, students voted against the strike, "at the same time, I thought it was *really cool* to see so many people *affected* by it, to the point that the heh, the DSU had to *recall* the vote, because there weren't enough seats to hold all the students that showed up to vote, because so many students, they weren't apathetic anymore, they were you know, they were into it, they wanted to be involved and they wanted to vote, whether it was to go on strike or not to go on strike, they *still* felt that it was important," explains Celine. "I always have the idea that our generation is super apathetic towards politics, apathetic towards life in general (inhales) so, it was um, it was *eye-opening* and kind of *hopeful* to see that so many people (inhales) were um, *inspired* or just motivated to um, do something about it." And then seeing other students in the streets and uniting for "something huge" also contributed to her sense of hope in her generation, a hope that she previously did not have:

"That was so *motivating* for me to see that the students that, who I *thought* were so apathetic and this generation of mine that I had *no hope* in the future for, they were *able* to get *together* and fight towards a common *goal*."

Like Alexandre, these emotions lasted beyond the strike, transforming her sense of what she felt it was important to do with her life. She explains:

"I definitely think the strikes were important, and were a big part of my life. And um.. (inhales) if anything like this feeling of being a part of something *so huge* has motivated me to.. do *more* in my life to, you know? Like, I don't wanna work on an *individual* basis I wanna work on engineering projects in groups of people and do something (inhales) for the *mass* public, like work on.. environmental initiatives to, but *with people* to.. (inhales) um *accommodate* large groups of people, I don't wanna work on an individual level anymore I wanna work *together*. And umm, just like the strikes, I want to work for freedoms, you know? Whether it's the freedom of education or whether it's the freedom

(inhales) of living in, on a planet that um, isn't going to (inhales) degrade to environmental, um, damages or degradations, you know?"

Celine also wants to continue being involved in student activism and is optimistic about the potential for change and mobilization even after Marois indexed the fees: "I know as soon as I get into McGill I'm gonna get in contact with the or, um, the student body there," she says, "cuz I definitely don't think the strikes are over. I don't think the protest is over. I think that, as long as tuition is *increasing*, um, there's still gonna be strikes." The collective hope and pride that she felt during the strike remained at its end, despite its outcome. "*Tuition*-wise I'm not happy but (clears throat), I *am* happy with the strike in general," she clarifies, because she remains amazed and motivated by how "a student body could get together and be united and fight towards the same thing" and "organize things to the point that the government felt *intimidated* and had to create these *ridiculous* laws and bills to like *surpass* that." Celine was able to view even Bill 78 with a twist of collective empowerment and hope. And this was all, inevitably, related to emotions -more specifically passion- for Celine: "I think that as long as people are still united and people still feel *passionately*, which I do, which I know that everyone who I've protested with we all still feel passionate about this, I think that as long as that still happens there'll still be pressure on the governments to change." Celine was not the only one to view this new spirit of standing up and sacrificing one's self for a collective cause as a 'structure of feeling' emerging, beyond her personal path, within a generation of students.

### **Those who missed class**

It should be noted before continuing that the stories Alexandre and Celine above are particular in that their student unions did not officially join the strike: thus they did not participate in general assemblies, there were no picket lines, they did not miss classes. Furthermore, Alexandre and Celine did not participate in direct actions, so their participation in the strike was limited to demonstrations. Thus with the exception of Alexandre feeling that the police were intimidating, and Celine mentioning "hostility from the older generations, from the police," there were few utterances of difficult emotional experiences during the strike.<sup>407</sup> As such, without

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<sup>407</sup> This was similarly the case for Marie-Louise, who was a high school student at FACE during the strike, as students did not vote to picket classes, but they supported by joining protests.

intending to use the term in a derogatory way, they could be considered as 'free riders' of sorts, in that they rode the wave of collective-oriented experiences, and could more clearly sense an emerging 'structure of feeling,' because they did not suffer through as many difficult emotions as those who were very involved in the organizing, or those who missed class,<sup>408</sup> like Sandra, Juliette, and Teresa. If the latter three DOHP interviewees did not participate in picket lines, their student associations voted to strike, thus they had to sacrifice their classes and to experience the more difficult emotions such as stress or concern about their semester and more frustration at the government's policies. As such, I consider that the 'structures of feeling' they sensed were particularly strong, as they had to sacrifice their own well-being for the collective good -albeit not as much as organizers- and they derived a particular pride from it.

### ***Sandra's love of school, but also of the collective***

Sandra did not personally have issues with paying her tuition fees as her parents were going to pay them for her, “mais j’étais dans la rue vraiment pour le, pour le concept, le principe, pour tous ceux qui sont pas capables d’aller à l’école à cause de d’ça.” Her strike started around February 21st, she recalls, clarifying that they wanted to go back to school, “On *fait* justement ça parce qu’on aime *l’école!*” Then, highlighting the sense of sacrifice that the strike involved because of a larger sense of duty, she adds, “Mais c’est juste que.. il fallait, il *fallait* qu’on le fasse, c’tait comme un *devoir* de, de se *soulever* devant ça.” She adds, “c’tait aussi *beau* de voir notre force, comment ensemble on pouvait, qu’est-ce qu’on pouvait faire.” So even though Sandra had a "vraiment épouvantable" experience at the Victoriaville protests on May 4, and even though she experienced feelings of vulnerability and fear from police force (“on n’était pas du tout protégés” in comparison to the force of the police), she emerged from the strike with a sense that with numbers, “on pouvait s’assurer dans le fond d’être *protégé* ensemble” because “quand on est des p’tits groupes on est *beaucoup plus* vulnérables que quand on est unis, hein?” The sense of youth as collective agents of change and its associated hope remained with Sandra even after the strike: “la grève étudiante, ça montre un peu euh notre caractère,” she says, “on va pas se

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<sup>408</sup> However, these were by no means mere excitement-seekers, as their values were changed and internalized by the strike, as Collins (2001) urges is important to clarify. More specifically, Collins (2001, p. 30) writes that “It would be a mistake to draw too sharp a dichotomy between excitement-seeking (put more generally, emotional energy-seeking) participants, and the “morally serious” participants who come out of a deeper sense of need or dedication” as those who happen to arrive at a moment full of emotional energy might end up internalizing it through attachment to symbolic objects.

laisser faire. Ça c'est *sûr*." The strike also changed her "vision de voir le monde," as now her "façon de voir la vie" is "être en communauté, vivre en communauté, vivre avec les autres," so that "les inégalités diminuent parce que, justement si on redistribue l'argent de meilleure façon, ça fait que tout le monde peut avoir, peut avoir accès à plein de services justement." In other words, "j'ai développé une idée politique, là!" And "ça m'a aussi éveillé sur pleins de, pleins de trucs! Comme, je pense pas que je m'aurais intéressé à, à certains à certains choses dans le *monde* aussi!" Sandra feels that now she knows more not just what she wants for herself, but "pour euh la société en général."

### ***Juliette and the gift of solidarity***

Juliette is a fast-paced, particularly passionate and self-reflective speaker, often ending her sentences with a final fervent impact by saying "vraiment." She recognizes that she had been a difficult child and student –by high school, she was the student whom everyone would blame for everything “et avec raison,” as she was always instigating useless discussions in class. Her strike story is particular in relation to emotions because she feels that her mere arrival at her CEGEP, before the strike, significantly changed who she is. Coming from a private high school and being “une fille qui a bien vécu, j’ai rien manqué,” she found herself in the *Action sociale et medias* program at the Cégep Vieux-Montréal, where she was:

“entourée de personnes très granos, très terre-à-terre, où les idées matérialistes, pour eux ça existait pas. Fallait qu’on se centre sur l’individu, sur ses sentiments pis tout ça. Donc moi, être entourée de personnes aussi ouvertes et aussi sensibles, aussi émotionnelles que ça, ça me rejoint au plus profond de mon cœur. Parce que même si j’suis une fille qui a été gâtée toute ma vie, pour moi le plus important c’est les sentiments des autres. Pis c’est les idées des autres. Pis ces personnes-là ils m’ont enrichie à un point où j’ai, j’ai changé totalement de personnalité, je me suis intéressée à autre chose qu’à mon nombril. J’ai découvert que dans le monde, il se passe des choses qui sont contestables, pis qu’on doit contester. ”

So Juliette's experiences with the strike were closely entangled, at least initially, with her program through classroom discussions and program meetings:

"Pour les étudiants autour de moi c'était une question tellement importante que c'en est devenue d'une importante capitale aussi à mes yeux. Ce qui était pas le cas au début. Parce pour moi au début j'tais comme 'Regarde. Ceux pour, les gens qui font la grève, sont contre la hausse de scolarité. C'est pourquoi? C'est parce qu'ils ont pas d'argent pour ça! Moi j'ai pas de problème d'argent, pourquoi je m'impliquerais dans une grève comme ça?'"

Yet Juliette soon started thinking differently -and started feeling the 'beautiful' experience of collective-oriented emotions and values, an emergent 'structure of feeling' oriented beyond even the collectivity of Quebec:

“Dans la vie, là, les, les, les conflits, là, on se bat pas juste pour soi, en? On se bat pour une collectivité pis, moi si j’suis capable d’assurer l’avenir de mes enfants, l’avenir de mes petits-enfants, au niveau scolaire! C’est la chose la plus belle que tu peux donner! Parce que, on s’entend que, une société éduquée c’est une société qui est capable de prendre des déc-décisions intelligentes! Pis des décisions pas non plus qui vont centrer sur s... sur leurs propres *intérêts* mais aussi sur l’intérêt *international*.”

Even though Juliette only attended her general assemblies and provincial demonstrations, and even though most of the people she hung around in the West Island were not for the strike, similar to Celine her passion for a common cause led her to see the unity and solidarity at demonstrations as something immensely beautiful. These were the hints of a collective-oriented 'structure of feeling' at both the rational and emotional levels, emergent within her life but also those around her:

“Les étudiants qui m’ont entourée c’tait des étudiants tellement passionnés pour ce quoi ils se battaient, que ça m’a influencée pis ça m’a fait rejoindre des choses que je savais pas qui étaient [...] autour de moi! Pis ça m’a fait découvrir à quel point c’est *beau* de s’unir pis c’est, c’est *bon* de le faire! Parce que toute seule c’est, *oui* tu peux faire des, des démarches pis des, des contestations seule mais, y’a rien qui vaut *plus* qu’un groupe qui *soutient* pis qui est *uni*. C’est la plus belle ch-- pis qui se bat pour la même cause. Y’a rien



de plus beau que ça... rien rien rien! Pis j'pense que ça, ça l'a été vu dans les manifestations. Moi c'est la plus belle expérience que j'ai pu vivre. Sincèrement. Au niveau de la solidarité, là! La, la plus belle démonstration qui m'a été euh, qui m'a été donnée, là."

This was a sense of collectivity embracing more than just her generation, but involving people of all ages:

"Pis de voir que les gens se soutenaient, les gens souriaient, les gens étaient *confortables* là-dedans, c'tait, c'tait *beau* à voir. Sincèrement là moi j'en avais quasiment les larmes aux yeux, je trouvais que c'tait.. le plus beau geste de solidarité.. que j'aie jamais vu de ma *vie*, pis que j'ai.. pis pouvoir en faire partie c'est la plus belle chose. Sincèrement. Pis qu'est-ce que je trouvais beau aussi là, c'est que c'tait pas juste des étudiants, là! Tu voyais des personnes de 70 ans, comme t'en voyais des (inhales).. comme tu voyais des enfants! Tu vois comment c'est beau les parents de leurs enfants parce qu'ils savent que.. *nous* on se bat pour pour eux! On se bat pour leurs enfants aussi, là. T'avais des, moi j'avais, j'ai vu un groupe d'une garderie qui était là. Ou des fois on passait, comme j'disais, devant des garderies et toute ça là tu voyais les, les eum, les euh éducatrices qui étaient là pis qui tapaient des mains, pis qui avaient des chandails rouges pis toute ça pis, ils nous *encourageaient* parce qu'ils savent que.. on se bat pour ces p'tits-là aussi, là. On va pas juste pour *nous* on n'est pas.. qu'est-ce que je trouvais qui était *beau* c'est que c'tait.. le geste le *moins* égoïste, le plus *collectiviste* que j'aie jamais vu."

Similar to Celine, Juliette brings out the physical and visceral embodiment, the "felt experience" to use Williams' words, of collective-oriented emotions and solidarity with the collective, and the particular meaning it has in what they consider a generally apathetic and individualist culture. In that moment "où tu ressens l'émotion là, moi j'avais des.. des *frissons*, là, là-dedans. Là je me suis dit c'est impossible que-e-e j'sois.. j'sois euh-h, pas concernée par ça. Au contraire là, c'est là j'ai su, le moment crucial, faque y'a rien de mieux que de *vivre* ça." This increased her sense of collective impact and collective empowerment and hope: "c'tait beau aussi parce que.. tu reviens de là, pis t'as comme un espoir, on dirait. Tu te dis, « Si ça peut créer un aussi gros

impact sur moi, comment ça peut pas n'en créer un autre sur le gouvernement? » Juliette has her explanation for why it felt so special : "C'est *beau* de savoir que.. on, dans une société aussi *individualiste*, on est quand-même capables de se rassembler en un si grand nombre pour la, pour la même cause."

This was not just about enjoyable feelings, however. As the strike went on, the sense of solidarity and collective-oriented emotions -the collective structure of feeling that was emerging- was tested, toughened, reinforced, by the sacrifice and frustrations with which it was interlaced:

"Au début moi je pensais que.. la grève ça allait empêcher ma progression *scolaire* pis que ça allait me, me rajouter une demie *année-e-e* au *cégeep*, bla bla bla bla bla *bla!* Mais, tsé quoi, j'aime mieux avoir une demie année de plus au cégep pis de perm- me permettre et de permettre aux autres personnes qui m'entourent et à l'avenir euh, tsé les futurs eux étudiants, de plus étudier, c'est un sacrifi- c'est un, un *moindre* mal pour un plus grand bien, selon moi. C'est un sa- c'est même pas un sacrifice c'est quelque chose que j'aurais dit qui était nécessaire de faire. Pis *oui* sincèrement, j'avais hâte au retour en classe. Parce que c'est, c'est des mois, où c'est éprouvant, que tu te demandes, tu te poses toujours des questions sur 'Aw finalement on va finir quand? Est-ce que la session va être annulée, est-ce que mon, mon entrée au cégep va être retar- à l'université va être retardée? Pis c'est plein de questions par rapport à ça! Sauf qu'en même temps, tu deviens politiquement tellement *touché-e* que.. ça passe au second plan."

Juliette also experienced frustration and disappointment with the police and government, though it was not able to temper her hope in the end. If she was not the victim of police brutality, from the restaurant where she worked on Crescent street, during the Formula One in June of 2012, she saw people get pepper sprayed. "Tu voyais les gens souffrir dans tes yeux.. par des corps policiers qui se.. qui ont comme l'autorité sur toi" and this gave Juliette "envie d- d'aller dehors pis de *crier*." More than the fear this inculcated in her, she was frustrated and "estomaquée" by the government taking so long to respond to the situation, and by policies like Bill 78. This shock sometimes cut into her hope upon coming home from a demonstration:

“Tu reviens de là, pis t’as comme un espoir, on dirait. Tu te dis, ‘Si ça peut créer un aussi gros impact sur moi, comment ça peut pas n’en créer un autre sur le gouvernement? Comment ça peut pas faire ça?’ [...] Comment le gouvernement a fait pour ne pas *agir*, quand *moi* je vis des choses aussi *extrêmes* que ca, aussi *belles*, aussi.. *intenses*. Comment un gouvernement peut rester là les bras croisés à.. à dire qu’il, à qu’y’agisse, pis qu’ils font des projets de loi [Loi 78] que tant, pendant que nous on voit rien de ça! Pis.. *moi* je revenais chez *moi*, pis j’avais l’es-*l’espoir*, mais après ça tu te.. avec des projets de loi comme la loi 78 tu vois que, c’est comme un retour (inaudible), t’as un *espoir* mais en même temps tu te le fais..”

I don’t clearly hear Juliette's next word as she claps her hands together very loudly, but it sounds like she ends her sentence with: “*piqué..* draite dans l’face.”

Nonetheless Juliette's amazement and pride clearly persisted beyond the strike. She is proud that Quebec is seen on the international stage as being composed of “des gens qui s’entraident.” This spirit is rare, she explains, because we live in such an individualist-oriented society. “On a besoin de ça un peu d’humanité, dans cette société moderne contemporaine,” she says, “d’un esprit de soutien pis tout ça,” and policies that look towards “l’épanouissement de la collectivité.” She is optimistic that such change is possible in the long-run, even though the elected Parti Québécois would not have been her first choice. “Ça donne un *espoir* de savoir que on est *aussi* conscientisé dans une époque *aussi* individualiste,” she affirms. Juliette is certain that it is because of the strike that Charest was not re-elected, and that future generations will learn about their ability to make a difference through learning about the 2012 strike. She believes in the strike’s potential to incur collective empowerment in generations to come. She is “fière.. d’avoir fait partie de ce mouvement-là. J’suis fière au moins d’y avoir mis mon grain de sel.” Despite the “stress immense” due to starting university “après avoir vécu des événements aussi tumultueux,” Juliette feels that the strike “m’a fait grandir.”

### ***Teresa and the value of sacrifice***

If Juliette does not elaborate on the “stress immense” that she mentions having lived after the strike, Teresa more than compensates with her elaborate descriptions of post-strike sacrifices that reinforced the hints of an emerging 'structure of feeling' in her life. But let me start from an earlier beginning. Shawn Katz (2015) writes:

“In the wake of the Indignados and Occupy Wall Street, of the students of Chile and of Britain –all movements powered by the rising generation and its new media– the dots were strung together as the historical narrative crystallized: Around the world, the hijacking of our democracies by global economic and financial élites has sabotaged our collective capacity to look after the common and long-term good, to the point of even imperilling human civilization on this planet” (p. 7).

While the relevance of comparison between movements like Occupy and the ‘Chilean Winter’ student movement of 2011 has been astutely challenged,<sup>409</sup> it remains that Teresa clearly knew about that international context. Teresa’s family is from Chile. Knowing that there was also a student strike happening in Chile, “ça m’a plus, comme *poussée* à le faire parce que je me suis dit, “on n’est pas les seuls à travers le monde qui sont en grève.”

So when neighbours started banging their pots and pans on her street, “je suis sortie avec ma casserole pis j’ai commencé à faire du bruit aussi, parce que je voulais participer, pis je l’ai fait, pis j’étais vraiment contente!” Inevitably the international -or more specifically Chilean- context was always in the back of her mind. She went to bang her pots not only for “l’éducation au Québec mais j’suis sortie en même temps en me disant que (inhales) tsé c’est pas juste, comme, c’est toute l’éducation, autour du monde, qui devrait avoir (inhales) un prix stable genre. On devrait pas augmenter ça, l’éducation ça devrait être accessible à *tout le monde*.” She went because “il devrait pas y avoir quelqu’un de plus chanceux que moi, qui qui-i, que, qui a accès à l’éducation non, tu, tu prends l’éducation la même que la *mienne*.”

It had all started for her when she, alongside, fellow students at Cégep Ahuntsic, the largest francophone CEGEP in Quebec, voted to join the strike. She had been happy about the vote, despite the sacrifice for those like her who were in a technical program. She had heard other students at the general assembly, when they were about to vote, complaining that they were in a technical program and thus they couldn’t permit themselves to be on strike; yet she would tell herself: “on est *toutes* solidaires, on sait *tous*, on va *toutes* perdre quelque chose, mais que tu sois en technique ou pas, on *perd* quelque chose, on perd du *temps*. Le temps c’est précieux là.

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<sup>409</sup> Guzmàn-Concha (2012)

Comme, tout le monde est conscient de ça, pis... on est consc- on on *savait* ce qu'on faisait.”

I was surprised that Teresa was able to recount these initial experiences of solidarity, as she had begun the interview stating that the condensed semester after the strike was the most stressful experience she had ever lived. Since the beginning of the strike, she had been conscious that it could involve a sacrifice, but she did not realize just how much the end of the strike would bring. Yet there were hints along the course of the strike indicating that she would be willing to deal with the increasing emotional difficulties the strike posed in her life: there were small sacrifices throughout, which she saw as being necessary for the common good, and to change the mainstream view of youth's ability to collectively empower themselves. Indeed, Teresa felt they did not only mark history but “on a aussi marqué la vie des, autour de, la, la vue. Euh, le point de vue des *autres*,” says Teresa, especially those who were cynical, by showing them that youth were not willing to sit back and instead were together expressing their opinion against the tuition increase.

Before the *cacerolazos* (the word for 'casserole-banging' in Spanish), Teresa recounts that the first demonstration she went to was one of the larger ones. She went with her boyfriend, her brother and sister-in-law, and the latter's cousins. “On était vraiment uni-e-s,” recalls Teresa. “C'tait vraiment le fun! Vraiment j'ai vraiment senti que *tous ceux* qui marchaient avaient un point en commun! C'est-à-dire *défendre* les étudiants. Défendre la *cause*. Défendre, défendre tous ceux qui voulaient aller à l'école d'une façon *équitable*.” People on the streets kept joining in, she remembers, and “on était *tous là* en train de se, de *crier*, (inhales) on, on *ria*it, parfois on *chantait* (inhales).” She thought it was “beau” and “vraiment j'pense qu'on, cette journée là on a vraiment *surpris* tout le monde, parce que tout le monde disait « Ahh ç'a pas de bon sens, (inhales) ah les jeunes euh de nos jours sont euh, sont tellement genre euh, comment on dit, irresponsables ». Tsé on est souvent, nous les jeunes on est souvent jugés! Pis c'est, (inhales) j'trouve qu'on leur a montré en disant comme regarde, *nous* on est solidaires.”

Yet after a while, “c'était redondant vu que genre j'avais *plus rien* à faire.” She explains: since every week the general assembly would decide whether or not to remain on strike, the uncertainty about when they would end up going back to school meant that she couldn't ask for longer hours at work. At the McDonald's where she worked, “y'avait *trop* d'employés,” she recalls, “y'avait quasiment juste des cégeppiens pis là maintenant ça se trouvait que tout le monde (inhales) était *disponible*” because of the strike. Everyone wanted more shifts so “le boss

savait pas comment diviser ça non plus!” Nor could she start her school work because she didn’t have information about future assignments, “faque vraiment j’tais juste genre, j’m’en- j’m’ennuyais,” and most of her friends were in Anglophone CEGEPs that were not on strike. “Je restais à maison pis je faisais vraiment rien,” she adds. “Genre j’ai vraiment senti que j’étais (inhales), je me sentais quasiment à la limite euh (inhales), comme, inutile,” she says -in a laughy voice, I wonder if to manage the difficult emotion- adding, “pour la société.” It was only her second semester at CEGEP and “l’école me manquait.” When the summer finally came, Teresa started working at La Ronde. If her student association had started its strike in March, by June they were still on strike, so she ended up taking a chance and asking for more hours at La Ronde; later that summer, “on a voté pour que genre la grève.. soit illimitée, là! Jusqu’à l’entrée euh en août!” They decided to go back in August because “si on rentrait pas on avait zero dans le, dans notre bulletin, un échec!”

Surely in part because she was not an organizer, it was the end of the strike that was the most difficult and stressful emotional experience for her. Teresa had been one of the only students in her CEGEP who had been willing to risk her semester: During her CEGEP student association’s last general assembly when they had to decide whether to continue despite the fact that “ceux qui continuent la grève t’as un échec,” Teresa was “une des *seules* qui s’avait levé dans la salle pour continuer la grève.” She talked herself into it, “tsé oui je sais, genre ça me fait mal de perdre beaucoup mais je me suis dit tsé si c’est pour une bonne cause, ç-ç-ça vaut la peine.” But the vote to continue didn’t pass; “j’suis un peu contente,” she giggles, acknowledging how hard it would have been to lose a year, as her classes were year-long. Yet the most difficult for Teresa was trying to complete her schoolwork at the end of the strike in the short amount of time that Bill 78 had prescribed. Teresa speaks of it as such a terrible experience, at times claiming that she was angry about it, and yet she simultaneously expresses this sacrifice with a pride and a sense of beauty. “Ç’a vraiment été euh la *catastrophe!*” she recounts. “J’ai jamais autant tant *rushé* de ma *vie*. J’ai, là j’ai vraiment fait des nuits blanches pendant des semaines et des semaines! On faisait *juste* travailler, on devait *juste* étudier pis *juste* remettre des travaux!” she recalls. “Ç’tait rendu que si on avait 60 (pour cent), on on était *contents*” simply to have passed the class. “C’tait.. vraiment une affaire de fous!” she says, inhaling. “*Personne* dormait, tout le monde était euh, on voyait tout le monde courir.. sans a.. sans arrêt.” When you got home, “la première chose tu faisais c’tait même pas manger ni prendre ta douche c’tait vraiment genre,”

she inhales, “faire tes devoirs, jusqu’à,” she inhales again this time with a laughy voice, “jusqu’au lendemain,” she says swallowing. “Donc dans ce sens-là, oui ça a affecté ma vie dans, comme dans mon sommeil (inhales), mais ç’a affecté genre j’avais jamais vécu, *vécu* un aussi grand euh, eum, aussi grand *stress* de ma vie.” It was “*insupportable*, j’en pouvais plus,” continues Teresa, “j’ai même pensé *lâcher* là, pis juste genre okay j’accepte le, *l’échec* dans mon, dans mon bulletin, j’m’en fous, j’suis tannée (inhales). Mais j’ai été capable. Je, j’ai surmonté, euh, les obstacles.” Now, Teresa is in her last session of CEGEP.

Looking back, despite the days that were “insupportables,” she says, with a passionate voice, as if giving a speech:

“Pour vrai j’suis contente qu’on ait eu la grève parce que ça m’a, (inhales) ça m’a permis de voir que genre.. j’ai j’ai, j’étais solidaire. Comme j’étais *consciente* de perdre beaucoup de choses pis j’ai été solidaire pis j’ai resté euh, (inhales, laughy voice) j’ai été euh jusqu’à la *fin* là, j’ai vraiment, je me suis battue jusqu’à la *fin*. (Swallows) Pis eum, même si après genre euh, j’tais, j’ai rushé<sup>410</sup> pis j’ai, j’étais vraiment *fâchée* de *rusher autant*... j’étais vraiment genre euh.. (exhales as she says next sentence) si on veut, morte à cause de l’école! Mais j-j’suis contente d’avoir fait ça même si euh, c’est *dur* en, de l’école pis tout.. les études pis tout que j’ai, on a faites.. et les sessions qu’on a faites. Mais j’suis vraiment contente d’avoir fait ça pis.. (exhales) on, on se *bat* mais on, on se bat pour *gagner* quelque chose, mais pour *ça* il faut, faut perdre des trucs. Faut sacrifier. Pis euh, *ça* c’tait un sacrifice pour moi.”

Sacrifices were not pleasant, and yet they contributed to feelings of solidarity and pride to be able to do that for the collective. Despite the most stressful weeks of her life, Teresa still expresses a sense of pride that her CEGEP marked a historic moment, as it was the longest strike in her CEGEP’s history. She developed through practice a sense that sacrifice for the collective is valuable -a 'structure of feeling' that would mark "ce *bout* d'histoire de, du Québec," if not more.

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<sup>410</sup> The verb 'rusher' is an anglicism (from the English verb 'to rush') used in Québécois French to denote working hard (<https://offqc.com/tag/rusher/>).

## **From migrating to belonging**

For a few of the DOHP participants -Ioana and Julian- the sense of a new 'structure of feeling' emerging from the strike was more limited, perhaps because they already had sensed the emergence of such a 'structure of feeling' from previous involvement in activism. Yet perhaps because they had recently arrived to Québec -one from Romania, the other from Alberta- they did sense the collective essence of the 'structure of feeling' through the sense of belonging acquired from their involvement in the strike, which I suggest is an important element of the structure of feeling in a movement that places much importance not just on one's presence in the streets, but on one's voice in a general assembly (May, 2011). Ioana and Julian also had in common a lack of clear interpersonal support from those around them, in comparison to Teresa, Juliette, and Sandra in the section above, who had support from their parents (Teresa would even go to demonstrations with her family members). Ioana was less involved in the strike than Julian, and she would end up more optimistic at its end than Julian.

### ***Ioana: protesting from Romania to Québec***

In Romania, Ioana had protested and organized for lesbian and gay rights, she recounts, as “the situation with um, uh LGBT people is um, ya it’s worse than in, in Western countries.” Being involved with that had helped her with her own coming out process, and throughout the years working with that organization she had spoken on television, had travelled around Europe and had even come to Montreal for the Out Games.<sup>411</sup> “I loved the city so much that I decided to move here.”

At the beginning of the strike, even though Ioana was influenced by and believed in the European model of free quality higher education, “because I was new, I didn’t really feel like I *belong* here, in Quebec. It was too soon that I moved here. So I, at *times* I felt it was my strike *too*, at *times* I thought that is not my fight. And... in *time* during during, well while I followed the whole conflict, I started to feel like I *belong* here more than before, because I was involved in something *political*, and, I was in a way *forced* into having an opinion on things, well not *forced* but um, I like.. yeah I'm, I'm.. I was involved in activism, heh, so I do have, I am interested in having an opinion on, on conflicts and getting informed on what’s happening and.. trying to understand things better.” The strike:

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<sup>411</sup> What she described as an “Olympic Games for LGBT people.”



“taught me so much more about politics in *Quebec*, and how things *function* and how people *react*, and how students get *involved*, and how.. yeah it’s how you ask for *rights*, and how you um, *fight* for for them. And then also a lot about how the government works and... um, how the legislation is being passed, so I did follow the conflict and I did um, get involved um, as, as much as I *could* at the beginning um, more than later on! Um, cuz I was also very curious. But it’s um, it was a liberating, um, it was a liberating movement. Going, being part of the marches and, and being *out there* in the streets with all these people that were asking for the same thing, it was *huge*! It had such a.. yeah, it was, it was huge. And it had an impact on *every every* citizen in in this province. Like there’s, I don’t think there’s one single person living in Quebec that didn’t hear about this strike he he he! So um in a way I was also proud that I was part of a university that was really active, and really involved into this, and that I was one of the first uh, students that got, got, that went on strike!”

Ioana thus echoed other DOHP participants' description of a sense of a generation that was more willing to fight for the collectivity. She enjoyed seeing “people’s perseverance in in *pursuing* with their cause, um, even though they kept *hitting* walls continuously”; she would “go to bed hearing *marches* outside, every night, um, for months, eh he!” Especially in the summer “when they started with the *casseroles*, to bang on uh, on *pots* and *pans*!” she says, with a voice that sounds giddy, but I have no way to confirm it from facial cues.

Those feelings were soon interwoven with worry about her semester and courses.<sup>412</sup> Initially she felt missing class was “okay because um I had my job,” so she just worked more hours and took on more projects at work. Yet around April or May, Ioana started “to be worried about what was gonna happen later because there were all kinds of *rumours*, that at UQAM we were gonna have to um, go to classes during the summer. And I, I *couldn’t* go to class during the summer because I was planning to have my first trip back to Romania, um, after um, after what

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<sup>412</sup> Just when Ioana was describing what she considered “abuse” on the part of the police that she witnessed “on TV and radio” but also the marches she participated in, and the government’s lack of response to students, her interview recording was cut off, perhaps due to a technical mistake with the original recording. So while it is possible that Ioana expressed negative emotions around the issue of police brutality, all I could assess from the interview in terms of negative emotional experiences is worry and disappointment regarding her semester.

three years!” Ioana had already bought her tickets, and she did not want to drop the courses “because I wouldn’t, I wouldn’t have got um reimbursed for *any* of them.... So I was um worried but I was very um *surprised* and *happy* to see that teachers were um very cooperating, cooperative in terms of um... and *flexible* in terms of organizing um exams especially for the students that were in specific situations.” In any case, the strike did not end during the summer, “so I in a way I left um to Romania without being worried that um, about school.”

Time dragged on, and “during the strike I changed my feelings towards the strike so many times.” At some point, despite believing in free education -“that’s the model that we have in Europe”<sup>413</sup>- and considering herself “on the *strikers*’ side,” she “didn’t turn *against* it, but I, um, thought that it’s *useless*. And I thought that we were starting to waste *time* and to waste our *own* time. And to waste *energy* and to um, end up, um, having to um, study a whole semester in a very short amount of time, at the *end*, and to just do things just to get them *done!*” It is interesting here that Ioana mentions the waste of “*energy*” -akin to the notion in Collins’ and Summers-Effler’s model discussed in Chapter 2- as if the initial emotional energy was, by the end, not compensated. In Ioana’s particular case, this might be explained by the fact that she was less and less involved in the strike actions as she had spent most of her time working, thus was unable to benefit from the emotional energy of being with others; and perhaps because the risks for her were greater, as she was paying international tuition fees, unlike other participants of this thesis. “My *classes* from that semester were kind of compromised, in a way. And it’s true it ended up, they ended up being, like we ended up doing a whole semester in three weeks. In September,” explains Ioana. “So each week, instead of being three hours one class three hours um the next week, we would do six hours each week of each class,” which was “very *intense*” in combination with her work. In the end Ioana gave up one of her three classes, “I ended up finishing only two of them. Um... I also um, gave it up because it was one of the classes that really interested me to *learn*,” so she hopes to retake it another semester.

Despite these ambivalences and sacrifices, the result of the strike reaffirmed the sense of a 'structure of feeling' of a generation particular to Quebec, of citizens willing to fight for the

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<sup>413</sup> Ioana considers the model in Québec to approximate the “American model” as opposed to the model in various countries in Europe that are free and nonetheless “have *amazing* schools,” so “why is it possible in *Europe* and it’s not possible *here*?”

collectivity. “In the *end*,” recounts Ioana, “when I saw that the *result* was the one that the students were asking for, I realized that, that’s how you make a change, when you *push* things forward even though you hit walls *continuously*,” she says – a different mentality than her activist experience in Romania where “we go out and protest for a few days and if we don’t get anything we just go home and, hee hee, forget about it,” she says, as both her and the interviewer giggle, where “we were giving up, um.. conflict much easier.”

***Julian: protesting from Red Deer to red-square-Montreal***

Perhaps because Julian had been more invested in the strike since its beginning, more involved in a greater number of strike activities for a longer period of time, and continued to be involved in student politics after the strike, difficult experiences and fatigue took more space in his memory, clouding the sense of belonging to Montreal that the strike helped him to acquire. Julian had come from Alberta to McGill University to do his PhD, and was an exception among the DOHP interviews in that a quite marked disappointment loomed over any 'structure of feeling' that he observed, but also he was explicitly disappointed by the lack of interpersonal support from fellow activists.

However what he did share in common with Ioana was a greater sense of belonging to Montreal thanks to the strike. Sometimes he felt that “there’s a whole other world, francophone world, in Montreal and then there’s like an anglophone world in Montreal,” and “one of the things that was cool about the student movement was that [...] we were very much following the lead of the francophone schools and.. and uh, this really helped me to feel like we were kinda *growing*, you know growing my network or growing my circles, and and and seeing the other other side of Montreal.” Thus, especially when working alongside francophone students, this allowed Julian to “feel more part of like.. like the *French* side of Montreal. At least a little bit,” which made a difference because a lot of his anglophone friends come and go in Montreal, and his best friends mostly went to the bigger demonstrations if they went to demonstrations at all, meaning that sometimes he felt alone at protests. “Getting integrated into like the *French part* makes you kind of feel like, like *more part* of the city,” and even have:

“a little bit more sense of *belonging*, maybe? as an anglophone in Quebec I kind of say that with... a bit of reservation, but, uh... yeah like, I mean (inhales), uh... spending hours and hours marching on the streets.. for all the different protests and stuff, makes

you kind of feel really *a part* of the city. So we have much more sense of belonging I guess. It's one of the things that I think was really meaningful for *me* was that, you know just spending so much *time* on the street was.. like.. claiming that space for, that space for yourself, and for like the people that you're with! You know when you're blocking and stuff you're kind of asserting your right to the space or whatever or this like area, this is like *my street!* I remember we used to say that in the protests. *Whose streets our streets* so, uh.. yeah, I *guess* like.. it helped bring about a sense of, you know, it helped bring about a sense of belonging, in *Montreal.*”

Like others above, he clearly delineated a 'structure of feeling' of a generation asserting their collective rights, which made it difficult not to feel a part of that collectivity.

Of all the DOHP interviewees, Julian is the only one desiring more clarification about how I would use his interview.<sup>414</sup> When we meet, he wants to make sure that it was clear that while he did feel part of the Montreal community during the strike, he did *not* feel any kind of sense of community at an interpersonal level during the strike. Sure, he did feel that he “*belonged to the movement as an abstract idea, I felt I belonged in those protests, in the organism of street rallies,*” but it was *not* a sense of community built on interpersonal relationships. At one point in the strike, he felt that the strike alongside the romantic relationship he had maintained with a woman were the most important parts of his life. He felt “*inspired, committed, loving it,*” he says, in a rather soft, seemingly nostalgic or even loving way that makes me assume he is talking that way about the relationship in addition to the strike.

Julian's worry started trickling in “once I saw how big” the strike was, and how “*strong* it was,” probably “around the time when the *casseroles* started” when “it just kind of *exploded* all of a sudden” into “another *wave,*” he explains in his initial DOHP interview. In a dialectic fashion, if he felt inspiration at seeing this wave:

“the feeling I had more was this kind of, I was *worried* that, uh.. you know, this is kind of a, this is a movement in Canada... that is *unparalleled,* I think, like... in in in *breadth,* I

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<sup>414</sup> For this process and to use the content of our conversation, I asked Julian to sign my own consent form for this project in addition to the DOHP one. Since only took notes during our conversation -I did not tape-record it- his words are italicized.

guess... popularity, um... and in, like, active participation. And my concern was that, like, *what if* something that, this *big*.. doesn't affect change.. I guess in like, observable, you know *tangible* ways."

"That was *terrifying* to me," he continues, "because it's very *difficult* to grow a movement that big," and "if even something this *big* doesn't affect change, then... then it's it's kind of a scary world that we *live* in, or country that we live in," "if *this one* doesn't work, you know this is a concern for *all* Canadians." When talking on the phone with his parents back home in Alberta during the strike, "I remember just like.. ugh I'd get so *upset*." Julian's initial inspiration was transformed into, or hinting at, notes of despair.

Nonetheless, right after the strike, Julian was elected as a representative of his departmental student association, and he continued to participate in other types of activism (such as *Black Lives Matter*, *Idle No More*). Yet by the time I meet him in 2016, things seem to have changed, as he calls himself "*jaded*" in comparison to those activists who are still very involved. The day I meet him, I sense a strange or sad vibe or affect on his part based on his words, but also his body posture and his facial expressions. I tell him that I had understood from the DOHP interview that he had become disappointed about the strike: No, not disappointed, he clarifies, rather he became "*unhopeful*." Part of his disappointment results from the lack of interpersonal connection or support from fellow organizers: even now when he sees McGill activists there is at best "a tepid kind of acknowledgment," and Julian wonders if it was because of how he dressed, or maybe, he wonders, it is just that activists are awkward? I laugh at that comment, mostly because I have also felt rejected by activists who don't seem to have the courtesy to say hello. Julian adds that there seems to be a constant self-criticism in the group of McGill activists whom he worked with, or a lack of willingness to recognize how forms of exclusivity are created not just politically but also interpersonally. "*I never talk about the strike with anyone*," he says, confirming the possibility that a lack of emotional reflexivity after the strike contributes to not only despair, but withdrawal from activism, or at least a feeling of being "jaded."

At the end of our meeting, Julian suggests that he might be aware of the negative affect he is emitting, as he adds, "*This is coming off bitter, I'm not bitter!*" In the end, he insists, the *Maple Spring* was a good thing for Canada and it is good to have it as part of our history. But it was a sacrifice, he says, because he is so behind in his PhD: sometimes he feels some sort of stigma

because he is “*at an older age limit of students.*” He thus sometimes wonders if those students who continued to work on their PhD instead of getting caught up in the strike were smarter, as sometimes he feels it was “juvenile.” He felt a lot of personally-imposed obligation to go to the demonstrations, since unlike undergraduate students in anglophone universities, he did not have exams to study for at the semester's end.<sup>415</sup> He asks me if I felt the same way. Having felt relieved by his blatant honesty about his ambivalence and his self-concern, I suddenly feel less guilty about my own doubts about my age and my delayed PhD progress, so I answer blatantly: “*Well, I definitely felt a certain stigma sometimes from parents and society that it was juvenile,*” and I sometimes imposed that stigma on myself. “*I think it’s a form of paternalism that becomes ingrained in our heads,*” I add. Despite my own struggle with the stigma –my own dissonance, as King (2005) might call it- “*I don’t think it was actually juvenile,*” I clarify. “*I often felt I was doing something much more important than my PhD.*”

“*Me too,*” he answers, echoing the complexity of dissonant feelings about sacrifice in social movements, reaffirming King's (2005) suggestion that emotional reflexivity is necessary to address such dissonance. Since he had previously described his feelings about the end of the strike as “*unhopeful,*” I ask him, “*are you still unhopeful now?*” He is not sure. He asks me how I feel about it.

My answer to him surprises me. “*I don’t believe in anything anymore,*” I say, “*sometimes I think that the strike ruined my life.*” Yet such regrets, or such legacies, just like 'structures of feeling,' change with the ebb and flow of time, which is true in my case, and in the case of the legacies for those who lived 2005, too.

### **Back in time: 2005**

With the exception of Julian, all of the DOHP interviews about the 2012 strike<sup>416</sup> took place soon after the strike in comparison to interviews I conducted about 2005 and 2007. Thus the latter interviews -especially those that involved communication beyond the interview itself- tended to 'measure' legacies for a greater number of years after the strike itself.<sup>417</sup> Jeff's following

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<sup>415</sup> McGill University, like Concordia University, did not extend its semester to account for classes missed due to pickets, thus Julian is likely referring to the fact that undergraduate students had to study for final exams.

<sup>416</sup> Some DOHP interviews took place as soon as November 2012 before tuition was indexed under premier Pauline Marois' government, while others were carried out in 2013. Other interviews about 2012 included in this dissertation were carried out between 2013 and 2014, with the exception of Marya's, which took place in December 2015.

<sup>417</sup> For example, in the case of Julie, our last point of contact was 10 years after the 2005 strike.

story –also at McGill University- illustrates the vulnerability of legacies to time, yet it also reveals the role of interpersonal relationships and emotional reflexivity in sustaining long-term activism beyond the strike, in contrast to Julian. His interview also interestingly brings up the possibility that any emerging 'structure of feeling' from 2012 was a continuation -or a renewal- of one born in 2005.

***Jeff: belonging from east to west, then 'est'***

If we saw above that the 2012 strike imbued Julian with a sense of belonging to the East side of Montreal,<sup>418</sup> this was also the case for Jeff, though many years earlier. Jeff had moved to Montreal from Nova Scotia in the fall of 2004 to do his undergraduate degree at McGill University. Before coming to Montreal, “I don’t think I had *any* awareness of [the Quebec student movement],” recalls Jeff, “but I *did* know that unions were *bigger* in Quebec.” He had read about the *Convergence des luttes anti-capitalistes* (CLAC) “and I was excited about that,” because even in high school, he had been interested in anarchism, although “only in a very limited way.”

I know Jeff from earlier political organizing work we had done together in 2007-2008, unrelated to the student movement. Considering that I always found him so easy-going and fun, I am surprised to hear him describe himself during our interview as relating to life more intellectually than emotionally, “my emotions don’t have many extremes usually,” he tells me.<sup>419</sup> In that first year of his undergraduate program, Jeff got involved in everything from signing petitions to joining diverse groups like the NDP and Oxfam. He was “just really excited about everything,” he recalls. Though he remembers having interesting conversations with “some people who were *more* anarchist,” in those days he probably did not identify politically in a particular way. Soon Jeff started attending meetings with GRASP, which stands for “Grassroots Association for Student Power.”<sup>420</sup> Because he was “very new to those meetings” he did not

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<sup>418</sup> The ‘east’ (l’est) in Montreal has historically been considered to start at Saint-Laurent boulevard (also called ‘the Main’), because “at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even more than today, the neighborhood around the Main was a dividing line between two very distinct worlds: the French-speaking Catholic east and the Golden Square Mile of the Anglo-British in the West” (Anctil, P. (2002) *Saint-Laurent: Montreal’s Main*. Pointe-à-Callière, the Montreal Museum of Archeology and History: Sillery, QC: Septentrion. p. 65)

<sup>419</sup> When I ask him why he thinks that is, he answers right away, that there is pressure for “people who are socialized as *men*” to relate that way -and perhaps growing up in relative privilege “in a rural Nova Scotia, like, *bubble*.”

<sup>420</sup> GRASP was founded in the fall of 2001, but after the 2005 strike they added “é” at the end, explained Jeff, to allow for the French translation, “GRoupe d’action et de sensibilisation au pouvoir *étudiant*” (GRASPé). See: <https://grasp.wordpress.com>.

participate actively, but rather was “more listening and hearing what was going on, and probably helping make banners,” he recalls, but then doubts his memory and laughs, “it’s all kind of a blur.” What he does remember is that through GRASP he found out about the upcoming plans for a student strike.

Indeed, some of the students active in GRASP who had previously been active student organizers in CEGEP had encouraged Jeff to join the CLAC-ASSÉ demonstration, that November of 2004. Walking down the steep street from his McGill University residence towards the demonstration “it was like a very kind of like ‘Ooh here I go!’ kind of moment!” says Jeff. “And seeing the lines of like police cars,” he says moving his arms to imitate a long line, “along University street [...] I was like ‘Okay! Going anyways!’” This ‘Ohh here I go’ feeling, recalls Jeff, was “a *sense* that you’re starting to *do* things that you haven’t done before” in a political context, things that are risky so you “don’t really know what to expect,” but you know that it’s “gonna be like something new, or exciting or scary.” It was the first demonstration Jeff had ever been at where there were a lot of police. To use Brené Brown's (2015, p. 4) terminology, he was making himself *vulnerable*, if vulnerability is defined as "having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome.”

After witnessing some mass arrests that he narrowly escaped, “I was kinda just milling around with people,” continues Jeff, and they started chanting “So-so-so, solidarité!” It was the first time Jeff had heard that chant. Jeff thought to himself: “Oh... this is... amazing!” The hints of a 'structure of feeling' of a fighting spirit in the name of collectivity was emerging. Jeff “had heard kind of a rumor kind of thing that people had been yelling that there was an occupation going on at Cégep du Vieux,”<sup>421</sup> so he decided to walk back to his McGill residence up on the high slope of University Street, pack up his stuff and try to go join the occupation at the CEGEP.<sup>422</sup> But by the time Jeff got there, “it was all locked down and closed, so I couldn’t get in, so I went home,” he recalls, laughing in his wholehearted way. “But like I was *really* excited.” He did not yet realize back then in 2004 that the 'Cégep du Vieux' would come to have more meaning and feeling for him over the next few years.

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<sup>421</sup> Short nickname for Cégep du Vieux Montréal

<sup>422</sup> This is the same occupation where Julie was in 2005.



Once the 2005 strike started, if Jeff was not that involved in the planning of the general assembly on his campus, he does remember “an overwhelming feeling because we had been so successful in mobilizing it.”<sup>423</sup> The assembly “was *huge*,” recalls Jeff, to the point where “more people came out to that general assembly than could fit in the Shatner Building Ballroom, it was like *overflowing*. There were like *hundreds* of people who couldn’t get in, um and there was a lot of really intense debates that went on there... about legitimacy of GAs [General Assemblies], about the strike, about a lot of different things.” *The Varsity* newspaper reports: “McGill students voted to strike and set up picket lines on their campus. After that meeting they joined over 60,000 Montreal students in a march down Sherbrooke Street.”<sup>424</sup> The ‘structure of feeling’ was setting in, thanks to the provincial context: Jeff clarifies that it wasn’t really their success, “it was just the fact that the movement was so.. broad and had so much support” that year. There had been “*really* big meetings in 2005,” because “a bunch of francophones and people from Quebec got involved in the strike, ‘cause they *knew*.. what it was about and were committed to it!” McGill students’ involvement was only a one-day solidarity strike and that day<sup>425</sup> most people went to class anyways, he says laughing, “it’s different than it is at other schools.”<sup>426</sup> It was more like “there was a strike going on and we [McGill] joined in, in a kind of peripheral way.”

Despite McGill’s peripheral involvement, his sometimes blurry memories, and his memory not being very “emotionally triggered,” Jeff remembers feeling a certain sense of historic collective possibility in 2005, alongside excitement. In his words, it was a moment in which there is “uncertainty about where things could go and there’s a lot of people in the streets and like, a lot of young people, and a lot of things could happen in those moments,” he recalls, “*that* was how it *felt* in 2005.” He laughs as he remembers feeling “*so excited* when I found out that people were drawing red squares on money!” He had enthusiastically started drawing red squares on every bill he had. “And then they put the red square on the mountain, on the cross, and that was really exciting!” Jeff still gets excited at the time of our interview in 2011 upon seeing a red square, and if there was ever anyone around who doesn’t know what it stands for he is still

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<sup>423</sup> According to the University of Toronto student newspaper *The Varsity*, the McGill undergraduate student union (the SSMU represents all undergraduate students at McGill University), the GA took place on March 16th. (<http://thevarsity.ca/2005/03/28/quebec-students-strike-over-fee-bait-and-switch/>).

<sup>424</sup> Ibid

<sup>425</sup> March 18, according to *The Varsity* (Ibid).

<sup>426</sup> Jeff is referring to how students voted to strike yet did not necessarily picket their classes, a phenomenon that we also witnessed at Concordia University in some instances.

keen to explain it to them. That red square brings “a *nostalgic* feeling,” precisely because in 2005 everyone was wearing it – “not just students or even radicals or even politicized people as far as I could tell,” he adds, so it was “one of the only times I’ve seen something that very clearly had popular support, like there was, you would see people in the streets wearing red squares pretty widely.” It was the emergence of a ‘structure of feeling’ of collective possibility during a moment that felt historic; yet it is not certain that he felt it, just *yet*.

For he suddenly doubts, “at least that’s how I remember it,” and “maybe it’s kind of a... a myth,” he laughs, “that I’ve, that I’ve turned into a memory, I don’t know.” Here Jeff consciously debates the possibility of the present interfering with our memories of the past. Indeed he would later learn that others had also been “really excited about the 2005 strike we did at McGill, I think people felt really good about that” because of the big turnout “which had never really happened before.” They had “expressed similar feelings to what I have,” he says, “of just being a real *intense* time of just things always happening and... it being kind of like an overwhelming exciting kind of feeling!” So it is very well possible, like any memory, that this later knowledge influenced his memory of his own 2005 feelings; yet regardless of whether they were his memories or those of others, Jeff reveals hints that 2005 birthed the seeds of a ‘structure of feeling’ of the intense elation of collective possibility.

Jeff’s doubt about his own emotional experiences were in part due to the fact that time aggrandized his “feeling of inclusion in... the Quebec student movement specifically and Quebec culture generally.” If a collective-oriented ‘structure of feeling’ was sparked in 2005, Jeff thinks that he only became conscious of it in 2007. Had I interviewed Jeff in 2005, he might not have felt this sense of belonging as much because what he lived between 2005 and 2007 impacted his memories, and the legacies of the strike in his life. During a long trip with the *Mexico Solidarity Network*, Jeff felt “really lucky.. to be involved in, in the Quebec student movement during strikes!” because “there’s *few* situations in in.. I mean North America definitely,” says Jeff, “where there’s like large-scale... social, like confrontation as a strategy for change” in the form of “general strikes,” “economic disruption,” and “general assemblies of hundreds of people.” He adds: “the Quebec student movement is one of those *few* situations where it does.” So that “was a really big deal for me,” says Jeff, and when in Mexico “they were talking about these sorts of things,” says Jeff, “I was like talking about it from first-hand experience of general strikes and of

like economic disruption as a strategy, and of um, general assemblies of hundreds of people” during the 2005 strike.

Yet Mexico also affected his interpersonal world, which would, I argue, also affect his future student activism. For until Mexico, Jeff did not have one-on-one friendships with activists whom he saw at student organizing meetings and he mostly related “to people on an intellectual basis.” Since 2005, meetings and events related to his extracurricular activities such as GRASPé had been his only social interactions: “I was definitely channelling desires that I felt to be closer with people, *into* my... involvement in different projects.. because that was the means by which I.. related to people.”<sup>427</sup> This, combined with the fact that he did not go to every strike action or because he was not “in the midst of the actions” and would leave before things got too intense, meant that internal conflicts within activist organizing circles had often gone over his head,<sup>428</sup> and he “definitely experienced less of the negative parts” of organizing, “it was all way more exciting.” So it was only when he was in Mexico that he noticed his desire to see people outside of meetings. Living among like-minded people for three months, he began to realize what he was missing -especially when a friend commented that McGill people seem to only have very long-term relationships or casual hook-ups, but little in-between. He decided afterwards to be more proactive upon returning to Montreal to relate to people “more one-on-one,” he recalls. “I specifically remember that kind of loneliness feeling becoming more explicit... as opposed to being something that I felt, but kind of wasn’t aware of,” another example of how emotions might be hidden and only recognized later, thus their legacies can appear much after the fact, their ‘facticity’ not as clear as other ‘historical facts.’ Within a couple of months of arriving from Mexico, Jeff had started dating the person with whom he was still in a long-term relationship at the time of our interview; soon enough, he had “other friends who were *actual* friends” whom he would see outside of meetings.<sup>429</sup>

I argue that greater enmeshment in interpersonal relationships increased his involvement in student organizing during the 2007 strike; and while such involvement increased the likelihood

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<sup>427</sup> To be clear, another reason Jeff says he went to meetings was because he “wanted to be politically involved,” and his interpersonal relationship patterns slowly changed throughout the next years as he moved out of McGill residence to live with his friend Ben, and later with his sister and others whom he had met during the 2005 strike.

<sup>428</sup> For example, he relates that he only became aware after the fact of the tension between organizers as to whether or not to focus on organizing an occupation or organizing the strike general assembly at McGill in 2005.

<sup>429</sup> Though Jeff says that “*still* I have trouble like, initiating hanging out with people,” says Jeff. I am very surprised to hear Jeff say this -as I always saw Jeff as someone who is surrounded by friends and so easy-going.

of disappointment, interpersonal relationships led to resilience against disenchantment. Indeed Jeff was more involved in 2007 than had had been in 2005, initially mostly at McGill, which was “kind of like bubblish and not necessarily in touch with what was happening elsewhere.” When their attempt to organize a general assembly failed<sup>430</sup> despite the process of general assemblies they helped to introduce at McGill in 2005 and days of “really intensive mobilization,” it was very “*frustrating*” and “there was a lot of disillusionment” and Jeff felt “kind of just like ugh, resignation” towards the general assembly process at McGill.

Since him and others “wanted to be participating in this movement,” and the Cégep du Vieux-Montréal was having a ‘Bed-in’ that had turned into an occupation.<sup>431</sup> “There was a callout for people to come join, and so, a few of us went down, from GRASPé.” The Cégep du Vieux-Montréal had “over the years come to have a *significance* to me like just knowing that it was always very *active* in the student movement,” but also because he had unsuccessfully tried to go in 2004, and then ended up there in 2005 when he had coincidentally been on the premises for a CLAC general assembly. This time, he was going: “*knowing* that I was gonna be there, kind of thing! So it had a *meaning* to me to go there.” That night, it wasn’t just students from that CEGEP chanting like, “A qui le Vieux! À nous le Vieux!” For Jeff, “the chant kind of had like a, a larger feeling of like the *Vieux* is this symbol of the Quebec student movement in a lot of ways,” so “we’re part of this, like we’re gonna defend this kind of thing, so that was, that had a lot of significance.” The events and feelings from that night thus cannot be seen in isolation, as Jeff clearly benefited from the “emotion-laden symbolic capital” that “reverberates from one movement mobilization to the next” (Collins, 2001, p. 43), notably from 2005 to 2007. The Québécois band the *Cowboys fringants* song, called *La manifestation*,<sup>432</sup> which would “always get played” during the 2005 demonstrations, he recalls smiling, “referenced Cégep du Vieux!”

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<sup>430</sup> There were not enough engineering and science students to meet quorum to vote for the strike. See: <https://grasp.wordpress.com/2007/10/08/ssmu-smushed-tuesday%E2%80%99s-ga/#more-50> and <https://grasp.wordpress.com/2007/10/30/what-ssmu-bigwigs-dont-graspe/#more-51>

<sup>431</sup> This was the same *Mardi de la Matraque* event where Élise had her traumatic encounters with the police as described in Chapter 3.

<sup>432</sup> The song was released in 2002 and can be heard at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d51eSW40\\_hg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d51eSW40_hg). The song at first it seems like a mockery of the student movement, but alas seems to have been written about a protest related to logging (more specifically against “la déforestation et les coupes à blanc”); the songwriter explains the song was motivated by the need for citizens to protest but also the feeling that they do not change anything, as explained briefly here: <http://www.cowboysfringants.com/?cat=22>. Such ambivalence and possibly despair is a theme, coincidentally, that has percolated the more difficult emotions experienced by participants of this thesis.

The song became a reminder that the Cégep du Vieux-Montréal is “part of this like Quebec cultural thing that um... I’ve felt some affinity with I guess.”

The effect of time allowed him to acknowledge to a greater degree the 'structure of feeling' that he had been impregnated with since 2005, so that by the time he found himself at the 2007 occupation at the Cégep du Vieux-Montréal, “at that point I was also older than a lot of the people there, so it’s a bit of this feeling like, and it’s become more and more so as time goes on, ‘I was around in 2005’ like!” he says laughing. Though that did not make the occupation that night any less intense for Jeff: “That turned into a really... intense situation, it was like building barricades... and just running around crazily, knowing that the police were gonna show up, and trying to figure out what to do, but not *really* knowing what to do!” Unlike Élise's experience of that same night, for Jeff this event reinforced the 'structure of feeling' of collectivity and fighting spirit from 2005: “it’s hard to describe that feeling, I don’t think there’s.... *words* that like precisely describe it!” It was like feeling something difficult happened and wanting to continue anyways because you “feel committed to it um, even more because of what happened... so that all kind of comes together in one thing that’s just this like uh this *determination* I guess, or something.”

While his experience of the night of the *Mardi de la Matraque* had its particular effect on Jeff, it was also clearly part of a larger trajectory that had been sparked in 2005 for Jeff, hinting again at the indescribable 'structure of feeling' that the 2005 strike sparked and the 2007 rekindled, which takes on different meaning for each person. Without it being “a specific emotion,” he clarifies:

“it’s just kind of that feeling of familiarity or like, umm... what’s the word... being a part of something kind of feeling that’s, that has significance, and especially did at that time. I think being away from home and being like, in a new place, um... but it’s almost the kind of thing that I think it’s almost, taken on more significance... as time went, like at the moment I don’t think I was this super aware of that, but as time went on it became more so.”

He adds: “And even now in retrospect probably even more so than it was then,” laughing; though he probably felt it most when he went to Chicoutimi in 2008 to learn French, and did a

presentation about the student movement there with the *Cowboys fringants* song, and came back to Montreal able to speak French for the first time, which allowed him to feel “way more, like I felt at home in Montreal.” There is: “an emotional thing with that of just kind of feeling like being a part of this thing” despite coming out of a different anglophone context in Nova Scotia and “coming *into* this culture of student politics in Quebec that’s really militant and has a lot of energy to it,” adding: “it’s kind of like a home away from home kind of feeling, of like I know this really well, and kind of came, grew up politically in it for a few years, and so it kind of has this familiarity that um.. has always felt really nice!”

At the time of our interview, still, Jeff exclaims: “2005 like it was this... long ago historical moment!” he says laughing, “I’m like yeah!” as if to convey a feeling of enthusiasm or pride. Now Jeff says he feels he could then envision going further than what the student strikes had accomplished, “I’m aspiring to even *more!*” It was probably after his Mexico trip, he recounts, that he started to identify more as a “revolutionary to *some extent*” and “probably, definitely an anarchist as well,” whereas previously he had more vaguely considered himself “anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist.” If Jeff “wore a red square when I graduated in McGill,” he says -pointing to his chest where he had pinned it for that occasion- he is very clear about no longer considering himself a student activist. Even though he is studying part-time and about to start full-time graduate studies, his identity as a student is no longer the primary basis or focus for his activism as it might have been before. He is more involved in “neighborhood-based things,” with a community of people who mostly consider themselves to be anarchist, and most of whom are no longer students. While Jeff sees himself getting involved in student-related activism in the future, especially “if there was a really active student movement in Quebec,” it will now be “on a different basis,” alongside the community of people with whom he now lives near and does organizing work -some of whom he met during his involvement in student activism at McGill. He doesn’t discount the possibility of mobilizing other students, including in the Engineering and Computer Science program he is about to start in the fall at Concordia. Indeed, around one year later I find myself at Jeff’s side on picket lines at Concordia, impressed by his “even-kieled” way of convincing his Engineering and Computer Science classmates why it was important to leave their classes.

Jeff’s story highlights the vulnerability of legacies to time, the emergence and re-emergence of 'structures of feeling' from the strike, and the idiosyncratic way they are noticed

depending on the time and person. His story also hints at how interpersonal relationships can increase the likelihood of involvement in activism in the long-term. In that way, his story contains interesting parallels with that of Élise: Both were amazed by 2005 and then disappointed by 2007; both developed through the strikes long-lasting ties to activist (anarchist) friend groups; and both continued to be involved in political organizing beyond the strike. Yet Jeff appears to have suffered the emotional consequences of 2007 less than Élise, even though he was also disappointed by that strike: he did not drop out of school nor did he feel the “nuage noir” that Élise felt over her head due to the strike. Perhaps this is also in part because Jeff tends to relate to things less emotionally, but perhaps also because he never considered himself a main organizer, nor was he an elected representative and a staffperson, as was Élise. Indeed, taking on the position of elected representative or staffperson appeared to allow for a particular experience of fatigue and confusion for others, too, such as Simon, Audrey, Pierre, Philippe, Marie, Tania, and me. In the case of Élise, we left her story in Chapter 3 as she was describing feeling “*vidées et déprimées*” during the last winter working for her student association in 2008.

#### ***Élise: Friendships and activism beyond CEGEP***

“Quand je suis sortie du mouvement étudiant,” Élise tells me near the end of our interview, “j’étais juste tellement écoeurée que,” she says inhaling, “y’avait pas mal, c’était pas mal plus le *néгатif* qui me restait en mémoire, là!” She adds at another point, “j’suis sortie du mouvement étudiant avec des émotions *super négatives*.” During the year after she dropped out of CEGEP, “pis même les deux années suivantes, là, comme le mouvement étudiant c’était, euh...” she laughs, “je n’en avais pas de très beaux souvenirs, mettons là!”

Quite differently from the positive yet brief intensity she recounts of the 2005 strike, the 2007 strike was “quelque chose que j’avais à *vivre* pour me rendre compte que c’est peut-être *pas* une bonne idée de fonctionner comme ça, là!” Putting all your energy in an activist campaign for months on end without knowing “qu’est-ce que tu vas recevoir en échange de... de cette énergie-là” was not a good idea, explains Élise, because afterwards “j’étais complètement *vidée*,” which she describes as having no more energy and being “épuisée.” Despite the emotional energy of her peer group, 2007 was particular. This challenges Summers-Effler’s (2002, p. 53) contention that “high levels of emotional energy allow the environment to be reframed so that essentially anything can be framed as a victory.” If the 2005 strike brought for Élise a ‘high’ of collective-oriented feelings, like many others who lived through the 2007 strike it was overridden by

disappointment, partly due to the very expectations that had accumulated from 2005 (and other strikes that she had discovered in the SIAM archives).

Yet Élise wouldn't describe it as a "burnout," she says when I ask her, because she still had energy for other activities outside the movement, "pis j'avais *quand-même d'autres choses positives dans ma vie, tsé!*" For example, she and Chloé did follow their promise to each other to meet in the park, "ça c'tait vraiment un beau moment, là! Comme le, les souvenirs du BC au parc après notre vote de grève, euh raté!" Indeed, it was really during that autumn of 2007 that Élise got much closer to Chloé, and since Chloé was "quelqu'un qui exprimait vraiment *beaucoup* ses sentiments" and since they were living and feeling "pas mal les mêmes choses," being with Chloé "m'a beaucoup aidée à, à exprimer mes sentiments!" She also got closer to "toute la gang des gens de 2005 qui m'impressionnaient dont," and "j'en suis venue à arrêter de mettre ces gens-là sur un piédestal, pis comme être capable d'interagir *normalement*, d'être humain à être humain avec eux, tsé?" By the fall of 2007, she had been involved in her student association for already a year, so "j'me sentais en *confiance*" and thus was more able to express her feelings, as previously she was not that good at expressing them, or even "de les identifier à moi-même!" In this sense, says Élise, the whole experience, especially living through intense moments in 2007, was "une partie importante dans ma maturité *émotionnelle*" because it brought her to "réfléchir beaucoup" and to learn how to identify her emotions "*quand elles arrivent et non, euh, six mois plus tard,*" she giggles, "en écrivant des histoires, tsé!"

Thinking about her "souvenirs positifs de la période où est-ce que c'était super le *fun* à St-Laurent, pis... ça l'a encore des conséquences super *positives* dans ma vie," she says, pointing to her ongoing friendship with Chloé: "c'est vraiment quelqu'un que j'apprécie, pis que je pense que je vais continuer à apprécier et à vouloir être proche toute ma vie!" She also recognizes that she was politicized in CEGEP in a way that she was not during the high school strike and that she very much developed her "analyse *politique*" and developed "pleins de *skills*" like repairing a photocopy machine, she says giggling, or classifying archives, "la mobilisation, euh, l'organisation d'une action, etc., etc., tsé?"

Despite recognizing these positive outcomes, and all the other "beaux moments" and lessons she learned, "même maintenant, euh, j'ai, j'ai encore des sentiments *ambivalents*," Élise says at one point, and then at another point, "une relation *très* ambivalente avec le mouvement étudiant!" With her arms, she imitates a cloud floating over her head and laughs, "y'a un espèce



de petit nuage noir, là, qui me pousse au-dessus de la tête!” Ambivalence leads her to acknowledge both the black cloud lurking above her alongside the possibility of doing it again in a way that might be healthier : If one day she returns to her studies, “là je *commence* à être un peu au point où est-ce que je me dis, bon, je pense que je serais *capable* de me ré-impliquer, comme, dans une *asso* de manière *saine*, et comme en respectant mes limites, et que ça soit agréable! Tout dépendamment de l’asso, tsé?”

I ask Élise, like all of my interviewees, if she is now involved in other kinds of activism, to get a sense of whether the student activism she so eagerly left behind might have transformed into some other type of activism. “Euh, oui!” Now she is part of the collective of “DIRA! Qui est la bibliothèque anarchiste sur Saint-Laurent!” She volunteers there, opening the library and welcoming those who enter, as well as fundraising for the library and going to DIRA monthly meetings. Élise acknowledges, after all, that she would not be who she is today without that ambivalent experience. “C’est ça qui m’a fait développer mon analyse politique, tsé? Je serais *pas* dans la communauté anarchiste maintenant, si je m’étais pas impliquée dans le mouvement étudiant! Probablement que j’habiterais pas *ici*,” she says -referring to the apartment where she lives with Sylvie and other friends made during student movement activities- “si je m’étais pas impliquée dans le mouvement étudiant, tsé! Ç’a été quand-même un... un élément, euh, *majeur* et *marquant* de ma vie, là!”

#### PERSISTENCE THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS AND VULNERABILITY

Élise’s story is an interesting example of vulnerability, as Brené Brown (2012, p. 33) sees it. “Vulnerability isn't good or bad,” she writes. “It's not what we call a dark emotion, nor is it always a light, positive experience. Vulnerability is the core of all emotions and feelings.” In this sense, participants’ vulnerability in the strike was necessary to allow them to live the negative but also the positive emotions that came with it. This vision of vulnerability coincides with Gould’s (2009) call for a greater acceptance of despair in social movements. Speaking of the ACT UP experience, which she contends was destroyed in part by despair, she notes that “We need to think of ways to work *with* despair other than through denial and conversion into the (ostensibly) requisite hope” (p. 437). She adds:

“Parts of the political left more generally prohibit despair, and my sense is that doing so impedes leftist activism [...] Rather than requiring outrage and optimism, perhaps we should recognize that people feel all kinds of feelings regarding the state of the world, and acknowledging those feelings rather than denying them or requiring their conversion is a first step toward seeing their political potential” (p. 438).

Without referring to Miriam Greenspan’s (2004) book, *Healing through the dark emotions: the wisdom of grief, fear, and despair*, Gould is applying its potential for sociological relevance - though Greenspan already implies this herself when she contends that “our emotional lives as individuals are always connected, for better or worse, to the emotional environments in which we live” (p. xiii). In the same vein as Solomon (2007), Greenspan contends that “there are no negative emotions, just unskillful ways of coping with emotions we can’t bear.” Echoing Gould’s (2009) words about ACT UP, Greenspan adds: “While generally devalued in our culture, the dark emotions have a wisdom that is essential to the work of healing and transformation on both individual and collective levels” (p. xiii). In fact she refers to grief, fear, and despair as “an inevitable part of every life” that, when suppressed, can become more toxic in the form of depression, anxiety, addiction, prejudice, violence to one’s self or others, psychic numbing, as well as anger.<sup>433</sup>

Ancelovici and Dupuis-Déri (2014) seem to align themselves with Gould (2009) -at first- when they propose “se mobiliser non par espoir mais par désespoir, pour déjouer les calculs de celles et de ceux qui réduisent la rationalité et la légitimité d’un mouvement à son « efficacité » institutionnelle” (p. 367) in favor of acknowledging “d’importants espaces pour vivre la politique autrement” that were opened up by the 2012 strike. In his 2004 article, Dupuis-Déri explains this “principe désespérance” would be a counter-point to Ernst Bloch’s “principe espérance,” notably the idea that hope is “le moteur de l’histoire car il insuffle aux acteurs politiques la force pour tendre vers l’horizon d’un monde meilleur”; and Dupuis-Déri substantiates the “principe désespérance” with the idea that revolution is not as accessible in the short-term as it used to be - or used to feel- thus current revolutionaries are stuck with rage and love but no longer have hope

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<sup>433</sup> Greenspan (2004) clarifies that anger that is “a by-product of aborted grief, fear, or despair” is different than the anger as a response to violation and injustice that “is a fiery moral passion that impels us to act in the protection of one’s life or integrity” and thus “honorable” as long as it is not used as a “fuel for hatred and violence” (p. xiii).

so they have to content themselves with the here-and-now. I am not in disagreement with the idea of focusing on the here-and-now -indeed those “importants espaces pour vivre la politique autrement” are the focus of the collective-oriented emotions that burst from my interviews- and I agree with some of Dupuis-Déri’s critiques of such a focus. Yet what I deem problematic in using a “principe désespérance” is that it seems to avoid or escape the possible disappointments and despair regarding the functioning of the here-and-now project, as well as ignoring the problem of what happens when the here-and-now project (with its association to new collective-oriented emotions) ceases to exist. In other words, a “principe de désespérance” takes, to some degree, emotions out of the activist, as if one were capable of repressing their hopes or disappointments, instead of simply seeking ways to deal with their inevitable disappointments of life, as Brown, Greenspan, and Gould suggest.

I am not saying that we should march around blindly hoping that revolutionary change will come tomorrow; rather, the problem with focusing all the “deuil” on the revolution alone seems to allow one to go to the other extreme in which there is no allowance for hope of any kind. Many participants of this dissertation suggest that hope for the collective, for the future of student mobilization, for the future of society -even if it was not necessarily something that would affect them- came along with the magical sense of anything being possible and the power of vulnerability. In seeking to escape such vulnerability through a principle of despair without the joyous hopes that precede and lead to it, I am not sure that the strike would have taken place, at least for many of the participants of this thesis. Perhaps instead what is necessary, in order to undercut “the calculs de celles et de ceux qui réduisent la rationalité et la légitimité d’un mouvement à son « efficacité » institutionnelle,” is a focus on movements’ emotionality,<sup>434</sup> to change the focus of hope precisely from questions of “efficacité” to questions of what kind of emotional habitus, emotional communities, and structures of feelings we have and need to deal with and compensate for our inevitable disillusionments. It perhaps is a question of semantics depending on our notion of “espoir” or hope and “désespoir” or despair. Solnit (2016) defines despair as “often premature: it’s a form of impatience as well as of certainty.” Her definition of hope has similarities to Brown’s notion of vulnerability in that she considers hope “an embrace of the unknown” and as located “in the dark around the edges.” More specifically, Solnit writes:

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<sup>434</sup> As Dupuis-Déri (2010) does so poignantly in his book, *Lacrymos: Qu'est-ce qui fait pleurer les anarchistes?*

“You could call it an account of complexities and uncertainties, with openings. “Critical thinking without hope is cynicism, but hope without critical thinking is naivety,” the Bulgarian writer Maria Popova recently remarked. And Patrisse Cullors, one of the founders of Black Lives Matter, early on described the movement’s mission as to “Provide hope and inspiration for collective action to build collective power to achieve collective transformation, rooted in grief and rage but pointed towards vision and dreams”. It is a statement that acknowledges that grief and hope can coexist.”

Accepting vulnerability, and allowing space for grief and other ‘negative’ emotions, is easier and can have more powerful effects on participants’ lives with the help of interpersonal relationships to get one through: “when it comes to vulnerability, we need to ask for help,” writes Brown (Ibid, p. 53). If Greenspan (2004, p. xii) argues that “our emotional illiteracy as a species has less to do with our inability to subdue negative emotions than it does with our inability to authentically and mindfully *feel* them,” what is clear from these stories is that interpersonal support and structures encouraging emotional reflexivity assist such a process of authentically and mindfully feeling them. Élise experienced the downfall of 2007 in a supportive student association atmosphere and with interpersonal friendships that lasted beyond the strike, consciously helping her to process her feelings about what happened, to lessen the individuating potential of despair that Gould (2009) suggests took place with ACT UP. In other words, we might say that Élise experienced what Greenspan calls the “alchemy of dark emotions” (p. xiii), thanks to interpersonal support. King (2005) would argue that Élise and Jeff were better able than above DOHP interviewee Julian to sustain their optimism and involvement in activism, despite the disappointments of 2007, thanks in part to a supportive community through which they experienced less ‘dissonance’ with dominant ideologies and had more occasions for emotional reflexivity and interpersonal support. Such a focus on relationships alongside the lens of vulnerability, or the inevitability of despair, provides an alternative lens to the stories that follow: It is not the difficult emotions that are necessarily problematic, but how they are dealt with by individuals and by the movement. Indeed the experience of Élise and Jeff above forms an interesting comparison to those participants who experienced 2007 without such interpersonal

bonds with fellow activists, who exited student activism despite remaining students (e.g. Audrey, Pierre, Philippe), and in the long-term either intermittently continued being involved in activism until eventually exiting it altogether (Audrey<sup>435</sup>), deradicalizing their politics (Pierre).<sup>436</sup> Indeed we left Pierre's story in Chapter 3, describing the “vide” in his life after the two strikes, a “perte de sens” in his life after he stopped being involved, and a recognition that he could have tried to talk more about these feelings with fellow activists. Interestingly enough though, similar to Élise, Pierre did not feel that he experienced a “burnout,” as he had kept a balance between activism and other aspects of his life; not to mention that he had built a “carapace” to keep himself optimistic, despite the unsuccessful general strike campaign of 2007 and the UQAM strike of 2008.

### **Pierre: from a shell of hope to one of fear**

Now, “cette carapace-là, je l’ai plus!” says Pierre, during our interview in January 2012. “J’en suis sorti uh, un peu écorché”<sup>437</sup> and he has much less desire to participate in another strike. Reading Bourdieu in his Master’s program, removing himself from UQAM activist circles, and starting to feel more shy at general assemblies, he has “une vision euh, vraiment critique de l’ASSÉ maintenant! Quoique j-j’suis fier d’être membre de l’ASSÉ encore.” Like Philippe, he started to have doubts related to the inevitable power dynamics within the ASSÉ. “Y’a des rapports de pouvoir dans les assemblées générales, y’a des gens qui parlent tout le temps, y’a des gens qui parlent jamais!” And then you have “l’exécutif qui arrive euh, avec des documents, avec des propositions, pis t’as le simple membre qui comprend pas trop comment que les procédures fonctionnent.” He stopped believing in direct democracy, or at least he no longer felt that is what they had lived in 2007, in part because “aux assembles générales y’a pas grand monde qui

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<sup>435</sup> As for Audrey, while she stopped being involved in student activism after her elected mandate finished in 2008, she continued intermittently her involvement in other activist pursuits. In 2011 during our interview she expresses finally being “healed” from the 2007 experience and “I feel like this [strike] is gonna be really big and I wanna be involved,” adding: “I learned all those lessons, right? So I know what to give and I know what not to do.” In 2012 as a student at Concordia, Audrey participated in student strike once again, yet to my knowledge has not been involved again since in any type of activism.

<sup>436</sup> Marie’s case is particular, as she did not experience 2007 as a disappointment, and had the support of her internship supervisor; so if after 2007 she was alienated from student executive teams, she persevered until she later developed her feminist support network through the *Centre des femmes de l’UQAM* in 2011, which she felt allowed her to be able to be involved in a way that was not so emotionally tiring (see Chapter 1 and 4).

<sup>437</sup> When I ask him to clarify the meaning of this term, he says “blessé,” “frappé.”

participe non plus,” he says. Clearly at the time of our interview, his expectations of reliving 2005 have subsided and now his own experience from 2007 has taken its place.

“Là c’est rendu le problème c’est que je m’implique plus du tout, pis j’suis juste comme un [sic] espèce d’intellectuel déconnecté.” While he is a member of the political party *Québec Solidaire*, he is no longer involved in any activism at the time of the interview. He is still critical of political parties, but doesn’t believe that free education will be possible without a replacement of the *Parti Libéral*. “Mes espoirs sont comme plus euh modérés,” he says, as he does not see the strike as the only tactic to obtain free education. His sense of life meaning is slowly being reconstructed by developing “une nouvelle approche, euh, de peut-être comment changer les choses,” he says, “de manière moins euh, unidimensionnelle ou de manière moins euh radicale, peut-être, tsé.” He adds: “j’ai moins le goût de m’impliquer maintenant” because his new relationship with his girlfriend “me prend genre quand-même un certain nombre de temps, dans ma vie, que tsé on est souvent ensemble,” even though she is involved in student activism herself at the time of the interview in 2012.

I would argue that Pierre's conversion of emotional disappointment into a deradicalization of his politics was particularly and comparatively quick because he did not have a solid activist friend community or interpersonal support throughout the strike to deal with the disillusionment he lived after the 2007 strike. Even though the massive November 10 protest in 2011 “a recrinqué ma motivation” he says, “les seuls espoirs que j’ai présentement c’est, c’est de *freiner* le néo-libéralisme,” he says inhaling, “pis éventuellement de, de repartir sur une nouvelle *base* mais peut-être plus social-démocrate” with more state intervention amidst space for the cooperative and social economy movement, he says. Why? Because “c’est un espoir qui est comme, tsé qui est, qui est faisable, qui est réalisable.” Scared to live once again the dialectical emotional roller coaster of the strike, it seems that his ‘carapace’ of hope became a ‘carapace’ of fear that would help him to justify the deradicalization of his political beliefs. For if the arrival of the 2012 strike is no longer “central dans mon existence,” it is because “psychologiquement j’pense que c’est à cause que j’ai déjà vécu une grève, pis que là, je me suis rendu compte à cette époque-là que une grève c’est pas le *fun*, tsé c’est du travail! C’est *beaucoup* de travail, c’est beaucoup aussi de..” with his arms he imitates a roller-coaster gesture with his hands, and continues : “up and down, c’est beaucoup, euhhhh, de d’espoirs qui *peuvent* être déçus pis dans mon cas *y’ont* été déçus. [...] la crainte d’être désillusionné après, euh, me fait peur.” Without the recuperation of

emotional energy, the recuperation from the inevitable downside of vulnerability that friends can provide, first his collective-oriented emotions and existential meaning fizzled; progressively his sense of what was possible, his sense of a structure of feeling of collective possibility, had faded, despite the momentum accumulating at the eve of the 2012 strike.

Similar to ACT UP, notes Gould (2009), “where anger had made participants feel like they were part of something vibrant and larger than themselves, despair made people feel alone and guilt-ridden and sad and bad, and thus less inclined to stay in the movement” (Ibid). It is not so far from some of the emotional legacies for Pierre, Julian, and others below. “The work of activism makes it difficult to deal with despair” and “we have few models for dealing with bad feelings like despair that are not individualizing and depoliticizing” writes Gould (2009, p. 438). And if the emotional habitus of the Quebec student movement is a masculine one that more likely allows for expressions of anger than despair, one that does not prioritize emotions generally, it increases the likelihood that student activists are likely dealing with despair alone, as compared to other emotions, as indeed participants of this dissertation suggest.

Alternatively, could it be that Pierre suffered from not having felt the 'structure of feeling' first-hand from the 2005 strike that he missed? This can only be part of the explanation, for Julie lived 2005, and while the 'structure of feeling' she therein encountered continued to affect her life for up to ten years after that strike, ultimately the lack of strong interpersonal support led to its withering, though it took many years for her to pinpoint it. Indeed for Julie it was a more gradual roller coaster than for Pierre, as time gently moulded the curves of such legacies throughout those ten years, surely surprising us both at the very ‘end.’

### **Julie: Ten years later**

If I had interviewed Julie at the end of the 2005 strike, the legacy of the strike in her life would have been overwhelmingly positive, which is where we left her in Chapter 3. It was only when she became an executive of her student association during her second year at CEGEP, that Julie had an experience that would eventually bring her to withdraw from activism. Similar to when she first got involved in the strike, she had yet another “déplacement d’amis,” because the executive team that she worked with sided more with the FEUQ, while the friends she had made during the strike sided more with the ASSÉ. One day, because of a position she had taken in a

meeting,<sup>438</sup> her group of friends from the strike in 2005 “avait décidé de me rejeter.” Instead of just telling Julie “on n’a pas apprécié c’tu move-là” and having a discussion about it, they treated her as if she was the enemy, as if she was “fasciste,” recalls Julie.

“Pis de ça, j’en ai eu vraiment plus des séquelles,” recalls Julie, “parce que c’est *pas* quelque chose que j’avais vécu pendant la grève!” Suddenly Julie hesitates; it is as if focusing on her later 2006 experience is allowing her to remember elements of 2005 with a slightly different light. In fact, *yes* during 2005 as well there had been psychological pressure towards others that went something like: “Ah t’as telle position, faque t’es fasciste tout de suite.” She adds, “j’pense que eux y’avaient une tendance à *intimider*, euh, des gens qui idéologiquement ils considéraient comme des ennemis.” And come to think of it, “je pense que ça arrivait des fois aussi que y’avait des gens qui étaient plus fédés (supportive of the FEUQ and the FECQ) qui essayaient de venir à l’occupation” who were soon reprimanded and intimidated by students at the occupation. The post-interview context was affecting her memories of 2005; yet she herself never experienced it personally until 2006.

After that experience, “je démonisais tout le monde qui pouvait être proche de l’ASSÉ, parce que j’affiliais tout le monde de l’ASSÉ ou qui pouvait être proche de l’ASSÉ aux gens qui étaient au Vieux-Montréal qui avaient fait de l’intimidation!” explains Julie. During our interview, she no longer feels that way about ASSÉ as she has gotten past it; yet it certainly left a mark on her in the two years immediately following that experience in 2006, as Julie kept her distance from “tout milieu politique.” During the interview she wonders, “Peut-être que j’tais faible psychologiquement comparée à d’autres,” noting, “j’avais peur que des gens me traitent de fasciste alors que... c’tait pas la conception que j’avais de mes positions!” She hadn’t felt “à l’aise pour avoir un débat, confronter des idées,” back then, because she wondered: what if -as sometimes happens when we say our thoughts without thinking them through first- she made a statement that was somewhat naïve and then someone labeled her ‘fasciste’ because they

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<sup>438</sup> When I ask her later to clarify by email, she explains: "J'ai commencé à être déléguée à l'académique après que les militants de la grève de 2005 m'aie tournée le dos suite à la situation en table de concertation où j'ai demandé la question préalable (...) sur un débat qui s'enlisait et qui avait avoir avec la création d'un xième comité par des gens d'un même réseau qui multipliait les comités et donc le nombre de voix qu'ils et elles avaient sur la table de concertation. On avait à mon avis fait le tour de la question. Je ne me souviens pas des détails. Ils m'ont accusé d'avoir pris le bord de l'exec, puis fasciste devait être une insulte parmi d'autres auxquelles j'ai eu le droit."



disagreed with some element of what she said? She had also worried, if others intimidate her based on an idea she brings up, how far could the intimidation go?

In hindsight, Julie wonders if she had difficulty managing her emotions when it came to political tensions. “Je deviens trop impliquée personnellement des fois,” she says, as she takes things personally when they are rather “des attaques au niveau de l’enjeu politique.” Six years later at the time of our interview, having spent the previous two years trying to revive the student association of her Sociology department at UQAM, Julie has decided not to be a student representative because “j’suis trop impliquée émotionnellement.” Nonetheless she is clearly enthusiastic about the 2012 strike mobilization committee that is meeting during the time of our interview. Sometimes Julie speaks about the new mobilization committee because I ask her about it, but most of the time it comes up because Julie brings it up: She believes that activists who had participated in the 2005 strike are now in a position to help build the capacity for the upcoming one. Thanks to her own 2005 experience, for example, she has been able to explain the importance of student associations and general assemblies and how they function; she knows from experience that “agir politiquement” means students actually getting involved rather than expecting a top-down process that depends on a few executives. “C’est des choses que j’ai retirées de 2005, que j’ai pu expliquer, qui fait que maintenant, aujourd’hui on a une rencontre du comité de mob[ilisation] de socio[logie], tsé!” Julie exclaims. “Aussi parce que y’a d’autres gens qui ont vécu 2005, qui sont revenu-e-s aussi, j’pense!”

Indeed among those who lived 2005, it seems, there were not just a set of common skills, but a sense of having lived them together, having witnessed a ‘structure of feeling’ of collective possibility. Julie recalls that many years after the strike -after the intimidation- when she ran into those same students who had intimidated her, she felt that “ce moment-là qui a été vécu ensemble a créé, a fait que y’avait un *lien*, tsé quand on s’est revus, y’avait une *reconnaissance*, pis y’avait genre... je je sais pas tsé, c’tait pas de l’amitié mais c’tait comme un peu de complicité,” she says. Despite her experience of social intimidation, Julie had eventually come back to the student movement with a commitment to recreating and emphasizing such a ‘structure of feeling’ composed of the strong and specific social bonds that flourish around a collective project to build a better society. Her experience of such bonds in 2005, despite the temporary nature of the experience, had changed her own perspective on life. “Même si j’ai voulu m’écarter des mouvements, des milieux politiques [après 2006], je pense que dans mes relations sociales, ce

que je recherchais c'tait, euhm, un peu cette *union*-là de, je [ne] sais pas, vivre quelque chose *ensemble*, d'important, sur lequel on *travaille* aussi ensemble!"

In other words, Julie remained with the memory of a 'structure of feeling' of which she could simply not let go -now combined with a sense of how important the interpersonal aspect could be in maintaining that 'structure of feeling.' On the eve of 2012, Julie is fervently committed to recreate the social bond she so valued, the "lien social qui doit se créer, au plaisir que les gens doivent avoir ensemble." Rather than mobilizing with the AFESH mobilization committee or at the larger inter-faculty level, she is mobilizing at the departmental level because "les gens se reconnaissent, tsé, plus directement par la base par quelque chose qui vient les rejoindre," as they know each other, and are thus more comfortable. "Il faut qu'il ait cet aspect-là, collectif, comme sensible, qui se crée!" Julie is thus hoping to create moments, like a "5-à-7" to meet others in sociology, to create a group that is "uni, le plus possible ou en tout cas de gens qui se connaissent, pis sont capables de se mettre en lien ensemble." She is also encouraging courses of action that would allow spaces of debate to be less intimidating for students in her department: instead of merely stopping classes from taking place, in each classroom they would have a discussion and even a vote about whether or not to cancel the class. For an hour or two during class time, depending on what students in each class prefer, they would discuss in an open atmosphere students' opinions about the strike and different actions, and would answer students' questions.<sup>439</sup> With Julie's story, it is possible to see how a desire for what I would term the "collective-oriented" emotions, values, and structures of feeling attained through the social bond of a social project led her to participate in the 2012 strike despite the interpersonal disappointments, the lack of interpersonal belonging that dominated the more negative parts of her story up until 2011.

Alas, eventually the interpersonal realm -belonging to a group of friends, long-term interpersonal support- would come back to haunt her, overwhelming any belonging to a larger collective or any inspiration from a 'structure of feeling'. Years later, after writing all of the above, I discover an email I had missed from her dating from November 30, 2011: it is Julie's

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<sup>439</sup> The purpose wasn't necessarily to convince students -since a position had already been taken in the general assembly- but rather to stimulate debate and facilitate a greater understanding of certain issues, says Julie.

response to the standard email questions I send to all the participants about their identity and their experience of the interview. Julie ends her email response on a completely unexpected note:

“[...] avant 2005, je faisais partie de mon groupe d’amis, on disait "La tribu", musique, musicien (pas moi mais certains), bière et discussion autour d'un repas sur Marx dont 2 d'entre nous faisait une lecture attentive et nous communiquait ce qu'il comprenait, puis nous discussions de comment concevoir un monde nouveau. "Des révolutionnaires de salon, quoi, à 15-16 ans." Le cégep et le mouvement étudiant, dans son mouvement, plus que dans sa forme communautaire quoique les relations sociales fussent importantes, m'a arraché à eux. Nous avons pris des voies différentes et depuis, mon appartenance est vague et parfois vide.”

Hold on: could this instead be the emotional legacy of the 2005 strike for Julie, rather than the positive focus on collective bonds she emphasizes throughout our interview? Coming back to the question of time, I wonder: how come this vague and sometimes empty sense of “appartenance,”<sup>440</sup> and its implicit sense of regret about the 2005 strike enveloped in a droplet of pre-2005 nostalgia, did not surface in our interview? Perhaps, as oral historians argue is always the case, it was merely that different moments in time and different ways of expressing one’s story bring out a different set of lenses; that a narrator can become more comfortable and feel more at ease saying something that might upset the interviewer with time,<sup>441</sup> or that “a previous interview may have simply awakened memories which are then told in later meetings” (Portelli, 1991, p. 55). There are hints from the interview itself: Julie admits to having felt “une angoisse” at the very beginning because of her feeling that “y’a un *récit* qui s’est créé depuis les cinq dernières années qui est épuré, qui est nettoyé.” She adds : “Je suis sûre que y’a des émotions vraiment négatives qui se sont passées à ce moment-là que j’arrive pas non plus à les chercher... Euh... je pense que y’a comme eu un *blocage*, là.” Were those ‘blocked’ negative experiences emerging in her later email as a latent regret about the impact of the 2005 strike in her life? Did

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<sup>440</sup> “Appartenance” is a trickier word to translate than I thought, which is why I left the original: It can mean “membership” to a group (<http://www.larousse.com/en/dictionaries/french-english/appartenance/4633>), or “belonging” (<http://dictionary.reverso.net/french-english/appartenance>).

<sup>441</sup> Indeed Julie told me at the beginning of our interview that she did the interview to help me out after hearing about my thesis from a friend, as she was worried I would not find interviewees to talk about this topic.

they nullify the “lien communautaire” she so valued from the strike? Or, in an ironic twist of past mingling with present, could it be that she developed such latent regrets precisely *because* of her appreciation for the “lien communautaire” gained through the 2005 strike?

In the few lines from her email, Julie manages to discard the story I have constructed from her interview with a slightly sad implicit wish that she could go back in time before the 2005 strike entered her life. Her doubts resemble Brené Brown’s description of the process of rising up from vulnerability:

“We can rise up from our failures, screw-ups, and falls, but we can never go back to where we stood before we were brave or before we fell. Courage transforms the emotional structure of our being. This change often brings a deep sense of loss. During the process of rising, we sometimes find ourselves homesick for a place that no longer exists. We want to go back to that moment before we walked into the arena, but there’s nowhere to go back to. What makes this more difficult is that now we have a new level of awareness about what it means to be brave. We can't fake it anymore. We now know when we're showing up and when we're hiding out, when we are living our values and when we are not. Our new awareness can also be invigorating -it can reignite our sense of purpose and remind us of our commitment to wholeheartedness. Standing the tension that lies between wanting to go back to the moment before we risked and feel and being pulled forward to even greater courage is an inescapable part of rising strong” (Brown, 2015, p. 5).

Julie certainly rose out of her interpersonal disappointments in 2006 to engage in student politics during her undergraduate degree, and in the 2012 strike; and certainly elements of her plunge into student activism yielded life-changing experiences for her, including collective-oriented emotions and the discovery of the 'structure of feeling' of collective possibility. Yet her experience, alongside Brené Brown's research and the literature about persistence in activism, affirm that such vulnerability is more meaningful, less empty, with the accompaniment of interpersonal support -even if it is friends who are not involved in activism. In August 2015, I

send Julie a version of her complete story, as she had requested,<sup>442</sup> and she seeks to answer my incomprehension about her suddenly much darker view of her 2005 memories. To complicate matters I make a mistake in the draft of the story I send her, writing that her above-mentioned confusing email had been sent to me in November 2012 -whereas in reality it was in November 2011. So assuming that her confusing email had been sent in 2012, she seeks to explain her darker view:

"Rapidement, je crois que l'enthousiasme pré-strike 2012 et la dépression post GGI-2012 et tout le brassage émotif et idéal qui s'y est joué ont à voir dans le déplacement de perspectives. Aussi, je n'ai jamais su retrouver ce lien, qui m'emballait tant. Tout au long du printemps 2012, je me suis sentie m'atomiser de plus en plus. Malgré certaines personnes, féministe ou devenues féministes en 2012 qui ont été mes amies, qui m'ont supportée et ont été présentes, j'ai continué à me sentir atomisée, sentiment qui s'est raffermi au moment de la montée de la lutte contre la culture du viol et les agresseurs.<sup>443</sup> Je n'ai pas su les suivre, et maintenant les liens sont diffus et confus. Ce que j'ai retenu, c'est que le lien, ce sentiment d'attachement profond qui se crée dans la solidarité et les épreuves partagées, n'est qu'éphémère, ou du moins, dans mon cas, les liens s'estompent en grande majorité, mais il restera toujours cette reconnaissance."

I try to follow-up, clarifying that in fact even before the strike, in 2011, she had started to view 2005 in a more somber way. Julie finally replies, in October 2015, revealing perhaps sadness, perhaps fatigue from thinking about the interpersonal disappointments: "Désolée, je suis passée tout droit, je crois que je ne te ferai pas de commentaires. Je n'ai pas vraiment le temps en ce moment et c'est plutôt éprouvant émotivement de replonger dans les souvenirs."

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<sup>442</sup> In her response, Julie writes of my rendition of her story that, while weird to read about herself in the third person, "cela traduit bien la rencontre que nous avons eue" and "J'apprécie beaucoup lire les réflexions personnelles de ta part qui émergent au fil du texte." Due to the limitations of space, I removed many of my own personal reflections.

<sup>443</sup> Unfortunately, the particular issue of rape and sexual assault is beyond the scope of this dissertation as I did not interview anyone directly affected, nor was I able to do follow-up interviews with Julie on this topic to specify what exactly she was referring to.

### **Also vulnerable to time: Others who then lived 2012**

Julie is not the only participant who was actively involved in both 2005 and 2007 and then also lived through the 2012 strike. Interestingly, my later communications by email with Marie convey a similar experience: after the 2012 strike many of the friendships that emerged out of feminist solidarity, and that she thought would last for life, did not survive. I only discover this by chance upon emailing Marie with clarification questions about her interview in March 2015, when she mentions in passing in her email that she is no longer friends with them because "la fin de la grève [de 2012] a été difficile pour beaucoup. Beaucoup ont changé, plusieurs se sont radicalisées, d'autres non. Je trouve qu'il y avait de plus en plus de violence dans le milieu féministe. Il n'y avait plus vraiment place à la discussion, c'était vraiment difficile. Mais ça c'est une tout autre entrevue."

Email correspondence in March 2015 with Philippe similarly reveals a different outlook on the legacies of strikes in his life. If during our interview in 2011 he remembered being disillusioned by 2008 and therefore stopping his involvement in student politics, he clearly maintained positive memories of the 2005 strike that ruptured the cultural clash he had felt his whole life in academia. And yet now in 2015 he suddenly doubted whether he wanted any trace of his participation to remain, even in this dissertation: "Tout ce que j'ai vécu dans le mouvement étudiant appartient à un passé que je désire maintenant ardemment oublier pour passer à autre chose dans ma vie." After re-reading the transcript of his interview, he decided to remain a participant of the study with a pseudonym, writing in his last email to me: "Ça m'a fait très plaisir de faire cette entrevue avec toi, je m'excuse pour ma réaction, je vis encore beaucoup d'émotions négatives relatives à cette période de ma vie." It is not clear if Philippe was referring to the 2012 strike or to the three previous strikes in which he participated; then again, it appears from his email that they might now be indistinguishable in his memory, characterized as "cette période de ma vie" within "le mouvement étudiant."

### **Vulnerable memories and relationships at Concordia**

What is clear in all the cases of the students above who were very involved in the strike - regardless of which strike, regardless of educational institution, regardless of the time of the interview, regardless of what variety of difficult emotions they experienced- interpersonal support and emotional reflexivity mediated their emotional legacies, encouraging them to

continue or not. Such was also the case for participants of the 2012 strike at Concordia, including myself.

Like Julie, I have gone through ups and downs in terms of my conclusion about the legacy of the strike in my own life; perhaps the only thing I can say with certainty, upon writing and ingesting all of the above, is that its beauty is magnified when I share its memories with others -thus my contentment at the ‘reconnaissance,’ as Julie calls it, upon meeting fellow strikers many years later at the *Café Artère* reunion on March 22, 2014, despite not having prolonged friendships with most of them. The most long-lasting form of commemoration of the strike for me occurs with Marya and Tania, my two closest friends at Concordia before the strike, with whom I dreamed and prepared for months and even years before the arrival of the *Maple Spring*. They are the first people to whom I send a text message when something related to the strike happens;<sup>444</sup> they are the women with whom I have shared more than just meetings, whose hands I have held beyond the context of picket lines, despite the fact that the strike also drew us apart; more than anyone else, it is through talking to them that I have been able to get near to mourning, and acknowledging the continued existence of, the strike in my life. Of all the interviewees of this thesis, they are thus the ones whose legacies are most intermingled with mine.

### ***Tania’s burnout amidst continued hope***

At the time of my interview with Tania, most of which was recounted in Chapter 3, a year has passed since the strike. Her state of mind during the interview is reflective of the dialectical potential of vulnerability: despite the difficult emotions she experienced during the strike, she conveys a sense of collective empowerment, hope and faith in direct democracy. We might say that she continues to sense the ‘structure of feeling’ that emerged so clearly during the strike, and I suggest that this is in part because of her maintenance of interpersonal support during and after it.

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<sup>444</sup> For example, sometime in July 2016, I have just finished reading the introduction of Ancelovici and Dupuis-Déri’s comprehensive and inspiring edited collection, *Un printemps rouge et noir: Regards croisés sur la grève étudiante de 2012*. I text Tania and Marya: "Am reading book about strike by two uqam profs, and the intro has absolutely no mention of concordia [sic] student strike! And yet they mention mcgill! [sic]" I add a face with a horizontal squiggly line instead of a happy face to indicate my discontentment and puzzlement – it is not a question of not being aware of the Anglophone realm, as the strike McGill University is mentioned, but not Concordia University. Marya replies: "'Cause we have to write it ourselves!" Tania responds: "Lol forgotten so fast - before we even heal from the burn out."

When I ask her what the successes of the strike were, she says “I think just hope,” more specifically it showed people that at a very local level like the *Women’s Studies* department “we have *power*, um, and that we’re capable of organizing ourselves and, and resisting, um, you know really powerful forces!” Like others, Tania feels “it was just like an *incredibly* like *intense* you know, growing experience” and it “changed my politics.”

“Really?” I exclaim, since I assume that Tania’s confidence, intelligence, and political analysis had always been as solid as it is now.

She explains: “I feel like maybe I just didn’t have that much faith in like, in people in general! Before the strike! And seeing sort of direct democracy in action kinda led me to think otherwise.” Tania’s previous sense of societal apathy was transformed, “seeing that.. um.. that if people are empowered to make decisions for themselves as opposed to giving away their decisions to *other* people, um, that they will.. you know that they *will* participate.” Previously, “I think maybe I’d assumed that if people are not involved in something then that they don’t care about it. And I think I learned through the strike that actually if you present the, if the appropriate spaces are created and proper like, forms like sort of structures *exist*, then you’ll have a lot more participation.” Unsurprisingly then, at the time of our interview Tania has been working on trying to create “more democratic structures at Concordia.” I can relate, as that is one of the reasons I wanted to be VP-External after the strike.

I ask her what emotions keep her going: it is the “collective spirit” of student activism, she answers, because it is democratic and has more respect for individuals than labour unions - confirming once again the sense that these student strikes made evident an alternative 'structure of feeling' entailing a fighting spirit for collective possibility. More specifically, she adds that what keeps her going is:

“some like weird balance of like anger and like love or something. I don’t know, it sounds super cheesy but like, just being really outraged at all the injustice and all the oppression.. Around you know so many different things, it’s not about the strike it’s not about tuitions, or student organizing but just in general. I think that’s really, uh.. yeah. I don’t know it’s like energizing in a way.”



The above quote, I suggest, hints at the dialectical transformation of seemingly contradictory emotions -the anger and love of the present, the hope and disappointment of the past- into a new, perhaps difficult-to-describe affect, energy, perseverance -perhaps, I might call it, a willingness to be politically vulnerable. Indeed, she adds what might sound like a “principe désespérance,” yet which I suggest is actually a statement gently laden in the uncertainty that Solnit (2016) suggests is inherent to hope. What also keeps her going, she clarifies, is:

“that vision for a more humane existence –the way I keep saying it- or a different um, world, um.. a more loving sort of um.. world is probably also something, um, that’s really motivating, and that keeps me involved. Yeah. And it’s just like a sense of responsibility too, like you have to.. you know? Like if you-u-u see so much injustice in the world and, um... it’s like regardless of whether or not your actions will *actually* have an impact, you have to try.”

In the years after this interview, however, Tania and I both end up having moments when we are tired to try, as we have taken breaks from activism or protests and experienced burnout at different points. We have discussed together at various occasions throughout the post-strike years the ways that activist burnout and subsequent disengagement from activism affected our sense of self and life vision; and how in turn, our disengagement seemed to contribute to further depression, as when the busy rush of life died down it sometimes became so apparent that something (activism) was missing from our lives.<sup>445</sup>

And then, demonstrating the ways that legacies evolve with the flow of time, we both also end up participating in the 2015 strike at Concordia. Instead of listening to the advice of my life partner and supervisors to simply finish my thesis, I decide to join the Humanities general assemblies as a voting member, out of a sense of responsibility, but also some kind of regretful desire to capture ethnographically the strike in a way that I did not in 2012.<sup>446</sup> While that strike is beyond the scope of this dissertation, interesting for my purposes here is its relation to 2012: I

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<sup>445</sup> In hindsight, on my end I consider that such conversations were small steps in the emotional reflexivity required for the long dialectical conversion of 'high' and then 'low' emotions into a new way of feeling about, and doing, activism.

<sup>446</sup> In 2015, I did participation observation and auto-ethnography of my own participation, as well as of Tania’s participation, since her Women’s Studies association went on strike again.

suddenly felt ambivalent to participate fully, similar to how Philippe felt he had spent enough time in student activism, and should get on with his degree. I was desperate to finish my degree, but felt guilty so I forced myself to continue being involved, doing so most of the time with a high level of anxiety and discomfort, in part because I did not really know the new Humanities PhD cohort and was no longer involved with the GSA. I kept feeling a strange sense of being there but not really being there; as if I were trying to relive 2012, while simultaneously sad that it was no longer 2012. I, and everything, felt different now.<sup>447</sup> Since then, I have had no desire whatsoever to be involved in any activist pursuits, perhaps because, as Brown and Pickerill (2009) suggest is necessary, I did not engage in emotional reflexivity about my burnout before re-engaging.

### ***The aftermath of Marya's seventh sky***

From 2012 up until the time of our interview in December 2015, during our formal interview as well as our informal discussions, it is clear for Marya that interpersonal relationships and conflicts at Concordia, and the lack of structure to address these during the strike, greatly affected her experience. And yet like most of the stories recounted above, I consider the effects of the strike on Marya's life to have been dialectical, as the positive and negative aspects of vulnerability continued to feed into *each other*, and into her life. "The *good* side, it's still with me I still work on it, I still try to make sense of, of the, the experience, try to pass it on, uh try to write about it." Yet in her next sentence she also mentions the pain, the difficulty of reaching "certain *heights*," which she continues to notice "every day." Thus, like many others in this dissertation, I argue that the 'high' collective-oriented emotions of the strike dialectically led to their low counterparts. "It has given me so *much* that, it's--it's--it's a difficult position," she says, adding "it's also difficult position because I think there are many other people who have gone elsewhere with it." In comparison, Marya feels that at the time of our interview, three years after the strike has ended, she hasn't necessarily had a chance to put that strike experience to use and valorize it or challenge it by "getting *somewhere else* after, y'know? I mean there's there's,

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<sup>447</sup> In my diary/fieldnotes on April 20, 2015, I write: "I feel like I am following a pale ghost version of myself around during this strike, seeking to recapture 2012 in some subconscious way, not really wanting to be here but my duty is the ghost, as my sense of duty has sort of passed away, and I still mourn it, trying to follow it through corridors, themselves filled with the ghosts of former strikers, at least those ghosts appear to me whenever I am in them... maybe one's first picket is always the best, and now they just seem so torturous to me..."

there's that part and I guess that's that's what is the pain." She remains thoroughly involved in activism, yet hasn't found spaces where she can put all her learnings about direct democracy into full practice.

It was difficult to come down from those "certain *heights*" which were emotionally and politically strong at the beginning of her strike experience. She explains:

"We were together and we *dreamed* together... you know? I really mean you and me! There were other people also but uh.. but uh.. I don't know there they they were nice *days*, beautiful *days*.. and uh y'know when you say things don't come back, uh, that's one of the things I think about."

I still am not sure if she is mostly referring to the high collective-oriented emotions she lived during the strike when she says "things don't come back," or to how our friendship inevitably changed after the strike; I'm assuming it is a bit of both.

Despite the fact that we were not working alongside each other as much during the strike, and when we did, we sometimes had arguments due to the stress and non-stop work involved in a strike situation, on my end there have been times when our friendship has allowed me to process the strike in a new way. Thus, in turn, it might be said that our common experience of the strike indirectly brought new meaning (a dialectic transformation) to our friendship, or at least to my own emotions related to the strike. Let me explain: In January 2017, a few days before finalizing the first draft of this dissertation, I print a chapter for Marya to be able to review the sections that mention her; yet I soon find myself worried about a quote it contained from one of my diaries written after a strike general assembly, notably: "Yesterday at the GA or after I felt suicidal again." Marya has recently lost a friend to suicide, so I should explain to her that when I say or write to myself that "I feel suicidal," that it is always a feeling, never a plan, as I know with full certainty that I would never do it. I also worry that if I include the latter words in this dissertation, it could appear to delegitimize concerns about people's utterance of the word 'suicide,' or arguably trivialize the actual suicides of some student activists after the strike as well as the

suicidal ideation reported by Pierre and other student movement activists.<sup>448</sup> Yet I have decided to bring it up here, because when I finally call Marya to warn her about that quote, an unexpected conversation occurs. I have already texted Marya to tell her that I need to tell her something before she reads the chapter, so we are both eager to talk about it as soon as possible, so she can get to reading the chapter sooner rather than later.

*“Sorry is this a bad time hon?”* I ask, just after she picks up the phone.

*“I have five to ten minutes, as we are starting to cook,”* she says.

*“Okay, maybe I will wait until another time as it might be a long conversation.”*

Meanwhile, Marya’s partner has heard her say those words and says to her in the background, *“it’s ok, as long as you don’t take an hour, go ahead.”* I heard him and Marya confirms that it’s okay, as she wants to know how I’m doing.

*“Hm I don’t know how to bring this up,”* I say. *“Okay I’ll just say it.”* I explain to her my quote about feeling suicidal, that considering her recent experience I wanted to tell her she need not worry about that upon reading. I add: *“Actually I think I’ve decided to stop using that word, to say something else instead, like I feel so bad I just wish I could disappear for a little while.”*

At first Marya is silent.<sup>449</sup> Then she says, *“Yeah, it’s true there are other ways of saying that. I mean I think I have felt that too sometimes, like when things go so badly, I feel like I am against a wall and can’t move forward and just wish I could just be gone.”*

*“Oh I didn’t know that you have felt that way,”* I say. I don’t know if it is my thesis stress, or because of my new desire to be more vulnerable with people I love, or because we have just spoken about a rather taboo and existential feeling that we both have felt, but I feel closer to Marya perhaps than ever before.

*“To me,”* continues Marya, *“it is this feeling of complete disempowerment,”* she says. *“Like when I went back to my thesis when the strike ended, what was particularly difficult was that I went from feeling so empowered during the strike, to feeling disempowered.”* I remember

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<sup>448</sup> Indeed, Vaccaro and Mena (2011) note that “Reaching the point of seriously considering or attempting suicide is a catastrophic event in a person’s life with many potential contributing factors.” In the case of their study of queer college activists of color, they note that “One potential contribution to such a severe crisis is that the leadership role predisposed these individuals to avoid help seeking. In other words, their commitment to helping others could have made it harder for these activist-leaders to get help for themselves, thus leaving them at greater risk of emotional distress” (p. 358).

<sup>449</sup> Marya mentions to me upon reviewing this section that she hadn’t expressed herself freely during this phone conversation, because her partner is nearby and she doesn’t want to startle him or violate my privacy.

that she had brought this up during the Café Artère reunion meeting, when she had said: “I wonder if now my thesis process is more difficult because of authority, as we so much defied it - and now that I am back to my thesis these two people [supervisors] are going to decide my future.” She adds: “*At least when you are passing out flyers you feel you are trying to do something.*” So “*I think it is the contrast between such empowerment to disempowerment after the strike that made it so difficult.*”

“*I feel better just having talked about it with you hon, because we never talked about this topic before,*” I tell her.

“*Yeah I guess I had been meaning to talk to you about the Politics and Care<sup>450</sup> group throughout the strike, and about self-care, but we weren't always able to talk as we were both busy,*” she says.

“*Thanks for talking with me about it hon, I really appreciate it, but you should get back to making dinner,*” I tell her.

This conversation, at least for me, points to the dialectical possibilities of vulnerable striking emotions and of emotional reflexivity through time and relationships. For in the process of interviewing Marya, having her read some of my chapters and then debriefing about it, I had become more vulnerable to her, inadvertently reproducing emotional reflexivity, and, I argue, transforming my difficult stories and experiences into new emotional experiences that could subsume both the negative and the positive. In future activist moments, when feeling despair I will be able to look back at that moment as one in which my difficult feelings during the strike were transformed into feelings of greater closeness with a friend, and I might be more likely to express them, but also to consider such feelings altogether in a new, transformed way.

The particular difficulty of losing both an activist moment and the friendships that accompanied it, and the importance of interpersonal relationships in preventing their complete disenchantment with activism, shines through Jean-Marc Potté's (1987) interviews with activists who were involved during the 70s in Quebec. In fact, the name of Potté's book, *La communauté perdue*, tends forth one of his main arguments: if the sixties in Quebec brought a liberation from

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<sup>450</sup> *Politics and Care* is a "space to weave links between collective wellbeing, care and politics" that was formed in Montreal during the 2012 student strike, "a collective of artists-community organizers (intersectional feminisms and disciplinés!) dedicated to integrate care in our politics" that holds "collective discussions and facilitate workshops for community organisations and more." See: <https://politicsandcare.wordpress.com/>

a previous "monde plein d'interdits et de contrainte," this sociocultural change also meant the loss of "l'esprit communautaire," or the "chaleureuse et sécurisante communauté" (p. 73-74) of French Canadian villages and institutions, a loss that led some to seek it out in their activism. If such an analysis does not come explicitly out of the mouths of Piote's interviewees, the stories they tell about their disenchantment with activism do suggest that the existential despair, emptiness, and depression were much more serious when they simultaneously lost their friend community or romantic relationship,<sup>451</sup> thus highlighting the importance of interpersonal health in mediating the vulnerability of activism, its emotional legacies, and the likelihood of future involvement. Indeed, Piote notes that who persisted in activism either define "leur engagement par un sentiment d'appartenance," or complement it with "les plaisirs de la vie" within their meetings, or with greater sensitivity to self and others (p. 122-23).

Yet quite differently from the participants of this dissertation, Piote notes that the majority of his interviewees ended up "repliés sur eux-mêmes" upon exiting activism, leaning closer to narcissism than to the devotion to others that spurred their activism. With the exception of a "sens à la vie" gained (and mostly related to its loss) through activism, Piote laments that most of his interviewees recounted only negative experiences and negative emotions, their stories void of nostalgia and any recollection of hope. As a response, Piote recommends a telling of the full story of the past with its positives and negatives as an important step towards mourning and persevering in activism:

"la plupart des militants ne semble pas avoir dépassé la "peine d'amour" vécue dans la rupture avec le militantisme: amers, ils n'y voient qu'erreurs, échecs. Nous devons faire le deuil de cette période [...] Pour véritablement désinvestir de ce passé, nous devons non seulement nous rappeler nos déceptions, mais aussi les succès remportés à travers la poursuite de nos rêves." (p. 126)

Otherwise, notes Piote, we are transmitting "à la nouvelle génération que leurs désillusions" (p. 120). Piote notes that "si nous renouons avec l'ensemble de notre passé, nous pourrions résister dans le présent et accueillir avec sympathie les mouvements sociaux de la prochaine décennie"

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<sup>451</sup> This was especially the case for those who were most involved in activism.

(p. 134), to recreate the ""nous" qui nous permettait de dépasser notre dérisoire solitude" (p. 133) giving life back a sense of existential meaning, while being open-minded and keeping an eye out for self and others. In other words, he recommends that we might strive to be like those of his interviewees who persisted in activism by bridging the movements of the past "qui ont nourri nos rêves" and the movements of the future that might have "un contenu et des orientations différentes mais une semblable révolte contre l'autorité établie et un similaire espoir qui donne sens à la vie" (p. 123).

Some participants of this dissertation must have done something of the sort, as they continue to be involved in various other activist pursuits despite their serious disenchantments with the strike. In contrast to Piotte's interviewees, for participants of this dissertation the expression of positive emotional experiences of the strike, including an explicit focus on how it gave their lives meaning and the 'high,' collective-oriented emotions they lived, was vibrant in their stories, as was their subsequent fall from grace. All of these moments, I propose, live on within participants, yet are also inevitably transformed in dialectical fashion into something new through their telling, as Piotte (1987) implicitly suggests: a step towards mourning and reconnecting to be able to move on to new forms of engagement. "We want to own, integrate, and share our stories of struggle" because "we feel most alive when we're connecting with others and being brave with our stories -it's in our biology," argues Brené Brown (2015). She adds:

"the idea that we're "wired for story" is more than a catchy phrase. Neuroeconomist Paul Zak has found that hearing a story -a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end- causes our brains to release cortisol and oxytocin. These chemicals trigger the uniquely human abilities to connect, empathize, and make meaning" (p. 6).

Similarly, Portelli (1997, p. 40) writes, stories "are the tools we need not just to survive, but to overcome. They are a protection that allows us to save ourselves, but also active instruments for changing the world -because there is power in words. They are made of air but leave their mark."

Marya certainly seems to believe in the importance of words about the strike leaving their mark in history, and like other participants who had ambivalent experiences of the strike, she appears to desire more venues to tell her story -as well as a comprehensive documentation of the 2012 strike- more fully, in what I perceive as her gradual mourning of the end of the strike, both

its positive and negative aspects.<sup>452</sup> She still writes about the strike<sup>453</sup> and hopes that some day there will be a book about “how we mobilized, how, how it happened,” including the “beautiful” times at the beginning “that we don't talk about enough.” Indeed, if I consider that Marya's faith in direct democracy became a crystallized value in part because of the empowering feelings through its encounter on the seventh floor at Concordia, it follows that perhaps in order to 'rise strong' -to borrow Brené Brown's (2015) term- from the disappointing loss of those moments, Marya expresses throughout our interview an intense desire to record its history at Concordia. Cvetkovich (2003, p. 452) similarly reports her interviewee's comment that “in the wake of the loss” of the AIDS activist movement, she “began really culling or nurturing an appreciation for not just my history but just the historical artifact.” Marya clearly feels happy when occasions arise to set the record straight about the strike at public presentations, and expresses on various occasions<sup>454</sup> feeling upset or depressed by the way the strike was inaccurately represented as protest-based rather than as campus-based direct democracy -which she considers was the birthplace of the strike-, or when thinking of how the documentation of the work that FEM and others did leading up to and during the Concordia strike was not preserved.<sup>455</sup>

Marya is not alone in this desire: When she sent out an email in October 2012 proposing a Concordia debrief event, albeit not specifically related to emotions or mourning, email responses from fellow female Concordia students showed a similar interest to document what happened. A sociology student responded: “I'm particularly interested in this for sharing accounts of what happened at Concordia and also for an opportunity to discuss where we go from here.” A

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<sup>452</sup> In a different ethnographic context yet on a somewhat similar note, Lehrer and Meng (2015, p.9) interestingly refer to "the pursuit of emotional catharsis through historical truth-telling."

<sup>453</sup> See, for example, Mehreen & Thomson (2017), Hausfather & Mehreen (2014) and Bick & Mehreen (2012).

<sup>454</sup> After the strike reunion meeting at *Café Artère* in March 2014, as well as during our interview together in 2015, and during follow-up informal conversations after 2015.

<sup>455</sup> For example, the [freededucationmontreal.org](http://freededucationmontreal.org) and [concordiastudents.ca](http://concordiastudents.ca) websites contained an enormous amount of documentation, and the few individuals who had access to them did not renew them, nor did they retrieve the data, despite various requests for them to do so. Thus all of the information on these websites was lost except for what is summarily found on <http://web.archive.org>. In the case of the Free Education Montreal website ([freededucationmontreal.org](http://freededucationmontreal.org)), a while after its disappearance someone must have purchased it to maintain the much barer existing version of the original site. In addition, Marya started to piece together documents from emails and hard drives with the intention of properly archiving for posterity, for example: <http://rushdia.virtualstack.com/concordia-graduate-students-make-history-by-joining-the-student-strike-movement/>; <http://rushdia.virtualstack.com/mobilization-at-concordia-a-retrospect/>. Other places where some remnants of Concordia mobilization can be found include: <https://www.youtube.com/user/freedomconcordia>; <http://stopthehike.ca/materiel-dinformation-2/depliants/index.html>.



geography student responded: “I think coming out with a useful document at some point would be nice.... collect papers ppl wrote about the strike, notes on organizing strategy, and on navigating the fall out (charges, security, tribunal process, etc).” Alex responded: “I think having people talk about these things face to face would be really important. In fact, it would be great to document these conversations in some way - I really feel like it's important to document the ways the strike happened at Concordia!” Such comments are reminiscent of Glazer's (2005) point about Spanish Civil War commemoration on the part of the American Left: “To somehow avenge the loss in Spain by refusing to forget it -and, in that refusal, transmit hope and strength -still seems to drive and be incarnate in this commemorative process” (p. 37).

Indeed, in both the Concordia University and Quebec context, loss related to the strike lies not only the loss of the beautiful moments that Marya and other participants remember: for some, it was also a loss in the struggle to have Concordia react towards the strike in a way that puts pressure on the government (e.g. by acknowledging the strike and extending the semester), alongside a loss in the long-term struggle against the government to freeze tuition, when the next government indexed tuition. Similarly akin to Glazer's above point about the effects of commemoration, the above email responses in combination with other comments from participants of this dissertation give a clear sense that their need for commemoration is forward-looking. As Cvetkovich's above-mentioned interviewee explains, the archives of AIDS activism are important because they “constantly give me a new approach to the present” (p. 452). In that sense, such a commemorative process might be said to have much in common with certain definitions of 'mourning.' Indeed, if the term 'mourning' was never used by participants of this dissertation, it was certainly implied by Marya when she wrote in the above-mentioned email in October 2012: “Personally, I need to do a proper “post-mortem” before laying it to rest.”

### *Alex's post-strike sadness*

Alex also spoke explicitly of post-strike sadness. But first, she speaks of confusion, implying the need to unravel the contradicting emotions:

“*Part* of the reason it's been so hard I think for me to emotionally grapple with the *aftermath* of the strike, (inhales) is because it was *so confusing*, like so emotionally, the ups and downs were so *high* and so *low* and so (inhales) *unpredictable!* That [...] it's hard to make *sense* of like how I *feel now* about the strike. Or how I *felt... then*. Like even uh

like a disruption [of event or a place] or something would happen (inhales) and I just remember, like every time I left something feeling *weird*, like feeling like not sure if I was *traumatized* or *excited*, cause I was probably a little of both... you know?"

The political outcome of the strike on a societal and university level also affected Alex: The end of the strike had plunged her into a depression that at the time of our interview one year later, she has not been able to get out of, she tells me. Despite generally being a "hopeful" and "optimistic" person, she feels "pessimistic", and "I feel a hopelessness because of the strike that is *new* to me! And like, it, sort of like, *jaded* hopelessness." While "talking about it is *helpful*," it doesn't make it go away. "It was really hard and it... I think triggered... a lot of darkness in me that I'm *still* getting over!" In part because, she explains, "the *ending* of the strike felt really frustrating. And... and *sad* to me." Her depression is due in part to how "the right-wing state is soo powerful in stopping, like, rebellion, um...they're just really good at it and that is saddening to me," and:

"*other* things in my life too, but it was largely about... like the strike just ended. And then we were like writing our final exams. And it was kind of like, what was all of that *for*?... And then, like province-wide, like it didn't technically *end* but it *sort of did*, it like *really* petered out and then went on this like summer hiatus and then *never* came back. And everything was *back* to normal *so* quickly. You couldn't even tell... Like, aside from like graffiti, and like posters that still exist, in like Villeray that are like wheat-pasted for casseroles and general assemblies and stuff, it's like largely you can't tell that the strike *existed*! Um, which is a *super* confusing feeling, when you just... like it really fucked me up, pardon my language, but like to then suddenly just like the world is normal? Again, and like *almost* nothing has changed...um... and yet everyone is acting like nothing ever happened."

The sun is setting and, in the middle of talking about her own darkness, Alex suddenly interrupts herself: "Do you think that there's enough light in this room for that camera?"

"Probably not," I answer, and we both let out a quick giggle. "But I just thought it was interesting how it..."

Alex smiles and finishes my sentence: "...how it gets *dark* as I get *dark*." I let out a loud laugh as I'm surprised she caught on so quickly, and Alex lets out a quick whispering chuckle, then quickly returns to what she was saying. These very few last minutes of the interview bring to light Alex's strange potential to be emotionally sensitive, aware of her environment alongside a great sense of wit; yet it also reflects the way that some participants tended to escape difficult memories or emotions through humour.

"Um, but yeah," Alex continues, clearly wanting to return to her story: "Soo, um *that's* how it ended for me, personally. Like (inhales), and I have struggled to *see*, like, a bright side of the strike, and, I *can now* see some things that were good about it! (inhales) And like see positive impacts! (inhales) In myself and like, as a whole! Like societally! (hesitates slightly) But um I still, like it makes me sad. The end of the strike makes me sad (inhales)." And yet it is rather clear that Alex's sadness is not nostalgic, as she makes sure to clarify in her last words of the interview:

"Not to say that the strike was this like [solely] amazing beautiful moment. Like there were so many things about it that were *awful* and that I'd never want to live through again! And... but, it, I *wish* that... it could've ended in a way that didn't feel like a cop-out or like, um, a *co-option*... of all that momentum. Yeah."

### **Diverse, collective mournings**

I propose that one way of heeding to Gould's (2009) above-mentioned suggestion that "[w]e need to think of ways to work *with* despair other than through denial and conversion into the (ostensibly) requisite hope," is to place more attention to diverse forms of mourning, including more collective forms. Indeed the email responses above reveal a desire not just to document, but to share experiences in a face to face context. Ann Cvetkovich (2003, p. 433) highlights Douglas Crimp's argument about AIDS (ACT UP) activism that "militancy cannot ease every psychic burden and that the persistence of mourning, if not also melancholy, must be reckoned with in the context of activism." On that note, Cvetkovich considers that her own interviews (2003b, p. 210) indicate "that one of the aftermaths of activism for many people was

the need to find a space for mourning that had not been available in the midst of activism.”<sup>456</sup> Arguably these student strikes did not entail the same level of trauma and death as did the many deaths from AIDS experienced by ACT UP activists: as illustrated in the first part of this chapter, various students experienced the strike without any trauma whatsoever. Yet alongside Crimp, Cvetkovich (2003) challenges “the tendency to think that only certain forms or magnitudes of loss count as real” (p. 433); she thus suggests that attention is due to “a range of everyday emotions that might otherwise fly under the radar screen of trauma studies” (p. 435). Her reference, for example, to “the traumatic effects of a sexism that does its work precisely by being constructed as normal” parallels the experience of queer female strike participants who described in Chapter 5 the continual homophobic and sexist targeting they faced on picket lines.

Pointing to the ways that activism can entail various kinds of losses, one of Cvetkovich's (2003) interviewees notes that after the disintegration of ACT UP: “I was really depressed. Because I lost - a lot. I'm not saying I lost more than anyone else lost, but I personally lost a lot. I lost a home.... It was my intimacy. That's where I had all of my friends.... It was my identity” (p. 447). Participants of this dissertation reveal parallel albeit different longings for the strike movement and what it meant to them, making the concept of mourning relevant here, too, beyond the hearth of interpersonal relationships themselves. For, like ACT UP,<sup>457</sup> if interpersonal relationships throughout and within the strike bolstered some participants, for some (like Julie and Marya) they also had the potential to be “a volatile source of power, although no more volatile than the desires and investments that underpin any relationship” (Ibid, p. 441) -though certainly more intensified because of the sense of intensity and urgency that the strike engenders. And for those who were lucky to maintain interpersonal relationships throughout and beyond the strike, even supportive interpersonal relationships and organizing groups could not completely cushion the fall, hinting at the need for collective structures and cultures to pick up the slack.

There exists the potential to work on mourning through such collective structures and cultures, since the Quebec student movement (like ACT UP) benefits from continued existence much beyond these strikes of the organization (ASSÉ) that spearheaded student strikes in Quebec

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<sup>456</sup> Interestingly, she notes on the same page that “One the value of oral history projects is that they can provide a public space for the emotional work of mourning at a time when the collectivity of activism may have faded and people are more isolated.”

<sup>457</sup> For lesbians in ACT UP, notes an interviewee in Cvetkovich (2003, p. 441), “'dyke dinners' and intense friendships "could sustain you through the burnout of organizing.””

since 2005. The existence of organizations persisting through time could be particularly important considering that “[a]ctivism has its own losses that need to be mourned” which can “give rise to the melancholy of incomplete mourning” retroactively because “the passage of time can bring backlashes or persistent problems that make one's activism seem in hindsight less effective” (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 451). And yet the continuing of such organizations can also further complicate the question of appropriate mourning when there are partial remains: “What kind of memorial would be appropriate for a movement that, while not exactly dead, since ACT UP/NY and other chapters continue to meet, is dramatically changed?” (Ibid, p. 427). Gingrich-Philbrook (2012, p. 87) begs a related dilemma: even a crucial, non-nostalgic commemoration (of ACT UP) can obscure the still surviving 'structure of feeling' related to it (and that may have existed before it) as well as effacing the “breadth and depth of panic and struggle” and the “sometimes ambivalent emotional labor” related to these. Yet I consider that in the case of the strike, such a structure of feeling is not always evident or permanent for those who lived through it, thus needs reminding; and that such emotional labor needs its respite, precisely why I suggest collective forms of mourning need to be paid more attention to, beyond mere commemoration.

Relevant to these questions -the relation of mourning to time and to the constantly changing present moment- as if answering the latter conundrums, in a similar spirit to Brené Brown's (2015; 2012) focus on vulnerability yet with a more collective and neo-Marxist emphasis, Eng and Kazanjian (2003) consider loss and the politics of mourning as “active rather than reactive, prescient rather than nostalgic, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary” (p. 2). In this way, similar to Brown, loss is an inevitable part of life<sup>458</sup> that is not “purely negative” (p. ix), but rather depends on how it is interpreted. “According to [Walter] Benjamin,” Eng and Kazanjian note, “to mourn the remains of the past *hopefully* is to establish an active and open relationship with history” [my emphasis] (p. 1). If such a conception echoes Piotte's (1987) plea for the necessity of activists to engage with a full story of their past in order to mourn the past and reactive their present, Eng and Kazanjian are proposing more than individual storytelling, or a static rendition of the past. Indeed participants of this dissertation conveyed a similar sense: in addition to an individual need to

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<sup>458</sup> As Brené Brown (2012, 2015) argues, being vulnerable is what makes life worth living); and as Miriam Greenspan (2004) suggests, the dark emotions are perhaps sometimes necessary and normal indicators of a life well-lived and of sorrows and disappointments that make all but too much ‘sense’ considering the world in which we live.

share their full strike history with me, or to document the full story to the public, appears the desire for mourning to be a collective, albeit diversified, process. Not just collective, but collectively lived. Alex's experience is important to recall at this point, as she developed a strong support group of friends (the Glitter Dogs) to whom she remained close much beyond the strike; and yet like other students in Chapter 5 who benefited from the expressive emotional style of geography student picketers, she nonetheless craved spaces to collectively address post-strike feelings. Marya conveyed a similar need: Reminiscent of Gluck's (2013) caution about individual interviews when studying collective movements, during one informal conversation with me she conveyed that a "*collective situation*" might have made our discussions around the strike easier, as our one-on-one conversations "*opened all the wounds but did not really dress them.*" While she benefited from the emotional support of the *Politics and Care* network described above, she also expressed the need for clearer methods of conflict resolution<sup>459</sup> at the Concordia level, so that such frustration and longing do not end up being dealt with -to use Alex's words- "largely alone." While King (2005) suggests that emotional reflexivity might be best with a different group from the main group with whom one organizes, Concordia students who responded to Marya's above-mentioned email in 2012 expressed the desire not just to record, but to share experiences in a face to face context, specifically with other Concordia students.

The desire to share one's past experiences with, or to hear from others who had similar experiences, implies the desire for collective acknowledgment but also for the possibility for divergences -since it is impossible that every person will have exactly the same experience- and thus for new individual and collective reinterpretations, thus allowing for "the ways in which loss and its remains are insistently creative and deeply political" (Eng and Kazanjian, 2003, p. 23). Indeed, such collective possibilities for mourning appeared to be the intention of Marya and Kiley, whose shared tears about the strike one day spurred them to organize the *Café Artère* strike reunion for March 22, 2014 that I described more fully in Chapter 5. Yet interestingly, such intention was expressed alongside concern of falling prey to nostalgia: at the end of the invitation email for that event, Kiley informed us of a demonstration on March 21 against colonialism and

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<sup>459</sup> Indeed, conflict resolution processes for interpersonal conflict between executive, staff, and members is one of the recommendations from Dagenais' (2010) study about feminism in ASSÉ.

racism,<sup>460</sup> about which she wrote “it is maybe more exciting and a better use of our time than waxing nostalgic about the strike?”<sup>461</sup> The ambivalence gently woven into Kiley’s latter question echoes my worry about focusing on emotions at the CLASSE founding congress in December 2011: can dwelling on emotions of the past inhibit us from acting in the future? Do they need to be dichotomies? Similar to Piotte, later during the meeting, Kiley suggests they can be dialectically interwoven.

“There is a consensus among many scholars that nostalgia, as a force in culture and society, is reactionary in nature,” writes Glazer (2005, p. 7). “Its sentimental and uncritical gaze into the past can tend to freeze the present and empower the status quo.” Yet Kiley's questioning of nostalgia in her email points to how nostalgia can be dangerous not as much because of its ability to keep us in the past, but because the attempt to avoid it risks inhibiting mourning the past in order to move on in the present -what Glazer would term 'radical nostalgia.'<sup>462</sup> As Cvetkovich (2003) notes of the AIDS movement, “[r]eturning to ACT UP's history in order to find what remains need not be a nostalgic holding on to the past but can instead be a productive resource for the present and future” (p. 435); and Janovicek's (2013) work suggests that nostalgia is in fact avoided by a discussion of how the past relates to the present.<sup>463</sup> Indeed the participants of this dissertation, similar to Cvetkovich's interviewees, did not reveal an un-nuanced or nostalgic view of these strikes: they were able to recall -and sometimes relive- a contradictory constellation of traumatic or difficult experiences alongside the more idyllic ones, making their ability to recall the positive ones rather impressive. They were able to remember, and to criticize

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<sup>460</sup> The demonstration was in the context of the Quebec secular charter controversy (<http://www.cbc.ca/montreal/features/quebec-secular-values-charter/>)

<sup>461</sup> I do not mean to single out Kiley: rather I think she expressed very explicitly the more implicit yet common societal eschewal of sentimentalism (Jamison, 2014) and nostalgia. Julie similarly rings the caution bell of nostalgia around 2005: “c’est sûr que des fois on est trop nostalgique, là!” Kiley's questioning of nostalgia also reminds us of the masculine emotional habitus of the student movement -and arguably of many spheres of society- that imbue us with a relentless habit of thinking that such emotional pastimes are not worth our full attention.

<sup>462</sup> More specifically -and quite similarly to Eng and Kazanjian's above-mentioned vision of mourning- in Glazer's words, commemorating the memory of the Spanish Civil War allows it to be "never forgotten, to give people the strength to keep living and create a better world. This is the theoretical and emotional foundation for a radical nostalgia" (p. 32).

<sup>463</sup> Janovicek writes that “The cultural memory of the 1960s is a preoccupation in recent scholarship. Revisionist histories that challenge the progressive narrative of the decade argue that a romantic and uncomplicated collective memory of it makes interviews with political activists from this period unreliable” (p. 185). And yet, similar to my participants, Janovicek finds that her interviews with back-to-the-landers showed them to be reflective about possibilities and limitations of their political and social experiments in the 1960s and 1970s, precisely because she was attentive to their current place in life at the time of the interview and their lives succeeding those times.

elements of the strike while praising others. Yet some more explicitly expressed their need to sort through these dialectical experiences with others, which I suggest has allowed them to engage with the mourning process, to be able to keep alive or recall the 'structure of feeling' from the past and continue to be engaged in activism. In such a way they are able, I suggest, to examine "the feelings and sentiments -including those of sorrow, rage, and anxiety about broken promises and lost compasses" and thus avoid their relation to "potentially conservative and even self-destructive undersides of putatively progressive political aims" (Brown, 2003, p. 464) to which other participants of this dissertation (e.g. Julian, Pierre, Audrey) hinted.

The desire on the part of Kiley, Marya, and others to talk with others about the strike reflects the need for King's (2005) concept of emotional reflexivity to explicitly encompass the specificities of the mourning process. Indeed, at the Café Artère meeting, I felt temporarily fulfilled by being around Concordia strike organizers, yet I felt that I needed a clearer process and regular meetings to feel safe enough to talk more about my feelings in depth -or to engage with a mourning process. Considering that Kiley had cried with Marya about the strike when they had previously met alone and planned the meeting, yet did not show sign of any sadness at this group meeting, suggests that more regular meetings would be needed for others, too. Rather than dwell on a conservative version of nostalgia or contribute to what has been critiqued as "trauma culture" (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 453), this could provide insight as to how to go forward as activists in a post-strike context, and if nothing more, recreate feelings of belonging, hope, and community (the collection of which I have called the collective-oriented feelings or 'structure of feeling') that partly evaporated with the strike. As Butler (2003, p. 468) notes:

“perhaps this is a place where belonging now takes place in and through a common sense of loss (which does not mean that all these losses are the same). Loss becomes condition and necessity for a certain sense of community, where community does not overcome the loss, where community *cannot* overcome the loss without losing the very sense of itself as community [...] then pathos is not negated, but it turns out to be oddly fecund, paradoxically productive.”

Butler's above parenthesis clarifying that this “does not mean that all these losses are the same” is worth mentioning here, for its relevance to the diversity of experiences of loss, and thus the



diversified ways and needs related to mourning. For one, some participants (Philippe and Julie, for example, in our last email communications in 2015) had no desire to re-engage with the emotionally difficult terrain of 2012 –at least with me, over email. Furthermore, in Chapter 5, I already suggested that belonging and emotional reflexivity among geography students depended on different experiences of marginalization before, during, and after the strike. Indeed, those who lived more difficult experiences ranged from mentioning trauma (e.g. Alex) to expressing sadness (e.g. Tania) to simply not feeling well (e.g. Shaun). The desire for emotional reflexivity after the strike -what I am here calling collective mournings- was simultaneously diverse; some like Shaun felt they needed to vent outside of the space of the geography group, despite benefiting from its expressive emotional style; Keara and Alex's experiences implied the need to share with people living with similar “multiple minority identity explorations” (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011, p. 339), or even simply similar post-strike emotional experiences. As Keara in her April 2013 diary:

“A couple weeks ago I met a friend to plan a workshop. She is a student at UQAM. I asked if she went to the March 15<sup>th</sup> demo against police brutality, she replied she needs to be cautious about going to manifs because she finds herself being triggered. She tells me she sees friends around her struggling with mental health, that psychology students were running post-strike support groups during the fall. It is the first time I hear of lasting trauma at a systemic level, that I have the various degrees of dissolving I have experienced and seen close friends struggle with, acknowledged.”

Keara's quote reflects the desire for collective acknowledgment of post-strike experiences, implying in turn the need for sharing common experiences with others who have lived the strike beyond Concordia students.

While Brown (2015) presents her theory grounded in data to map the patterns of rising from pain without offering a one-size-fits-all formula, she does argue that it demands “the foundational beliefs of connection and requires wrestling with perspective, meaning, and purpose” (p. 11). Brown suggests that some will do so through solitude, others through occasional companionship, yet engaging and staying curious about the emotions, thoughts, and behaviours of themselves and others and how these are all inter-connected. It is clear that all the participants of this thesis did precisely that -they critically reflected about the roots and benefits

and expressions of their emotions and how they connected to a larger whole, not shy to criticize themselves as well as the movement they fought within. What is not clear, and missing from Brown's model is how to build collective structures to increase the collective potential for student activists to rise from despair beyond sporadic or individual interpersonal relationships, and that is simultaneously aware of how power dynamics can make rising from the (existential, physical, material, emotional) vulnerability (from a strike) more difficult for some than for others, as Srivastiva (2006) elucidates and as Alex argues in an email she sends to a group of us in October 2012:

“One thing that really worries me is a sort of macho vision of activism and this idea that we should internalize all of our emotional trauma, “get over it”, and keep doing the work. After living through 4 of the most intense/violent/traumatic months of my life this seems really ridiculous, and looking back at the gendered dynamic of the strike (who was doing the work, how it was being done) it seems almost insulting to think that anyone should be expected to internalize these things.”<sup>464</sup>

In the same email, Alex writes that it would be important to not just talk about self-care but “hit on how we can perform collective self care, how we can make changes to the ways in which we organize so trauma/stress/responsibility/etc are not compounded on individuals in the same ways again.” Indeed, such collective structures for emotional reflexivity might need to constantly balance the difficult ground of allowing for vulnerability while also making room for questioning why some are systemically more vulnerable than others, with a critical view of how guilt should or can fit (Ahmed, 2004a) into an activist emotional habitus that is safe while being empathic and compassionate (Brown, 2015, p. 9), yet without condoning empathy towards injustice. This might mean assessing how power is imbued in our interpersonal relationships, as tricky as this process may be to disentangle when we are very intimate with others.

In Chapter 5, I hinted at the necessity for diversified groups to provide emotional reflexivity, to account for diverse experiences within the movement and diverse forms of

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<sup>464</sup> This echoes the comment of another strike participant in April 2012, who told me, at a GSA party, about her annoyance with the concept of self-care instead of community care, and how there is a general feeling that if you're feeling down you have to deal with it by yourself.

mourning. At the ASSÉ level, such collective structures or spaces might continue the work already begun whether implicitly<sup>465</sup> -by the ASSÉ *Women's Committee* since its inception- or explicitly –by groups like *Politics and Care* since 2012- to encompass mourning and emotional reflexivity, as well as to question what kind of emotional habitus the provincial student movement can work towards and what kinds of emotional styles might need to be fostered to encourage activists that loss and vulnerability do not have to be dead-ends, but can point to new avenues and open 'political horizons' (Gould, 2003, p. 3). Returning to the conundrum that closed the Introduction chapter of this dissertation, in keeping an eye open to the inevitability and benefits of mourning we might increase the likelihood of avoiding:

"a Left that has become more attached to its impossibility than to its potential fruitfulness, a Left that is most at home dwelling not in hopefulness but in its own marginality and failure, a Left that is thus caught in a structure of melancholic attachment to a certain strain of its own dead past, whose spirit is ghostly, whose structure of desire is backward looking and punishing" (Brown, 2003, p. 464).

Rather, we might find that it is not the ghosts that are problematic, but the fact that we have ignored them.

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<sup>465</sup> I write 'implicitly' because feminist structures don't necessarily mean attention to emotions. For example, as someone wisely mentioned during my informal research presentation for the group *Pink Bloc*, even in "les espaces non-mixtes" there is not necessarily a lot of talk about the distribution of les "tâches d'écoute émotionnelle."

## Conclusion Of strength and vulnerability

*When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability. To be alive is to be vulnerable.*

- Madeleine L'Engle (cited in Brown, 2012, p. 43)

*What is the meaning of life? That was all—a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one.*

- Virginia Woolf (1927), *To the Lighthouse*

I have sought to illustrate how these student strikes were, to borrow Virginia Woolf's words, like 'matches struck unexpectedly in the dark' for these participants. It is not that they did not see the strike coming, as some had been alighting and anticipating it for months and years before it exploded; yet the collective-oriented highs of its existential 'illuminations' -or at least the vulnerability they entailed- were unexpected, even though participants had taken the first step to open themselves to its ignition, and even though some may have already felt traces of such emotional experiences before. I contend that these strikes allowed such collective-oriented existential emotions to come out of their protective, individualistic shell -like ghosts of an obscured potential within, of a collective past, emerging from hiding amidst the backdrop of a neoliberal ethos.<sup>466</sup>

More specifically, I have argued in the preceding pages that despite the Quebec student movement's "masculine" emotional habitus, student strike campaigns from 2005 to 2012 sparked a collective-oriented 'high' that tended to instill existential and spiritual meaning in these participants' lives. Quite differently from what Jean-Marc Piotte (1987) and Jean-Philippe Warren (2007) perceived when looking at the 1960s and 1970s, I do not consider the desire for

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<sup>466</sup> Spiegel (2015) underlines Žižek's reference to the current ethos as a "nightmare" due to "the limiting of possibility that has emerged alongside the spread of the individualism and materialism of the American Dream that have colluded to make austerity measures *appear* inevitable" (p. 779).

community and "sens à la vie" to be the product of the Catholic church's influence in this province and a search for its replacement; rather, I see these participants' desire for collectivity and existential meaning as basic elements of our humanity (Frankl, 1984; Yalom, 2008) that are tightly linked to our emotions (Brown, 2015, 2012; Dupuis-Déri, 2016; Greenspan, 2003; Solomon, 2007). Unlike the sense given by Piote and Warren, it is not so much that participants went seeking a sense of meaning, but rather it often landed on their plate, taking them by surprise. My elucidation of the secular existential 'high' of collective-oriented emotions thus more explicitly highlights the spiritual and existential dimension missing from theorization about emotional experiences of secular social movements (e.g. Collins, 2001, 2005; Chabot, 2008; Summers-Effler, 2002, 2005; Dupuis-Déri, 2016).

And yet these were not spontaneous 'highs' engendered by urbanity or removed from strategic rationality, as Bhéreur-Lagounaris and colleagues (2015) and Giguère and Lalonde (2010) suggest. Indeed, I have sought to illustrate that collective-oriented emotions experienced by participants were 'high' not just because they were experienced as spiritual, existential, euphoric or exciting, yet also because they were tied into a historic moment of democratic possibility and rational arguments about the potential and needs of the collective. Indeed, the particular deliberative qualities of many assemblies and meetings of these strikes suggests, in line with Dupuis-Déri (2016), elucidates the particular role that agoraphilie and direct democracy can play in fostering strong -and 'high'- emotions directed towards the collective, especially near the beginning of participants' experiences. And yet collective-oriented emotions sometimes extended beyond the assembled people, emphasizing the particularity of a general unlimited strike -for instance, its ability to bridge local direct democracy within a more generalized movement- in comparison to other assemblies of people for protest or deliberation, or other collective gatherings that do not have a deliberative, collective-oriented spirit. Indeed, I have hinted at how the empowering qualities of direct democracy were amplified during these striking moments because of the historic breadth of the movement across the province: they gave general assemblies a more empowering feel, as their decisions were echoed by youth of all ages and broadcasted on news and through the propagation of red squares. Higher numbers at these assemblies, and the repetition of various types of gatherings to the point nearing ritual (Collins, 2001, 2005; Summers-Effler, 2010), combined with the particularly empowering and deliberative quality of direct democracy allowed these 'high,' collective-oriented emotions to flourish in the

long discussions, standing ovations, and endless marches under naked sunlight, or until the wee hours of darkness.

Indeed, darkness was inevitable, I have contended. Such are the dialectics of vulnerability inherent in any meaningful trajectory (Brown, 2012, 2015), and these participants jumped into it wholeheartedly, despite the uncertainty, fear, and stress they sensed at the corner of their mind's eye before diving in.<sup>467</sup> In such a perspective, then, it is not so paradoxical that just as the general unlimited strike "appears as the culminating point of life, its pure and glorious expenditure,"<sup>468</sup> its glory just as quickly revealed its sharp, searing teeth, only to vanish when these campaigns and energies failed, succeeded, or simply faded into the oblivion of memory. If the 'high' was life-changing, euphoric, and connecting to others, its disappearance and disappointments were just as intensely lonely, depressing, and empty in comparison. Thus quite to the contrary of Collins' (2001) focus on the transformation of 'negative' to 'positive' emotions, I have illustrated how positive emotions contributed to 'negative' ones.

Plunging themselves into the vulnerable world of political action, participants were soon met with a dialectical mix of more difficult emotions due to increasing discomfort and despair. In some cases -for example, at the beginning of Julie's experience- the discomforts were tolerable, and even constituted a source of lifelong learning. Yet in other cases the discomforts of increasing ambivalence and despair in the face of confusing combinations of emotions, compounded by confusing power and relational dynamics, were less bearable -as, for example, ended up being the case for Julie after the strike ended. While the nature of internal power and relational dynamics -for example, criticisms of centralized student unions, power dynamics criticized within general assemblies- might be said to reveal the limitations of representative democracy as compared to deliberative democracy, or the limitations of the latter as compared to consensus-based democracy (Dupuis-Déri, 2016), in other cases they were simply dynamics encountered in everyday life and woven into our upbringings (sexism, racism, classism, unequal division of labour between men and women, interpersonal conflicts and disappointments, intimidations from cliques, police violence, hierarchies in institutions) -thus attesting in many cases to their inevitability in any strike, or struggle, that we will encounter against the "pouvoir

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<sup>467</sup> Jeff describes it as the "Here we go!" feeling.

<sup>468</sup> To borrow Épopée's words, as cited in the introduction to Chapter 2

sur" of the established order, and within the diverse forms of "pouvoir avec" of direct democracy (Dupuis-Déri, 2016).<sup>469</sup> There is always room, of course, for working to prevent such disappointments through institutional structures and practices such as those suggested by the ASSÉ Women's Committee, and learning from best practices from scholarship and activist experience -such as training strategies and regular practice to prepare for picket lines, such as those employed to prepare for conflicts with police and fellow citizens during the sit-in campaign to desegregate lunch counters in the sixties in the American South (Martin & Coy, 2017).<sup>470</sup> Nonetheless, I contend that the sense of urgency and intensity that accompanied these general unlimited student strikes, and the vulnerability inherent in the most positive emotions, make the downfall to some degree inevitable.

What is less inevitable, I argue, is how such emotional downfalls and emotions in general, have been addressed; for this can enable or disable the potential of the dark emotions to "become

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<sup>469</sup> Indeed, questions or frustrations about direct democracy have certainly emerged in other circumstances, alongside their enjoyments and benefits. For example, Gordon (2007, p. 69) points to the 'hidden hierarchies' of anti-hierarchical consensus-based practices; Wilkinson (2009) points to how "some of the feeling rules produced in autonomous space may contribute to these hidden hierarchies" (p. 38); and Dupuis-Déri (2016) points to Ancelovici's interview with a Occupy Montreal activist overwhelmed by the task of preparing and facilitating an assembly amidst constant criticisms about the process. Nor are more 'institutionalized' or deliberative forms of direct democracy immune from disappointments and difficult feelings in other contexts: the particular experiences of those participants who held particular responsibilities during the strike either as elected representatives (e.g. me) or paid employees (e.g. Simon, Tania), as well as the disappointment about the actions of elected representatives has also been experienced in other social movement organizations. For example, Piote's (1987) interviews with Quebec activists in the sixties and seventies suggest that when they took on paid or elected positions, they sometimes felt removed from and resented by the people they were supposedly working for and with. The limited qualitative research about emotional experiences of a firefighter during labour strikes similarly reveals initial pride about his job, and a sense of community spirit and solidarity transformed into feelings of betrayal from fellow workers and especially union leadership, as well as from employers, media, and the general public, leading him to feel angry, bitter, stressed, and powerless (Brunsdon & Hill, 2009, p. 106). While there can be unfair and oftentimes overwhelming expectations for staff or executives to work beyond the hours that they are paid or mandated to do, those in elected positions and paid positions also need to be held accountable, as their actions have tremendous impacts on the hopes and investments of those they represent; the question of maintaining a balance between executives' and staff's well-being/rights versus their responsibilities is complex, perhaps lying in alternative forms of democracy and representation with greater rotation of tasks and executives, or in the case of the student movement particularly, an analysis of the strange employer-employee labour relations when employers are an entire student body (and its elected representatives). The particularities of such complexities are beyond the scope of this dissertation, yet hopefully can be explored in future research.

<sup>470</sup> Arguably, geography students carried out their picket lines impressively patiently considering that, to my knowledge, they had no such training; the only time I witnessed any type of practice for picket lines was during the summer training camp we co-organized for Ontario students in Toronto, which I recall as being somewhat fun-spirited despite the shock among some students that it could end up in physical confrontations, and which took place after the Concordia strike had technically ended. Yet the question remains from Chapter 5 as to whether more specific and preventive strategies to deal with the complex management of anger and grief upon dealing with such physical confrontations from fellow students and even professors on a daily basis, could help to make such situations less traumatic for participants when they end up happening.

dark in an altogether different sense," to borrow Greenspan's (2003) words introducing the previous chapter, notably "like a rich, fertile soil from which unexpected flowers can bloom" (p. 1). Throughout the strike campaigns and when they came to their end, the student movement's habitual mode of emotionality -its 'masculine' emotional habitus- was not attentive enough to the needs of those who had fed it for months, and sometimes for years, nor to the particular experiences that the urgency and intensity of these strikes engendered. With an insufficient diversity of spaces beyond the pub or bar and beyond already existent relationships, to vent, lament, or process, these 'low' emotions of the strike were sometimes victorious. Lost opportunities for mourning also meant lost opportunities to move on to future emotional and activist possibilities (Piotte, 1987; Eng & Kazanjian, 2003), I have sought to argue. Indeed, there remained a clear desire on the part of these participants for interpersonal connections and support and collective meetings to share feelings, *throughout* the strike<sup>471</sup> but also at its *end* -what I suggest were traces of the need for collective mourning of lost friends, lost moments, lost gains, lost belonging, lost pride, lost meaning, lost empowerment, lost hopes.

Those who were most invested in the strike, through time and through their actions, bore the brunt of the emotional experience of such ample losses more than others: they endured chronic stress and fatigue, physical sickness, ambivalence, despair, burnout, depression, and suicidal ideation, just as other social movement actors have (Brown & Pickerill, 2009; King, 2005; Klatch, 2004; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). In some cases, particularly when they did not have long-term interpersonal support from like-minded others -others who might provide them with

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<sup>471</sup> During the discussions following my presentation at the CLASSE founding congress, suggestions from male students included creating a 'psychological committee,' a 'comité d'écoute' for the CLASSE congress that could also help guide people who were lost, a mixte or non-mixte 'groupe d'entraide' called 'Militants Anonyme,' and a hotline called 'Émotions Anonymes.' Women suggested doing 'check-ins' and 'check-outs' about feelings at meetings, and the need to slow down the discussion if people are tired. "*Il faut axer sur l'humanité, que les critiques se fassent dans le respect, il faut qu'on continue de voir les personnes derrière la position politique,*" one woman stated. Others said: "*Il faut mettre des limites*" and "*reconnaître les émotions en général*" and "*créer des espaces sécuritaires*" where there is less pressure regarding political debate. On a similar note, Tania suggests: "being supportive of one another and having like a more *nurturing* environment" by creating a space within existing meetings where "everybody can *participate* and be *honest* about their limitations and expectations" and can respect others' limits regarding "what people are willing to do." Not to mention, being "conscious and appreciative of the effort that everybody's putting in," she says. Since the "Go go go" atmosphere of the strike doesn't ensure this will happen, Tania also suggests "having some kind of like conflict resolution mechanism established." Marya suggests: "when we are doing things we should be.. *mindful* of.. *who's* involved, *who* wants to be involved.. are we making *space* for everyone or *not*. I think that's kind of what it comes down to, you know we all want to *belong*. We all want to be *connected*, you know? And if we're all fighting for the same thing then, why not take care of each other in the process?"



emotional reflexivity, and the possibility of collective mourning- they ceased to be involved in activist projects. This is in line with Brown and Pickerill's (2009) contention that "the ability to sustain such heightened emotions in the pursuit of social movement activism is limited without creating space to reflect upon one's emotional needs" (p. 26), and that "creating a 'safe' space for activists to explore these difficult emotions might be just as important for emotional sustainability as fostering the more positive emotional responses" (p. 27). These authors add that burn-out "can result from a failure to engage in emotional reflexivity (early enough)," and recommend that "following a period of burn-out, social movement actors need to engage in reflection about their emotional needs and priorities before negotiating the terms of any potential re-engagement in activism" (p. 28). The importance of emotional support through interpersonal relationships or regular community gatherings with fellow activists is a common factor -among others- in the limited yet interdisciplinary literature about persistence in social movements (e.g. Mannarini & Fedi, 2012; Nepstad, 2004).<sup>472</sup> Indeed, some of the most involved participants of these strikes persevered, particularly thanks to interpersonal support throughout -which arguably allowed for some degree of emotional reflexivity- whether fellow anarchist friends in the case of Alex, Élise, Jeff, and Tania; supportive parents or partners in the case of Tania, myself, and various DOHP interviewees; groups like *Politics and Care* in the case of Marya; the particular emotional style of the *Centre des Femmes de l'UQAM* for Marie as well as that of fellow geography strike picketers for Shaun, Tony, Kiley, and other geography students.

Speaking of geography, these participants' particular experience of daily picketing points to the intense and unpleasant more than "full-time" work the strike entailed, a topic that the limited research about strikes is mysteriously silent on (e.g. Wickens, 2007, Barling & Milligan, 1987; Brunsten & Hill, 2009). It also highlights how, just as much if not more so than the streets and urban milieu (Bhéreur-Lagounaris et al., 2015), the place where the strike originated - academic institutions and departments, and the spaces within their walls and corridors- affected

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<sup>472</sup> Passy and Giugni's (2000) contention similarly implies the importance of interpersonal relationships within the activist milieu, for their interviews with Swiss solidarity activists suggest that sustained participation results above all when activists "keep a symbolic linkage between their activism and their personal life-spheres," suggesting "the importance of a sense of coherence and of a holistic view of one's personal life for keeping commitment." Arguably, if one's close relationships are not involved in the movement, this is more difficult. Along the same lines, within the Plowshares movement Nepstad (2004) points to emotional bonding through regular retreats, ongoing contact, and "time to openly discuss emotions" (p. 57), but also material assistance and support for activists' family members when arrested, to make such activism possible in their lives.

their emotional experiences of the strike. This institutional setting led such experiences to be intertwined with disappointed expectations about the university, its administration, professors, and fellow students. In turn such an experience, combined with the sense of belonging that the smaller department setting can induce, required and fostered a supportive and expressive emotional style necessary to sustain geography students' involvement amidst abuse and threats on the part of fellow strikers, professors, the department chair(s), and the administration. I suggest that the case of geography is illustrative, in this way, of the interaction and productive mating of syndicalist and affinity styles of organizing, despite literature underlining their differences,<sup>473</sup> and the concern on the part of at least one participant that they need to remain separate.<sup>474</sup> Even the geography departmental assemblies were described as small enough to feel safe, most of the time; and the geography picketers -despite being the result of a vote from the assembly- had voluntarily decided to help picket, and ended up in some ways taking on the role of an affinity group. For example, their group ended up being based on "a form of connection and a shared objective" (McDonald, 2002, p. 115), and there was a respect of difference, seemingly enough "trust, closeness, respect, and equality" (Clough, 2012, p. 1673) to talk through difficult emotions related to the pickets, and a sense of looking out for each other (e.g. Tony's description of people needing 'mental health days' at different times, and substituting for each other when need be). I thus contend that ignoring the positive contributions of affinity groups to the student movement, its strikes, and related movements is ignoring their various practical benefits<sup>475</sup> and the

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<sup>473</sup> McDonald (2002) notes, for example, that "affinity groups express a form of connection and joint struggle that is very different from the solidarity characterizing the labour movement, with its ethic of 'in unity is strength.' In that model, the group makes a decision that is then implemented by its members as an expression of solidarity," whereas with an affinity group, the basis is "friend-like relationships" and "Recognition of the difference of each person is the group's core characteristic" (McDonald, 2002, p. 115-116). While McDonald mentions affinity groups within the context of the globalization movement, affinity groups are also associated with anarchist movements or modes of organizing (Day, 2004; Graeber, 2002), including "non-hierarchical, grassroots, consensus-based democracy" (Clough, 2012, p. 1673), even if most globalization activists "fall shy of actually using the word 'anarchist'" (Graeber, 2004).

<sup>474</sup> Interestingly, the participant who emphasized this point, Pierre, is one of those who suffered most from depression after the strike, and admitted that he could have benefited from more emotional connections with fellow activists. One reason for this participant's hesitancy was the risk of cliques guiding -and resulting from- political action (Brown & Pickerill, 2009); yet I would argue that it is not that affinity groups *cause* cliques, but rather that cliques are inevitable in most situations, and that if anything affinity groups' emphasis on reciprocal friendship (McDonald, 2002) might increase the likelihood of those involved to be included -and if not, sometimes 'non-mixité' is simply necessary for those in marginalized positions (Dupuis-Déri, 2016).

<sup>475</sup> On this note, Dupuis-Déri (2016) points to various examples of such benefits, including Maxime Roy-Allard's (2016) Master's dissertation about the autonomous neighbourhood assemblies that burst out of the student strike,

importance of interpersonal relationships in sustaining them: In fact, the strong role of interpersonal support throughout this dissertation highlights the importance of affinity in sustaining activism and syndicalism. Indeed, perhaps those who continued to be involved in activism were those who realized not just that relationships helped them to be resilient to its disappointments, but that relationships are a necessary component of what sustains and nurtures collective-oriented emotions and existential meaning, especially when the collective moment dissipates into the invisible air of memory.

Such possibilities for combining affinity groups and the syndicalist model, and the particular disappointments and power confrontations related to one's educational institution, were certainly not limited to geography students.<sup>476</sup> In the winter semester of 2015, Tania ended up organizing a student strike at the departmental level with the Women's Studies Student Association (WSSA) mobilization committee. By the end of that strike, Tania told me she had difficulty sleeping due to her upset at the principal of the Simone de Beauvoir Institute at the time, and the majority of its professors, for saying they supported the strike yet not being willing to consider an extension of the semester, nor of assignment due dates, with what Tania considered to be a patronizing attitude. Echoing the sentiment of some geography students mentioned above, this left Tania and other WSSA organizers disappointed and confused by an Institute in which they held high hopes for the potential of bridging feminist theory and practice.<sup>477</sup> By the end of the latter experience, Tania tells me she was impressed at how different

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which highlights how affinity groups -or small committees- allowed those who feared speaking in front of the assembly a way to feel more at ease participating (p. 323).

<sup>476</sup> For example, professors at Université de Montréal in 2012 complained of being stuck in the middle of the conflict due to decisions of the administration. See: <http://blogues.lapresse.ca/lagace/2012/04/18/gerard-beaudet-ludem-inc-ou-ludem-dix30/> and <http://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/558044/udem-lettre-professeur>.

<sup>477</sup> The following Open Letter from the WSSA Strike Committee provides more details about their experience that year: <http://montreal.mediacoop.ca/blog/wssa-strike-committee/33443>. In contrast, that same year (in 2015), UQAM's full-time professors' union's public stance against the administration's refusal to extend the semester reveals a clear understanding that supporting the students' strike means allowing for a semester extension to avoid penalizing students, and it challenges the hierarchical professor-student relationships, reflecting the different practices and cultural history of that institution and its faculty union when it comes to student strikes: [http://www.spuq.uqam.ca/nouvelles/537?hc\\_location=ufi](http://www.spuq.uqam.ca/nouvelles/537?hc_location=ufi). The way that UQAM's Commission des études attempted to provide extensions that year is elaborated here: <http://www.afea.uqam.ca/2015/04/modalites-de-retour-en-classe-lorsque-la-greve-prendra-fin/>. Interestingly allowing them to avoid to some degree the administrative orders that UQAM professors faced in 2015, the Université de Montréal full-time faculty union managed to include the following clause in their collective agreement in the spring of 2015: "le droit pour chaque professeur de décider individuellement si les conditions pédagogiques sont réunies ou non pour dispenser sa prestation de cours dans le cadre d'un conflit étudiant"(personal communication with a staffperson at the SGPUM in 2015; see collective agreement here: [http://www.sgpum.com/content/uploads/files/30032015/Convention\\_collective-SGPUM-2013-2017-](http://www.sgpum.com/content/uploads/files/30032015/Convention_collective-SGPUM-2013-2017-)

and enjoyable it has been to work alongside fellow feminists in the WSSA mobilization committee: “*I think I’m realizing that a strike will always be screwed up like this, but that having a support group doesn’t make it less screwed up, but it makes it bearable, you know?*” She adds: “*We had a self-care meeting yesterday here,*” and as a result of that, “*I feel like I can actually do [political] organizing.*” These latter sentences from Tania about 2015 sum up one of the most underlying, repetitive themes of this dissertation regarding striking legacies: interpersonal and collective emotional support did not cancel the despair that is so probable with the vulnerability that these strikes and their power dynamics entailed, but can make them easier to rise up from.

On a similar note, the Humanities general assemblies at Concordia that I observed as a member during the 2015 strike, showed similar signs of the ways that smaller departmental associations hold a unique potential for complex, awkward frictions with departmental figures of authority and professors who are caught in the middle,<sup>478</sup> yet who wield a certain power. And similar to Geography and Women's Studies, the small size of the Humanities department and thus its general assemblies allowed for intense deliberation -with around ten students, they could have been carried out through consensus instead of majority votes. The small size of the Humanities cohorts and an affinity based on departmental affiliation similarly appeared to encourage a sense of camaraderie and support that allowed such a process to be more bearable for students, though this potential seemed to be greater for those in the cohort that was still doing coursework.<sup>479</sup>

Thus if the experience of these geography students points to the role of place and materiality of educational institutions in amplifying the conflicting emotions already so prescient in a strike context, and to the particular emotional possibilities for belonging, it also points to the particular emotional and activist possibilities when the power of common place and its progeny - belonging and solidarity (Muehlebach, 2017)- are further made fertile by emotional styles and

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[2015-03-30.pdf](#)). And in the same 2015 student strike, the part-time faculty union at UQAM managed to negotiate extra paid hours for their members to be able to make up for missed class time (Personal phone communication with an executive of the *Syndicat des chargées et chargés de cours de UQAM*, in 2015). This is a stark difference from Concordia's part-time union's stance in 2012, which while well-intentioned and generally supportive, ignored the question of semester extension, and used the term 'protest' instead of 'strike' (see <https://thelinknewspaper.ca/article/cupfa-statement-to-the-university-community> ).

<sup>478</sup> For example, one student during a Humanities general assembly on April 7th, 2015, summarized the strangeness of the general student strike as such: "this is not against our professors, this is not against [Humanities Director], this is not against Concordia, even, this is against um larger measures."

<sup>479</sup> Of course this is not always the case: at Concordia there were certainly at least two departments in which small graduate program general assemblies were rife with upsetting and bitter conflict and disagreements about whether or not to attend class.

reflexivity that are supportive, sustaining these activists in the long-term. Indeed, if Brené Brown (2012, p. 53) suggests that the trust needed for vulnerability to thrive takes time to develop, the smaller and more constant interaction provided by departmental student associations suggests that these may be potent spaces to do so -at least more potent than the larger faculty or university-wide student associations.

Then again, these stories highlight the fragility of and insufficiency of such departmental sources of affinity, belonging and emotional support. On my end, I assumed that the strike became lonely because FEM dissolved through it, and thus I lost a sense of group cohesion, which I assumed that department association members benefited from. Yet some geography students suffered nonetheless, suggesting not just the inevitable need for mourning, but also the importance of many kinds and levels of affinity, interpersonal support, emotional reflexivity, and mourning. Alex and Keara were in geography, yet did not appear to benefit as much from its emotional style. Their experiences were affected by the unequal division of labour on picket lines, and other instances wherein they felt that the experiences of queer women of colour were marginalized or taken for granted. Indeed, Alex's experience was survivable in part because of her group the Glitter Dogs, an affinity group even more specific than department affinity, an important reminder of the way that affinity groups can be particularly important and life-affirming for queer and other marginalized groups involved in student organizing (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011), arguably only intensified during a general unlimited student strike. Keara lent hints of similar affinity groups in her diaries, yet she also was dealing with a particular life history that entangled itself with her intense strike emotions, making it more difficult to disentangle when despair set in. As suggested in Chapter 5 and 6, these experiences suggest the need for analysis of power even within groups that aim towards 'emotional reflexivity' (King, 2005), and in the unequal ways that vulnerability can affect participants of the same group (Srivastava, 2006).

Indeed, interacting with vulnerability, and the place of local institutions and departments (and diverse emotional styles) to influence all of the above, were the idiosyncratic life stories of some participants (Beatty, 2014). While it might be said that Keara and Marie's family-related struggles made the emotions that the strike exploded in them more difficult to sort out and work through, by no means did it inhibit their capacity to transform such emotional histories into collective-oriented emotions and actions that would persist. Similarly, stories of socio-economic marginalization added to the emotional tenor of the strike and appeared to fuel the collective and

existential fervour of the strike and activism in the case of Alex and Marya.<sup>480</sup> This focus on individual life histories as providing the impulse towards a common project with the possibility for healing (in the case of Marie and Keara) thus provides a counterpoint to Mathieu Denis and Simon Lavoie's recent fiction film feature, *Ceux qui font la révolution à moitié n'ont fait que se creuser un tombeau*. A close-up on four former strike participants, if the film hits the needle on its head by pointing to the emptiness or 'néant' that strikes left for some when they deserted our streets and hallways, instead of focusing on the collective-oriented emotions and possibilities that could and did sprout amidst a large diversity of students with different family and socio-economic experiences, they zoomed into a simplistic caricature of the activist troubled by family issues that has, if anything, been disproven by scientific studies (Abramowitz, Abramowitz, & Nassi, 1977).<sup>481</sup> If anything, through its complete omission of sociological analysis, the film suggests the possibly debilitating effects of isolation from collective structures of mourning. Of course, I agree with Gavin Brown and Jenny Pickerill (2009) that “although we need to understand emotional sustainability as a collective and political issue, we cannot underestimate the importance of the personal”; yet I am specifying a focus on the existential and spiritual meaning of emotion and its interrelation of personal and collective, as illustrated by the experiences of participants of this dissertation. Thus I consider the comprehensive importance of the socio-political, historical, psychological and biographical -not to mention the interview-context, in all their full diversity, in understanding of those emotions.

Indeed, the particularities of individuals' life histories and their diverse experiences depending on the place they were in provides a stark comparison to Denis and Lavoie's film's caricatured representation of the strike. Quite unlike the film, the stories of this dissertation recount how some general assemblies were jubilant whereas others were more disappointing; some picket lines were empowering while others were debased by abuse. The experience of

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<sup>480</sup> In Philippe's case, I do not know if he continued to be involved, as he expressed the desire to cease discussing the strike over email with me, but I did see him at a protest in 2012.

<sup>481</sup> These authors conclude: "the failure of this and other research to confirm a chic stereotype of left political protesters—one perpetuated in the polemic literature of psychology and sociology—should serve as a caveat" to "the psychoanalytic notion that political radicals are acting out Oedipal aggression toward their fathers" and to "the level of analysis (that) tends to discredit the historical and political significance of student activism" (p. 91).

geography picketers, for example, highlights how despite the general momentum of 2012, in part because of the particular reactions of institutional actors (students, professors, administrators) in the physical context of a university and student populace that had not previously experienced a general unlimited strike, these geography students' experiences echo those of interviewees like Audrey and Philippe who faced considerable stress during the less 'historic' 2007 and 2008 strikes due to the lack of bodies on picket lines. Thus while the historic moment of 2012 played a role in encouraging geography students to plunge in, their experience was particular to the conditions of our local institution: the fact that it was our first time joining a general unlimited strike, that our administration acted the way it did, that we were sometimes unprepared for what was to come, and on a more particular level, how geography department chairs dealt with the situation.

The particularity of an institution with an Anglo-Saxon as well as 'masculine' emotional habitus (Boler, 1999) surely had some influence on at least some geography picketers' decision to repress any signs of anger on the picket lines, despite the abuse they often faced and the anger it boiled up inside them. This complete contrast to the masculine emotional habitus was not necessarily helpful either, as anger is one of many important emotions -albeit clearly not the only one- involved in strikes; without proper means or cushions for its later explosion, the suppression of anger, even when alleviated with the cathartic cacophony of protests, was more deleterious for some (Keara) than for others (Tony).

And yet the alternative emotional style of geography students at Concordia, alongside feminist emotional styles that have their effect at the provincial level, suggest that the emotional habitus of the student movement has its influence but is resisted, slowly changing. As Gould (2009) suggests, habitus "are historically contingent, requiring us to investigate the practices that generate, stabilize, reproduce, and sometimes transform them" (p. 36). We thus can consider the dialectic effect of strikes on the student movement's emotional habitus. On the one hand, these strikes' flare of urgency and intensity reinforce an emotional habitus that does not have time for emotional reflexivity; on the other hand, we need to consider the important backlash from women after the 2005 strike, which ignited a powerful spark to begin altering ASSÉ's emotional habitus.

Of course, such struggles came from a longer history of feminist activists before ASSÉ's existence; yet we might consider that the 2005 strike brought the deleterious effects of the movement's habitus to their climax, fomenting the clash needed to start deconstructing that

habitus. Women's struggles since 2005 have -consciously or not- contributed to fomenting alternative emotional styles through the practices of comités non-mixtes and the gardien-ne du senti, in combination with the emotional collective care work effected by groups like *Politics and Care* and the model of geography's emotional styles. Constantly keeping an eye out for intersectional forms of oppression and the need for affinity groups beyond the division of gender,<sup>482</sup> I suggest that these can only increase the focus on emotional reflexivity and collective mourning that appear to be necessary after the ground-shifting experience of general unlimited strike campaigns, for both male and female participants of this dissertation.

Despite the 'masculine' emotional habitus, for those who had not been as involved, as well as for those who were more involved yet had interpersonal support, their collective-oriented emotions from the strike transformed into the perception of new structures of feeling (Williams, 2009 [1969]). I have sought to illustrate how these formed the seeds of what might be considered a generational and collective sense of meaning: notably the importance of the collectivity in contrast to the individualistic ethos pervading society, and the willingness to fight and sacrifice for it. On a similar note yet from a different theoretical frame without an existential focus, Spiegel (2015) describes how "The extended duration of the Quebec student strike offered the time for cultures of care to be extended and the generation of techniques of "togetherness" to be developed," by re-inventing the experience of "private" and "public" time and space. In other words, she contends that "the "private time" of caring for self and the family was able to be extended into collective political space" and that "The affective power of collective political acts of solidarity, sensitive to differences in positionality and modes of engagement, thus helped to generate spaces of care that may form the basis of future political collectivities" (p. 786). While those participants who were not as involved tended to more easily recognize the 'structure of feeling' at a generational level (to which the explosion of individually-experienced collective-oriented emotions contributed), those who had invested themselves more completely were more vulnerable to intense difficult emotions ranging from burn-out to depression, thus it was more of a struggle to perceive the generational structure of feeling that these strikes recycled. If they did

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<sup>482</sup> In the booklet of reflections about the 2005 strike, the Anthropology student association of the Université de Laval noted their disagreement with the 'caucus non-mixtes,' noting that these could not prevent conflicts beyond gender that exist between members of congress and could even minimize such other differences (ASSÉ, 2005b). On a similar note, Dagenais (2010) suggested the need for committees addressing the experiences of "LGBTQ, antiracisme, antipacitisme, etc."



so, I have sought to suggest that it was thanks to interpersonal or collective support that helped to transform the combination of 'high' and 'low' feelings into something new.

Such a focus on structures of feeling reminds us that it is not just that the sociological study of emotions can enrich social movement studies, as suggested by Calhoun (2001), but that social movements can teach us and illuminate new structures of feeling, renew collective meaning, and possibly societal values (Eyerman, 2005). In other words, social movements and their participants can produce theory and knowledge (Choudry, 2017). Indeed, it was the day that the existential link to collective-oriented emotions emerged clearly in my mind that I started to reconcile with my own post-strike mourning.

It remains that the emergence of new structures of feeling, existential meaning, and new emotional styles cannot erase vulnerability. Indeed I have sought to suggest in this dissertation that a 'principe vulnérabilité' offers a way to conceptualize the ebbs and flows of student strikes. In this way I have sought to apply Brené Brown's (2015, 2012) emphasis on vulnerability to social movements, bridging the psychological and sociological realms, to consider how a 'principe vulnérabilité' might not just make us live more fulfilling lives, but allow for analysis and possibilities in the social and collective realm. Thus, by no means does my focus on vulnerability imply that pain is an individual issue, or that the social realm cannot contribute to its alleviation. Quite to the contrary, being aware of the inevitability of vulnerability means ensuring we have structures to address it; it means hoping for a more just, humane world while acknowledging that we will be met with failures, including injury and death -thus we might not see substantial change in our lifetime- because hope and the full gamut and intensity of other 'high' collective-oriented emotions constitute some of the greatest pleasures in working towards it, contributing to making our lives meaningful; and because the possibilities for transformation out of the dialectical intertwining of emotional light and darkness remain in the gentle terrain of the affective unknown *from which unexpected flowers can bloom* (Greenspan, 2003).

Thus, quite differently from Bertolt Brecht's quote at the start of this dissertation -and from the latter's attempt to void theatre of emotions in order to promote a rationally-motivated social change (McCallum, 2007)- this dissertation suggests that the "indispensable ones" are not just strong, they are, more specifically, vulnerable.

### **Limitations and future research**

If this dissertation has contributed to the scant academic literature about emotions

experienced during student strikes (Bhéreur-Lagounaris et al., 2015) and labour strikes (Brunsden & Hill, 2009; Wickens, 2007; Barling and Milligan, 1987),<sup>483</sup> it certainly does not pretend to be representative of the student strike experience. Each strike has its particularities, each institution its emotional flavour and style, each group and person its story. This dissertation has constituted merely one lens on the patterns of emotional experiences lived by these participants, based on always incomplete and continuing stories, and thus is merely one analysis of many. In putting forth my analysis, I have done so including the greatest number of stories and participants' words possible -here and online-, so that others can make their own analyses. I hope it can serve to spark further debate, research, and reflection by activists, students, labourers, and academics to confirm, disconfirm, or elaborate on the emotional experiences of strikes, to increase the likelihood of the latter being more effective and transformative for both society and participants in the short-term and long-term. Indeed, on January 19, 2012, just as the *Printemps érable* was lifting its wings, the *24 Heures* newspaper stated that "Certains employés de l'usine de Rio Tinto Alcan à Alma, en lock-out depuis le 1er janvier, vivent mal le conflit de travail, à tel point qu'une dizaine d'entre eux ont demandé de l'aide au service Info-Social du CLSC." Clearly such research in the Quebec context, and action to address such situations, is thus sorely needed; it might contribute to further illuminating the emotional habitus of social and syndicalist movements particular to this province.

Hopefully, any such future research might compensate for this study's limitations, by encompassing a larger number of interviews, more directly asking about the physiological sensations accompanying emotional experiences,<sup>484</sup> and paying better tribute to the auto-ethnographic project intertwined with 'friendship as method' that I attempted. Indeed, I often removed -or placed in footnotes- my own experiences (collected in written diaries and field notes, as well as an interview that both Audrey and Marya conducted with me at different times) from

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<sup>483</sup> More specifically, it adds perspective to Brunsden & Hill's (2009) above-mentioned qualitative study of one striking worker, while adding qualitative depth to the quantitative studies of Wickens (2007), which points to anger and negative moods due to the strike, and Barling & Milligan (1987), which points to problems with marital adjustment, psychosomatic symptoms and lack of psychological well-being up to six months after the strike.

<sup>484</sup> In my interviews, I hoped that using the word 'emotion/émotion' interchangeably with the verb 'to feel' (and in French, the verb 'sentir') -with questions such as 'What emotions do you remember feeling?' ('de quelles émotions te souviens-tu?' or 'comment tu te sentais?')- would allow for a comprehensive exploration of emotional experience. Yet my use of the term 'emotion' might have predisposed interviewees to certain labels over speaking about less describable or more physiological aspect of feelings - though they did mention when a feeling was hard to describe. More problematic than my questions was perhaps my nervous attention to the camera during some interviews.

this dissertation out of concern that they did not seem to fit appropriately among others' stories, and because I preferred to cut my own experience than those of participants. With regards to 'friendship as method,' despite the insight and beautiful moments it provided, in hindsight I consider that I should have provided Marya and Tania with more time to provide me feedback on the sections of this dissertation that reported their experiences, as I believe my limiting dissertation timelines made the process stressful and perhaps disempowering for them. Thus I learned the hard way that 'friendship as method' ideally requires preparing for much additional time for participants to read, to discuss feedback, and to address potential confusing feelings and misunderstandings, including teasing out the desires of the participant-friends to please their researcher-friend versus what the former truly feel comfortable with in terms of an end product.<sup>485</sup> Nonetheless, I propose that future research incorporating auto-ethnography and 'friendship as method' in combination with the use of video could be an important complement to the traditional interview context between strangers, which Cvetkovich (2003) and Ellis and colleagues (1997) suggest can be awkward and limiting not to mention difficult to represent on paper alone. However, such research can clearly never replace the important face-to-face work and experience of collective mourning and reflection that social movements can and do constantly take part in organically (Choudry, 2017).

Future research through the lens of institutional and political activist ethnography (Frampton et al., 2006; Hussey, 2012; Smith, 1990; Smith, 1987) might also consider the role of texts in mediating the power dynamics of emotional experiences during strikes, by more closely

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<sup>485</sup> While Tillmann-Healy (2003) mentions the time and care that regular informed consent with 'friendship as method' requires, missing from her account were more details about just how many drafts and how much clarity, self-reflexivity, sensitivity, and time might be required or ideal on the part of the researcher-friend to empower participant-friends to provide informed consent at each step along the way, in a dissertation process involving supervisors' feedback and multiple revisions; also missing from her account is the important discussion of the possibility that participant-friends could desire to withdraw from the research or to make detailed revisions to their sections of the written draft, with the subsequent potential of tension between researcher-friend and participant-friends. This might be remedied by the researcher-friend spending the time to be well-prepared to engage in a complex and very delicate balance of expressing honest disappointment to, or disagreement with, one's participant-friends about possible changes or omissions, yet in a way that does not further upset, disempower, and thus potentially pressure participant-friends to give in to the researcher's satisfaction or timeline. Tillmann-Healy (2003) does briefly discuss this uneasiness and entanglement with her own participant-friends, and alas I am not sure if there is a way around such a conundrum beyond co-authorship, except for allowing much additional time for communication and honesty, and a clear awareness and statement from the beginning on the part of the researcher that the inevitability of any researcher-participant dynamic is one in which the researcher ultimately has more power and status –particularly invisible and confusing considering the researcher's 'insider' position (Naples, 2003; Behar & Gordon, 1995) as a friend.

examining mainstream and social movement media, archives, and communications during strikes; such analyses might also be fruitful for further elaborating the theorization of the emotional habitus of the student movement as well as other Quebec social movements. In particular, an in-depth exploration of how Quebec's educational institutions -both in official statements and in unofficial communications and experiences- dealt with and affected the emotional tenor and repercussions of these strikes, might peak interest into how our educational institutions, and the faculty unions nested within them, can contribute to the emotional well-being and equal access of all of their potential students in a way that can consider not just individual but also collective rights, autonomy, learning, and purpose. I can only hope that the close consideration of this dissertation by those who circulate within these corridors will be one of many steps in that direction.

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## APPENDIX A:

### Consent to participate in INTERVIEW on emotional and interpersonal issues in the Quebec student movement

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Jean-Philippe Warren (514.848.2424, ext. 2825 / jphwarren@sympatico.ca). Co-Investigator: Nadia Hausfather (nhausfather@gmail.com).

#### A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of this research is to explore, through a video interview, my emotional and interpersonal experiences and memories related to the Quebec student movement for a study about the oral history of emotional and interpersonal issues in the Quebec student movement. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, questions will be open-ended, to allow me to consider the various ways that emotions and interpersonal relationships were related to my participation in the Quebec student movement.

#### B. PROCEDURES

I understand that I am being asked to participate in a one to two-hour video interview, in a location of my choice, about my emotional and interpersonal experiences and memories related to the Quebec student movement (as explored in the list of written questions that have been given to me by Ms. Hausfather).

I know that I am not required to answer any questions that I do not wish to answer. After the interview, Ms. Hausfather will provide me with the opportunity to view my video interview, and if I desire, to edit it (if I so wish, to delete any sections with the video editing assistance of Ms. Hausfather). I understand that I am free to decide not to participate and/or to withdraw the recording of my interview at any time during the interview and, if I decide to view my interview, up until and during the viewing of my interview, without any negative consequences. If I decide to withdraw at that point, Nadia will destroy the recordings and any identifying factors associated with them. I also know that if Nadia is accompanied by a cameraperson to film the interview, this cameraperson will sign a contract ensuring that he or she keep completely confidential both my identity and any information from my interview.

#### C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

I recognize that the findings from my interview may help to further understand and inspire social movement scholars and activists. I also recognize that speaking about these subjects may evoke negative emotions or thoughts in me during the interview, in which case if I so choose I can end the interview. I know that if I get too distressed after the interview and want to continue discussing the issues brought up in the interview, I can share these emotions or thoughts with Nadia and she will provide me with a list of counseling supports should I need such assistance. She will also provide me the opportunity to view and edit my video interview if I would like to do so.

I also understand that if I reveal information about illegal activities and choose to reveal my identity, law enforcement may be able to use information I reveal about illegal activities against

me. Alternatively, I can choose to have any mention of illegal activity deemed as a confidential segment, to avoid this risk. (See below for more details about confidentiality).

#### D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

I understand that if I choose that my participation or certain segments of my interview be CONFIDENTIAL, my name, as well as any information which could identify me or my student union/organization/group (including the visual of my interview), would be taken out of all presentations of the research and Nadia Hausfather would then protect these recordings and transcripts in a locked filing cabinet and create a code to number the interviews, so that none of the transcripts, files or tapes have my name on them. The list of codes would be kept in a separate locked cabinet only accessible to Ms Hausfather. Again, if Nadia is accompanied by a cameraperson to film the interview, this cameraperson will sign a contract ensuring that he or she keep completely confidential both my identity and any information from my interview.

I understand that the findings or video recordings may be presented, analyzed and summarized for future conferences, online and other publications, including video and audio documentary projects, depending on the boxes I check below in #1 and #2:

1) Please check ONLY ONE of the following boxes:

- I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND FULLY UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.
- I DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

2) After checking out one of the above boxes, please check ONLY ONE of the following boxes (please revise what Confidentiality means in Section D):

- I want my interview to be NON-CONFIDENTIAL (meaning that my identity COULD be revealed in future publications, presentations, audio-visual documentaries, and public screenings, including online on sites such as YouTube, which retain the license to do as they please with these video products.)
- I want my interview to be SEMI-CONFIDENTIAL (meaning that my voice recording COULD be publicly displayed in future presentations, audio-visual documentaries, and public screenings, but not my identity, nor any visuals. This includes online on sites such as YouTube, which retain the license to do as they please with these video products.)
- I want my interview to be COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL (meaning that Nadia Hausfather WON'T be able to display any of the material that could identify me by voice or visuals, but WILL be able to directly quote me in written publications as long as it does not identify me)

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Monica Toca at the Ethics and Compliance Unit, (514) 848-2424 at extension 2425, or by email at [ethics@alcor.concordia.ca](mailto:ethics@alcor.concordia.ca).

APPENDIX B:  
Questions for interview about the emotional and interpersonal issues  
during Quebec student strikes (WITHOUT PROBES)

INTRODUCTION

- Tell me the story of your involvement in the 2012 student strike!
- What is the most significant/important moment you recall of your activities in the strike?
- Can you describe the general atmosphere of the time of the strike?

EMOTIONS

- What were the good moments, and what were the more difficult moments?
- What emotions do you remember feeling during the strike?
- What factors limited or encouraged you to express your emotions during the strike?
- When you were de-motivated, what kept you going?
  - What do you think could have helped?

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- What was your most intense/significant interpersonal relationship during your participation in the strike? Why?
- How did this relationship or other interpersonal relationships affect your experience of the strike?

IMPACTS

- What role do you think interpersonal relationships and emotions played in this strike?
- During the strike, how did you balance your activism with other aspects of your life?
- What were the successes/gains of this strike?
- How did the strike impact your life?

PRESENT

- After your participation in the student strike, did you continue to be as involved in the student movement? Why, or why not?
- If you were less involved after the strike, were you involved in other forms of activism? How about now?

Anything else you would like to add?



APPENDIX C:  
Questions for interview about the emotional and interpersonal issues  
during Quebec student strikes (WITH PROBES)

### INTRODUCTION

- Tell me the story of your involvement in the 2012 student strike!
  - *How were you inspired to get involved in the strike?*
    - *Any key people who inspired you?*
    - *Any key emotions that inspired you?*
    - *Do you remember the place or moment you decided to get involved?*
  - *What was the role of the mobsquad?*
  - *What did people do during the strike?*
- What is the most significant/important moment you recall of your activities in the strike?
- Can you describe the general atmosphere of the time of the strike?

### EMOTIONS

- What were the good moments, and what were the more difficult moments?
- What emotions do you remember feeling during the strike?
  - *That others felt?*
  - *Men vs. women?*
  - *Before? During? After?*
  - *During conflicts?*
  - *During association meetings/general assemblies/other meetings?*
  - *Related to ASSÉ and FEUQ?*
  - *The most intense emotion? For you? In general?*
  - *Love? Rage/anger? Joy?*
- What factors limited or encouraged you to express your emotions during the strike?
  - *Were certain emotions more accepted than others? Were there emotions that you felt you could feel or express more than other emotions?*
  - *How did people react to different emotions?*
  - *Did you feel that you had a place to go to manage or express your emotions?*
  - *Do you have suggestions as to how the student movement could better manage or react to (certain) emotions?*
- When you were de-motivated, what kept you going?
  - *Were there emotions or interpersonal relationships that motivated you?*
  - *Did you experience burn-out?*
  - *What do you think could have helped?*

### INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- What was your most intense/significant interpersonal relationship during your participation in the strike? Why?
- How did this relationship or other interpersonal relationships affect your experience of the strike?
  - *In a positive or negative way?*
  - *During conflicts? Good moments? Difficult moments?*
  - *In relation to the tension between FEUQ and ASSÉ?*
  - *During the association meetings/general assemblies/other meetings?*

- *What do you think could have helped to better manage that relationship /those relationships?*

## IMPACTS & SUGGESTIONS

- What role do you think interpersonal relationships and emotions played during this strike?
  - *Were certain emotions more accepted than others? Or have more space?*
  - *Do you think there could be a way to better manage conflicts and interpersonal relationships?*
  - *Related to the relationship between FEUQ and ASSÉ? (REPETITIVE?)*
  - *What is the role of emotions compared to reason, during the strike?*
  - *Do you think certain emotions are more or less adequate than others...*
    - *To pass a message to students and the public?*
    - *To recruit students to the cause?*
- During the strike, how did you balance your activism with other aspects of your life?
  - *How could you have done this better? Suggestions for future strikes?*
- What were the successes/gains of this strike?
  - *For you? For others?*
  - *What were the good moments? The difficult or bad moments?*
  - *Concrete and non-concrete?*
- How did the strike impact your life?
  - *What did you learn from your experience in the strike?*
  - *Emotionally? (what did you learn about your emotions or others' emotions?)*
  - *Interpersonally? (what did you learn about interpersonal relationships?)*
  - *Related to democracy?*

## PRESENT

- After your participation in the student strike, did you continue to be as involved in the student movement? Why, or why not?
  - *Do emotions or interpersonal relationships have anything to do with that?*
- If you were less involved after the strike, were you involved in other forms of activism? How about now?

Anything else you would like to add?

## QUESTIONS ON THE INTERVIEW PROCESS:

- When you were answering these questions, did you feel like you were reliving the emotions, or that you were merely remembering them without reliving them?
- Comments on how you felt about the interview process?
  - For example, how did you feel about the presence of the camera (Were you conscious of its presence? When I looked at the camera, did it make you more conscious of its presence?)

APPENDIX D:  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE in PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION and AUDIO/VIDEO-RECORDING for research on emotional and interpersonal dynamics in the Quebec student movement

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Jean-Philippe Warren (514.848.2424, ext. 2825 / jphwarren@sympatico.ca). Co-Investigator: Nadia Hausfather (nhausfather@gmail.com).

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of this research is to explore, through participant observation\* and/or audio/video-recording, my verbal and non-verbal comments and behaviors, with a focus on emotional and interpersonal dimensions, for a study about the Quebec student movement. (\*Participant observation means that Nadia will be observing my comments and behaviors during this meeting and writing notes on her perceptions).

B. PROCEDURES

I understand that I am being asked to participate in Nadia's participant observation and video-recording of the meeting or activity that I am about to take part in, for Nadia's research on the oral history of emotional and interpersonal dimensions of the Quebec student movement.

I know that I am not required to participate in this research if I do not wish to, **by checking off the box in #1 on the next page.**

If I do decide to participate, I know I am free to decide to withdraw at any time during this meeting or activity, without any negative consequences, by going to see Nadia at any point during or after the meeting (or if I prefer, by sending her an email.) I know that if I so choose, after this meeting or activity Nadia can provide me with the opportunity to view the video of this activity or meeting, and if I desire, to change the confidentiality of my consent, without any negative consequences. If Nadia is accompanied by a cameraperson, or if Nadia hires someone to transcribe the recording of this meeting, this transcriber and this cameraperson will sign a contract ensuring that he or she keep my identity completely confidential.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

I recognize that the findings and outcomes of this participant observation and/or audio/video-recording may help to further understand and inspire social movement scholars and activists.

**Important:** I understand that if I reveal information about illegal activities and choose to reveal my identity, law enforcement may be able to use information I reveal about illegal activities against me. Alternatively, I can choose to have any mention of illegal activity deemed as a confidential segment, to avoid this risk. (See below for more details about confidentiality).

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

I understand that if I choose my participation or certain segments of this meeting or activity to be CONFIDENTIAL, this means that my name and any information which could identify me or my student

union/organization/group (including the visual) would be taken out of all presentations of the research and Nadia Hausfather would then protect these recordings and transcripts in a locked filing cabinet. Again, if Nadia is accompanied by a cameraperson, or if Nadia hires someone to transcribe the recording of this meeting, this transcriber and this cameraperson will sign a contract ensuring that he or she keep my identity completely confidential.

I further understand that the findings or audio/video-recordings may be presented, analyzed and summarized for future conferences, online and other publications, including video and audio documentary projects that could be disseminated online, **depending on the boxes I check below in #1 and #2:**

**1) Please check ONLY ONE of the following boxes:**

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND FULLY UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND **AGREE** TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

**I DO NOT AGREE** TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. THIS MEANS THAT NADIA WILL NOT BE ABLE TO USE ANY OF THE OBSERVATIONS OR RECORDINGS OF ME IN HER RESEARCH, EVEN IN CONFIDENTIAL FORM.

**2) After checking out one of the above boxes, please check ONLY ONE of the following boxes (please revise what Confidentiality means in Section D):**

I want my participation in this meeting or activity to be NON-CONFIDENTIAL (meaning that my identity COULD be revealed in future publications, presentations, audio-visual documentaries, and screenings, including online sites such as YouTube, which retain the license to do as they please with these video products.)

I want my participation in this meeting or activity to be SEMI-CONFIDENTIAL (meaning that my voice recording COULD be publicly displayed in future presentations, audio-visual documentaries, and screenings, but not my identity, nor any visuals. This includes online sites such as YouTube, which retain the license to do as they please with these video products.)

I want my participation in this meeting or activity to be COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL (meaning that Nadia Hausfather WON'T be able to display any of the material that could identify me by voice or visuals, but WILL be able to directly quote me in written publications as long as it does not identify me.)

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

COLOR OF SHIRT (so Nadia can know that I signed the consent form): \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Monica Toca at the Ethics and Compliance Unit, (514) 848-2424 at extension 2425, or by email at [ethics@alcor.concordia.ca](mailto:ethics@alcor.concordia.ca).

(The other component of this research consists of one-on-one and group interviews, if you are interested to participate in an individual or group interview please contact Nadia at [nhausfather@gmail.com](mailto:nhausfather@gmail.com).)

## APPENDIX E: Dawson Oral History Project Assignment Guidelines

Research Methods

Winter 2013

### Quebec Student Strikes Narrative Assignment Instructions – 10%

The successful completion of this assignment depends on several steps. Please be sure to read the following instructions very carefully:

1. Find someone to interview that fits one of the sampling categories, explain the details of the project, and arrange a time with them.
2. Record a 60-minute interview in .wav format, and have the narrator fill out a consent form.
  - a. The first 30 minutes of the interview should be a life history; the second 30 minutes should be a focused reflection on the Quebec student strikes.
3. Debrief on the class forum about your experience. Note anything memorable and offer some self-evaluation. This should be completed as soon as possible after the end of the interview (preferably within the first couple of hours).
4. Re-listen to the interview and write a 200-300-word summary of the interview. Make note of the major elements in the life history and give the reader an idea of the narrator's feelings about the Quebec student strike.
  - a. In the same document and just before the summary you must write the quota category that the narrator fits in.
5. Make a CD for the narrator and return it to them, along with a copy of the signed consent form.
6. Submit the .wav file, an .mp3 file, the consent form, and the summary. The audio files, the summary, and photo (if taken) must be brought to class on a USB key in a separate folder titled: YOUR NAME\_QSS (i.e. BEAUCHAMP\_QSS)

NB: The audio files, summary, and photo must be titled in the following way.

1. The project name (DOHP).
2. The type of oral history (QSS for Quebec Student Strike).
3. First initial and last name of the narrator (Ben Lander).
4. The date recorded as day, month, year - ddmmyy.
5. The place the interview was conducted.
6. First initial and last name of the interviewer (Mark Beauchamp).
7. The type of file format (this should appear automatically).

Below is an example. You must copy this format:

DOHP\_QSS\_BLANDER\_060213\_MONTREAL\_MBEAUCHAMP.wav (or .mp3)

Grades for this assignment will be awarded as follows:

Recorded interview of 60 minutes or more in .wav and .mp3 formats	5
Properly filled out consent form granting archival release	1
Forum Posting	1
Summary and Keywords	2
Proper File Naming	1

Total grade /10

APPENDIX F:  
Table of participants

\* 'YES' means that students voted for at least a one-day strike. 'NO' could mean that either students voted against the strike or that a general assembly did not take place.

\*\* 'Elected' and 'Staff' imply active organization of the strike. The former refers to those who had an elected position in their educational institution (otherwise I specify in parentheses). 'Organizer' refers to those who were neither representatives nor staff but were clearly active in organizing the strike before it started. 'Active participant' refers to those who were involved beyond general assemblies and protests, who were also involved in picketing and/or in direct actions, or in organizing all of the above. It should be kept in mind however that in the case of institutions that were closed by the administration during the strike, picketing was not always necessary, or at least certainly not each classroom.

NAME	LANGUAGE OF RECORDING	GENERAL STRIKE CAMPAIGN	SCHOOL & DISCIPLINE OF STUDY (DURING STRIKE)	DID STUDENT UNION STRIKE*	LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IN STRIKE**	METHOD & DATE OF DATA COLLECTION
Julie (pseudonym)	French	2005	-Cégep du Vieux-Montréal	YES	Active participant	-My interview (2011)
Simon Van Vliet	French	2005	-Cégep Saint-Laurent (Musique)	YES	Staff	-My interview (2011)
Élise Guérin-Bouchard	French	-2005 -2007	- École secondaire Joseph-François Perreault (2005) -Cégep Saint-Laurent (2007)	-YES -YES	-Active participant (2005) -Elected & Staff (2007)	-My interview (2011) -Diaries (2005, 2007)
Marie Pagès	French	-2005 -2007	-Cégep Sherbrooke (Observatrice) (2005) -Université Sherbrooke (Travail social) (2007)	-YES -YES	-Active participant - Organizer	-My interview (2011)
Philippe (pseudonym)	French	-2005 -2007	- Cégep St-Jérôme (2005) - Université de Québec à Montréal (Sociologie) (2007)	YES	-Active participant - Elected	-My interview (2011)
Pierre (pseudonym)	French	-2007	-Université de Québec à Montréal (Sciences politiques, undergraduate student)	YES	Elected	-My interview (Jan. 2012)
Audrey (pseudonym)	English	2007	Dawson College (Arts, Literature and Communication)	YES	Elected	-My interview (2011)
Jeff (pseudonym)	English	-2005 -2007	McGill University (International Development Studies and Sociology) (2005 and 2007)	-YES -NO	Organizer	-My interview (2011)

Victoria (composite character)	Composite character	2012	Composite character		Composite character	Composite character
Tania (pseudonym)	English	2012	Concordia (Biology undergraduate student)	YES	-Elected -Staff	-My interview (2013) -My observation of our interactions (2012-2015)
Anas Bouslikhane	English	2012	Concordia (Fine Arts undergraduate student)	YES		-Recording of Feb.15 2015 workshop about strike
Marya (pseudonym for Rushdia Mehreen)	English	2012	Concordia (Geography graduate student)	YES	-Organizer -Elected (CLASSE Comité Luttés Sociales)	-My interview (2015) -My observation of strike reunion meeting (2014) -My observation of our interactions (2012-2015) - Recording of Feb. 15 2015 workshop about strike
Alex Matak	English	2012	Concordia (Geography undergraduate student)	YES	Organizer	-My interview (Dec. 2013) -Her zine (Nov. 2012)
Tony (pseudonym)	English	2012	Concordia (Geography undergraduate student)	YES	Active participant	-My interview (Dec. 2012)
Kris	English	2012	Concordia (Geography undergraduate student)	YES	Active participant	-Leyla's interview (2014) -My observation of strike reunion meeting (2014)
Shaun	English	2012	Concordia (Geography graduate student)	YES	Active participant	-Leyla interview (2014) -My observation of strike reunion meeting (2014)
Keara	English	2012	Concordia (Geography undergraduate student)	YES	Active participant	-My observation of strike reunion meeting (2014) -Her diaries (2012-2013)
J-F (pseudonym)	English	2012	Concordia (Geography undergraduate student)	YES	Elected	-My observation of strike reunion meeting (2014)
Kiley	English	2012	Concordia (Geography undergraduate student)	YES	Active participant	-My observation of strike reunion meeting (2014)
Fern	English	2012	Concordia (Geography undergraduate student, minor in Anthropology)	YES	Active participant	-My observation of strike reunion meeting (2014)

Julian (pseudonym)	English	2012	McGill University (Education graduate student)	YES	Organizer	-DOHP interview (2012) -Follow-up interview with me (2016)
Émilie	English	2012	Université de Montréal (Political Science undergraduate student)	YES	Active participant	-DOHP interview (2012)
Ioana	English	2012	UQAM (Environmental design undergraduate student)	YES	Attended protests and general assemblies	-DOHP interview (2012)
Teresa Besnier	French	2012	Cégep Ahuntsic (Graphisme)	YES	Attended protests and general assemblies	-DOHP interview (2013)
Sandra (pseudonym)	French	2012	Cégep Marie-Victorin (Arts, Lettres & Communication)	YES	Active participant	-DOHP interview (2013)
Francis Juneau	French	2012	Cégep Gérald-Godin (Sciences humaines Profil administration)	YES	Organizer	-DOHP interview (2012)
Juliette Marcoux-Tassé	French	2012	Cégep du Vieux-Montréal (Sciences Humaines)	YES	Attended protests and general assemblies	-DOHP interview (2012)
Romeo (pseudonym)	English	2012	Cégep du Vieux-Montréal (Sciences humaines Profil individu)	YES	Attended protests and general assemblies	-DOHP interview (2012)
Celine (pseudonym)	English	2012	Dawson College (Environmental Science)	NO	Attended protests and general assemblies	-DOHP interview (2013)
Alex Pettem	English	2012	Royal West Academy (High School)	NO	Attended protests	-DOHP interview (2013)
Marie-Louise (pseudonym)	French	2012	FACE High School (French side)	NO	Attended protests	-DOHP interview (2013)