

Making Politics and Creating Spaces: A Study of the 2012 Québec Student Strikes

by

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Abstract

This work uses historical, theoretical, and experiential lenses to examine the Québec Student Strikes of 2012. The first section of the work offers a condensed history of the evolution of post-secondary education (PSE) in Québec followed by a parallel review of student activism. The second chapter focuses on different conceptions of political and public space. By focusing on public space and the university as a changing spatial milieu and space of politics, I underline the multiplicity and polyvalence of space, and the ways in which people like students act upon and within spaces to renegotiate and reclaim them. The final chapter presents conversations from seven interviews with individuals who participated in the strike actions followed by theoretical reflections that relate back to the central themes of citizenship, representation, and political action and autonomy.

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List of Acronyms

AFESH-UQAM - Association facultaire étudiante de sciences humaines de l'UQAM/Social Science Students Faculty Association at UQAM

ANEEQ - Association Nationale des Étudiantes et des Étudiants du Québec/National Students Association of Québec (Formed in March, 1975)

ASSÉ – Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiantes/Association for a syndicalist student solidarity (formed in 2001 in Sherbrooke)

CAP(s) – Comité d'action politique/Political Action Committee (became very popular after the demise of UGEQ, leading up to the creation of ANEEQ in 1975)

CASSÉE – Coalition de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiantes (2005 coalition)

CASA – Comité d'accueil du Sommet des Amériques/Welcoming Committee for the Summit of the Americas

CLAC-Montréal – Convergence des luttes anti-capitalistes/Convergence of Anti-capitalist struggles Montréal

CLASSE – Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiantes (formed in 2011, dissolved in November 2012)

Conseil des Universités/Council of Universities

CRAM – Conseil régionale d'ASSÉ à Montréal

CREPUQ – Conférence des recteurs et des principaux des universités du Québec/Council of rectors et principals of Québec universities

CUTV – Concordia University Television

FAGECCQ - Fédération des associations générales des étudiants des collèges classiques du Québec/Federation of General Student Associations of the Classic Colleges of Québec (Formed in 1963)

FAECQ - Fédération des associations étudiantes collégiales du Québec/Federation of college student associations of Québec

FEUQ – Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec/University Student Federation of Québec, formed in 1989

FECQ – Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec/College Students Federation of Québec (formed in March 1990)

FRAP – Front d'action politique (1960s-1970s)

AGs/GAs – General Assemblies

MDE – Mouvement pour le Droit à l'Éducation (Movement for the Right to Education)

Québecor – Large media conglomerate that owns much of Québec's media including “Journal de Montréal and Journal de Québec newspapers and the Sun News Network, an English-language television channel that could be considered the Canadian equivalent of Fox News.”

MEEQ – coalition between FEUQ and FECQ formed in 1990

PLQ – Parti Libéral/Liberal Party of QUÉBEC

PQ – Parti Québécois

RAEU – Regroupement des associations étudiantes universitaires du Québec/Regrouping of University Student Associations (formed March 28, 1976)

UGEQ – Union générale des étudiants du Québec/General Union of Québec Students 1963-1964

UdM – Université de Montréal

UQAM – Université du Québec à Montréal

UQO – Université du Québec à Ouatouais

Introduction

“...people really were dreaming, people were dreaming of a different world...” – Monica*
(participant in the strikes)

The small quotation I have placed at the beginning of this chapter says a lot about what this work is meant to be about. It emphasizes an important core belief underpinning the entirety of this work as well as my own personal perspective. The events described herein, the participants interviewed, and my own intentions in writing this all share a central belief that the current organization of resources, power, and privilege in our world exploits, oppresses, damages, and disempowers a majority of the people seeking to share an existence here. That belief then extends itself to the revolutionary concept that change is possible, that through collective actions, another world is possible. Shaped by that core belief, this work will attempt an in-depth exploration of how students and other activists in Québec took on a fight against a tuition hike as part of a much broader project of societal change. I had the privilege of speaking with seven different participants, kind enough to indulge my questions and offer their experiences and insights to help me write this story. Without their help, this work would be far less informed, far more shallow, and offer only my limited analysis and commentary. The richness of their experiences and insights is in part why their comments will take up a large portion of this thesis.

I feel it is important to position myself in this project while at the same time declaring that in no way will this work attempt some arbitrary (and what I consider to be impossible) level of objectivity or neutrality. Many researchers attempt to maintain some distance from their research subjects, working to balance inherent biases that might accompany their personal perspectives in order to ensure their observations avoid becoming polemical or one-sided and

* All names of interviewees have been changed to protect their identities.

therefore judged unreliable or lacking in credibility. I am not about to enter into a debate on the possibility of academic objectivity or neutrality. Rather, I feel it is important to emphasize exactly where this work is coming from and my own relationship to its subject matter, the participants, and the events discussed. I believe my experiences and closeness to this subject will provide an added richness to the observations and narratives I hope to comment on.

I began my involvement through solidarity *casseroles* marches in Ottawa in the summer of 2012. As I became more committed and more involved with ‘radical politics’ and direct action mobilization, I later participated in some demonstrations in Montréal in February and March of 2013 and again in April of 2014. On one occasion in Montréal, I was kettled by police with fellow demonstrators, many of whom were students, and ticketed \$630 under the Montréal by-law P6 that aims to prevent protests and demonstrations from taking place. On another occasion I experienced riot police shooting plastic bullets, flash-bang grenades, and tear gas canisters at myself and other students and activists as well as the deliberate cornering and beating of activists. It should go without saying that these police actions were without provocation from the students. Any latent trust I may have held about the benign character of the state was broken. While I have only experienced these types of actions by police a handful of times, many students involved in the strikes, including some of the participants I interviewed, experienced this type of policy brutality on a very regular basis. I mention these details to not only give the reader an indication of my perspective and experiences of the subject matter I am describing but also to emphasize the risks and commitment taken on by students in Québec, risks taken to fight for what they believe to be true, to dream of a different world, and take action to see that change happen.

In the same way these experiences and conversations shattered my remaining comfortable assumptions about our social reality. They also demanded that I approach this study in a way that breaks with traditional models of scholarly analysis. Conducting my research in this way has required me to take personal and intellectual risks leading me into uncomfortable and challenging territory. David Graeber’s comments on ‘ethnographic writing’ as a “kind [of writing] that aims to describe the contours of a social and conceptual universe in a way that is at once theoretically informed, but not, in itself, simply designed to advocate a single argument or theory”¹ capture the tone and structure I wish to employ. The historical narratives and theoretical discussions will highlight events and concepts that I feel inform the story I aim to tell: a story of the Québec Student Strikes of 2012. They are useful for rendering actions, messages, and opinions comprehensible but they are not meant to be universal explanations of the experiences and goals of a massive, heterogeneous, student and social movement, a veritable multitude. This is also why this first story will then be followed by seven different conversations, all shedding light on different facets of the object I aim to study.

Some Comments on the Multitude and the Problem of Representation

If one wished to choose one concern that recurs throughout my study it would be a growing sense of the contradictions and exclusions inherent in political and cultural representation. At a more theoretical level, this is captured by my attempts to avoid reducing the multitude of meanings into one representative message in this work. The use of “multitude” throughout reflects the influence of Hardt and Negri on my thinking. Hardt and Negri contrast concepts of ‘the people’ and ‘the multitude’ by identifying “the eclipse of internal differences through the *representation* of the whole population by a hegemonic group, race, or class”² as a

¹ David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009) vii.

² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

process that at once backs the concept of nations while obfuscating through representation the revolutionary power of the heterogeneous multitude: “The multitude is the real productive force of our social world...The emancipation of humanity from every transcendent power is grounded on the multitude’s power to construct its own political institutions and constitute society.”³ This critique of ‘the people’ is easily extended to the citizenry or any other group designation that aims to homogenize the diversity of its constitutive parts under a political whole that ultimately divorces them from their political power to “constitute society” or create their own worlds. Governance models premised on representative democratic structures are obvious examples of the ways in which representation distances actors from their own constructive political power to define themselves and their relationships to their social world. This critique informs my later discussions of political decision-making models and spaces in particular but also structures many of the editorial choices I have made.

Of course this ‘rejection’ of representation creates an inescapable contradiction. I am arguing against representation while at the same time using a mode of representation to explain the very events and opinions that I considered to be violated through representation. I am describing narratives through the imperfect representative or signifying system of language in order to set the stage for theoretical arguments that in one way or another lend meaning to my interpretation of the Québec student strikes and the opinions of their participants. I am arguing against representative politics and the fundamental act of speaking or acting on behalf of others because my interpretation of the actions and politics of many students in Québec identifies a fundamental rejection of representative politics and authority, seeking instead to individually and collectively, through consent, describe, control, and articulate their own social realities. While the imperfections of representative language and contradictions of my study cannot be fully

³ Ibid., 104 & 165.

reconciled, this position does in fact explain the structure of my work. In order to address some of these contradictions of second hand interpretation and representation, my final chapter entitled “Students Speaking for Themselves” will be largely unaltered in terms of transcript apart from following a question grid for each interviewee and some necessary shorthand and editing to accommodate the demands of coherence for an academic work and the space constrictions of a thesis project. By keeping the responses of the participants more or less intact, I will avoid some of the representational pitfalls that would otherwise stem from me truncating and selecting certain responses or comments. I recognize this is a break with more accepted academic practices but it is consistent with my political and epistemological convictions. The participants all had important reasons for expressing their particular conclusions and ideas, reasons and thought processes that I feel should be heard in this work. These are their stories as much if not more than it is my academic work. While my voice will not be absent from the interviews, our different voices will be heard together.

Structure

Leading up to the interview portion of this study, I will follow a more traditional academic format by providing two important narratives, the first being a condensed history of the evolution of post-secondary education (PSE) in Québec and the second, a matching outline of the changing scenery of student activism. These two narratives will form the first chapter and will provide important context for considering the events of 2011 to 2012. To support this history I have also compiled two abbreviated timelines: one charting important events in Québec’s educational history (Appendix A) and the second outlining in more detail events of 2011-2012 (Appendix B).

For the first chapter, I have chosen to separate the more general evolution of Québec PSE from the history of student activism. The first section of the chapter deals with the ideological, discursive, and institutional shifts to PSE by looking at the effects of the Parent Report, the expansion of state funding and control of post-secondary educational institutions, and the later shift towards neoliberalism. These transitions resulted in a rapid expansion of funding and access to universities and colleges (CEGEPs) in Québec. Education, including post-secondary education, was rearticulated in the 1960s as a public service that should be made as widely accessible as possible, one that should be regulated and funded by the state. Over the course of the late 1970s up until the 2000s, this consensus was rejected in favour of viewing education as a commodity for individual consumption rather than a service, one that should increasingly be influenced by market forces and fee for service models of access. These transitions resulted in continual pushes by the state to reduce funding and increase user fees (namely tuition fees) and to encourage private enterprise involvement in the educational sphere.

These important shifts in the sphere of post-secondary education in Québec were not the sole product of intervention at the state level. The second section of the first chapter focuses on the initial burst of student activism occurring in the 1960s, which resulted in the first mass occupation of a CEGEP in Montréal and the formation of a broad student-based union organization, UGEQ. This interlinked history follows the rise and fall of various student associations and key moments of mobilization and opposition resulting in student strikes. This section identifies the enduring influence of combative syndicalism embraced by student activists and organizations in Québec. Influenced by student activism in France and the early syndicalist charters of La Charte d'Amiens and La Charte de Grenoble, students adopted a political orientation emphasizing their identity as intellectual workers part of a broader society. Modeling

their structures on labour unions and adopting structures based on general assembly style direct democracy, student organizing took on a political role that emphasized direct action based mobilization to achieve its goals. Adopting confrontational tactics based on direct action, students adopted free education as a fundamental principle and goal and demanded the state negotiate and respond to them as equal stakeholders. More recent student organizations like ASSÉ have built on this tradition and expanded their activism to a broader political project condemning neoliberalism and imperial capitalism in solidarity with other social movements.

While the first chapter fills in the history leading up to the student strikes of 2012, the second chapter offers a theoretical discussion of broader concepts at play in the history and reflects on how these themes relate to this study. Chapter 1 exposes an ongoing tension between the public and private character of the university as a space and education as social good. This chapter begins with a discussion of different conceptions of public space bringing together Habermas' theories of the public sphere with works that both criticize and expand upon his initial concepts. By focusing on public space and the university as a changing spatial milieu, I aim to draw out the multiplicity and polyvalence of space, and the ways in which people like students act upon and within spaces to renegotiate and reclaim them. Students used direct action to create new zones of political agency, creativity, and social unrest. These actions demonstrated the polyvalencies of space, revealing a broader understanding of politics captured by Jacques Rancière's vision of politics as an individual or collective intervention in the "visible and sayable".⁴ This vision of politics finds resonance in concepts of direct democracy and direct action that reject the distancing of political actors from their ability to intervene in their social realities, a distancing created by hegemonic representative political forms of organization. By

⁴ Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics" *Theory and Event*, 2001.
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v005/5.3ranciere.html

rejoining individuals and their communities with their capacities to define and act on their own behalf and in concert with larger groups, people are empowered to reclaim their own legitimacy as political subjects capable of authoring and altering their societies.

As I stated at the beginning of this introduction, this work is framed by a larger questioning of representation itself and the ways in which the act of representation consumes heterogeneity and agency. The final lengthy chapter aims to partially accommodate this tension by presenting the conversations I shared with participants in the student strikes. These conversations add an invaluable dimension to this work by rejoining the events and themes I have written about with the people engaged in living them. Their stories will demonstrate a small example of the diversity of experience among participants as well as illustrating places of commonality and unity essential to realizing collective direct actions. The presentation of the interview material will be followed by a somewhat personal reflection inspired by these stories, which I have called “the Myth of Citizenship”. This reflection will bring together Barthes’ thoughts on myth and myth-consumption and my own reactions to some of the comments of participants. I began this study thinking of citizenship as a useful category for thinking about radical politics and social justice. As a result, citizenship as a representational category runs throughout the work and plays a central role in my conversations with the participants. I was surprised to learn that participants reacted in ways that resonated with Barthes’ view of myths as depoliticized speech, exposing both a rejection of citizenship as a successful myth as well as an interest in creating something different as an inclusive social identity. Through these conversations and my own experiences in social movements, I have come to understand citizenship as a broken myth and a failure of representation.

It is my hope that this work will provide a useful guide for thinking about not only the Québec Student Strikes but about the ways in which we choose to act, especially how we define and perform politics. This work is not meant to provide an exhaustive explanation of the how, why, and what of the strikes. Rather, I aim to interrupt the dominant representations of both the events of 2012 and the students who dedicated so much of their time to that struggle. In order to do this, I feel it essential to give students the loudest voice in this work. I hope their comments encourage others to intervene more forcefully in their own lives, to question and reject their own myths, and ultimately to work together to build a more just future.

Chapter 1: A Condensed History of Post-Secondary Education and Student Activism in Québec

Section I: From ‘Social Good’ to Commodity: A Short History of Changes to Post-Secondary Education in Québec

To frame this study of the Québec Student Strikes, it is crucial to establish two important narratives: first, one that charts the evolution of post-secondary education (PSE) in Québec; and secondly, one that maps the concurrent history of student activism and organization. To properly consider the actions of student protesters during the events of 2011 and 2012, it is necessary to frame and conceptualize the spaces they acted within and upon. Like any other institutional sphere, the PSE sphere is not static and the form and content of this sector changes over time. This chapter will provide a socio-economic account of changes to post-secondary education as well as a political time-line of key moments and shifts in the evolution of PSE. These analyses will be framed by a general outline of the marked shifts in discourse,⁵ funding, and regulation of PSE in Québec. I will draw particular attention to the effects first of the ‘publicizing’ of PSE in Québec, and later the neoliberalization or ‘growing marketization’ of the province’s university and college institutions. These two shifts in ideological orientation are key moments in the history of post-secondary education in Québec. Changes to university and post-secondary spaces stemming from these shifts provide a more focused lens for evaluating key discursive impacts of notable shifts in political and social ideologies, which are dialectically linked to broader social

⁵ A note on the use of ‘discourse’ and ‘ideology’ throughout the work: an editor noted the potential for contradiction in using both. I am choosing to use both ideology and discourse to reflect my own ambivalences about choosing between the two. Especially when I am discussing a phenomenon like neoliberalism, I find restricting that phenomenon to being either an ideology or a discourse problematic and falsely reductive. To me, neoliberalism can form an ideology but also play out as a constitutive discourse, a language that perpetuates ideas and norms. Bruce Lincoln articulates this tension by explaining his own choice to embrace both terms in a way that I find particularly useful and far more coherent: “What I particularly like about “ideology” is its insistence on the interested nature of speech and its attention to the way material interests condition the production, circulation, and reception of speech acts that encode and advance such interests. What appeals to me about “discourse” is its recognition that speech possesses constitutive power such that certain signifiers can—and do—conjure that of which they speak in the collective consciousness of those among whom they circulate.” Bruce Lincoln, “Responsa Miniscula”, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 17/1 (2005), 63. <http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/10.1163/1570068053429884>.

changes and actions of student activists. Major moments of mobilization have often occurred in response to aggressive attempts to reduce accessibility and funding. To contextualize the events of the student strikes and the experiences of participants, a review of these shifts and resulting changes to PSE is thus essential. This review will provide a backdrop for mapping out a condensed history of student activism in Québec in Section II of this chapter.

My analysis is oriented by three pivotal transition moments in the evolution of PSE in QUÉBEC, each of which had an impact on university funding and accessibility: the rise of the welfare state (occurring in the 1960s); the introduction of austerity and budget cut language (beginning in the mid to late 1970s); and the neoliberal consensus culminating in additional cuts and tuition hikes (forming and solidifying over the 1990s and 2000s). These three pivotal moments map out a general ideological shift that is at first characterized by the dominant influences of Keynesian social and economic policy, pushed from below by socialist political perspectives. Later, beginning mostly in the 1970s, there is a marked shift towards neoliberalism, a social, economic, political, and ideological project marked by the introduction of deficit and austerity budget language, and the primacy of the ‘free-market’. By the 1990s the influence of neoliberalism legitimated government attempts to raise tuition costs all the while decreasing access to student funding and aid. This narrative will provide the necessary context to frame the Québec student strikes and protests of 2011, 2012, and 2013 and will introduce many of the key actors and events.

From Private, Elite, and Religious to Public, Regional, and Secular: A Short History of Post-Secondary Education in Québec

The realm of post-secondary education in Québec has evolved somewhat differently than most other places in Canada. The British North America Act of 1867 solidified provincial control over education and in particular, the right to separate schooling institutions for Catholics and Protestants. This resulted in the establishment of Confessional School Boards (school boards organized according to religion), which held control of the education system in Québec until the reforms of the 1960s.⁶ Québec's system was held back primarily by a collusion of state and religion that kept the education system small, underfunded, and religiously and linguistically divided. Post-secondary education, such as it was, was inaccessible to few outside of the elite, a group mostly dominated by wealthy English-Québeckers and Union Nationale patrons. Maurice 'Le Chef' Duplessis, head of Union Nationale, held control of the province as premier from 1936-1939 and again from 1944 until his death in 1959. His regime sought to maintain a traditionalist social structure by promoting conservative family values, a small agrarian economy, and allegiance to the Catholic Church. The latter maintained control of most social services, particularly in health and education.

Protestant and Catholic elites also dominated the sphere of Québec university-level education, beginning with the founding of Jesuit College in 1635 in Québec City and later McGill University in 1821. Up until the creation of the University of Québec network in 1969, universities in Québec were primarily private institutions with clear religious and linguistic affiliations.⁷ Leading up to the reforms of the 1960s, the post-secondary network included only six universities (3 French, 3 English), around fifteen affiliated colleges, twenty Catholic

⁶ Norman Henchey and Donald Burgess. *Between Past and Future: Québec Education in Transition*. (Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1987) 21-27.

⁷ As examples, McGill University, founded in 1821, was a private Protestant and English university with roots in the Scottish intellectual sphere, Université de Laval which began as the Québec Seminary in 1663, was French and Catholic.

seminaries, and four Protestant seminaries.⁸ In 1939, provincial funding for Québec universities made up 22.3% (the federal funding portion only 0.2%), of their overall revenue; by 1952 the provincial contribution stood at 19.6%, and the federal portion 13.4%⁹ while tuition fees (31.0%) and auxiliary services (16.9%) made up almost half the revenues of Québec universities (47.9%). These data demonstrate that universities in Québec, prior to the 1960s, were primarily funded by user-fees, commodity services sold on campuses, and private donations. As can be expected given the economic and social realities of Québec prior to the Quiet Revolution, the university network in place mirrored the language and cultural inequalities of the province: English, Protestant universities (particularly McGill) were better funded (through mostly private sources) and French, Catholic universities were less so.¹⁰ For the majority of students in Québec, attending university was unlikely if not impossible, especially if a potential student was working class francophone and/or female, or from a rural area. While funding from the provincial government did increase over the 1950s, it was the combined influences of grassroots pressure from students and activists coupled with pressure from above in the form of Jean Lesage's Liberals and the five volume Parent Commission (1961-1966)¹¹ that led to the dramatic restructuring and reorientation of Québec's post-secondary network as a public good, one that should be publicly funded.

⁸ Jean-Luc Ratel in collaboration with Philippe Verreault-Julien, "Le financement des universités au Québec: histoire, enjeux et défis/Financing of Québec Universities: History, Stakes, Challenges", CADEUL, October 2006, 12.

⁹ It should be noted that the federal portion remained particularly low in Québec in 1939 due in part to Duplessis' position that accepting federal funding would threaten the economic and political sovereignty of Québec. There was later a spike in federal funding due to allowances following World War II to support veterans education by additional funding being given for each veteran registered in university. Duplessis accepted the federal transfer in 1952 and then chose to reject it the following year (Ratel & Verreault-Julien, 14).

¹⁰ Ratel & Verreault-Julien, October 2006: "For the year 1961-1962, l'Université de Montréal had endowment funds from multiple sources of \$1,453,302 at its disposal providing an annual revenue of \$85,320...[whereas] McGill had access to endowment funds of \$84,611,696, offering an annual revenue of \$3,722,999. (13) *French originals, my translations throughout.

¹¹ Headed up by the Vice-Rector of Laval University, Mgr Alphonse-Marie Parent, the commission sought to study the organization, funding, and overall structures of all elements of the Québec education system.

Reforms of the 1960s

Duplessis's death in 1959 marked the end of "La Grande Noirceur" and the beginning of what has later been termed the 'Quiet Revolution' in Québec. The election of Jean Lesage's Liberal government combined with mounting social and cultural change from below to result in substantial restructuring of the social service sphere, especially education. The reforms of the 1960s shifted control of social services away from religious entities, primarily the powerful Catholic Church, to an expanding state apparatus. Québec scholar Jean-Marc Potte characterizes these changes as not only a shift from a minimalist, patronage-based state to a Keynesian welfare model, but also a shift in the form and content of Québec nationalism, accelerated by youth eager to push forward change and disseminate visions of a different, independent Québec:

The strengthening of the state is accomplished in the name of "maître chez-nous" ('masters in our own house'), in the name of nationalism. Not the French-Canadian and Catholic nationalism of before, but under the banner of a secular (public) state. The battle divided the ruling elites: between the Union Nationale, partisan to continuity and the Liberal Party of Lesage, Gérin-Lajoie and Lévesque, between the laity and the clergy, between a fraction of those who would see the Church adapted to modernity and others wishing to protect their privileges and nostalgic visions of the past. Faced with these competing struggles taken on by the leaders of Québec, young people obviously support change but judge the changes as not fast enough or far enough. They invest support in the R.I.N (Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale, Assembly for National Independence) and the F.L.Q., and fight for an independent Québec, one they desire to be more or less secular and vaguely socialist. This neo-nationalism, consistent with its predecessor in its sense of belonging but inconsistent in terms of its progressive character, is taken up and distributed by singers, songwriters, writers, artists, intellectuals. Across the movement lives the same spirit of community found in the fifties, but purged of the oppressive character that had rendered it so odious.¹²

This purging and recasting of Québec nationalism as secular and tied to the state resulted in a nationalism focused on the role of the state as a safeguard and promoter of national wellbeing.

This new discourse, focused on social goods and accessibility, resulted in a "new Québec identity based on notions of social progress strongly [emphasizing] state involvement and the

¹² Jean-Marc Potte, *La communauté perdue: petite histoire des militantismes./The Lost Community: a small history of militantcies* (Montréal, QC: VLB Éditeur, 1987) 19-20.

development of a welfare state...”¹³ The changes to Québec’s education system, especially the reforms to university funding, the creation of CEGEPS (Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel/General and Vocational Colleges) and the Université de Québec network, offer key symbols of these dramatic social changes. Policy changes were partially driven by the provincial government but these changes were accelerated and shaped by changes in social discourse among students and the general population.

While the Parent Report (1961-1966) made sweeping recommendations for all parts of the Québec education system, it is the changes to post-secondary education that are most relevant to this study. Guy Rocher describes the essential mission of the Parent Report as “a dual aspiration of its era: one being the entry of Québec into modernity and secondly the democratization of Québec society.”¹⁴ This dual aspiration resulted in recommendations meant to democratize and secularize the education system in Québec by establishing it as a social service managed and funded by the state. The changes were dramatic and fast-paced: “Within a decade, the administration of education shifted from decentralized and religious-oriented instruction to a centralized and secular-based education system”¹⁵ that now also included state-funded post-secondary institutions. The social and economic transformations experienced in Québec over the course of the 1960s were strongly influenced by Keynesian, social-democratic approaches to political arrangements of society. The third volume of the Parent Commission on post-secondary education in Québec reconceptualized universities, and education generally, not as private institutions benefitting private individuals, but as social institutions benefitting Québec society as a whole:

¹³ Punita Bhardwaj, “Neoliberalism and Education: A Case Study on Québec” M.A. Thesis. (Montréal, QC: McGill University, 2010.) 11.

¹⁴ Guy Rocher, “Un bilan du Rapport Parent: vers la democratization/An assessment of the Parent Report: towards democratization” *Bulletin d'Histoire politique*, vol. 12, no 2, Hiver 2004, 7. *French in the original

¹⁵ Bhardwaj, 12.

...the benefits of education surpass the individual and the locality; the progress of teaching serves principally the interests of society in general, in such a way that we can and must consider education as a national endeavour. This signifies that the education of each child as well as each adult is not the principal responsibility of a local collectivity or of particular groups; it is the society as a whole that is responsible for the most complete education possible of each student, regardless of the region in which he lives or his place of origin.¹⁶

In support of this collective view of education, the Parent Commission went on to advocate for public financing of post-secondary education.

Recommendations from the Parent report resulted in the creation of the publicly funded CEGEP system in 1967 and a year later the creation of the Université du Québec public university system. The creation of CEGEPs established a system of public post-secondary colleges meant to complement university education by providing pre-university study and diploma-based professional training. Facing strong pressure from student groups such as the Union nationale des étudiants du Québec (UGEQ), tuition to the public CEGEPS was made free and remains so to this day. The establishment of the Université du Québec offered a public university network with campuses in various regions across Québec (Montréal, Chicoutimi, Rimouski, Hull (now Outaouais) Trois-Rivières, Abitibi-Témiscamingue) to improve access and availability to all Québécois citizens. These objectives, accompanied by a discourse redefining education as a social good and public utility, resulted in massive increases in public funding of Québec universities and post-secondary institutions. Reflective of a Keynesian social welfare ideology, this era also saw the establishment of other public utilities like Hydro-Québec. Facing student protests and pressure, Québec put in place very low tuition fees with a net freeze on tuition remaining in place from approximately 1968 to 1990-1991.¹⁷

The Dawning of ‘Austerity’

¹⁶ Parent Commission, “Administration and Instruction”, 1966, IV, 33, as cited in Ratel & Verreault-Julien, 26.

¹⁷ Ratel & Verreault-Julien, 29-31.

Discourse and policy on public education began to shift in the mid-1970s. Up until this point, public discussion among politicians, journalists, and student activists, maintained a strong socially democratic and nationalist tone. The expansion of Québec's welfare state throughout the sixties and early seventies was part of a nation-building project couched in the rhetoric of propelling Québec society forward into some version of a socially democratic modernity. This progressive view permeated society at many levels and lent political and public support to the massive increases in state spending on social service projects. These political tendencies were similar across North America and the West. The mid-1970s ushered in a new social doctrine shaped by influential economic and political theorists Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman: neoliberalism. When shifts in the hegemonic ideology began to affect policy, Québec's approach to the welfare state also changed. To better understand this shift in the language and forms of post-secondary education policy, we need to briefly consider the key concepts of this new ideology.

The arguments of David Harvey and Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy (among many others) characterize neoliberalism as an ideological, political, and economic grouping of ideas working to achieve the consolidation and (re)assertion of wealth and power in a small transnational elite capitalist class.¹⁸ Neoliberal visions of society were shaped by a glorification of the individual as a free political-economic actor in an abstract free-market capitalist economy and responded to the economic and political transformations of the previous era by criticizing expanded state structures and advocating their reduction. Prominent economist and political theorist Milton Friedman drew heavily on the thought of Hayek, focusing on the concept of individual freedom and how society might best be structured to achieve optimal individual

¹⁸ See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (2005), Gérard Duménil & Dominique Lévy, "Costs and benefits of neoliberalism. A class analysis" *Review of International Political Economy*, 8:4, 578-607 and *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*, (2011).

freedom. This fundamental form of freedom is predominantly political in nature but, according to Friedman, necessitated by economic freedom. Faithful to his liberal tradition and almost copying verbatim Isaiah Berlin's account of negative freedom, Friedman defines political freedom as

the absence of coercion of a man (sic) by his fellow men (sic). The fundamental threat to freedom is power to coerce, be it in the hands of a monarch, a dictator, an oligarchy, or a momentary majority. The preservation of freedom requires the elimination of such concentration of power...and the dispersal and distribution of whatever power cannot be eliminated...¹⁹

Negative freedom, defined as such, entails no more than the protection of the individual from physical or legal inhibition of their person. Positive freedom, as Berlin explains, usually refers to the institutional production of conditions that either encourage or enable individuals and the collective to flourish.²⁰ Notions of positive freedom provide the ideological backing to the development of the social welfare state in the West. While negative freedom is not directly opposed to visions of positive freedom, for Friedman these two strains of freedom should not intermix. As the above quote explains, Friedman's liberalism is characterized by a profound distrust of centralized power. Political power concentrated in large centralized bureaucracies, he argued, runs the risk of abuse in the hands of those interested in restricting negative freedom of the individual, even if done in their best interest.

Friedman's definition of freedom favoured individual autonomy and decentralization in all matters pertaining to political and economic social forms. The popularization of his ideas have had significant ramifications for understandings of society as a collective and claims to

¹⁹ Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962) 15.

²⁰ I am providing simple, cursory definitions of these concepts but they are primarily based on theory from Isaiah Berlin's "Two Concepts of Liberty" in *Four Essays on Liberty*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1969) http://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/wiso_ywl/johannes/Ankuendigungen/Berlin_twoconceptsofliberty.pdf and John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, edited by C.B. Macpherson (Indiannapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1980).

common social space not controlled by the market. This re-conceptualization of individuals separates them from notions of collective good, breaking away from variants of liberalism that position individual liberty in relation to the liberty of other actors.²¹ Friedman's theories also became a constituent part of neoliberal market economy doctrines promoting deregulation of trade and the cutting back of state social services and programs to promote 'individual freedom' allowing for private enterprise to take over service provision, all in the name of promoting efficiency, choice, and freedom.

The ascent of neoliberalism as well as the specific sets of economic policy reforms promoted by 'neoliberals' was facilitated by the economic realities of the 1970s and 1980s. In North America the 1970s were characterized by an economic phenomenon known as 'stagflation': concurrent high inflation with slow or stagnant economic growth or demand in the economy. Many commentators assign partial causation to the OPEC crisis of the 1970s set off by an oil embargo against several countries including the United States and Canada by Arab oil-exporters.²² David Harvey describes the shift in US monetary policy as a dramatic break with

the long-standing commitment...to the principles of New Deal, which meant broadly Keynesian fiscal and monetary policies with full employment as the key objective [domestically, which was] abandoned in favour of a policy designed to quell inflation no matter what the consequences might be for employment. The real rate of interest, which has often been negative during the double-digit inflationary surge of the 1970s, was rendered positive by fiat of the Federal Reserve... The nominal rate of interest was raised overnight, and after a few ups and downs, by July 1981 stood close to 20 percent. Thus began 'a long deep recession that would empty factories and break unions in the US and drive debtor countries to the brink of insolvency, beginning the long era of structural adjustment'. [Paul Volcker, chairman of the US Federal Reserve Bank under Carter, argued that this] was the only way out of the grumbling crisis of stagflation that had characterized the US and much of the global economy throughout the 1970s.²³

²¹ See prominent liberal thinkers like John Rawls and Charles Taylor.

²² <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/oil-embargo>.

²³ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2005, 2007 reprint), 23.

As Harvey denotes, policy responses by governments converged around a rejection of Keynesian monetary and fiscal policy that promoted intervention on the basis of protecting employment and therefore consumption rates and instead focused on monetary interventions meant to ‘stimulate’ economic growth and control debt at all costs. These were followed by ‘liberalizations’ or ‘deregulations’ meant to enable ‘free-er trade’ and to allow private enterprises deemed strong enough to thrive in such difficult economic circumstances the space to take over many public services. These moves were all premised on the assumption that by allowing the space for private enterprise and market forces to prevail and take over without state control or intervention, economic growth would necessarily prevail. Oddly enough, the contradictory nature of extensive state interventions in monetary and fiscal policies like interest rates, tariffs, trade agreements, etc, meant to free up economic spaces from government intervention, was overlooked or ignored by many leading proponents of neoliberalism.

Québec and Canada were not immune to the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s. Pierre Filion explains the impacts of what he terms as ‘Post-Fordist’ economic changes on the Canadian economy by emphasizing the imbalance between consumption cycles and production as well as the effects of ballooning debt and extensive economic restructuring over the course of the 1980s:

The progression of post-Fordism can be understood as a succession of phases. The first phase lasted from the Oil Shocks (1973-1974) to the beginning of the 1980s. This period was marked by a slowing of economic growth. These years also saw an important increase in international trade, resulting in part from Japan’s explosive entry into the automobile and electronic markets. “Stagflation”, the simultaneous appearance of high rates of inflation and high unemployment, is observed for the first time during a climate of economic stagnation and instability. This phenomenon was linked to efforts by unions, social movements, and governments aiming to maintain strong growth during an era where the expansion of production equipment and gains in productivity stayed weak. While in previous years debt had been either absent or very minimal, it reached between 5 and 15 billion per year during this period (Statistique Canada, 1995, cat. 68-212, p. 4). These deficits were the result of a certain sensibility towards social pressures motivated

by fights against unemployment, and a cyclical rather than structural interpretation of economic slow-downs. The second period extends from the beginning of the recession of 1982 to the end of the recession of 1990-1999. [The years that followed] were ones of profound economic restructuring, accelerated by two recessions... This restructuring resulted in the complete loss of entire sections of the manufacturing sector (where salaries were relatively high); it was precipitated by the adoption of NAFTA and more recently, redundancies in the tertiary sector which until then was one of the largest creators of employment.²⁴

Filion's summary of 1973-1991 demonstrates that the economic realities of those years provided in some ways, an ideal backdrop for the discourse of neoliberalism and monetarism to be seen as the ideal and at times only solutions to socio-economic crises, especially on the side of policy-makers looking for ways to address the crises in state-funding of expansive welfare-state programs. Neoliberalism brought together an array of economic ideas under the philosophical backing of classical liberalism and the supremacy of the individual. These ideas included "a complex fusion of monetarism (Friedman), rational expectations (Robert Lucas), public choice (James Buchanan, and Gordon Tullock), and the less respectable but still influential 'supply-side' ideas of Arthur Laffer, who went so far as to suggest that incentive effects of tax cuts would so increase economic activity as to automatically increase tax revenues."²⁵ Over the course of the 1970s through to the 1990s, neoliberalism and its various expressions such as the "Washington Consensus", achieved prominence as the 'only option' for policy makers through the combined forces of ideological shifts, economic crises, and regimes newly imposed by international actors like the IMF and the World Bank. Rather than seeking to address the structural and systemic problems at the root of these economic crises, states instead latched on to economic policies that aimed to cut taxes (traditionally the main funding support for state-run services), 'liberate' trade through deregulation or regulation favoring business interests, and

²⁴ Pierre Filion, « L'enracinement de l'après-fordisme au Canada: retombées régionales et perspectives d'avenir » *Cahiers de géographie du Québec*, vol. 40, n° 111, 1996, <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/022585ar>. 318-319. *French in the original.

²⁵ Harvey, 54.

imposed budgetary cuts to public finances meant to battle deficits regardless of the effects on employment, social service provision, and the consumption capacities of the general population. The effects of these various forces became remarkably evident by 1981-1982 in Québec with unemployment rates of youth reaching 25%.

The effects of neoliberal doctrine began to play out in education policy as early as 1978-1979 when the first small cuts to post-secondary education funding took place.²⁶ By 1981-1982, the tone and direction of government policy was clearly falling in line with neoliberal rhetoric. Education minister Camille Laurin issued a report in 1981 discussing the goals of education policy, including the necessity to cut operational budgets and spending:

...In 1981-1982 and over the coming years, we cannot proceed in all tranquility to pursue the great goals of quality and democratization [of education]. We cannot cover up reality: alongside the majority of countries in the world, we are entering an era of financial austerity and economic constraints, constraints that budget cuts, as you know, despite their spectacular character, only represent the symptoms and first consequences. I speak of symptoms because these compressions reflect a general context that affects all sectors and seems to be a marker of the 80s. It was already well understood for a number of years that the rates of growth of the public sector could not continue to grow at the pace to which we have become accustomed. We also felt that public budgets... could not continue to grow without limit. Even if we would like to, we cannot continue to finance such rapid expansions of our social service programs, we quite simply do not have the means. We must then, like other societies, learn to manage austerity, and without doubt, a certain decline. All indications seem to say that this austerity... will not be temporary...²⁷

This language of austerity, still dominant today, formed a key part of Québec policy documents especially budget reports and reports from the Ministry of Finance for the length of the 80s through to present day. 1981 also marked one of the first key changes to tuition fees since their freezing in the 1960s with the ministry's decision to up tuition fees for students from outside of

²⁶ See Ratel, Henchey and Burgess, and Eric Martin & Maxime Ouellet, *Université Inc.* (2011).

²⁷ Camille Laurin, Québec. Ministère de l'éducation. *L'Éducation en 1981-1982: discerner l'essentiel/Education in 1981-1982: discerning the essential.* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère de l'éducation, 1981). 11.

*French in the original

Québec to approximately \$4,128.²⁸ Laurin's comments were notable due to their contradictions. While the reports pinpointed austerity-budgeting and reduction of state funding as key characteristics of education funding, the minister's other comments maintained a discourse of accessibility and democratization of education to enable more groups of Québec citizens to access college and post-secondary education, sentiments in line with the ideals of the Parent Report.²⁹ Although spending on education did increase over the late 70s and early 80s, Henchey and Burgess observe that if "inflation [is taken] into consideration, there have been a continuing series of budget cuts: -3.4% in 1978, -4.1% in 1979, -0.4% in 1980, -9.7% in 1981, -2.6% in 1982, -5.0% in 1983, -3.8% in 1984, -1.1% in 1985, and -3.4% in 1986."³⁰ This points to an interesting tension in policy. Laurin's commentary shows an ongoing political rhetoric appealing to the social good discourse of Québec's 1960s while at the same time pushing forward a neoliberal spending agenda focused on individual consumer access and reduction of state-funding for social services. It is fair to say that these conflicting dynamics were in part influenced by public sentiment and student pressure to maintain low, fixed tuition rates. The Québec government did not attack tuition fees for domestic students until 1989-1990, when a marked shift in discourse demonstrated a clearer consolidation of neoliberal ideals, both economically and discursively.

Education but at a Price: The Neoliberal Push to Hike Tuition, 1990s and 2000s

In 1986, the government of Robert Bourassa produced the Gobeil Report, which, among other things, recommended raising tuition fees "between three and four times, depending on the program of study."³¹ The influence of the Gobeil Report was widespread, and leading up to

²⁸ Ibid., 29.

²⁹ Ibid., 9.

³⁰ Henchey & Burgess, 177.

³¹ Ratel & Verreault-Julien, 51.

1990, the potential unfreezing of tuition fees had already garnered many proponents, including Québec's 'Council of Universities, CRÉPUQ, several ministers, young liberals, and [even] certain student associations'.³² In 1990 Robert Bourassa's Liberals implemented tuition hikes of \$280 per year over four years. Students mobilized and went on general strike but were defeated resulting in a substantial divide in the student movement.³³ Government discourse took on an overt neoliberal flavour and style with direct references to the rationalization of state intervention in public service provision and the economy:

[Across the world,] we are witnessing numerous re-evaluations of the existence and operational modalities of certain public services. This movement is particularly striking in countries like Sweden that have heavily developed the concept of the 'Welfare State'... Québec, open to the world economy, has already initiated this necessary re-evaluation of the role of the state but the movement must be intensified. In Québec, like all industrialized countries, we must assure that the level of governmental intervention stay compatible with the pursuit of economic progress.³⁴

In the absence of a strong and united student opposition, and facing an expanding neoliberal consensus on the role of the state, the tuition hikes went ahead until 1994, when a PQ government was re-elected and re-installed a tuition fee freeze. While the 1990s did have similar rhetorical tensions as those found in Québec government policy documents in the early 1980s, governments became more consistently committed to neoliberal economic and social policies, demonstrated by their policy discourses as seen in the above quotation from the Johnson-Lévesque Report of 1993. Despite freezing tuition in 1994, the PQ under Lucien Bouchard with Pauline Marois as education minister attempted to raise tuition fees another 30% in 1996. In spite

³² Ibid., 77.

³³ Nicolas Phebus quoted in Aidon Conway's "The Strike of the General Assembly: An Interview with Nicolas Phebus" <http://uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/02-the-strike-of-the-general-assembly/>

³⁴ Daniel Johnson & Gérard D. Lévesque, Québec, *Rapport Johnson-Lévesque. Les finances publiques du Québec: vivre selon nos moyens*. (Québec: 1993), Introduction. Accessed online: <http://www.ling.uqam.ca/ato-mcd/documents/dnl-com-pro-jol93.txt> *French in the original

of some rhetorical and tokenistic adherence to themes of democracy and solidarity,³⁵ the PQ adopted a language, now very familiar to us, of ‘zero deficit’ for public budgets.³⁶ This budget language also accompanied ongoing reductions of federal transfers to provinces over the course of the 1990s, called the ‘Axworthy reform.’³⁷ Students, who had already been protesting federal funding cuts, were readily mobilized by a new student coalition, MDE (Mouvement pour le droit à l’éducation/Movement for the Right to Education). This time students responded with more coordinated force, with protests in the streets numbering close to 100,000 and general student strikes, resulting in another tuition freeze.³⁸ The government would not attempt another strong push to raise tuition fees again until 2005.

In 2003, with the language of austerity and zero deficit budgeting now firmly in place at the state policy level, the Québec Liberals under Jean Charest announced a campaign promise to freeze the public cost of education in Québec, which necessarily would result in additional attacks on state funding of post-secondary education. Following their election, the Liberals went on to propose drastic changes to the student aid system, specifically the conversion of millions of dollars in bursaries into loans.³⁹ Members of CASSÉÉ described the proposed reforms as a direct threat to the accessibility of education: “The changes this [reform] will bring are not simple readjustments: this reform is a general attack on the accessibility of education, on the autonomy of students and students benefiting [from state support] and an obvious gift to financial

³⁵ See *Estates-General: The State of Education, 1995-96*, Québec, Ministry of Education, as an one example among others.

³⁶ Ratel & Verreault-Julien, 82.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, “Known as the “Axworthy reform”, these measures would see that between “1994-1995 and 1997-1998, the level of transfer payments of CHST [Canada Health and Social Transfer] would pass from 18.7 to 12.5 billion dollars.”” 80.

³⁸ Nicolas Phebus interview.

³⁹ CrimethInc, “While the Iron is Hot: Student Strike & Social Revolt in Québec, 2012.” Accessed online: <http://www.crimethinc.com/texts/recentfeatures/Montréal1.php>

institutions.”⁴⁰ CASSÉE (French word for ‘dead broke’) represented a newly formed student coalition grouping together ASSÉ (Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante/Association for a Syndical Student Solidarity), a new, more radically political student association formed in 2001,⁴¹ and other independent student unions and associations. This coalition organized protests and opposition to the proposed reforms alongside the other less radical student federations FEUQ and FECQ, who also opposed the reforms. The first enlarged coalition of ASSÉ (CASSÉE) led the organizing push and successfully organized one of the largest and longest (lasting a month and a half) student strikes in Québec history prior to 2012 with over 100,000 students on strike in Québec by March 15th, 2005.⁴² Facing intense resistance and disruptions including blockades, occupations and street violence, the government agreed to negotiate with FEUQ and FECQ (which at the time were the largest student federations) and agreed to drop its reforms to the AFE (Aide Financière Étudiante/Student Financial Aid).⁴³

Staying true to its austerity-style budgeting and modeling access to education on consumer-service models rather than accessible social services, Charest’s Liberals announced a tuition hike of \$500 over five years. They faced some opposition but nothing as united and organized as the successful strikes of 1996, 2005 and then 2012. This trend would continue until 2010 when the Liberals pushed to accelerate increases in tuition at rates higher than the \$100 increases already underway: “The Liberal government... met in Québec City with representatives of CRÉPUQ and the three student federations. Busloads of students arrived from across Québec to demonstrate outside the summit, especially from Montréal. Inside, the

⁴⁰ Marc Jonas and Jérôme Charaoui, “Réforme de l’aide financière aux études: Endettement, contrôle et autres mauvaises surprises/Reform to student financial aid: Debt, control and other nasty surprises”, CASSÉE, 27 mars 2005 (Deuxième édition) *French in the original. accessed online http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/reforme_afe_2004-2005.pdf, 1.

⁴¹ ASSÉ, <http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/asse/historique/>. More attention will be given to the creation of ASSÉ in the following section focusing on the evolution of student activism in QC.

⁴² CrimethInc, “While the Iron is Hot”.

⁴³ Ibid.

government and CRÉPUQ confirmed to the student representatives that, beginning in the 2012/13 school year, tuition would increase by \$325 each year for five years; they insisted that the decision had already been made and there was no alternative.”⁴⁴ This same year, the Liberal government pushed to reform the administrative councils of CÉGEPs and universities, changes that accompanied what ASSÉ viewed to be an austerity budget. ASSÉ responded with protests in Montréal of approximately 10,000 students.⁴⁵ The obstinacy of the Charest government encouraged students to step up their mobilization efforts. As in 2005, ASSÉ formed another organizing coalition, CLASSE (Coalition Large d’ASSÉ) and worked with FEUQ and FECQ to organize a demonstration November 10th, 2011 giving the Charest government an ultimatum to abandon the proposed hikes or else students would strike again. The government ignored the ultimatum and 2012 was marked by the largest general student strikes and sustained protests in Québec and Canada’s history.

Throughout this lengthy history, there has been a conceptual transition in the discourse surrounding post-secondary education. The general student discourse, and society-wide rhetoric of the 1960s and 1970s articulated education at all levels as a public good, a service and a right that should be afforded to everyone in society regardless of social position or privilege. The highly influential Parent Report of the sixties articulated that vision and sought to democratize, modernize, and secularize education at all levels in Québec, including post-secondary education. The Report itself argued that funding of education should render it as inexpensive as possible and eventually make it free to students in order to better promote accessibility and societal well-being. The neoliberal discursive shifts of the late 1970s through to the consolidation of its ideals in the political rhetoric of the 1990s and 2000s pushed for a reconceptualization of education,

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ ASSÉ, <http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/asse/historique/>.

and especially post-secondary education, as an individual consumer good. Neoliberalism promoted a renewed focus on the individual as actor rather than a view of the individual as part of a collective. This very noticeable shift in discourse had wide-ranging impacts on Québec education policy, an effect that was remarked upon as early as 1978. The ‘neoliberal turn’ would play out in ongoing attempts to attack tuition fees by unfreezing them and even suggesting at times to introduce tuition fees at the public CÉGEP level. This discursive shift also resulted in decreases to public funding of education, examples of which this section has demonstrated at the university level. As this section has already introduced, student activists in Québec have a long history of pushing from the bottom for broader social changes by articulating their own visions of an accessible post-secondary education system. Their visions of education and society have manifested in extensive grassroots organizing and direct action and will form the subject of the next section of this chapter.

Section II: The Evolution of Student Activism in Québec and the Creation of ASSÉ

The first section of this chapter gave an historical outline of the major transitions and events in the evolution of Québec post-secondary education. I have grouped this analysis into three major ideological phases, each characterized by changes in social discourse, economic and political changes, and changes in the accessibility of PSE. These changes are part of an ongoing ideological struggle over the role and form of education in a society, specifically post-secondary education as either a commodity to be purchased or a social good to which all citizens should have a right of access. As Punita Bhardwaj explains in a thesis on the impacts of neoliberalism on primary and secondary schooling, the later part of Québec’s social history came to be dominated by the ‘neoliberalization of education’, resulting in changes to its access and

provision as well as the role of public versus private schools.⁴⁶ Bhardwaj argues that “approaching education as if it were a consumer good undermines [its role as] a fundamental social right that should be equally funded for all students...[reducing] schooling to a service where clients get to exercise choice as if it were a consumer right.”⁴⁷ Like primary and secondary education, Québec’s university and college systems were affected by this rearticulation of education as a commodity for individual consumption in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. As these ideological and political shifts played out in attempts to increase tuitions fees or otherwise alter the accessibility of PSE in Québec, students battled directly with the state primarily through student organizations. This section will review the evolution of student activism in Québec in order to understand the creation and expansion of ASSÉ, one of Québec’s most radically political student entities and a key actor for the strikes of 2012.

Beginnings: The Charter of Grenoble, Nationalism, and the Student as Worker

For much of its existence, post-secondary student activism in the Québec has largely been a struggle for wider access to university and college and ultimately free education at all levels. This struggle has often focused on tuition fees. The shape and form of these struggles have been affected by the earlier history of student unionism and mobilization in Québec, whose organizations were heavily influenced by the newly re-imagined currents of Québécois nationalism, labour unions, as well as student activism abroad -- particularly in France. Students in Québec adopted a student identity based on *La Charte de Grenoble/Charter of Grenoble* (1946 France) that offered a key self-definition of the student as an intellectual worker. *La Charte de Grenoble* was itself a product of the anarcho-syndicalist movement in France and an earlier Charter that dealt with a radical worker identity more broadly, *La Charte d’Amiens*

⁴⁶ Bhardwaj, 31-32.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 32.

(1906). This charter, considered to be an essential text for anarcho-syndicalism and combative syndicalism, key components of the student political tradition in Québec, outlined the political aims of the French CGT (Confédération générale du travail/General Work Confederation).⁴⁸ The Charter of Amiens made explicit the goals of unions and general worker syndicalism and also enforced the need for unions to work first and foremost to better their everyday working conditions while concurrently fighting to transform society through revolutionary action.⁴⁹ The charter also clarified the position of the CGT regarding political parties, stating that unions should refrain from promoting or working with political parties and, importantly, made explicit the CGT's role as a revolutionary, anti-capitalist workers union.⁵⁰ The *Grenoble Charter* and its later Québec iteration *La Charte de l'étudiant universitaire* (AGEUM, 1961), incorporated the influences of the *Charte d'Amiens*, by insisting on the recognition of students as intellectual workers. Québec students were looking to other struggles on an international scale and were seeking to place themselves within that framework, allying themselves with students, workers, and oppressed peoples worldwide. Sean Mills aptly explains how this political orientation that was at once internationalist and 'nationalist' or 'separatist', shaped the politics of activism in the 1960s and 1970s:

The power, appeal, and very foundation of socialist decolonization rested on a reading of the local situation through the lens of international movements and processes, through an optic of revolutionary humanism which gave individuals the belief that they were part of a movement of world-wide dimensions. Because francophone Québeckers were oppressed on national and cultural bases, it was on these grounds, radicals believed, that they needed to organize.⁵¹

These influences resulted in Québec university student associations, partially led by Québec

⁴⁸ CGT, *Charte d'Amiens*, 1906, http://www.marxists.org/francais/cgt/works/1906/10/cgt_190610000.htm.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Sean Mills, "The Empire Within: Montréal, the Sixties, and the Forging of a Radical Imagination," M.A. Thesis (Kingston, ON: Queen's University, 2007) 127.

student activists from the PEN (Presse étudiante nationale/National Student Press), seeking disaffiliation from the NFCUS/FNEUC (National Federation of Canadian University Students) in order “to create a francophone, nationalist, student organization, open to the international reality.”⁵² This disaffiliation⁵³ from Canadian student groups marked a key moment of departure for Québec student unions, necessitated by their nationalist orientation as well as their political orientations favoring international student-worker movements and more direct forms of democracy.

In 1961, members of AGEUM (Association générale des étudiants d’Université de Montréal/Université de Montréal General Students Association), Louis Bernard, Jacques Guay, Yves Papillon and Michel Pelletier, authored *La Charte de l’étudiant universitaire*/Charter of the University Student, a document Alexandre Leduc identifies as very similar in content to the Charter of Grenoble.⁵⁴ While Leduc offers a more detailed analysis of the Québec student charter in his study, it should be highlighted that the charter sought to incorporate the essential identity of students as *academic workers and citizens* and student associations and organizations as *unions*, deserving of the same level of respect and power as traditional labour unions. Leduc explains that the claims of this charter were strategic as political claims “resulting from a mutation of identity that confers the status of a worker on to a student and consequently, the

⁵² Jean Lamarre, “«Au service des étudiants et de la nation»[1] L’internationalisation de l’Union générale des étudiants du Québec/ “Serving the students and the nation”: Internationalisation of the General Students Union of Québec (1964-1969)” *Bulletin d’histoire politique*, volume 16, numéro 2 Accessed online: <http://www.bulletinhistoirepolitique.org/le-bulletin/numeros-precedents/volume-16-numero-2/%C2%ABau-service-des-etudiants-et-de-la-nation%C2%BB1-1%E2%80%99internationalisation-de-l%E2%80%99union-generale-des-etudiants-du-Quebec-1964-1969/>. *French in the original.

⁵³ Leduc’s piece on UGEQ offers more detail regarding the relationships between FNEUC (later UCE/CUS (Canadian Union of Students)), PEN, UGEQ, AGEUM, and other Québec student associations. While disaffiliation occurred fairly early, Québec student unions did not cut off all participation or discussions with Canadian student organizations and were involved in attempts to reform the federal groups. Alexandre Leduc, «UGEQ: centrale syndicale étudiante»: L’Idéologie syndicale au sein du mouvement étudiant québécois des années 1960»/UGEQ: central student union: Union ideology of the Québec Student Movement of the 1960s”, M.A. Thesis (Montréal: Université du Québec à Montréal, 2010 March)

⁵⁴ Leduc, 55.

power and status of unions [onto student unions and associations]. If...students and their unions present themselves as equal to worker unions, why not lay claim to the same recognition and the same legal treatment from the State?"⁵⁵ This core concept that positioned students as equal workers and citizens meriting an equal level of respect and consultation from the State became a defining element of student organization and politics in Québec. Viewing students as active intellectual workers who form part a larger collective union -- as opposed to individual commodity consumers or users -- opened up a broader scope of political action. Many student unions outside of Québec focused on extracurricular and administrative organizing and academic service provision, eschewing explicitly political organizing on the basis of union membership and instead favoured lobbying or advocacy work. Québec student organizations put forward a conception of the intellectual worker and their role in education as embedded in a wider social reality. This key difference in the political-economic orientation and positioning of student unions resulted in Québec student groups demanding a different relationship with the Québec state. Their political orientation has manifested itself in a markedly different student politics, one that embraces general assembly style direct democracy and militant labour direct action, including large strikes, occupations, and blockades. These politics became visible for the first time during the 1960s with the rise of UGEQ (Union Générale des Étudiant-es du Québec/General Student Union of Québec) and militant direct actions at the newly formed CÉGEP level.

General Assemblies, Occupations, and Strikes: Student Syndicalism and the Fight for Free, Accessible Post-Secondary Education

Québec students began organizing themselves more fervently during the 1960s with a fairly strong adherence to principles of direct democracy, based on general assembly style

⁵⁵ Ibid., 57.

decision-making. This style of democratic decision-making is based on what might be considered an inversion of more traditional representative democratic structures more common to student politics outside of Québec. Traditional forms of representative democracy are structured on a hierarchy of decision makers: the members of the decision-making body ('citizens', students, community members, constituents, etc.) delegate their decision-making power to representatives whom they elect to act in their interests as either a trustee or a delegate.⁵⁶ These representatives usually are grouped together into executive boards, sometimes with a key authority figure as the final decision-maker (such as a president, CEO, Prime Minister, etc.), who is invested with additional powers or privileges as well as additional authority for making decisions. This democratic form based on a hierarchy of representatives results in more authority being invested in a smaller group of actors combined with a distancing of decision-making power from the base, created by the different levels of representation and the location of power. Representative democratic forms also usually employ majoritarian voting processes to make decisions (e.g. the House of Commons). More directly democratic models incorporate different decision making models that tend to leave important decisions up to the wider community and employ a variety of different decision-making processes ranging from mixed consensus decision-making, to mixed models of majoritarian voting using 'spokes (spokespersons)' to general assembly style majority voting. Many Québec student unions and associations base their governance models on the supremacy of the general assembly, which inverts the 'executive representative board' model by maintaining key decision-making power in

⁵⁶ For the purposes of this study, the main difference between trustees and delegates rests on their actions in deliberation and decision-making. A trustee model of representation assumes that a representative is chosen based on the trust invested in them by their members to act on their behalf which means they may choose to act or vote in ways contrary to the opinion or short-term interests of the group they represent. A delegate model differs in that the elected representative is given the authority to represent the views and interests of the membership and is expected to consult with their constituents to ensure they express or represent their interests. A delegate model assumes that a representative may at times go against their own opinion or judgment to properly represent the wishes of their constituents. Of course, in practice, there is certainly not a hard or fast line between the two representative roles.

the base. Key decisions are taken via general assemblies open to all members of the group, using different forms of majority voting. Members who take on executive or leadership roles are usually elected as spokespersons and/or executives who continue day-to-day operations and actions but all major political directions and decisions, such as the decision to go on strike for instance, rest with the larger assembly rather than elected boards.

Using the general assembly model of direct democracy, college level students organized the first major student occupation in 1968 of CÉGEP Lionel-Groulx at Saint-Thérèse conducted by approximately 200 students. This major action was voted in by a general assembly with 824 college level student participants (509=for 313=against)⁵⁷ and those who remained during the occupation debated and decided day to day how long the occupation would last:

The occupation of 1968 was conducted by students of the newly formed CEGEP, but directed by students from the classic colleges who had known each other longer and had more common organizing experience as well as control over the union and the student press... The occupation, voted in by the general assembly of students, lasted a week and a half. Every day, students met and discussed issues related to education as well as social issues. Everything was debated: the pedagogic relationship, lectures, written exams, course content, the control of the school by administrators, the lack of opportunities for students, etc... The general assembly ended the occupation but not before obtaining the opening of University du Québec and student control over their own services.⁵⁸

Unlike other cursory accounts of the 1968 occupation and student strikes that tend to lump the rise in student activism among cultural tendencies of the Quiet Revolution, Benoit Renaud points out that 1968 was marked by the brief return of the Union Nationale party and an economic downturn that played out in factory closures and labour disputes, a “drag on the wave of reforms and a renewed radicalization of social movements.”⁵⁹ This first major direct action by students

⁵⁷ <http://bilan.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/pages/evenements/1918.html>.

⁵⁸ Piotte, 24-25. *French in the original.

⁵⁹ Benoit Renaud, “Six grèves générales/Six general strikes” in *Recueil de textes sur l’histoire du mouvement étudiant québécois/Collection of texts on the history of the Québec student movement* (ASSÉ: Winter 2005) <http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/histoire-du-mouvement-etudiant-hiver-2005.pdf>, 17. *French in the original.

also marked what some call the inauguration of direct democracy as the organizing force and form of decision-making for student groups: “This mobilization solidly established the tradition of direct democracy [in student organizing]. It was the general assemblies that had the final word in all matters. The role of local executives and of UGEQ was limited to taking up the ideas adopted at Gas and coordinating actions.”⁶⁰ These political structures would continue to be followed by most local student associations and larger student organizations and ASSÉ itself requiring that all member student associations employ either general assembly style decision-making or conduct a referendum vote in order to become members.

Student organizing and the formation of UGEQ did not occur spontaneously. Leduc, Pottie, and Bélanger all emphasize that the radicalized student press, politically active in student organizing since at least the second World War and particularly active during the 1950s and 1960s⁶¹, played a key role in organizing pre-university level students as well as influencing many university level student associations.⁶² Having already begun a campaign for free education in the summer of 1963 via Opération gratuité scolaire/Operation Free Education (OGS)⁶³ the influence of student journalists was pronounced and helped to shape the political orientation of student unions and the soon to be formed UGEQ. Radical student journalists encouraged the larger student associations to disaffiliate from Canadian national student groups, deemed unreformable, which then led to the formation of UGEQ in November 1964 as an alternative

⁶⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁶¹ See Leduc, Lamarre, and Pottie as well as Sean Mills.

⁶² Leduc, 80 & L'Association nationale des étudiants et étudiantes du Québec, 1984, p. 8. See also Jean-Marc Pottie (cited above) and Pierre Bélanger, *Le mouvement étudiant québécois; son passé, ses revendications et ses luttes: (1960-1983)*. Québec.

⁶³ Ibid., 88-89.

Québec-wide student union. UGEQ went on to be an instrumental organizing body supporting the 1968 occupation and general strikes⁶⁴ throughout Québec.

From its founding in 1964 to its dissolution in 1969, UGEQ campaigned for the key goals of free education at all levels, recognition of students as intellectual workers, and direct student participation in the democratic governance of their union as well as academic affairs.⁶⁵ It should also be noted that UGEQ's early campaigning focused on the fight for a second francophone university in Montréal and while their political campaigns did focus on education priorities, language politics also played a key role in the political rhetoric and organizing of students.⁶⁶ Reflective of the global orientation of their politics, UGEQ authored a 'White Book' outlining their political positions regarding popular struggles worldwide. Lamarre explains that while their 'White Book' outlined their support for popular struggles abroad, their mobilization and campaigning focused on "three principal files: their recognition at an international level, their denouncement of racial segregation in the US, and support for Third World struggles against imperialism."⁶⁷ These positions reflect the international orientation of student activism in Québec as explained by Mills above, an orientation shaped in part by student associations' political support of Québec independence and their commitment to positioning Québec as a member of a global community. UGEQ's politics laid the groundwork for a student political tradition that would continue to orient itself within an international framework while maintaining the local fight for increasing access to education with the ultimate goal of free education at all levels.

Their support for struggles abroad represents a tendency to position the fight for free education

⁶⁴ For my purposes I am borrowing a definition of 'general strikes' from Benoit Renaud, ...the definition of the expression "general strike" will be the following: a systematic boycott of courses by a significant portion of students of colleges and/or universities lasting more than one week." (17)

⁶⁵ Lamarre, paragraph 4.

⁶⁶ Renaud, 18. See also Leduc and Bélanger.

⁶⁷ Ibid., paragraph 28.

and the role of students as part of a broader struggle and a larger society existing beyond the social spheres of Québec and Canada. This same tendency would continue to shape student organizing in Québec and then see its most dramatic manifestations in the discourses of student organizers like ASSÉ during the Québec Student Strikes of 2012.

However, as the timeline provided at the beginning of this work shows, ASSÉ did not form until the early 2000s and student-level organizing underwent many transformations leading up to 2012. Despite what many would consider to be a massive organizing victory in 1968 in the form of a general strike and occupations, 1969 saw a remarkable dissolution of student associations and the collapse of UGEQ itself.⁶⁸ The dissolutions came from multiple factors including critiques from the left pushing for more ground-up spontaneous organizing that some felt might be hampered by membership in larger associations or a provincial, large-scale union. According to Leduc, UGEQ faced internal conflicts regarding democratic and membership structures, which split delegates and member associations into two reformist camps:

Animated by the desire to create more space for spontaneous militant organizing, the MSP [Syndicalist and political movement] wanted to transform UGEQ into some kind of ‘super action committee’, in the spirit of decentralisation. In other words, the MSP wanted to create a rupture between American style syndicalism, [creating something] closer to French style syndicalism. The “critical” tendency, [MSC, critical syndicalist movement] wanted to maintain the traditional union structure and planning instead to “encourage base locals” to define their own values and modes of actions, sustained through strategic actions and participation.⁶⁹

The conflicts between the two more dominant sides eventually led to what might best be called an ineffectual *détente* in which no side was able to persuade enough delegates to their cause to take power and reform the organization, resulting in the dissolution of UGEQ at its congress in March 1969. Similar political dynamics continued to play out among student organizers and they have continued to animate conflicts, splits, and restructurings of student associations to present

⁶⁸ Leduc, 171.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 174-175.

day. The divisions on the left of the student political spectrum resulted in the establishment of many CAPs, (Political Action Committees) which functioned similarly to the more contemporary activist organizing units, ‘affinity groups’.⁷⁰ These groups were in part reactions against the potentially stifling effects of centralizing and bureaucratized mass student organizations, working instead on grouping together activists sharing similar ideological stances in smaller groups capable of more spontaneous ‘self-organization’. The demise of larger student associations, however, and the division of key activists among CAPs, resulted in the loss of democratic student organizations capable of providing student managed services, a role that was absorbed by administrations during the period of collapse of general student associations.⁷¹ Additionally, without a larger democratic student union to provide a venue for students to decide on collective actions, the ability to mobilize on a large enough scale to cause serious disruption was severely compromised given the difficulty of CAPs to organize forums for mass political participation and decision making without the forum of the larger general assembly. Eventually, students sharing many of the same social and political goals that UGEQ began advocating for in the 1960s, mobilized again in the mid 1970s to oppose the use of aptitude tests for French students, leading to the rise of ANEQ or ANEEQ (Association nationale des étudiants et étudiantes du Québec/National Association of Québec Students) in 1975.

Prior to the formation of ANEEQ, five CEGEPS went on strike in October of 1974 to protest the use of TAEU (aptitude tests) for Francophone university applicants, viewed as discriminatory towards students coming from lower-income or non-bourgeois backgrounds,

⁷⁰ For a detailed discussion of affinity groups, see David Graeber’s *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (AK Press, 2009) and footnote 110.

⁷¹ Benoit Marsan, “Pourquoi le syndicalisme étudiant” in *Recueil de textes sur l’histoire du mouvement étudiant*.(ASSÉ).

demonstrating once again the political tone of student organizing at the CEGEP level.⁷² The government retreated and eventually did away with the TAEU testing. Given the renewed interest in multiple student associations working together to coordinate actions, at least 30 student associations participated in the founding congress of ANEEQ in March 1975.

Maintaining similar political positions as those of UGEQ during the 1960s, ANEEQ helped to organize general student strikes in 1978 against reforms to the student grants and loans. During their first few years, another political divide developed among the membership of ANEEQ, this time shaped by political party preferences, specifically coming from students who strongly supported the Parti Québécois:

ANEEQ divided amongst two tendencies: those who remained confident in the government and preferred to work towards improvements through dialogue...which signified a rejection of general strikes as a key method of struggle. The more critical [students] argued that the PQ government is no better than the liberals or unionists concerning the interests of students and only radical mobilization would enable them to achieve real gains.⁷³

This division eventually resulted in the separation of RAEU (Regroupement des associations étudiantes universitaires/Regrouping of university student associations) from ANEEQ as well as the formation of FAECQ (Fédération des associations étudiantes collégiales du Québec/Federation of college student associations of Québec), founded in 1981. These organizations positioned themselves as more moderate in demands and methods, preferring instead to take on lobbying efforts, an advocacy method more akin to Canadian student association equivalent, CASA (Canadian Alliance of Student Associations).

Throughout the course of the 1980s, ANEEQ continued pushing for on-the-ground mobilization in the form of strikes, occupations, and protests as the most effective means of combating state actions to increase tuition. This form of student mobilization led in the past by

⁷² Renaud, 24.

⁷³ Ibid., 30.

CEGEP associations and UGEQ had often resulted in direct negotiations with the Québec state, similar to labour negotiations with public labour unions. Given the economic climate of the 1980s coupled with the growing acceptance and promotion of neoliberal rhetoric and policy, the 1980s were eventful for student mobilization against possible attempts to unfreeze tuition fees. In 1982 the PQ, despite their early appearances as a socially democratic, pro-union party, was embattled in fights with labour unions in Québec. 1982 was marked by a significant recession in Québec and Canada with rates of inflation climbing to 12.4% by 1982 and an overall unemployment rate of 14% for the population.⁷⁴ Young people were hit particularly hard by the recession with youth unemployment reaching approximately 25% in 1983, pushing students to mobilize for improvements to social assistance levels for young people through the RAJ (Regroupement Autonome des Jeunes/Autonomous Youth Coalition) who worked closely with ANEEQ.⁷⁵ In 1984, faced with a new law limiting the autonomy of student associations as well as the independence of educational institutions, ANEEQ organized a three day strike with occupations in CEGEPs. By 1985, a new Liberal government with Claude Ryan as education minister came to power offering a tentative promise to maintain the tuition freeze. By 1986, Ryan moved to break that promise prompting renewed mobilization among students. Starting with a protest at parliament of 5000 people, ANEEQ then organized a special student movement meeting where all associations regardless of their membership in the association had the right to vote, resulting in a decision to launch a general strike once a ‘floor’ of at least 20 associations with mandates was reached.⁷⁶ As before, the students put forward specific demands of the government including the maintenance of the tuition freeze as well as inclusion in negotiations to

⁷⁴ [http://bv.alloprof.qc.ca/histoire/histoire-et-education-a-la-citoyennete-\(2e-cycle-du-secondaire\)/les-enjeux-de-la-societe-Québécoise-depuis-1980/recession-au-debut-des-années-1980.aspx](http://bv.alloprof.qc.ca/histoire/histoire-et-education-a-la-citoyennete-(2e-cycle-du-secondaire)/les-enjeux-de-la-societe-Québécoise-depuis-1980/recession-au-debut-des-années-1980.aspx).

⁷⁵ ASSE, “Chronologie approximative du mouvement étudiant québécois”, *Recueil de texts sur l’histoire du mouvement étudiant*. 7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

reform student financial aid. Two-week long strikes broke out and the government conceded to some of the students' demands, showing once again that militant strike actions were effective for ANEEQ in achieving their demands and earning space as an equal stakeholder in negotiations regarding education. Events of 1986 marked the fourth general student strikes since their first mobilization in 1968.

By 1987 RAEU and FAECQ had officially dissolved leaving ANEEQ as the only national level student association. Over the course of the year, ANEEQ organized two key occupations. The first one was of Claude Ryan's county office and the second was a major occupation with 200 participants. They occupied a government building, pushing once again for the government to respect their demands, this time specifically asking that any planned reforms to student aid be made public.⁷⁷ Despite their continued ability to mobilize strong numbers of students, by 1988 divisions were developing within ANEEQ around the use of general strikes as tactics, tendencies that would soon be exacerbated by language politics in 1989 and would eventually lead to the de facto dissolution of the organization. Given government plans in 1989 and 1990 to end the tuition freeze, the divisions within ANEEQ and the student movement at large were poorly timed and essentially led to two failed general unlimited strike attempts, one in 1988 and the other in 1990 faced with government plans to increase tuition by at least \$600 over two years.⁷⁸ FEUQ and FECQ were born out of these mobilizations, grouping together university (FEUQ) and college (FECQ) level students who were opposed to striking.⁷⁹ The disjointed and divided opposition to the tuition hikes failed to win concessions from the government. Over the next couple years, divisions continued to affect the mobilization efforts of ANEEQ and local student associations like AGEUQAM (General students association of UQ à Montréal) whom

⁷⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 10-11.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 12.

had acted as the main locus of support for ‘pro-ANEEQ’ student organizers. Despite tensions, AGEUQAM and ANEEQ continued to organize in opposition to continual moves by government to apply neoliberal ‘marketization’ logic to university and college level education, organizing limited strikes of a few days and putting forward alternative visions of education funding in reports like “Voir plus loin/Looking farther ahead”, a response by AGEUQAM to the government finance document “Vivre selon nos moyens/Living within our means”.⁸⁰ Despite these efforts, internal struggles resulted in the eventual collapse of ANEEQ in the winter of 1994, this time leaving FEUQ and FECQ remaining as large student federations in Québec.

FEUQ and FECQ as student federations had never fully adopted free education at all levels as a key goal so the disappearance of ANEEQ momentarily left the Québec student political landscape without a clear leading organization advocating that platform despite this goal’s continued importance to many activists. Student organizers rallied again in 1994 and 1995 against the Axworthy reforms⁸¹ to protest potential changes seen as yet another attempt to increase the cost and decrease the accessibility of education. Three major student groups, Coalition X (a coalition that organized a demonstration on January 25 1995 in Montréal with 12,000 participants), CASÉE (a mobilization committee) and a student journal l’Étincelle (The Spark) grouped together resulting in the creation of MDE (Mouvement pour le Droit à

⁸⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁸¹ The Axworthy Reform, named after its designer Lloyd Axworthy, proposed linking post-secondary funding to the student loan system by establishing a system where students would be given loans to cover their university fees which they would then pay back at rates established by their eventual incomes after leaving school, named an Income Contingent Repayment (ICR) plan. As should be obvious, student proponents favouring education as a social right that should be free to all saw this as yet another way of forcing students to pay more for education and in no way a means to increase accessibility. They also argued that such a system would result in many being assigned repayment plans they couldn’t possibly afford and low-income earners, regardless of their educational history, would be stuck in debt. Axworthy faced strong opposition from students both inside and outside of Québec. (See Hans G. Schuetze, William Bruneau, Garnet Grosjean *University Governance and Reform: Policy, Fads, and Experience in International Perspective* (Palmgrave MacMillan, 2013) 79) It’s interesting to note that the controversy of Axworthy’s proposed reforms have now been largely overshadowed by his work on landmines at the international level.

l'éducation/Movement for the Right to Education) in May 1995.⁸² Once again, a student led organization was advocating free education as a right, with mass student mobilization and protest as a key method of action:

The Movement for the Right to Education was built as an alternative to lobbyist and corporatist strategies common to the other student federations. Their objective was to put the right to education back in its place at the heart of student demands and to do this within a framework of mass mobilization... In a society that calls itself democratic we can no longer tolerate education being reserved only for an elite. Therefore, the MDE aims to liberate education from economic obstacles, from discrimination, and from the arbitrary barriers that hinder it.⁸³

The creation of MDE brought with it the revival of syndicalist student organizing in Québec with the explicit aim of fighting for free education through union-based mass mobilization. Their organizing strength would be tested not long after their formation. In 1996 the PQ government of Lucien Bouchard with Pauline Marois as education minister proposed tuition hikes of 30%. MDE responded with a resoundingly successful strike mandate and mass mobilization bringing approximately 100,000 students into the streets to protest the reforms with strikes lasting a month. The government retreated but not without the two student federations (FEUQ and FECQ) negotiating increases to tuition fees for non-Québec residents⁸⁴ as well as a “failure tax” on college students, (a form of taxation on students that fail classes), a measure proposed to her by the leadership of the FECQ! That move was immediately considered as treason by the radical activists and rank-and-file who helped build the movement that stopped the hike in tuition fees.”⁸⁵ Tensions had existed between FEUQ/FECQ and the more radical and syndicalist

⁸² Renaud, 45.

⁸³ Text from old MDE website reprinted in ASSÉ document *Recueil de textes sur l'histoire du mouvement étudiant*. 81.

⁸⁴ ASSÉ. <http://www.gratuitescolaire.info/histoire>.

⁸⁵ The TAE (taxe aux échecs/failure tax) or “la taxe d'incitation à la réussite/success incentive tax” as it was formally called was a penalty program enacted with the goal of encouraging students at CEGEP to pass by charging them a \$2 fee per hour of repeated course in the event they failed a class. (see <http://tvanouvelles.ca/infos/national/archives/2001/01/20010110-122209.html>) The quoted section comes from:

portions of the student movement since their inception as federations and this represented one among many ‘betrayals’. Regardless, due to the strength of student resistance, tuition fees remained frozen, and the battle for free education remained rather quiet up until 2005 when Charest’s Liberal government announced once more their intention to increase tuition fees. Despite MDE’s influential role in reviving student syndicalism, its membership dwindled and the organization dissolved in 2000 with many of its adherents working to establish the next chapter of syndicalist student organizing through ASSÉ.

The Millennial Years and the Rise of ASSÉ

At the final congress of MDE in the fall of 2000, students were discussing the potential for a future combative student union association, acknowledging that the future association should be more clearly syndicalist and combative in structure and political orientation and should also afford more importance to regional member associations.⁸⁶ At the time many smaller affinity groups and anti-capitalist organizations, including many students, were occupied with organizing resistance to the Free Trade Area of the Americas Summit set to take place in Québec City in April of 2001. CLAC (Convergence des luttes anti-capitalistes/Convergence of anti-capitalist struggles) and CASA (Comité d’accueil du Sommet des Amériques/Welcoming Committee for the Summit of the Americas) were two key groups involved with ground organizing and coordination for the multitude of affinity groups coming to Québec. During the same timeframe, student associations were coordinating a “failure tax/TAE”⁸⁷ boycott, where student associations would vote in mandates encouraging their members not to pay any TAE fees assigned to them, for the beginning of the 2001 winter term. Activists involved in both

“The history of the Québec student movement and combative unionism (tour notes)”

<http://www.prairiestruggle.org/news/history-Québec-student-movement-and-combative-unionism-tour-notes>.

⁸⁶ Héloïse Moysan-Lapointe, “L’ASSÉ depuis sa création” (2003) in *Recueil de textes sur l’histoire du mouvement étudiant*. 102.

⁸⁷ See footnote 41.

organizing efforts began the formation of ASSÉ, meant to be an explicitly combative and explicitly syndicalist student association. ASSÉ formed officially on February 25th, 2001. For this early transition period, ASSÉ established democratic structures requiring that all member associations receive mandates from their local student general assemblies before receiving full voting privileges in ASSÉ's assemblies while ensuring that associations that had not yet received their GA mandates would still be able to indicate their concerns through opinion vote polling on every decision prior to formal voting (what might be considered akin to straw polls of all present).⁸⁸ As organizing efforts for the FTAA summit took precedence, ASSÉ established coalitions with a variety of different groups including CLAC and CASA. These early links remained strong throughout the years with CLAC working alongside ASSÉ during the 2012 strikes.

Following in the traditions of its politically aligned predecessors, MDE, ANEEQ, and UGEQ, ASSÉ's first congress saw the adoption of general strikes as a key principle and tactic for their organizing.⁸⁹ They also maintained a larger scope of action and opposition by organizing protests of the FTAA and neoliberalization more generally. Like UGEQ, ASSÉ insisted on placing itself within a larger social sphere of struggle, drawing links between the impacts of imposed 'free trade' agreements on societies abroad as well as the effects of neoliberal policy logic on broader sections of Québec society beyond students. During their foundational years leading up to 2012, ASSÉ adopted a confrontational style of action including occupations, street protests, and strikes, espousing a de facto if not formal acceptance of direct action combative syndicalism and a 'diversity of tactics'. They also authored texts critiquing the continued application of neoliberal market ideology and policy reforms to education and society,

⁸⁸ Moysan-Lapointe, 103.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 105 and ASSÉ website: <http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca>.

opposing the privatization of university services like cafeterias and producing proposals for alternative funding schemes for public education.⁹⁰ Consistent with these politics, direct actions as a form of protest also increased. Following up on their mobilization against the FTAA Summit, student groups with ASSÉ at the forefront, organized a 10,000 strong protest in 2002 against FTAA in Montréal. Then in 2005 by broadening their organizing outreach through CASSÉE (Enlarged coalition of ASSÉ), student activists organized one of the largest general strikes prior to 2012 in opposition to government attempts to reform student financial aid (AFE).⁹¹ Despite earlier divisions between the moderate federations (FEUQ and FECQ) and ASSÉ, all three student organizations united together to oppose the reforms that would see a majority of bursaries and grants turned into loans, with each organization calling for strike mandates among their memberships. ASSÉ's membership, numbering 30,000 at the time, were the first to go on strike with FEUQ and FECQ following, achieving a total of approximately 100,000 students on strike. The 2005 strike also included the more pervasive use of occupations and hard-pickets,⁹² as well as the inauguration of the red square as a symbol of the strike.⁹³

As Section I already described, ASSÉ and other student organizations struggled to coordinate their actions into a strong united opposition to the ongoing Liberal government attacks on tuition until the strikes of 2012. Leading up to the strikes of 2012, ASSÉ and CLASSE (the newly formed coalition) grew in strength and support and following the strikes, ASSÉ's

⁹⁰ ASSÉ. <http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/asse/historique/>

⁹¹ ASSÉ website and CrimethInc piece: <http://www.crimethinc.com/texts/recentfeatures/Montréal1.php>.

⁹² Hard-pickets mean that students were involved in physically preventing other students (or scab students if one prefers that nomenclature) from entering the university and attending classes. From my interviews with student participants, general assemblies usually decided ahead of time if their strike action would employ soft or hard pickets. Soft pickets are more commonly associated with 'slow-downs' of traffic into an institution and so on.

⁹³ CrimethInc "While the Iron is Hot" provides more details as to the origins of the red square: "2005 was the first year that the student movement used the symbol of the red square, indicating that students were "squarely in the red"—an expression that works as well in French as in English. Without acknowledging its origins, the students appropriated this symbol from the direct action-oriented anti-homelessness movement that had been quite powerful in Montréal just a few years earlier."

membership grew to over 70,000 with 36 different student associations represented. The aftermath of the strikes also saw several student associations leave FEUQ or FECQ to either seek membership in ASSÉ or choose to remain independent. Following in the ideological footsteps of their predecessors and containing language reminiscent of the Parent Report, ASSÉ maintained an explicitly political position vis à vis free education, society and solidarity, outlined very clearly in their core principles:

1. for a free, secular, and quality public education that is accessible and non-discriminatory;
2. for a financial aid system that has the elimination of student debt as its main goal, and one that is adequate enough to satisfy the fundamental needs of students;
3. for a public education network free from all forms of interference from private business, including subcontracting;
4. for the democratization of teaching institutions from a perspective of self-management;
5. for a syndical solidarity with all progressive international struggles aiming to better society;
6. against all forms of globalization that endorse the predominance of profit over the well-being of the population;
7. for a combative feminism aiming to abolish the system of patriarchy, against all forms of oppression and discrimination.⁹⁴

While themes related to these principles will be explored in more depth in Chapter 2, I would like to highlight four broad characteristics that underpin the specific principles laid out above, as well as the tradition of combative student syndicalism in Québec, in order to frame the actions and experiences of participants to be explored later.

Combative Student Syndicalism: Solidarity, Democracy, Participation, and Autonomy

In the subtitle I have identified four principles, **solidarity, democracy, participation,** and **autonomy**,⁹⁵ that I feel have characterized student syndicalism in Québec, especially

⁹⁴ ASSÉ. <http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/asse/principes/> *French in the original.

⁹⁵ A history and tour notes document from The Prairie Struggle Organization cites similar core principles but also includes feminism and combativism more explicitly. They offer a useful history of the Québec Student Strikes, that share in timeline and analysis to the narratives explored here. The Prairie Struggle Organization: Anarchist Communist Organization of the Prairies, “The history of the Quebec student movement and combative unionism (tour notes)” <http://www.prairiestruggle.org/news/history-quebec-student-movement-and-combative-unionism-tour-notes>

ASSÉ's style of organizing. While some may seem obvious, it is useful to investigate some of these in more detail in order to highlight some of the more pressing concerns of student organizers. This process obviously draws out some of the more notable differences between Québec student organizations and their Canadian counterparts as well as identifying the more contentious points of division between the student federations, FEUQ and FECQ, and ASSÉ. Dating back to the early student activists who adopted principles from La Charte de Grenoble and La Charte D'Amiens, solidarity across the domestic and international social landscape has been a guiding principle of many student unions⁹⁶ and associations in Québec, shaping their policy, support work, and political rhetoric. As Marsan points out, "the realization of the social role of the student as an intellectual worker is not limited only to student-based demands, but also pushes students to take on joint struggles with the labour movement and to make the daily struggles of the working class their own."⁹⁷ Direct democracy based on a profound respect for the general assembly as the key forum and final authority for important decisions has been integral to local student associations and the various larger student organizations taking a more progressive and syndicalist orientation. ASSÉ values this concept so highly that at its inception, protocols were put in place to ensure all member associations received strong mandates from

⁹⁶ In the Québec case, it can be helpful to differentiate student unions from student federations. In French, the use of *syndicat* and '*syndicalisme étudiante*' is almost always very specific in meaning a student organization or association that functions as a union (in the labour sense). This is important to take note of given the tendency (including my own) to switch organization, association, and sometimes union, back and forth without noting the difference. Many faculties in Québec PSE have their own student associations that act as student unions and are members of ASSÉ (e.g. AFESH at UQAM – Student faculty association of social sciences). In English Canada there is a marked difference in the meaning and use of the term when used to describe student organizations. A student government may call itself a student union but may not at all adhere to many of the core principles associated with student syndicalism and unionism as exemplified in Québec and France. My undergraduate student union (UNBSU) used this terminology but the representative body at the time certainly did not employ hardly any forms of direct democracy, solidarity, or feel that students should conceive of themselves as workers, and their representatives have usually eschewed any form of direct action, favouring corporatist lobbying tactics and membership in CASA. The larger federations in Québec generally employ representative democratic structures and do not call themselves unions or 'syndicats'. However, keep in mind many student groups call themselves associations regardless of whether or not they adhere to principles and structures of student syndicalism.

⁹⁷ Marsan, "Pourquoi le syndicalisme étudiant", 51.

their students through general assembly votes or referendums prior to becoming full members. They also ensured this did not prevent new associations from participating by facilitating their participation in organizing actions and taking votes of opinion from all present prior to taking formal votes on decisions. Additionally, mass participation in democratic decision-making at the general assembly level, in direct protest actions, and in the provision of student services at the local and national level, have all been instrumental parts of the organizing models of these student organizations. By relying heavily on high levels of participation, student organizing has benefited from massive student participation in strikes and demonstrations, as well as large-scale participation in other forms of direct action like occupations and blockades. These first three all seem rather obvious as part of the organizing structure and political orientation of ASSÉ and other student associations. The fourth characteristic I have listed, autonomy, is perhaps a little more difficult to identify and requires additional discussion to get at the nuances associated with its valuation by ASSÉ and student activists and the continued attempts to promote the autonomy of student movement.

Autonomy carries several meanings and implications for student organizations and may at times be one of the most strongly contested positions of groups like ASSÉ. Since the early efforts of student associations to organize themselves, autonomy has meant self-organization and self-management or ‘autogestion’. This means ensuring students have control over their own services and spaces and use their own capacities as individuals and collectives to organize, govern themselves, and ultimately negotiate and interact with the state. Autonomy then has meant a struggle for freedom from administrative and state interference in the management of student spaces, collective finances, activities and services, governance, and representation. For many activists, including many members of ASSÉ, autonomy has meant the autonomy of

universities and educational institutions from the influence and control of private business as well as the intellectual freedom and independence of the university from the state. Additionally it has also meant the independence of faculty student associations from each other and from the larger associations, as demonstrated by the importance placed on the will of general assemblies to decide on their political directions, financial decisions, service provisions, membership in larger associations/organizations and ultimately whether or not to take direct actions like strikes or other political campaigns. All of these different applications of autonomy have played out in the discourse and actions of Québec student organizations and they are vitally important concepts to understanding how groups like ASSÉ and the activists who organize themselves within them operate.

Among these implications listed above, one key and often controversial, application of the principle of autonomy is in regards to the relationship of student associations to the state and to political parties. As you might recall, La Charte D’Amiens that I briefly introduced earlier outlined autonomy from political parties as a core principle of anarcho-syndicalist organizing and Marsan, reiterates the importance of autonomy to student syndicalism here:

The union conducts politics in the aims of carrying out a progressive battle for the improvement of living conditions for the general population while defending the interests of its members. Its goal is not the seizure of power, nor the advancement of a particular partisan politic. This is why in Québec, student unions have always defended the notion of autonomy for the student movement. An autonomy that is maintained vis à vis labour unions, popular movements, community groups, and political parties. An autonomy that aims for independence from the structures of collaboration and concertation of the State. The student movement definitively lost their autonomy at the turn of the 1990s with the appearance of the Federations [FEUQ and FECQ]. These groups broke with the tradition [of autonomy] by becoming more or less vehicles for the Liberal Party or the Parti Québécois (depending on which party was in power) and by inserting themselves into spaces of collaboration and consultation...⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Ibid., 64.

ASSÉ's aversion to cooperation or collaboration with the state or political parties stems from several concerns, but as Marsan notes, the most obvious is that unlike other unions whose primary enemy is their immediate boss, for student activists, their direct adversary is the state (and sometimes local administrations of their institutions).⁹⁹ Choosing to maintain distance and a clear differentiation of boundaries from the state and the various political parties aiming to take control of the state becomes for some a key principle to ensuring the student movement is not co-opted or betrayed by a particular political party or government promise. This stems from a concept common to class-based politics positing that one's class position defines one's interests and that these interests are so divergent that no mutually beneficial agreement or representation of one's interests can be accomplished, only compromises.¹⁰⁰ This principle applies to the actions of other student leaders or activists, exposing one of the main tensions between ASSÉ and FEUQ/FECQ. ASSÉ considers itself to have been betrayed several times by student leaders of the two federations. Notable examples being the choice of FEUQ and FECQ leaders to negotiate a settlement with the government to end the 2005 strikes without any members of ASSÉ being included; the role of FEUQ/FECQ in negotiating the 'failure tax' for college students and increases to student fees for foreign students to end the 1996 strikes; and more recently the choice of Léo Bureau-Blouin, former leader of FECQ during the 2012 strikes, to attend the controversial education summit in 2013, after joining the PQ and entering political office. Betrayals by government officials are many, but two examples that are emblematic of such dishonesty include Claude Ryan's initial promise to maintain the tuition fee freeze in 1987 and his later attempts to unfreeze tuition fees, and most recently, the continuous contradictions of Pauline Marois. The PQ politician and now premier led attempts to raise tuition fees in 1996 as

⁹⁹ Ibid., 62.

¹⁰⁰ For more information on class interests see Erik Olin Wright, *Approaches to Class Analysis*. Cambridge University Press. 2005.

education minister only to be faced with large-scale general strikes. In 2012, Marois proved herself quite the opportunist by marching alongside students in the streets once or twice, wearing the red square, only to later propose increasing tuition fees by linking them to a CPI index despite initially stopping the hikes introduced by Charest's Liberals.

This adherence to autonomy from the interference of political parties and administrations is certainly not a homogeneous opinion among progressive student activists and members of ASSÉ. Some students genuinely believe that change can occur through taking control of the state apparatus, and other also believe that refusing to collaborate with those claiming to be your allies, regardless if they are part of the ruling government or a political party, does little to advance the movement, serving only to divide the base rather than promote unity and collaboration to achieve mutual goals. Despite the ambivalences and mistrust that may at times characterize the relationship between activists of ASSÉ and the student federations, it cannot be denied that the groups have worked together on numerous campaigns and issues and have successfully organized powerful general strikes, including the largest and longest mass mobilization and student strike in Québec's history, forcing the government again to retreat and offer concessions. If anything, these debates and concerns reflect not only a diversity of opinion around the best means of achieving the goals of the student movement, as well as arguably a healthy level of caution when dealing with political parties and opportunists. Most importantly, they demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring that democracy and the will of general assemblies is respected and that above all, solidarity among students in the face of attacks on education prevails. These attitudes, core principles, and organizational structures and history will all frame the theoretical discussion and the opinions of student participants to be explored next. The themes I have begun to introduce all interact in some way with the convictions that my

participants were kind enough to share with me and they all play into the theoretical concepts I wish to explore as a backdrop for the conversations I shared with them.

Chapter 2 – Reclaiming and Recreating Political Space: Exploring Public Space, Citizenship, Democracy, and Action

This chapter will provide a theoretical discussion of various concepts that inform and influence my study of the Québec student strikes. By exploring the ways in which concepts of political action, space, citizenship, and democracy are negotiated by students and exposed by the events and experiences of the student strikes, I hope to provide a useful backdrop for presenting the conversations I shared with participants. When I began my fieldwork, I approached my interviews with a certain theoretical focus regarding questions of public and political space and the role of ‘citizen’ as a political identity. My list of questions¹⁰¹ were divided into three categories: general background and involvement in the strikes; definitions of political/public space; and political participation and action. The questions on space and political participation aimed to link distinctions between different types of space (economic, private, social, political, public, etc) with definitions of citizenship and political participation. As one might expect, each conversation influenced my prior understandings of my initial theoretical framework, demonstrating to me that the conversations themselves in their variety and nuance were much more valuable than my original plan to fit the opinions of my respondents into some all-encompassing theory of citizenship and space. Despite this realization, there are still persuasive concepts that shape my study of the strikes as well as my own experience as a researcher and activist, concepts that will be explored here. This chapter will draw some important links between key themes that I feel were demonstrated, performed, or reinforced by the discourses, actions, and experiences of the student strikes and will also help to elaborate on an understanding of politics that goes beyond representational models of decision-making and governance.

¹⁰¹ See Appendix C for the list of interview questions I used.

Because my conversations with student participants were focused on questions of space, political participation, and citizenship, this chapter will extrapolate on the ways in which these concepts interact and build upon each other but will attempt to avoid catering to one theoretical conception of any of them. Positing an overarching theoretical premise as a method of explaining the actions and views of student participants would in essence commit a form of representational violence against the agency of participants and the diversity of positions to which they hold. In attempting to represent my arguments as emblematic of the views of others, I would falsely reduce the heterogeneity of experience and practice of the student strikes. Such an approach would go directly against primary values of agency and collective action that aim to empower individuals politically and enable different social groups to accommodate diversity without sacrificing unity and commitment to certain personal positions and truths. Therefore the discussions of theory will be used here to showcase concepts that have helped to shape my study of the discourses and actions undertaken during the strikes as well as the experiences and opinions shared with me by participants.

In terms of structure, I will mostly follow the transitional frameworks already outlined in the previous chapter that traced the waves of Keynesianism and neoliberalism and their resulting effects on PSE in Québec. Through that narrative, I introduced several important factors: Keynesianism and the expansion of the welfare state, neoliberalism and its impacts on the university sector, particular characteristics of Québec student politics, and the dominant values and structures characterizing student associations like ASSÉ and their predecessors. Now I hope to link those earlier themes to a discussion of political space. The previous chapter focused on the work of student activists to organize actions opposing state attempts to limit or interfere with accessibility to post-secondary education. These actions were not placeless or ‘space-less’. In

fact, the spaces in which they occurred and the forms they took on were deliberate and highly relevant in terms of the political positioning of student actors. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the importance of political space. In this context, political space will be taken to mean any space in which debate, political dissent, direct action, or any other form of collective action that may be interpreted as political in orientation, takes place. While a spectrum of political action this wide runs the risk of being ineffectual as defining criterion, the addition of ‘group-based’ activities helps to refocus my definition of political space to emphasize collective space-creation and political debate. This focus reinforces the positioning of political actors as acting within different collectivities and ultimately a larger society that acts as an audience and participant for political speech and action. This is not to say individuals do not engage in political action. Instead this criterion follows the assumption that politics *is a social relationship* and that political action requires an audience and the interplay of actors and their opinions, interests, and social positions. Additionally, given the vital role played by social media and internet communication, I am avoiding defining space as solely physical to allow room for conceptions of political space that manifest virtually in online communities and discussions.¹⁰²

Different social, economic, and political structures will organize and regulate space in different ways, delineating boundaries, rules of access and legitimates uses via policing mechanisms. For some, political and public space are synonymous, public spaces are necessarily political and political participation occurs in some form of public space. Others would argue that only specific locations might be designated as spaces for political participation. This would of course follow from a very narrow conception of what counts as political participation – a liberal

¹⁰² I had respondents who were markedly opposed on this issue in my interviews. Some insisted that any space, virtual or physical, could be considered to be a public space or a political space, while another insisted that public and political spaces must be concretized in physical locations. Of course, one could argue that the ‘non-physical’ space of the internet is concretized in the physical spaces and tangible materials that create it and allow actors to access it. The third chapter will present the opinions of the participants on this issue.

democratic model based on representative political structures could potentially only allow for 'politics' in the halls of formal institutions like national assemblies, parliaments, ballot boxes, constituency offices, and so on. For this work, I am functioning under the assumption that public and political space can go hand in hand and that public space is often defined in opposition to private space. This does not mean private space should be seen as a binary opposite to public space nor should it be seen as exempt from politics. The lines, forms, and functions that demarcate space are fluid and always being re-negotiated, contested, at the same time as they are being policed and reinforced by various forces emanating from the current hegemonic structure of capitalist social relations. By naming and discussing public space, I am emphasizing that the wide array of activities designated as political such as demonstrations, voting, group decision-making, debate, exchange of ideas, art displays, often occur in spaces that society generally qualifies as public. The degree to which spaces are 'public' as well as what functions public space can have depend on the governing structures and ideologies of particular times as well as the actions of political subjects in using, challenging, or reclaiming them. Based on the ways certain definitions of space are often imposed on societies through state regulations and that these state interests often focus on protecting private property rights ahead of public use rights, it makes sense then that many direct actions and dissenting discourses focus on the right to reclaim or take over public space, as well as the right to remake spaces differently with alternative functions. Given the high degree to which 'public space' is claimed, defended, and protested, it makes sense to offer some theoretical discussion of its definition before elaborating on the links between the actions and discourses of student activists and the changing discourses of what constitutes public spaces, services, and political action.

Jürgen Habermas' work on the evolution and transformation of the public sphere is one of the most noted theoretical arguments on the public sphere. Despite its historic importance, I agree with political theorist Nancy Fraser that Habermas' conception is inadequate to address the 'multiplicity of publics' and their corresponding political claims existing today.¹⁰³ Habermas depicts the idealized 'bourgeois public sphere' as an arena where the "public nature of...deliberations was once supposed to ensure and for a while actually did ensure, the continuity between pre-parliamentary and parliamentary discussion, that is, the unity of the public sphere and the public opinion crystallizing within it..."¹⁰⁴ While Habermas remains critical of the ways in which commercial interests facilitated by capitalist development transform this public realm of deliberation, Fraser demonstrates that Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere as a "body of "private persons" assembled to discuss matters of "public concern" or "common interest"" fails to acknowledge "other, nonliberal, non-bourgeois, competing public spheres."¹⁰⁵ By exposing four key assumptions underpinning Habermas' public sphere, Fraser identifies the need for alternative definitions of 'publics' and concurrently, public spaces, that do not fall prey to positions that assume 1) actors can set aside their positions of power or privilege; 2) that discourse and politics of the public should not include 'private issues or interests'; 3) that a "democratic public sphere requires a sharp separation between civil society and the state"; and 4) "...that a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics."¹⁰⁶ The public sphere described by Habermas not only precludes publics composed of those excluded by the bourgeois sphere of rational public debate, it also rejects a wide range of

¹⁰³ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, 25/26 (Duke University Press, 1990) 56-80.

¹⁰⁴ Jürgen Habermas, Translated by Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989.) 206.

¹⁰⁵ Fraser, 58, 60-61.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

public activities and political actions performed by actors inside and outside of the bourgeois public sphere and the variety of spaces we often call public.

The work of Margaret Kohn as well as Setha Low, Neil Smith, David Harvey, and Elizabeth Blackmar also go beyond the narrow Habermasian public sphere model. Kohn captures its complexity by identifying public space as a “cluster concept...that has multiple and sometimes contradictory definitions...”¹⁰⁷ Low and Smith add a necessary concretization and spatial component to Fraser’s “multiple publics” while also acknowledging the diversity of meanings bound up in the term “public and public space”:

A multiplicity of divergent meanings attaches to “public,” “public space,” and the “public sphere.” By “public space” we mean the range of social locations offered by the street, the park, the media, the Internet, the shopping mall, the United Nations, national governments, and local neighborhoods. “Public space” envelops the palpable tension between place, experienced at all scales in daily life, and the seeming spacelessness of the Internet, popular opinion, and global institutions and economy. It is also not a homogenous arena: The dimensions and extent of its public-ness are highly differentiated from instance to instance... Stretching back to Greek antiquity onward, public space is almost by definition urban space, and in many current treatments of public space the urban remains the privileged scale of analysis and cities the privileged site. Far more rare are analyses that take rural space or global space, for example, as public, and while we retain here a focus on the urban we also broaden our purview. Public space includes very recognizable geographies of daily movement, which may be local, regional, or global, but they also include electronic and institutional “spaces” that are every bit as palpable, if experienced quite differently, in daily life... “Public space” has very different meanings in different societies, places, and times, and as all of this suggests, its meaning today is very much bound up with the contrast between public and private space. It is impossible to conceive of public space today outside of the social generalization of private space and its full development as a product of modern capitalist society.¹⁰⁸

These more developed definitions of public space acknowledge the differentiated fluidity and contingency of “public space” as a hegemonic organizing category for our societies. By emphasizing the ways in which differentiation of private from public space factor into the

¹⁰⁷ Margaret Kohn, *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space*. (New York: Routledge, 2004.) 11.

¹⁰⁸ Setha Low and Neil Smith, “Introduction: The Imperative of Public Space” in *The Politics of Public Space*, Setha Low and Neil Smith eds. (New York: Routledge, 2006.) 3-4.

changing meanings of ‘publicness’, they ground understandings of space in our socio-economic realities. I argue that this same contingency must be applied to understandings of any spaces and in this case political and public space. Put simply, public space can mean different things for different actors, at the same time. These different meanings or ‘valences’¹⁰⁹ are contingent upon regulatory mechanisms, individual and group uses and actions, and social positions of privilege. For example, the street is deemed a public space as a thoroughfare but its public use is predominantly restricted to people driving cars and sometimes bicycles. Therefore, only those who have access to certain privileges of use (e.g. owning a car, affordable public transit, ability to ride and own a bicycle, etc) can count as the public in this case and their rights and responsibilities of using that space are regulated by the state and its policing mechanisms (traffic cops and so on). When a mass of students and demonstrators go against this prescribed definition of the road as a public space for motorized transportation by disrupting traffic flow and defying police attempts to move them back to the sidewalk, they are interrupting and recreating that public space at the same time as motorists and police attempt to regulate its use according to its predetermined function and rules of access.

Depending on their social structures and discursive regimes, different societies will adopt different understandings of politics, public spaces, and the spaces considered legitimate for political activity. In order to get at the ways in which student activists have rearticulated a wider scope of political participation and political spaces, I will explore the ways in which different social discourses and ideologies project or organize ‘legitimate’ political space. The three major political ideologies to be examined are ‘neoliberalism’, ‘Keynesian liberalism’, and ‘collective action oriented direct democracy’ (CADD). The third category (CADD), while certainly an imperfect designation, is deliberately listed as such in order to avoid being cast as yet another

¹⁰⁹ Gratitude to Peter Hodgins for suggesting this word choice.

variant of ‘liberal democracy’. By focusing on the intent behind different democratic structures it is possible to differentiate CADD from liberal democratic forms that rely on representative politics. I acknowledge that CADD does share characteristics with mainstream socially democratic politics because I consider it impossible to completely separate different modes of socio-political organization from others. However, the ways in which activist groups and students in Québec have sought to employ certain forms of democratic decision-making as well as their adoption of political positions that are at times explicitly anti-capitalist or ‘anti-neoliberal’ require that this ideology be set apart from its more moderate relatives. Furthermore, emphasizing ‘collective-action oriented’ reminds us of the key functionality bound up in the democratic forms employed in this category: that of enabling groups to collectively decide on principles and actions to be taken. Positions or direct actions are usually in opposition to decisions or outcomes that have been made through the exclusionary and hierarchical liberal democratic governance structures that rely on representation. This political ideology sets itself apart from liberal and social democracy traditions in its emphasis on group-based responsibility and outlook as opposed to protecting and maximizing individual self-interest in the form of protecting individual rights. As the first two chapters underlined, discourses flowing from CADD styles of democratic models focus on the importance of continued democratization of decision-making and expanded access to social goods and resources, the most obvious example for this study being the fight for free post-secondary education.

The ideologies discussed here are constituted through models of political space that produce their own versions of the base unit political actor. For the first two models, models that are in one way or another premised on certain tenets of liberal thought and nation-states, this base political actor is usually the ‘citizen’ who is then absorbed into the representative group of

‘the people’ or the ‘the citizenry’. The citizenship models ascribed to Keynesian liberal and neoliberal ideologies are predicated on formal membership in bounded political communities, most obviously the nation-state, but also the province, the city or municipality, and they often accompany certain delineations of individual property rights. The third model also produces a political actor but in this case their membership usually derives from their role as students or members of affinity groups,¹¹⁰ as opposed to an explicit appeal to political membership and identification in state-sanctioned spheres. In this case membership is temporally fluid and based on participation and the sharing of space, resulting in a permeable capacity for membership compared to the regulated and reified categories of citizenship. As the previous chapter emphasized, for many student unions including ASSÉ and its member associations, the identity of ‘student’ encompasses an active, socially embedded, role as an ‘intellectual worker’.¹¹¹ In depth discussion of the ways in which individual students negotiate the multiple identities available to them as students, city-citizens, affinity-group members, national citizens, permanent residents, immigrants, members of marginalized communities, and so on, is far beyond the scope of this work. Instead, I will draw on the ways in which certain versions of space and political agency factor into conceptions of political space, public and private space, and direct political action, resulting in a rejection of conventional or more aptly titled, *neoliberal citizenship* as an

¹¹⁰ On affinity groups: “Essentially, they [affinity groups] are just small groups of people who feel they share something important in common, and decide to work together on a common project. The term itself derives from the Spanish *grupos de afinidad* which again, originally referred to clusters of friends (a common synonym was *tertulias*, groups of drinking buddies or young people used to hanging out together in cafés), but which in the 1920s became the basic organizational unit of the Spanish anarchist confederation, the FAI. When the first large-scale consensus-based groups came together during the antinuclear campaigns of the early 1980s, the base unit was always assumed to be a affinity groups.” David Graeber, *Direct Action*, 288.

¹¹¹ Article 7 of La Charte de Grenoble, outlines the responsibility and social outlook of students as intellectual workers who must not only engage in the philosophical project of pursuing truth but most also fight injustice. This broad conception of the roles and responsibilities of students as workers reinforces an activist role fighting against inequality. “As an intellectual, the student has a responsibility – to seek out, propagate and defend Truth which entails sharing and advancing culture as well as drawing the meaning of history – to defend liberty against all oppression, which constitutes, for the intellectual, his most sacred mission.” <http://unef.fr/2011/06/09/la-charte-de-grenoble/>

empowering political identity or as a meaningful basis for collective action.

The three political ideologies listed above more or less correspond with the three marked transitional moments of the historical narratives outlined in the first two chapters. The reader should of course keep in mind that these ideological shifts are never complete or separate. Rather, a dialectical interpretation of discursive and ideological influences within society should be considered essential to any work attempting to trace the impacts of certain ideas and their interactions with social movements. Both Keynesian liberalism and neoliberalism allude to this reality by pointing to the continued impacts of liberal thought within the expanded social democracy and welfare state realities of the 1960s and the later currency of liberal ideas under the packaging of neoliberal market ideology. Liberalism's influence on understandings of individual autonomy, rights discourse, and representative democracy, all carry through the expansion of public spaces and services associated with the Keynesian welfare era. In terms of space, liberal concepts of positive and negative liberty¹¹² and social benefit broaden the scope of what services and spaces should or could be legitimately provided, and more importantly, *regulated* by the state. The resulting reconfiguration of more spaces as public spaces under Keynesian state intervention signifies a broader trend in the changing definition of citizenship under Keynesian policy modes. Speaking more directly of citizenship, Bourque, Duchastel & Pineault, refer to the significant process of 'publicisation' through the enlarging of the public sphere under the welfare state as hallmarks of the extensions of 'social citizenship'.¹¹³ Bourque

¹¹² See liberal thinkers like Isaiah Berlin, and John Rawls.

¹¹³ Gilles Bourque, Jules Duchastel, et Éric Pineault, "L'incorporation de la citoyenneté" ("The Incorporation of Citizenship"), *Sociologie et sociétés*, 31:2, 1999, 49. French in the original. Also see seminal work by T.H. Marshall on "Citizenship and Social Class". Marshall's influential work divides citizenship into three components, civil, political, and social: "The civil element is composed of the rights necessary for individual freedom – liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice...By the political element I mean the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body...By the social I mean the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the

et al. identify the extension of “the social right and social citizenship [as] resulting in an extensive politicization of civic and civil spaces.”¹¹⁴ The Keynesian or interventionist social welfare state model of national society achieves, albeit partially, the rejoining and enlarging of the political spheres through the expansion of public spaces. This expansion results in national citizens’ social rights to participation and legitimacy in these spaces also being expanded.

Keynesian interventions in property rights still followed a disciplinary and hegemonic character, where state apparatuses exist to regulate, define, and control property and resulting access to certain spaces, based on certain property rights. While this expansion of certain individual citizenship rights to newly designated and predetermined ‘public spaces’ did open up access to certain places to a wider range of citizens, it also installed strict limits on access and use of property, stripping open access and common property rights. As the liberal democratic nation-state expanded throughout the 19th and 20th century, the push to designate certain spaces as private or public and to exert control over use and access resulted in a decimation of the older ‘common property’ rights of open access:

The commons is perhaps unusual within the lexicon of American place names because it refers to a kind of property rights as well as a site. Nonetheless, common properties in the United States have been enclosed – that is appropriated – since the nineteenth century; their vestiges – whether communal water or land rights in New Mexico or properties of certain Indian reservations – are seen as just that, the residue of archaic social relations. “Commons” as a place name is meant only to conjure up pleasant feelings of connection, not to describe or empower claims on shared resources... as public and private property rights expanded together in the nineteenth century, they left little room for the long-established common property rights of Indian societies, Mexican villages, or Southern farmers. The federal government expropriated Indian territories and granted or sold land from this new public domain in the name of yeoman democracy, on the one hand, and industrial empire, on the other. It also retained jurisdiction over vast amounts of western territory as public, not common, property.¹¹⁵

social heritage...” T.H. Marshall “Citizenship and Social Class” (First Published in 1950) in *Inequality and Society* edited by Jeff Manza and Michael Sauder, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2009), 148-149.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth Blackmar “Appropriating “the Commons”: The Tragedy of Property Rights Discourse,” in *The Politics of Public Space*, Setha Low and Neil Smith eds. (New York: Routledge, 2006.) 50, 55.

This important difference between ‘common’ and ‘public’ is often misunderstood by ‘citizens’ and other community members eager to claim rights to access, use, or occupy certain spaces.

Whereas the tradition of ‘common property’ rights reflects collective access and use, relatively free from state interference or regulation, state-owned and regulated public spaces are held and controlled by governments *on behalf of the people*, who are then capable of redefining their legitimate uses and limiting or expanding access to such spaces as they see fit. These tensions regarding the right to access, to act upon, or to define certain spaces plays out in complicated ways in the space of the university.

The effect of expanding conceptions of regulated public space and rights of citizenship is notable in the space of the university, which up until the 1960s, maintained a very particular configuration, one that was separate from the state and based on elitist membership shaped by spatial factors related to class, religion, culture, and private economic interest. As university spaces were redefined to be public in purpose, membership in these spaces was widened to include, as the Parent Commission directly specified, each and every student in Québec national society, achieving a sort of ‘horizontalizing’ effect on the university. Despite this equalizing or horizontalizing of the university as a ‘public citizen space’, certain defining scales dominated the definitions of membership in these communities. It is predominantly Québec citizens who have full membership and privileges within this changing educational space.¹¹⁶ The nationalist discourse of the Quiet Revolution coupled with the reframing of political space and membership under the nationalist Keynesian welfare state resulted in Québec’s university spaces being redefined according to their role within the national architecture. Despite this expansion and so-

¹¹⁶ Note that out of province and international students still pay substantial premiums to attend university in Québec. The exclusion of international students is comparable to the rest of Canada but most other provinces do not maintain an out-of-province premium. For example, Newfoundland & Labrador which now offers the cheapest undergraduate student fees in Canada charges the same tuition for all Canadian students (though International Students still pay about four times as much). They are also converting student loans to grants in 2014.

called ‘publicisation’, the reconfiguring of university and other post-secondary spaces as social and public in purpose did not escape the legacy of private autonomy for university-spaces. This tension usually devolves into a debate on definitions of property types, specifically private vs. public vs. common. The terms of common and public are often invoked as synonyms but they are different in important ways and the controversy between the two carries with it an ongoing confusion regarding the role of the state in maintaining access to spaces deemed public.

Property can be thought of as enforceable claims to the benefits of resources. These claims carry with them duties and liabilities. The Anglo-American legal tradition has recognized essentially three kinds of property rights. Private property is the right of individuals to exclude others from the uses or benefits of resources. (Legal individuals can be human or “artificial persons,” as in the case of corporations [or university administrations].) Public property, owned by governments, gives state officials the right to determine who has access to resources held *on behalf* of a wider constituency. Common property is an individual’s right not to be excluded from the uses or benefits of resources. Historically, common property rights were recognized and enforced for members of a bounded community. Thus common property is usually distinguished from “open access” or unappropriated resources that are beyond a prescribed political jurisdiction (as might be the case with fish outside territorial waters).¹¹⁷

While universities are still referred to as public institutions, the publicness or open access of their property is in fact more illusory than anything. This, as we have already seen, leads to conflicts between those who feel they share in access and control over university spaces by virtue of their membership as citizens or students and assume the meaning of the public to be more synonymous with ‘common’ and/or ‘open access’ property rights. By identifying the differentiation between public spaces as public forums or public institutions, Margaret Kohn clarifies the level of autonomy university administrations hold over the university as a ‘public space’:

Just as a homeowner is not required to allow protesters on her lawn, the administration need not allow students to demonstrate on university plazas. According to this position, the university, like a military installation or administrative office building, is not a public forum but rather a private institution owned by the government. Any activity that the

¹¹⁷ Blackmar “Appropriating “the Commons”: The Tragedy of Property Rights Discourse,” 51.

relevant administrators feel disrupts the primary mission can be prohibited at its discretion.¹¹⁸

The example Kohn offers above played out in real time throughout the student strikes with an infamous example being an episode occurring November 10, 2011 on McGill campus when the university administration called in the Montréal riot police (SPVM) to discipline demonstrating students.¹¹⁹ The sovereignty and autonomy proclaimed by individual university administrations as well as ongoing decreases in public funding challenge their positions as ‘open’ public spaces and legally their behaviour as private autonomous property holders is protected. Despite this tension, a sense of ownership and right to space falling more closely in line with property as a ‘commons’ is present in the discourses and actions of Québec students in regards to their university spaces and society generally. These concepts are used to promote a different and far more expansive claim to political control and access to ‘public spaces’ especially on university campuses, one that is directly opposed to neoliberal models of space, political participation, and public goods.

Neoliberalism: Divorcing Politics from People and Liberalism from Democracy

The neoliberalization of public spaces and services like universities and education, carries with it specific representations of ‘citizens’ and legitimate political participation. As education, public space, and public services are increasingly characterized as consumer commodities that

¹¹⁸ Kohn, 41.

¹¹⁹ “On November 10 – last Thursday – approximately 100 riot police from the Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM) marched onto the campus of McGill University, beating billy-clubs against shields. They did so in order to drive student protesters gathered in front of the James Administration Building off of their own campus. In the process, they pepper-sprayed, clubbed, and tear-gassed hundreds of students and at least one faculty member (philosopher Greg Mikkelsen, who was in the wrong place at the wrong time, on his way to pick his kids up from daycare). These events have sent shock-waves through the University community. Not since March 1969, when the “Opération McGill français” brought 15,000 nationalist protesters to the gates of McGill, had riot police been on the campus of the University. This time, it didn’t require external intervention: the administration of McGill seems to have called the cops on its own students.” Blog post by Hasana Sharp, Assistant Professor of Philosophy William Clare Roberts, Assistant Professor of Political Science McGill University, November 14th, 2011. <http://www.newappsblog.com/2011/11/the-crisis-at-mcgill-who-called-riot-police-onto-campus.html>

should be subjected to the market forces of capitalism, the role of the citizen is rearticulated as that of the consumer, a trend Habermas' work, despite its limitations, took note of: "private enterprises evoke in their customers the idea that in their consumption decisions they act in their capacity as citizens, [therefore] the state has to "address" its citizens like consumers."¹²⁰ As we have already seen in the first chapter, Québec like the rest of Canada and United States (as well as many other parts of the world) did not escape the effects of the neoliberal turn. The most significant changes eventually took shape in the 1990s (a peak neoliberal policy moment for many parts of North America) when tuition fees were unfrozen and accompanied by significant funding cuts to public sectors including post-secondary education. The *Johnson-Lévesque Report: Living Within our Means*,¹²¹ published in 1993, offered recommendations emblematic of neoliberal orthodoxy. "Faithful to its neoliberal ideology, the document proposed reductions in government spending but also reductions in taxes... This orientation could only result in the disengagement of the state from society in general and the economy, all in conformance to the doctrine of economic liberalism"¹²² and all done in the name of reducing the deficit. Not isolated to policymakers, Peter Graefe identifies the development of a homegrown neoliberal think tank community in Québec as "revealing a neoliberal landscape in the making... [with] the ideological production of [Québec] think tanks defending almost unanimously a deep restructuring of the Québec state, through a significant reduction of its size and the implementation of market structures in the [few social] programs left [intact]."¹²³

¹²⁰ Habermas, 195.

¹²¹ See footnote 34, page 25.

¹²² Ratel & Verreault-Julien, 78.

¹²³ Peter Graefe, "La topographie des think tanks patronaux Québécois. La construction d'un paysage neoliberal." (A topography of Québec business think tanks. The construction of a neoliberal landscape." *Globe: revue internationale d'études Québécoises*. 7:1, 2004. 201. French in the original, my translation.

On a theoretical level, these logics speak to a significant transition away from both Keynesian conceptions of society and public space as well as earlier traditions of ‘common or collective property’. We have witnessed the reconception of certain spaces as only private market spaces as well as increased restrictions on legitimate uses and access to certain spaces. According to Bourque et al. this move is predicated on a logic that aims to “reparate the public and private spheres,” which at times saw themselves more united under social citizenship and public space discourses, to allow for “the principles of ‘autoregulation’ through the market and the desocialization of relations of inequality to dominate.”¹²⁴ This separation is facilitated by a more fundamental separation of the economic and political spheres under liberalism and later exacerbated and repeated under neoliberalism. Unlike a dialectical vision of society as made up of all economic and social processes and their interpenetrative reproducing relationships, “disembedded [political] orders of which free market capitalism [and neoliberalism are the main examples], separate politics and economics by subordinating the former to the latter.”¹²⁵ Reminiscent of classical political economists, this “differentiation of the official economy, ... as a seemingly autonomous system that dominates social life,”¹²⁶ results in only certain narrow zones or spaces being conceived of as legitimately political. As neoliberalism pushes for the disengagement of states from this seemingly natural overarching economic realm, it also pushes for the disengagement of subjects or market actors (i.e. citizens) from politics.

Neoliberalism’s impacts on conceptions of spaces, particularly those spaces previously deemed to be public and social goods in nature, hinge on the ‘recommodification’ of social goods. Neoliberal ideology’s fetishization of the market presumes that it is the best means for

¹²⁴ Bourque et al. 49.

¹²⁵ Adam Harmes, “Neoliberalism and Multilevel Governance” (*Review of International Political Economy*, 13:5, Dec 2006, 725-749.) 730.

¹²⁶ Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State” (*Signs*, 19:2 Winter 1994, 309-336) 331.

allocating resources and wellbeing to human beings. However, “to presume that markets and market signals can best determine all allocative decisions is to presume that everything can in principle be treated as a commodity. Commodification presumes the existence of property rights over processes, things, and social relations, that a price can be put on them...”¹²⁷ The dominant discourses of the Quiet Revolution resulted in educational spaces being reconfigured as public spaces benefitting society as a whole and therefore different from zones of private accumulation (i.e. private marketplaces). The neoliberal ideological turn sees these same spaces redefined, along with their purposes of providing social goods, enabling the commodification of social relations of knowledge production as consumer goods. Neoliberalism also sees the state’s role redefined as only a protector of individual private property rights as protected and promoted by legal sanction: “Neoliberal concern for the individual trumps any social democratic concern for equality, democracy, and social solidarities. The frequent appeal to legal action, furthermore, accepts the neoliberal preference for appeal to judicial and executive rather than parliamentary powers.”¹²⁸ In direct contrast to the Parent Commission’s vision of education as a social good whose ‘benefits surpass the individual and the locality...serving society as a whole,’ neoliberalism restructures educational spaces as either research tools serving business interests¹²⁹ or privileged consumer goods private individuals must pay to access.

The language of social goods versus individual consumer goods at play between Keynesian views of educational spaces and neoliberal versions of post-secondary education exposes some interesting contradictions when read alongside neoliberal ideologue Milton Friedman’s own conceptions regarding publicly provided services. In *Capitalism and Freedom*,

¹²⁷ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 165.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹²⁹ Eric Martin and Simon Tremblay-Pepin, “Do we really need to raise tuition fees? Eight misleading arguments for the hikes” IRIS Institut de recherches et d’informations socio-économiques, 8 mai 2011.

Friedman often makes use of the concept of ‘neighbourhood effects’ to explain instances of monopoly and government regulation in the provision of certain services.¹³⁰ ‘Neighbourhood effects’ result when services rendered cannot, due to logistical infeasibility or intangibility, be adequately compensated for via individual economic exchange in the capitalist marketplace. For Friedman, education (up until a certain point) is one sector in which substantial neighbourhood effects occur:

A stable and democratic society is impossible without a minimum degree of literacy and knowledge on the part of most citizens and without widespread acceptance of some common set of values. Education can contribute to both. In consequence, the gain from the education of a child accrues not only to the child or to his parents but also to other members of the society. The education of my child contributes to your welfare by promoting a stable and democratic society. It is not feasible to identify the particular individuals (or families) benefited and so to charge for the services rendered. There is therefore a significant "neighborhood effect."¹³¹

While Friedman then goes on to examine each sector of education and argue against post-secondary education being publicly subsidized or funded (though there are some interesting discussions of voucher usage), the parallels in discourse compared to the universality arguments found in the Parent Report are striking. Despite being convinced that individual private exchange offers the best means possible of achieving wellbeing and ‘freedom’, Friedman finds himself reasoning that there is also some sort of collective whose overall good and stability might be served through publicly organized and funded education. Apparently such things as social goods (such as stability and democracy), rather than just individual interests, do exist even under neoliberalism. The Parent Commission argues for much the same view of education as providing ‘neighbourhood effects’ to society as a whole and unlike Friedman, it is consistent in its ideological arguments by extending that designation to all levels of education. This comparison

¹³⁰ Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*.

¹³¹ Ibid., 75. <http://ebookbrowse.com/friedman-milton-capitalism-and-freedom-pdf-d314485034>, accessed Dec 15, 2012.

not only acknowledges an example of significant contradictions inherent in neoliberal doctrine but also exposes the artificiality of the separations of social/public spheres from the economy and from the political realm, a point that is particularly relevant to the discussion of public space and legitimate political spaces.

When neoliberalism divorces the public and private spheres, all the while enlarging the private, economic sphere, it works to negate the legitimacy of political membership in those spaces deemed public and politically legitimate under other ideologies. Antonio Vázquez-Arroyo argues that this tension between political and economic, public and private spheres results in an uneasy, rhetorical and political relationship between neoliberalism and democracy, characterized by a ‘privileging of the *liberal*’ over the democratic, i.e. ‘depoliticization and de-democratization, not popular participation’¹³² in economic, political, and social spheres. Vázquez-Arroyo identifies a strong ‘anti-democratic’ tendency in neoliberal thought and in liberal democracy in general that exemplifies the current state of our representative political institutions: “In rituals of power, like elections, the demos tacitly legitimizes...transitions of power. Yet it never becomes an actor that explicitly decides outcomes, or even directly authorizes them.”¹³³ It is my view that it is most often this anti-democratic trend signified by the ongoing dilution of democratic citizenship coupled with the recommodification of public spaces and goods such as the university and education, that student activists and groups like ASSÉ take discursive and practical action against.

It is important to remember that the actions taken by students were not only reactive in nature. They should be viewed from a frame that acknowledges the role of power and states in producing systemic social relations rather than simply restricting or taking away certain rights.

¹³² Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo, “Liberal Democracy and Neoliberalism: A Critical Juxtaposition” (*New Political Science*, 30:2, June 2008, 128.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 132.

This acknowledgement forces us to remember that regardless of the ideologies at play during certain moments, power always produces the categories, roles, and subjectivities to which we adhere, respond, and ultimately seek to break or overthrow. The move towards not only reacting defensively but seeking to actively envision and create a different reality means reversing one's interpretation of the state as well as one's own power to act:

From the outset, the claim was formulated in defensive terms: the Charest government sought to *remove* a given, to *deprive* a segment of the population access to education, destroying the heritage of the Quiet Revolution. Maybe instead we ought to reverse the discourse against the hike, take it from behind: not ask ourselves what the government wanted to *take away* from us, ask instead what did power seek to *produce* by doing so? Such a reversal implies thinking about power not only as a expropriating limit of legitimacy, but think of it equally as a *producer* of reality, modeler of subjectivity, a catalyst of conflict. A gesture of power is never just a privatization, unilaterally repressive, it is also creative in the sense that it presents another play in the game...¹³⁴

Understanding direct political actions in this way reminds us that such responses to power are creative as well as disruptive and/or defensive. In their summer 2012 manifesto, CLASSE articulated a creative vision of social change by expanding their call to action to a general social strike. Their use of the 'social' signals an ideological repositioning of society as encompassing economic, political, and cultural interrelated spaces, moving instead to define space and society rather than only react to it. Practicing general assembly based forms of direct democracy, CLASSE's position hinges on a revisioning of society as comprised of social spaces in which direct democracy should be experienced, practiced, and lived on a daily basis.¹³⁵ They couple their conception of democracy directly to space in the following passages:

The way we see it, direct democracy should be experienced, every moment of every day. Our own voices ought to be heard in assemblies in schools, at work, in our neighbourhoods. Our concept of democracy places the people in permanent charge of

¹³⁴ Collectif de Débrayage (Walkout Collective), *On s'en calisse: histoire profane de la grève, printemps 2012, Québec*. (Montréal: Sabotart & Entremonde, 2013) 53-54. *French in the original.

¹³⁵ CLASSE, "Share Our Future: CLASSE Manifesto" <http://www.stopthehike.ca/2012/07/share-our-future-the-classe-manifesto/>. Accessed December 15, 2012.

politics, and by « the people » we mean those of us at the base of the pyramid – the foundation of political legitimacy... We are talking about shared, participatory democracy... Our view is that truly democratic decisions arise from a shared space, where men and women are valued. As equals, in these spaces, women and men can work together to build a society that is dedicated to the public good.

We now know that equal access to public services is vital to the common good. And access can only be equal if it is free.¹³⁶

The language of common good and social spaces is certainly reminiscent of the Parent Commission but goes a good deal further in its conception of space. Their call to action redefines all space as common and shared, all resources as shared, rather than maintaining support only for those spaces deemed public in nature through hegemonic institutional frameworks of space:

If, by throwing our educational institutions into the marketplace, our most basic rights are being taken from us, we can say the same for hospitals, Hydro-Québec, our forests, and the soil beneath our feet. We share so much more than public services: we share our living spaces, spaces that were here before we were born. We want them to survive us...

Yet a handful of greedy persons, answering to no one, is hard at work devastating these spaces – and they are getting away with it, with projects such as Plan Nord, shale gas, and more. For these few, who view the future in terms of the next quarter's profit, nature has value only when measured in economic spin-offs. Blind to the beauty of the common good, this clique is avid and unpredictable, with eyes only for its faraway stockholders. It caters to those stockholders' whims in colonial style, with no consultation.

Here we see a discourse that is adamantly exposing and attacking what David Harvey calls the 'astonishing claim' of neoliberal states, "that they and only they have the exclusive right to regulate and dispose of public space."¹³⁷ Neoliberalism is presented as a mechanism for promoting individual negative freedom by reducing the intervention of the state into every day life. However, as Harvey and student groups like ASSÉ suggest, the result of neoliberal hegemony is an intensification of the reification of certain spaces as exempt from politics and subject to state regulation. The direct actions of Québec students manifested themselves in spaces all over the landscape of Québec. They called into question the validity of elite claims to

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, (London: Verso, 2012), 163.

structured private spaces and zones of consumption. By taking over the roads they demanded those spaces and their public functions be viewed differently, as spaces open to reinterpretation and a diversity of actions. As the above quote clearly states, students demanded that people and the various spaces they occupy, be they stores, bar patios, university classrooms, administrative offices, or city parks, be seen once more as the ‘foundation of political legitimacy’, and the social community. Thinking in spatial terms, students demanded that space be expanded horizontally on the basis of universal, nonhierarchical community membership, membership premised on a foundational social relationship with others defined by the *sharing of space*. The production of hierarchical spaces of governance and the reduction of education spaces to zones of private consumption must be fought through the reclaiming of these zones as ‘spaces of society’, with members having rights to expansive political legitimacy.

The Problem of Representation: Media, Politics, and Action

Although it was noted earlier that Habermas’ work carries significant limitations for thinking about diverse public and political spaces, it should be noted for its comments on the role of media in constructing and transmitting public discourse, facilitated by the interplay of private and commercial interests in the dominant discourse of the public sphere. Habermas remarks that the expansion of public discourse and political debate is accelerated by the expansion of media and communicative technologies resulting in

on the one hand, ... an incomparably greater range and effectiveness [for mass media, but] on the other hand [media] have been moved ever further out of this sphere and reentered the once private sphere of commodity exchange... Whereas formerly the press was able to limit itself to the transmission and amplification of the rational-critical debate of private people assembled into a public, now conversely this debate gets shaped by the mass media to begin with.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Habermas, 188.

This interpretation of the role of media as both constructing and at once transmitting content of public discourse is important to consider when reviewing the ways different media covered the events and arguments of the Québec Student Strikes.¹³⁹ Much of the mainstream media coverage of the student strikes took an active role in shaping the very content of their reporting along accepted discursive tropes, resulting in misleading and inaccurate depictions of many of the key arguments and messages behind the students' demands and actions. In the piece "Creating Possibility: The Time of the Québec Student Movement" Alia Al-Saji captures both the debility of media and politicians in representing the student movement as well as a form of discursive violence resulting from the imposition of certain meanings and dominant categories onto the actions of students:

Attempts to explain the current Québec student movement in the media and by politicians have, with few exceptions, imposed on the movement predefined parameters and positioned it within an already mapped field of meaning...Such interpretations of the student movement are not only reductive, flattening the heterogeneity of voices and diversity of tactics within the movement to a univocal register; they also forget the creativity of the movement, projecting a future based on an inventory of measurable accomplishments in the present. This is a *politics* of the present (or status quo) in which the possibility of the future is taken to be contained within and delimited by the contours of the present.¹⁴⁰

Examples of this 'misrepresentation' and flattening include mainstream media's insistence on describing Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois¹⁴¹ as "*the* leader" of the student movement, neglecting that he

¹³⁹ Habermas' preliminary linking of commercial interests to mass media is amplified when one considers the role of media conglomerates and monopolies such as Québecor which owns the majority of Québec's media including most newspapers, television, and internet media outlets and distribution networks. Pierre Karl Péladeau, who owns and runs Québecor, has often been accused of controlling media messaging around controversial events as well as destroying the careers of journalists critical of him or dominant media messaging. He recently agreed to run with Marois' PQ party in the upcoming Québec election. <http://www.macleans.ca/economy/business/the-king-of-Québec/> and <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/10/canada-politics-Québec-idUSL2N0M70Y920140310>

¹⁴⁰ Alia Al-Saji, "Creating Possibility: The Time of the Québec Student Movement" in *Theory & Event* 15:3, 2012 http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy.library.carleton.ca/journals/theory_and_event/v015/15.3S.al-saji.html.

¹⁴¹ An example from a headline in the National Post where Nadeau-Dubois is described as a protest *leader*. Mainstream media seemed incapable of understanding these student groups and actions as different from traditional hierarchical leadership structures, often assuming student leaders could "call off the strike" or start it at any given moment. "Charest breaks cover to finally meet students as protest leader faces court"

was only one of many spokespeople (including Jeanne Reynolds, his co-spokesperson, who was largely ignored by the media after a couple months) and literally *hundreds of thousands* of participants who engaged in collective decision-making and organizing on a regular basis. Anyone familiar with the difficulty in organizing large groups of people or who has ever participated in collective decision-making would know that a movement that brought hundreds of thousands of students into the streets could never be organized or directed by one individual. Instead, the media anointed Nadeau-Dubois a strong leadership status and assigned him widespread authority to direct students. This act of ascribing power and influence also played out in the decision by a Québec judge to convict Nadeau-Dubois of contempt of court when he spoke in favour of students disregarding court injunctions and continuing hard pickets against students defying strike mandates given by their general assemblies.¹⁴² Perhaps even more damaging, the media more often than not failed to report on cases of police brutality, focusing instead on smashed bank and store windows, the occasional burning cop car, or the traffic delays caused by the protests.

This failure of representation resulted in many people turning to student and independently run media alternatives and social media reporting such as CUTV (Concordia University Television) and Twitter. These virtual spaces became key forums for disseminating photos, accounts, and videos covering all manner of events, many of which were never included

<http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/05/29/protest-leader-pleads-not-guilty-as-Québec-premier-finally-meets-with-students/>

¹⁴² The following article is representative of media styles that construct as much as relay the facts and identities present in a story as well as the demonstrating the assumption carried by the judge that Nadeau-Dubois through his comments as a leader carrying influence must bear responsibility of actions taken collectively by others: ““If it’s true that the defendant had a symbolic power, and that part of the population saw this in him, it constitutes an aggravating factor in his call to disrespect the court injunctions,” Jacques wrote, adding that Nadeau-Dubois’ actions had consequences. “The defendant trivialized, before the youths on whom he exercised a strong influence, the efforts of every citizen who respects court rulings. He called on them to contravene them.”” “Québec student leader sentenced” <http://www.macleans.ca/education/uniandcollege/Québec-student-leader-sentenced/>

in mainstream media coverage.¹⁴³ The manifestos and statements, youtube videos of police brutality, photos of mass student street demos as well as smaller direct actions, student speeches, creative art actions, and a multitude of twitter hashtags like #manifencours, #ggi, #loi78,¹⁴⁴ as well as facebook pages were instrumental in organizing the strikes but also in communicating arguments and actions to others inside and outside of Québec. People outside of Québec showed solidarity by organizing *casserole* demos in cities across Canada and abroad, usually coordinated via community facebook pages. With mainstream media either deliberately refusing to report certain events or finding their usual models and languages of reporting inadequate for capturing the heterogeneity of actions, identities and discourses, students created and adopted their own spaces, creating their own “publics” as spheres in which to engage in debate, organizing, and ultimately act out their political convictions. These actions speak to active forms of politics that engage in continuous creation of what Julie-Anne Boudreau calls “new political spaces”:¹⁴⁵

New political spaces are the result of power struggles for constituting coherence and common objectives, rather than being the derivative of preexisting sovereignty. It is thus necessary to highlight the interplay between state institutions and other political actors, such as social movements and economic elites, as well as the intensity of political interactions. Political spaces are not fixed or areal (Low, 1997): their very fluidity and plasticity necessitates constant relegitimation and reactualization that goes beyond the state.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ A creative and festive action where a small group of students decorated a metro car completely in red with feathers and boas never made it to mainstream media (or at least none that I can find). Instead, student driven reporting ensured the event made it to internet to be disseminated: <http://boiterouge.net/2012/03/29/un-wagon-de-metro-le-28-mars-photos-et-article/>

¹⁴⁴ The three hashtags I have listed above are some of the most common hashtags used to organize and follow protest actions. In the age of smart phones and social media dominance, for youth these feeds were instrumental in covering events, often offering almost instantaneous reporting during actions. The SPVM also began using twitter during their attacks on students, and it was often interesting to see the contradictory messaging coming from the SPVM twitter versus the accounts coming from students or participants and alternative media sources. #GGI stands for grève générale illimitée (unlimited general strike), #manifencours: manifestation in progress, #loi78: law 78, anti-demonstration law that came into play in the summer of 2012. The following link (in French) provides an excellent diagram of the various hashtags, twitter feeds and destinations (@tabitruie for example is my twitter ‘handle’ or destination) that were most active during the strikes. Grève 2.0 <http://olihb.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/greve.pdf>

¹⁴⁵ Julie-Anne Boudreau, “Making new political spaces: mobilizing spatial imaginaries, instrumentalizing spatial practices, and strategically using spatial tools,” *Environment and Planning A* 2007, 39, pp. 2593-2611.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 2594.

This process of creation and action, driven from the base through an inversion of the traditional representative structure of political decision-making, positions itself as a rejection of most forms of *representation* and political power. Media failed to accurately *represent* students, be it their motivations, their arguments, or their actions. Government representatives failed to acknowledge widespread student opposition to tuition hikes and were judged incapable of acting on behalf of their constituents, of *representing* them. Students took it upon themselves to create spaces, individually and collectively, in which representation would not be in the hands of others holding more power by virtue of their socio-economic and political positions, spaces in which meaning and power were not already decided, “mapped”, and understood.

These acts of living and creating new or different spaces, demonstrate a fundamental commitment to **direct action**. We might then look at the various spaces created or taken over by students physically and virtually as “temporary bubbles of autonomy.”¹⁴⁷ Here we find an important link between direct democracy and direct action, that for me ultimately rests on an understanding of the fundamental rejection of representation at all social levels. Direct action, which shares theoretical similarities with notions of “pre-figurative politics”,¹⁴⁸

represents a certain ideal – in its purest form probably unattainable. It is a form of action in which means and ends become effectively, indistinguishable; a way of actively engaging with the world to bring about change, in which the form of the action – or at least the organization of the action – is itself a model for the change one wishes to bring about. At its most basic, it reflects a very simple anarchist insight: that one cannot create a free society through military discipline, a democratic society by giving orders, or a happy one through joyless sacrifice. At its most elaborate, the structure of one’s own act becomes a kind of micro-utopia, a concrete model for one’s vision of a free society... A revolutionary strategy based on direct action can only succeed if the principles of direct action become institutionalized. Temporary bubbles of autonomy must gradually turn into permanent, free communities.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Graeber, *Direct Action*, 210.

¹⁴⁸ See Gibson-Graham as a recent example, *Postcapitalist Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006.) <http://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/a-postcapitalist-politics>

¹⁴⁹ Graeber, 210.

Direct action, by its very definition, aims to close the distance that is created between the political actor and their social reality and political power or actions. Direct democracy through various mechanisms begins the process of rejoining the individual political actor with their own agency by refusing to designate organization and social decision-making to elected decision-makers, to political executives or rulers tacitly given sovereignty and legitimacy to rule.

Hobbesian notions of sovereignty, upon which understandings of the political social contract and representative political sovereignty are based, subsume all political agents into the corporate body of the politic and necessarily force the relinquishing of individual agency to establish the legitimacy of political governance, of ruling. The delegation of power through representation, as in the “people representing the multitude, nation representing the people... in each case means a further step of abstraction and control,”¹⁵⁰ divorcing individuals from their personal as well as collective agency and autonomy. Direct democracy and direct action aim to reclaim that agency and enact a delegitimation of the sovereignty or rule of the many, or the multitude, by a few.

This fundamental rejection of representation is itself a battle to organize, regulate, order, and name. It is a battle over language and a battle to represent oneself. It is a battle to define and shape space. Jacques Rancière defines this idea of politics as,

first and foremost an intervention upon the visible and the sayable...police intervention in public spaces does not consist primarily in the interpellation of demonstrators, but in the breaking up of demonstrations. The police is not that law interpellating individuals (as in Althusser's "Hey, you there!")... It is, first of all, a reminder of the obviousness of what there is, or rather, of what there isn't: "Move along! There is nothing to see here!" The police says that there is nothing to see on a road, that there is nothing to do but move along. It asserts that the space of circulating is nothing other than the space of circulation. Politics, in contrast, consists in transforming this space of 'moving-along' into a space for the appearance of a subject: i.e., the people, the workers, the citizens: It consists in refiguring the space, of what there is to do there, what is to be seen or named therein. It is

¹⁵⁰ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 134.

the established litigation of the perceptible, on the *nemein* that founds any communal *nomos*.”¹⁵¹

For Rancière, politics is an ‘intervention’ or an interruption in the process of regulation or of rendering visible ‘what is’. Regulatory forces, like the police, have the role of reminding everyone of what is deemed to be real or what ‘is’. Disruptive actions have the creative role of reminding us of the arbitrariness of space and social identities. The politics acted out by students were engaged directly in first naming and then rendering visible what *could be* and what they could make, if only temporarily, by intervening in the regulation of what spaces currently exist. Rather than fighting for more room or more recognition in these spaces, students went beyond demanding their legislators stop the tuition hike, to actually directly intervening, creating and naming alternative visions of space and society. They created possibilities.

This chapter has attempted to shed light on several components of an active rejection of representational politics and the concurrent collective actions taken to create and reclaim political spaces as well as individual legitimacy to act within and upon them. In his most recent book, David Harvey emphasizes the renewed relevance of the commons and actions taken to reclaim public spaces as social commons. Struggles to take back common space highlight how “the political recognition that the commons can be produced, protected, and used for social benefit becomes a framework for resisting capitalist power and rethinking the politics of an anti-capitalist transition.”¹⁵² Neoliberal restructuring of university spaces in Québec enabled exactly the sort of politicized anti-capitalist action from students aiming to reclaim and redefine university spaces as politically legitimate zones of common political action. By focusing on key

¹⁵¹ Jacques Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics” *Theory and Event*, 2001. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v005/5.3ranciere.html End of Thesis 7 and beginning of Thesis 8.

¹⁵² David Harvey, 87.

ideological models that have been part of the evolution of Québec's post-secondary sector, 'publicisation of PSE spaces' and later neoliberalization of this sector, the dynamics of neoliberalism's structuring effects on educational spaces are exposed. These effects hinge on several key factors. First the artificial separation of political/economic and public/private spheres is facilitated through the conceptualization of the economy as an autonomous, dominant, and self-regulating system separate from political society. This separation enables the recommodification of public spaces, particularly PSE spaces, as depoliticized zones of private accumulation with membership being defined as solely economic and private in nature. It is these various factors, important influences in the changing shapes of university spaces in Québec, that striking students and groups like ASSÉ responded so powerfully to. Their opposition to hierarchichal and exclusionary restructurings of educational and all social spaces manifests itself in eloquent messages of resistance, reclamation, and starkly politicized direct actions in taking over space. I have aimed to connect these political actions to a rejection of representation accompanied by the active reclamation of political legitimacy. For me, as well as others, this qualifies as a fundamental truth and a necessity, one that I feel characterizes the diverse opinions offered by participants in the following chapter. Darin Barney explains this truth by

[identifying] one form of the fundamental exclusion that structures the liberal-democratic public sphere: those deemed capable of making reasonable claims are in, while those whose claims are not recognizable as reasonable speech are out. The liberal conceit is that politics take place *within* the public sphere, amongst people speaking reasonably to one another. The truth is that politics takes place at the point where those who are deemed to be merely making noise are excluded from a conversation they might not want to be part of anyway... What makes the strikers politically exceptional is that they are militants of a truth they understand to be non-negotiable.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Darin Barney, "The truth of the printemps érable" *Theory & Event* 15:3, 2012, http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy.library.carleton.ca/journals/theory_and_event/v015/15.3S.barney.html

This quote offers an excellent summation of some of the key concepts characterizing the theoretical discussions of this chapter as well as the conversations to be presented next. All of the participants I spoke with were committed to their own personal versions of non-negotiable truths and all of them were dedicated to acting in a way they considered as political to fight for their convictions. Now, in order to do this work justice, I will do my best to present these conversations in a way that allows the participants words to speak more loudly than mine, to represent themselves and tell their own truths.

Chapter 3 – Students Speaking for Themselves: Conversations, Spaces, and Politics

The last chapter elaborated on key concepts of political space and political action that work to illuminate many of the important debates brought to life by the student strikes. These explorations focused on definitions of concepts like public space, political space, political participation and problems of representation. This chapter will present the conversations I had with participants, conversations that focused on different aspects and experiences of public and political spaces, universities, direct actions, and politics. The definitions of public space that I was given by participants were varied but all thoughtful and considered. Some felt any space, virtual and/or physical could be public provided it offered a space of interaction, communication, and was more or less openly accessible. One respondent emphasized the need for public spaces to be physical and differentiated from the intangible realm of shared ideas. Some insisted on the separation of private property ownership from public or collective ownership as an obvious indicator of public space and others focused more on the activities and functions given to spaces by groups of people as well as the ability to redefine and reclaim spaces through collective action. Still another insisted on the importance of one's body as a private space and the private space of one's home as separate from the public, a distinction put into question by yet another respondent who identified how private spaces like the home or the apartment may appear to be private yet they are not ever truly exempt or separate from society or the state given the way laws and our economic relations regulate and organize our spaces and behaviours within them.

These incredibly interesting and nuanced discussions of spaces, demos, and of course, politics, were located in different neighbourhoods and different cities, and took place at different times, and in different types of spaces. Two interviews took place in cozy coffee shops containing only a few other patrons, one inside and another on a sunlit sidewalk patio keeping us

in close contact with the ‘publicness’ of the street and several screaming fire trucks. Two more happened in bars, over at least two pints with loud music and ample laughter in the background. Another two interviews took place in two different public parks in Montréal on the same beautifully sunny summer day over shared snacks while we sat in the grass, surrounded by people enjoying the weather, the greenery, and each other, in a multitude of different ways. One more interview took place at a kitchen table in a joyful apartment interrupted occasionally by the needs and curiosity of a little boy and the ringing of a telephone. Different parts of what each participant considered to be public space appeared in each space regardless of how that particular participant may have chosen to define it and similarities of opinion on at least one topic always manifested in our conversations. While I did stick to my list of questions, more or less, the conversation expanded and developed according to whatever question, topic, or memory proved most interesting and worth expanding on to the individual participant or to me, drawing out follow-up questions. Like any researcher, I entered these conversations with an agenda and preconceptions, but those were always disrupted and reoriented by some revelation or comment.

Notes on Presentation and Structure

I debated with myself quite heavily as to the best way to present the following conversations. As noted in my introduction, I find myself embedded in an irreconcilable contradiction of representation, which presents problems for relaying the content of these interviews because I am necessarily engaged in the representation of others. This work has been an attempt to shed light on the student strikes and their participants in a way that provides useful context and discussion while at the time same fighting against a proclivity to speak on behalf of others through analysis and argument. When I first began this project I planned to curate my interviews, keeping only the most relevant material that would back up my theory of what the

strikes were *really* about. As I proceeded I realized that by doing that I would in fact be perpetuating this problem of representation, denying my participants their agency, by deciding on behalf of others what was most important about their experiences and opinions. Despite this, I am still bound by the limitations of this academic medium as well as the slippages associated with the transmission of content from audio material to written transcript, from French to English in some cases, and ultimately to abbreviated conversations that are relatively easy to follow. Therefore, this chapter will be structured as follows: short biographies of participants will be offered at the beginning of each conversation. The conversations will be presented in the order they were spoken roughly following the structure of my interview questions (see Appendix C). At the end of the transcripts, instead of gathering various points from each speaker into my own singular analysis, I will instead offer my own reflections on different concepts or points I found particularly interesting. These final reflections will reference earlier themes introduced in the work.

Transcription Style

I cannot perfectly replicate the tones, expressions, interruptions, and emotions of each conversation. People do not speak in grammatically correct sentences or in perfectly linear thought progressions, points loop in and out of sentences, laughter and contexts interrupt trains of thought, certain expressions do not translate perfectly into English. I necessarily had to collapse certain parts of the transcripts, puzzle out certain expressions or thoughts, fill in gaps where a word referenced earlier in comment is not repeated again. For each conversation I summarized some of the interviewee's background information into a starting paragraph, which also includes notes on the space in which the interview took place. Additionally, the transcribed conversations will include [bracketed] words and phrases as well as the liberal use of the ellipsis.

[Bracketed] words are usually included to ensure the reader knows what subject or context is being referenced in a particular phrase if that subject is not repeated directly by the speaker. At times, it was necessary to summarize a phrase or a tangential conversation in this way by bracketing and noting the content of the side conversation. When translating French to English, I sometimes included the French word used by the speaker if I felt the English translation of the word might not accurately reflect its meaning or connotation in French.* I have also used the ellipsis (...) notation to denote phrases where additional words or sounds (like ‘um’, ‘ugh’, ‘so’, ‘like’ etc) may have been omitted to improve the flow of a phrase. If a small sentence was incomprehensible on the recording when I later transcribed the audio, I used an ellipsis or a note to denote the omission of content. For the most part, I have attempted to relay the opinions of my participants as authentically as possible in order to preserve the personality and thoughtfulness of each person. All names have been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

Interview #1 – Mathieu

Background:

Mathieu and I met in a small coffee shop to chat. Mathieu participated in demonstrations from the beginning of the strikes and continued to participate past the ‘formal end’ of strike actions including attending a protest against the PQ Education Summit. He was not part of a student association at the time. He said he would have participated regardless, even if he had been part of a student association that voted against striking. He is a bilingual Francophone and chose to conduct the interview mostly in English.

Our Conversation:

TA: Why did you choose to participate in the student strikes?

Mathieu: Two things: analytical point of view, I like to understand these movements. And I felt personally compelled to do something about that, go there and see what was happening. I felt this moment was probably going to be one of the biggest parts of Québec’s recent history. History was in the making, it would have been a bit stupid to stay home.

* For example, the French word ‘lutte’ is often used in protest slogans and chants. It could be translated as struggle, fight, or battle in English. However, the French word has a much more assertive, positive connotation than the English equivalent of struggle. I usually chose to translate lutte as ‘fight back’ or ‘fight’.

I do believe in free education. At first like most people, I was against the hike but I was not necessarily for free tuition. It was really interesting, people wanted more at the end. Before the Québec Student Strike/Spring happened, there was nobody that was very, clearly opposed to free university because it wasn't seen as a sensible option, it was seen as utopian. So the right wing government, the right wing policy makers, they were not even building arguments, were not even trying to argue against it because it wasn't taken seriously. They've now developed this argument against free university, to me it shows that it actually became a sensible option in some peoples minds...Lots of people switched, lets just abolition them then [tuition fees]. That's one of the reasons I was involved. It was funny, I was walking with a friend in the streets during one of the demonstrations, he said: "Apparently we're in the end of history..." Well apparently the end of history is a lot more interesting then we thought...

The argument is easy to make regarding free tuition. I don't think it's necessarily the best argument, but societies where tuition is free are generally economically more powerful, more political participation, [I don't think this should be the end of education] it's good for those that don't go to school, to university. I see it more as an ideological thing... All these neoliberal politics, the idea where, if you use a service you pay for that service...Compromise was always leaking toward the hike... Low tuition fees are already a compromise on free education.

TA: Are there any political thinkers or theorists who influence your politics or that you think are relevant to thinking about the Québec Student Strikes?

Mathieu: Boétie, *Discours de la Servitude Volontaire*, comes back to do with civil disobedience, Liberal guys, like John Rawls, the idea that every social decision must be made in a way that benefits the poorest people if it benefits the richest as well... [Rawls is] a thinker who many people against the strike were very sensitive to...The student strike has a really strong anarchist influence.

TA: Any specific Québec thinkers/writers?

Mathieu: One book used many times over, Université Inc (Martin, Ouellet). Baillargeon, interesting stances on education, teacher of pedagogy, anarchist/rationalist (not a "typical anarchist) he took part in public debate, he was the origin of the idea to use a black square instead of the red square when Bill 78 came down, to mourn democracy, he was the one that pitched the idea.

TA: What is public space? Would you consider it to be different from social space?

Mathieu: No, they are not different. It depends on how you define them but personally I do not see a useful difference. Public space is a space where ideas are shared in society, where people are meeting, people are exchanging ideas, in general. Public space can be very virtual now, I think that's one of the problems with facebook, the main issue with facebook being used a lot in these movements, is that facebook is a privatization of public space. That's a real problem. It's very useful, but facebook is still a private company with interests, and they could censor anyone, they're not bound by any charter of rights of freedoms, any freedom of expression, for now they

seem to be pretty open...but still it is private space and that to me is a problem. I would like to see a platform like facebook that is open source, or public, that would be very interesting, one that would not be owned by anyone, a real public space.

TA: That brings up the problem of government owned spaces, held in trust to be open to people to meet and to be in them, we've seen lots of changes to how governments regulate those spaces over time, sometimes infringing upon those spaces, and telling people what they're allowed to do there...

Mathieu: I think there have always been regulations about how public spaces can be used which is kind of normal in a way. You have to regulate the common space in some ways. I'm not a big fan of law and order at all but I feel regulations can be useful. The public space has to have some form of regulation but the regulation should enforce freedom of assembly, freedom of thought, so that regulation should only permit for those rights to be served. It's interesting because this is one of the arguments that has been used by the government to crack down on demonstrators, that they are monopolizing the public space, which is kind of interesting to me, what does that mean to monopolize the public space? We're the public... oh cars were late, you know... weird laws that say things like you have to keep moving on a sidewalk you can't stand still. That's why you see picket lines, people are walking in circles, they have to walk, you can do whatever you want as long as you walk. And now with P6 and Bill 78 and they want to know where we are going... The government misunderstood completely the movement, the government thought that this movement was one of the traditional movements where we have leaders, organizations, and members. The Student Strike didn't have very strong leaders, they did have some organizations, but many of the demonstrations were not organized by anyone, were not under the [direct] supervision of anyone, so you cannot ask people where they are going if nobody decides. You didn't know in advance, people were like "oh ok, they're at this corner on this street, we're going to join them, lets go right, there's another group there"...people were moving freely, going where they wanted. I think the government really misunderstood the majority of 'organization' behind that because they faced something that was not organized like the government and the government was trying to impose its own structure [and conception] onto this movement.

"Who are your leaders?" – "Well I'm not a leader. I'm a spokesperson."

"No, that's bullshit, you're an exec." – "No, I'm not an exec, I'm a spokesperson, I cannot call shots, I cannot make decisions."

And they couldn't deal with that or understand it either.

TA: Do you think that's partly why it was so powerful and effective, because it was different?

Mathieu: It makes it effective but it makes it weak at the same time. I think that without people knowing or wanting it to be called this way, ...it was very much an anarchist movement. The CLASSE was itself very much organized by an anarchist organization. They would not call themselves anarchist for good reasons, because people have pretty bad understandings...[they] don't understand what it really means, they confuse it with nihilism. Which is pretty different. The thing is, that makes it powerful but it makes it weak. There's a reason why historically speaking most anarchists get screwed... the lack of organization can lead to problems at some point. It's kind of a paradox, yes it is useful, and no when they face very strong institutional power... It's because these movements exist and are powerful because they rely on people's

direct actions, continuous direct actions. You cannot stay into action forever. Institutions serve this purpose. They ensure that the interactions that were made are now institutionalized and are now protected and will still exist on their own. Institutions kind of permitted the [survival] of these ideas overtime while people are not actually ‘exerting’ [exercising] them. And that to me is the problem. I would have to think more about it... Those values were existing because of people’s actions, going out in the street, banging pots and pans, but at one point those values need some form of institutions to exist on their own and to survive.

TA: Is public space the same as political space?

Mathieu: It should be the same.

TA: But in our society, do you think it is?

Mathieu: In our society, we’ve pulled it apart. We should not fall into the pitfall of thinking everything is politics... There are some things you do that are not political. It’s not all social actions that are political in and of themselves. But there’s many that are. But political action is social interaction...

I think that one of the thinkers that got it right was Benjamin Constant in *La Liberté des Anciens et Modernes*. For him, he was comparing liberty according to the Ancients, and the one that existed in his time (1819). For the Greeks, we were free in the public space, people were free in public but very compelled by regulations and institutions in their private lives, so private lives were not free. Contrary to that the modern man sees politics as an annoyance, so he is free in his own life, on his own, but there’s no real collective freedom as there was with the Ancients. This man according to Constant is more interested with the economy for instance, with working and making money... So I think it should be a bit more balanced, a bit more politics in the public.

TA: In ancient times it seems like there’s ‘collective freedom’ in the public sphere?

Mathieu: All freedoms are collective anyway... It’s logically impossible to see freedom as something not collective. To be free you have to have a relationship with others. Freedom is a relationship.

TA: (Discussion of different types of spaces...) I hope to frame things based on the university as a very particular type of space in Québec.

Mathieu: Anywhere where people meet can be public space. We are in a public space right now [referencing the café we are sitting in]. It is different in that they [the café owners] could say “I don’t like your face, go out.”

TA: Because it’s privately owned...

Mathieu: But when we are in a park, nobody should be able to say “I don’t like your face, leave.” It’s about property.

TA: That's a different way of describing public space. Most people would say, no this is a private space because it is privately held/owned, only governmentally held/owned spaces are public.

Mathieu: Yes, but the problem again with this is that when we don't take ownership into account we end up with issues like facebook, being a public space but privately held... You should look into what happened in England to the 'commons', how it changed society...

[some back and forth about the tragedy of the commons, the enclosures...]

TA: Is private space always economic space, is economic space always private?

Mathieu: No, that's too simple... I believe there are some things that are held in private but have no economical grounds. Private from an economical point of view has to do with being able to be exchanged. My body is private, I cannot exchange it. So I don't think they're both the same. I don't think they're socially the same.

TA: Ok, what would you define to be economic space then?

Mathieu: Economic space, it's about exchange and it's about work. I would have a very basic definition of that which would be... economics for me is an exchange of goods or services, very simple. I believe we put too much emphasis on economics. We should keep it simple.

TA: So... private space?

Mathieu: It's a hard question. In contrast to public space/property? Private is what depends on the will I would say. On the will to share or not to share, to show or not, to exchange or not, whatever. If it's based on will it's also based on power. Power to exchange it... so maybe there's will before power both those are kind of linked. I think that ideas are private, desires are private, bodies are private. I think some objects can be [private] but we have a tendency to see private things as only objects, I don't think it should only be objects or material things.

TA: What would you define the university to be then?

Mathieu: Do you want the positive or normative answer?

TA: Both!

Mathieu: The positive answer is that universities are more and more, the classic answer, space that is devoted to research that is useful for the economy and economic interests in general. My normative way of seeing universities or schools, schools have the responsibility of socialization of human beings, parents as well. I think schooling people should not only be about developing skills, it has to do with developing good ways of thinking and to learn to be free. In order to learn to be free, especially in elementary school, you have to learn obedience as well, but once you learn that you should be able to learn how to disobey or how to disagree, critical thought, but more than that. But critical thought without rational knowledge/scientific thought, can lead to conspiracy theory. Schools should be a space for this, teachers should be allowed to do their

jobs... people don't remember facts and skills from school but they will remember a way of thinking, seeing the world.

TA: Do you think universities are spaces of politics or could be?

Mathieu: I think you'd find my answer in Max Weber's [Political Writings...] Book in which he explains why there's a need to have 'knowers', les personnes qui savent? Les saveurs ("The people who know, the knowers"...[note: Following transcript is translated from French] The work of a 'knower' is to strive for impartiality, but on the other side, we have political work, work of values, work of social action. These two are inseparable, but at the same time, they are separated in our work, so when we do science, we can't do politics but...when we do politics we must make use of science...but they do have to be separated. A good example is "Soviet Science" [offers example of "communist wheat", famines, and how Soviets combined political ideology with science, problems stemming from that.] That's an interesting case of where you combine science with 'politics'. On the other hand, science itself does not necessarily lead to action, action has to be political.

TA: What do you think of citizenship or the idea of a citizen?

Mathieu: I don't know what a citizen is, I know what citizenship is. To me citizen, we see that as someone who lives in a political context, we are all citizens, some are more than others, not because they deserve more but because they exercise their rights a bit more. Citizenship is about maybe knowing the relationship between you and the others, the collective...it's all about politics...I don't like the word citizen. I don't think it means [anything] these days.

TA: What about people who identify as citizens of different places, some people identify as citizens of certain places more than others...

Mathieu: I think this is because it has to do with institutions, citizenship depends on institutions. This whole idea of being a citizen of the world, does not make sense you cannot be a citizen of the world, because there's no institutions for that...

TA: So because institutions and citizenship go together...

Mathieu: That's why I don't like the word citizenship. Maybe we should just go back to calling ourselves humans? How we interact with each other as human beings. The citizen is the political institutionalized part of the human being. I'm a citizen when I go out and vote, I'm not a citizen when I cuddle with someone. Citizenship doesn't make any sense to me in a democracy because citizenship had meaning you know when you had those old Greek guys in Athens, where you had people who were citizens and people who were not citizens but living in the same political [realm]. So if you're living in the US in the 1930s you could say that black people were not citizens because they didn't have the same rights as other people but technically now we're all citizens...As soon as there's nothing to compare to except maybe permanent residency and refugees, which in itself doesn't justify the need to talk about a word, citizen, now.

TA: (talking more about participation and different forms of citizenship) So what types of demonstrations were effective?

Mathieu: Depends on where you are, and effective for what. Probably the most effective thing was the pots and pans [les casseroles] because it made people more sympathetic to the movement. But at the same time, it's hard to say 'effective' because it's effective against whom? If you want to be effective against political leadership and economical elites, you have to do actions that will impede the economy. If you want to be effective with the normal person who lives in the suburbs, you better take the pots/pans. It depends because your "rapport de force" is not the same and should not be exercised in the same way. I think direct actions were the most effective... I don't necessarily agree with this but when you see cops coming to beat the shit out of people to move them away it means they were effective at doing what they were doing because otherwise they would let them do whatever they were doing. So when the government is reacting to social movements it means that people are actually effective. If you look at what's happening in Brazil, what's happened in Turkey... people were actually effective. If they were not effective, there wouldn't be any repression.

TA: The student strikes employed blockades, marching in streets, interrupting traffic flow, occupation of certain spaces, talking about those types of actions specifically, where they are taking up or interrupting spaces that may be conceived as public, why do you think it was effective to take over those spaces?

Mathieu: They were effective in two ways. The first way was more concrete... made people lose business. So people when they lose business they're angry, the government is angry, loses taxes... The other way was that civil disobedience was effective because civil disobedience is effective in a way that... when people stop listening to authority, we are in a very slippery and dangerous slope. I also think that's why civil disobedience should not be used all the time, only at specific times for specific purposes and reasons. When it's used the government [note: noise on recording...] moral binding of people now the whole government doesn't have legitimacy. And this is why it's effective because you show the government that actually you, the government, are legitimate because we are obeying you, because we are [conducting ourselves in ways] that are not going against you. However if we stop listening and do nothing, you're nothing. It doesn't have to be going up and breaking stuff, you just don't listen. You just stay home. If everybody was just staying at home, not much would happen. Powerful people would not have their power. It's the general principle of strike.

TA: I like that way of thinking about it because that could be good for people to understand and see themselves as powerful.

Mathieu: Power lies in convincing people to act in [their] own interest. Power is making people act in a certain way. When people stop doing this, [it doesn't even mean acting contrary] you don't have power. We should be careful not to draw too many parallels between the Arab Spring and Québec but I do think if you look at Egypt, when the army said we're not dealing with it [the people revolting] and the cops said well if the army isn't then you're on your own. So when people just stop acting in your favour, that's where you're powerless. Power is an action.

TA: So the movement used civil disobedience, I assume you would consider that to be political participation?

Mathieu: Of course, because I don't think that politics are limited to institutionalized politics. That's a mistake.

TA: That's the link I'm trying to make, that politics/political actions fall on a spectrum much wider than the one contemporary 'citizens' get to use or see it as...

Mathieu: Yup, especially during crisis. Institutions are there to provide continuity. To make sure that political actions that emerge from a certain decision [making] process and certain values continue over time. There's aspects that are not covered by institutions...

TA: Are there certain spaces where political action isn't legitimate or where political actions shouldn't be allowed?

Mathieu: I don't think so. Maybe with some exception, we all need our little private zone. I think we should not do politics inside someone's house who doesn't want it. But if that person is a very rich person who owns every part of the city, we still can do it [in that space]... We should not extend property too much, there's a difference between your ownership of clothes and of all the parks. Example, the governor general. I would not go into their own apartment/bedroom but I would consider the grounds around 'ours' as well.

TA: I agree with that too, and that's why I'm asking about the university because the university has this weird middle position between being a privately operated institution but publicly held... Earlier you suggested we should discuss the role of Québec within Canada...

Mathieu: I'm someone who's too young to have known the last referendum in 95. I was in early high school, I don't remember exactly. [During the Strikes] it was the first time in my whole life that I felt very proud of being a Québécois. I remember seeing newspaper montages about the different coverage all over the world, it was very interesting to see German, Russian, Chinese, all talking about us. When I was coming back to Ottawa and seeing that people were not even aware of what the red square was, it was like wow, I really am living in two different countries. I mean UQO and the Cégep, were on strike for a long time, we live like five kilometers apart and people were not even aware it was existing. And when it was existing, I had more bad comments here about that than what I received in Montréal while wearing the red square. I remember having a discussion with a guy over a coffee. The guy was working in a coffee shop, he said why are you wearing that [red square]. So I explained, and he said "Ya but, that doesn't make you very different from the police because it's a uniform." And I was like ok, well uniform? Aren't you wearing a uniform? But he said something that I found very revealing about how English Canada sees politics, he said: "Political opinion [is] a private thing. You should not talk of that in public." I was very disgusted by that because I think many people think so. I mean, sexual orientation is a private thing not political opinion. Politics are about the public and that's the feeling I've had in many instances. Where people come to see political ideas as things that are very personal and private. That you can discuss and exchange but you should not debate too much about it. 'I think that, you think that... let's express our ideas then go back to our own

space and maybe think about what the other said and maybe I'm going to change my mind on that"... This idea of debate does not really exist. I already mentioned that there was not a single Canadian flag in the demonstrations in Montréal. You could see the complete misunderstanding of the movement in the rest of the country. I don't remember having read a single positive editorial or column about [it]. The usual thing was that "ok you guys still pay the lowest tuition fees in the whole country why do you guys complain?" ... You have to put it into context of the Liberal government being very corrupt, the allegations of corruption you see in Montréal... that was not helping the Liberal government at the time. You had kids, literally kids of 19 yrs old, using social media and being better at public relations than the Parti Libérale who had paid specialists to do that job.... There's a profound sense of distrust. This generation which I'm actually part of sociologically speaking, which makes me very proud, of whom we always said were apolitical, were individualistic, that was not interested in the public good, actually did something that no one thought would happen. The boomers always say, "Oh well May 68, we did our own little revolution, but you guys don't know how to do it." But there's a strong difference, social movements in the sixties were about "I". These people wanted to make their own place into institutions. They didn't want to actually bring them down or change them, they wanted their own space in it. They wanted to be able to exist as persons. Now, we see much, much, much more of the "we". Those who were against the students, the green squares, it was always about "I", what "I" want, what "I" think. And if you look at the rest, it was more about what "we" should do, what "we" think... I think many of them discovered that they were a bit more anarchist than they thought. That's going to definitely change how politics are done in the future. Also, the whole *bébés gâtés* [spoiled babies], stuff which is so not true... who, who's in 2nd year university, and has so much at stake, would fight so long and hard just to not pay more. They didn't do that for themselves. People who would have paid the full hike, were not even in high school yet. So people who went on strike didn't go on strike for themselves, their personal interest. Of course, many maybe went on strike because they wanted vacations, lazy... it happens all the time.

Interview #2 – Jean-Marc

Background:

Jean-Marc and I met on a hot summer evening in a small basement bar near Berri-UQAM Métro Station in Montréal to chat. The bar was just down the street from where I had been kettled earlier that year. Jean-Marc participated in demonstrations from late February 2012 onward and has remained very active in his student association and ASSÉ. He was part of a faculty student association at UQAM that was a member of ASSÉ and voted in favour of striking. When asked if he would have participated in the strike had his association not voted in favour he said it was unlikely he would have. A vote against striking would have meant that others would have likely voted against it and he wouldn't have had the time to dedicate to participating. He chose to conduct his interview mostly in English (he is a bilingual Francophone).

TA: What sorts of things led you to participate to begin with?

Jean-Marc: I wasn't very active in the first couple weeks or even the years leading up to the strike. I started out by participating in the debates, the general assemblies, seeing how the strike was becoming such a broad movement, that made me want to become a part of it. And I realized

that it was coherent with my values, to participate. Slowly but surely I started getting involved like that.

TA: So you started out getting involved with your faculty association?

Jean-Marc: Yup, pretty much by my faculty association. I participated with the ‘mob squad’, I participated in the large protests that were taking place during the strike.

TA: Your student association used general assembly style direct democracy to make decisions?

Jean-Marc: Yes, absolutely. I’m very proud of it.

TA: And your association voted in favour of the strike?

Jean-Marc: The assembly itself yes. Which is where every political decision is made. They voted in favour of the strike massively.

TA: And that was done on an ongoing basis right?

Jean-Marc: Yup, for the first few weeks yes. At one point where we felt the strike was going very long, we adopted a motion to pursue the strike until the minister [of education] made a reasonable offer, so we wouldn’t have to reconduct the strike [vote] every week. That was adopted massively as well.

TA: If the minister had put forward a reasonable offer, would that offer have been considered by the entire membership of your faculty association?

Jean-Marc: Yes.

TA: And they would have decided on their own, autonomously from ASSÉ?

Jean-Marc: In principle no national organization, not ASSÉ or FEUQ, etc were supposed to recommend accepting or refusing an offer. But the offer that came forward eventually still included the hike...the offers were more insulting than anything.

TA: Any influential thinkers, activists, etc you’d like to mention?

Jean-Marc: Oh my, there are several. First one, Bertrand Russell. For many reasons, but for clarity in terms of something that really spoke to me the most was his unconditional love for humankind and the fact that he was so inspired by the incredible amount of misery and suffering in the world that even though he was an aristocrat, he became incredibly active, he became a very important speaker for the fight for political liberation, for peace itself, for free love, all kinds of things. Next would probably be Noam Chomsky. What I really like about Noam Chomsky is that he’s not an intellectual turned activist, he was an activist first before becoming a linguist, philosopher, and a professor at MIT. The fact that he has such divergent [diverse] fields of interest, the fields of political philosopher and activism, he’s a well-known anarchist, but the

fact that he's such a genius in [all these fields] I find it inspiring. Well there are a couple of other ones but really not as much, Emma Goldman for one...

TA: Anyone from Québec in particular?

Jean-Marc: Actually during the strike there was one blogger, from La Journal de Montréal, Jean Barbe. He's not an academic person, he's not an intellectual or anything, he's just a man, an activist who takes social causes to heart... he was with the Journal de Montréal which is a very right-wing, demagogic, populist newspaper, and he was the only divergent voice supporting the strikers, supporting our cause, supporting free education. It was refreshing to read him. You know, to show that you can be surrounded by demagogues and liars, and they're the majority of people who are there, they're 'right'. He was a brave man to stand up, he got fired for it. He's an excellent writer too, he wrote a couple of books.

TA: So what's public space?

Jean-Marc: I guess, would be first of all, in opposition to private I guess. Which means that it has no specific owner, it has [belongs to] a collective. But it's space so it's something that can be occupied and that can be used for anything, for art, for demonstrations. It's something that belongs to people and can be used for whatever reason for whatever people want.

TA: Can you give me some examples of public spaces?

Jean-Marc: I think... well we were talking about the strike, so probably the most 'well-known' public space is probably the park Émilie-Gamelin, although technically it belongs to the town, to the city, but we made it a public space. Square Victoria in Montréal that was used by the Occupy Movement. Basically those places were reappropriated, they were made public, they were taken back.

TA: What about political space? Would you consider public space to be a political space?

Jean-Marc: Absolutely. I think anything can be a political space. Your home can be a political space, you can put up a flag, or a banner, you can put up a sign. Any advertising billboard conveys a political message whether it is aware of it or not. But in regards to consumerism and capitalism... anything can be a political space.

TA: Would you consider public space, political space, to be different types of spaces?

Jean-Marc: I'd say they are all the same. It's social because it's public... it depends on the interactions of people and politics of course is all about the decisions that we take collectively or that are taken for us. So you can't take the social out of the public, you can't take the public out of the political, you can't take the political out of the social. They are all connected in that sense

TA: What about private or economic space?

Jean-Marc: I guess the primary formal definition would be property. You can say public property but it sounds like an oxymoron as far as I'm concerned. Property means that it is mine or theirs and not anyone else's.

TA: So the right to exclude?

Jean-Marc: Yeah.

TA: Are there times though when public space is exclusive as well?

Jean-Marc: In practice maybe. Lets say there's a jazz festival going on, in public space and you don't like jazz...you might feel excluded in that sense. It's not fundamentally exclusive, I think in practice it can be. It could be [expressly] political as well... say there's a neoconservative rally going there, I will feel excluded but I'll feel happy to feel excluded.

TA: Would you also say there were times when the city of Montréal, the SPVM, government of Québec, were purposefully excluding people from public spaces?

Jean-Marc: They were certainly forcefully excluding people from places. A pretty clear example was last summer during the Formula 1 events, Crescent street in Montréal, they block off the cars so only foot circulation is allowed, people were forcefully blocked access and threatened with arrest if they were wearing a red square, or maybe four or five people together. Even the actual site of the F1 races, it was basically a police state. You get out of the metro and they see a red square and they search your bag without any kind of a warrant or anything and literally blocked you off and threatened to arrest you if you got too close, so that's one example of several during the strike. That's blatant exclusion in that sense.

TA: Would you say economic and private space are synonyms or can they be different?

Jean-Marc: I'd say in the current state they are synonyms... in our society right now, the current socio-economic [configuration] because we are in a capitalist society, which relies heavily on private property, on private enterprise generating capital. This may be outside the scope of this study... but you can have a participative economy, one that doesn't rely on private property, but as far as I can see it they are [currently] synonyms.

TA: Would you say there are certain spaces that are or have become only economic spaces?

Jean-Marc: I would be contradicting myself from earlier if I said they were exclusively economic because I don't think that anything is exclusively economic, any kind of economy conveys a political message. For example that plant in Greece that recently reopened that has been collectivized. It is presently functioning in an anarcho-syndicalist way, where it is self-managed by the workers, that conveys a political message too. There's a message of rejecting the hierarchy that is inherent to having a boss. It's a rejection as well to the economic system itself, that workers can collectivize, they can reappropriate the fruits of their labour, that's a political message even though it's done through economic means.

TA: So the way we use private property, the way we reappropriate it, can be a way that changes our conception of it.

Can you define the university in terms of space?

Jean-Marc: The university is a space of exchange, of knowledge, where we learn, learn the tools to build critical thinking, to learn everything there is to learn basically. Everything that we as a society have learned before, whether it be history or philosophy or science. It's where we have access to these vast amounts of knowledge. At least that's what I would like it to be, that's the idea of it, like Plato's Academy. More and more universities are being used to generate a workforce, a highly specialized workforce. Any place where you learn and express ideas, which are of course helpful to anyone who takes part in it, you can learn from each other, further your knowledge mutually. That is incompatible with the idea of the university that we're slipping towards, one that tries to eliminate critical thinking, tries to make you into someone who will do their job, will consume, and pay their taxes and vote once every four years.

TA: Thinking of Québec specifically, would you say universities are public spaces or should be?

Jean-Marc: They should be public spaces, absolutely. My university [UQAM] the way it was built, it was built right into the downtown. So there's no border between the downtown and the university itself. It should be a public space. If education was free there wouldn't be this elitism of, oh you know, I can afford to go to university and you can't, and that's why I'm on this side of the wall and you're not. The fact that people don't have access to the university makes it exclusive in that sense. It's supposedly public but it's not that public.

TA: If we go a step further and talk about people who had paid to be a part of the university space, and then decided during the strikes to have their own political autonomy, what do you think of the responses from universities towards these students?

Jean-Marc: Some universities...were extremely hostile and paternalistic by not recognizing student democracy. I think it's abhorrent.

TA: Do you think that was keeping with their tradition of being a public space?

Jean-Marc: No. They want people to finish the masters fast so they can get a new cohort of students who will pay and fund them.

TA: What do you think of the validity of protests/occupations in university space etc that were happening during the strikes?

Jean-Marc: I'm 110% in favour.

TA: And why are you in favour?

Jean-Marc: Well there are different reasons. When Concordia was blocked during the strike that was in response to the fact that the administration refused to recognize their strike votes. That's retribution first of all and it's building a power relationship, it's showing that their will will be

enforced whether the university likes it or not, whether they agree or not. Our democracy is good enough for us it doesn't need to be good enough for them.

TA: So it's a direct rejection of the contemporary hierarchies that already exist?

Jean-Marc: Absolutely. In a second sense, the universities are...well we are the ones who use them, we're the ones who make them alive. That makes them ours as far as I'm concerned, taking back what's ours, occupying what's ours, makes sense to me, why not occupying our universities to make art, to organize, for whatever reason, we don't have to justify it. If the administration doesn't like it well I really don't care, they don't have to.

TA: What does it mean to be a citizen?

Jean-Marc: It's a question of where you feel your 'belonging' I guess. It could be so different for so many people. Citizenship so often is mixed with nationalism. People feel some kind of superiority in regards to their own nationality in regards to others. I personally don't feel very much attachment to the Québécois or the Canadian flag. I know I'm a citizen of both of them, I know it on paper, I have a Canadian passport, I have a Québécois drivers license, I guess that qualifies me for being a citizen but it's not because I want to be. It's administrative... it doesn't mean anything. Like saying I'm a Canadian, ok does that mean you're different from someone who's from Japan or Germany, or Africa? No, we're human beings anyway. It doesn't change anything.

TA: If you were to envision citizenship that maybe wasn't tied to the State what do you think it would mean?

Jean-Marc: I don't know.... I am part of a structure, I'm part of the ASSÉ and I do see myself in it, because I know my voice is in it, and I do feel attached to it. If direct democracy was applied on a larger scale, and we collectively made it something to be proud of I would see myself in it... I don't recognize myself in Québec, or in Canada even less.

TA: What types of demos were the most effective?

Jean-Marc: Well, it's hard to tell which ones were the most effective because they were effective in different ways. When I think of March 22nd or May 22nd 2012, all the 22nds, those were the monster protests, that were hundreds of thousands of people. It's an incredible show of force, and an incredible show of solidarity for everyone across the world, showing that our movement was so, so big, so powerful, so united. So in terms of a show of force, nothing can compare to those protests but then again, there were the night protests that went on for more than 100 straight nights, at least one protest every night, the slogan was 'Manif chaque soir, jusqu'à la victoire.' ['Protest/Manifestation every night until victory.'] The fact that they lasted so long, it showed the tenacity of our movement and the determination because it was every single day and every single night, sometimes until 1 am. That was essential too I think. But of course there was the direct action as well, especially earlier on in the strike, March and April even, blockings/blockades, occupations, even these surprise actions that happened. In terms of having a profound economic impact, that's pretty hard to beat because some actions literally cost

millions of dollar, and that's a very noticeable dent in the economy. It's not a question of doing harm, it's a question of doing damage and of making enough noise so that we become, unignorable.

TA: So in terms of them being effective at certain things, some actions cause damage that has to be noticed, 300,000 students marching in the streets down the main streets of Montréal, that's going to be noticed.

Jean-Marc: And the metro smoke bombs, when the metro was stopped for several hours, I think it cost something like 9 million in one day.

TA: So more specifically, why do you think it is important to take over streets, parks, etc?

Jean-Marc: It's about establishing a power relationship. The difference between us and some smaller or weaker movements is that we're not a lobby [group]. We practice combativism and the strength that we have is in the streets, it's in the mobilization, that we can establish a power relationship. We don't ask, we don't ask for what we're demanding, we take it. That's not done with petitions, it's not done with letters to your deputy minister, it's done by [organizing] a large grassroots movement and having it make an impact.

TA: Are these forms of protest, forms of political participation or citizenship participation?

Jean-Marc: They are undoubtedly political participation, for sure, the strike was fundamentally political. Sure it was about tuition fees, but it was about much more than that, it was against neoliberalism, it was against austerity, it was against the direction our education system was taking, of privatization, of having it paired up with the economic demands. Form of citizenship? For a lot of people yes, absolutely, it was about taking back their Québec, about getting back Québec... there was the PQ that was in there, all the nationalists in there [making it about] the dignity and the strength of the Québécois people.

TA: What about Québec Solidaire?

Jean-Marc: They were there as well...QS as compared to the PQ saw it more for what it was, the social and political reality of it, more than the PQ for sure. For the PQ, it was fundamentally opportunistic and doing whatever they can to get votes. So for them of course the nationalist party as they are, it was about the dignity of the Québécois nation and people, I really hate them, I'm sorry.

TA: For those people that really saw it as part of being a citizen, was it as a citizen of Québec, of Montréal, or of both?

Jean-Marc: Both in some cases, of course the epicentre of the strike was Montréal, but had it not been such a province-wide movement, it probably would have been just Montréal, but it was so big, there were the four corners of the province affected by the strike in one way or another, so it was definitely a Québec thing.

TA: Do you think people who saw it as part of being a citizen, was it very much a citizen as recognized by the state or was it broader than that? I know it's hard to try and talk on behalf of others.

Jean-Marc: Well the movement is so heterogeneous; there were people of all kinds. There were people who saw themselves in terms of the Québec state, there were [also] people who recognized it in their global context of austerity and neoliberalism, those people weren't necessarily in the majority. I think the fact that we were able to reach people from all over the world, from England, to Australia, to English Canada, I think that helped to open our eyes to the fact that it really was an international problem.

TA: Are some places more legitimate as spaces of political action than others? Are there some spaces that you think maybe should be exempt from political action?

Jean-Marc: Legitimate spaces... Spaces have the legitimacy that we give them. I'm quite a fan of direct democracy, so there shouldn't be too much legitimacy given to Parliament, to the National Assembly, because they don't reflect the views of people. They make their own policies as they go along basically. They get their confidence vote, once every four years or less. So that [form] of democracy doesn't seem legitimate at all. People give them their legitimacy though, whether I like or not. Whether or not places should be exempt from politics, I don't think so. I think politics should be a part of our lives. It benefits the ruling class that we take politics out of everything, that we don't recognize that politics are everywhere. We're bombarded by capitalist propaganda in the city, by patriarchy, it's everywhere, people just don't see it. So no, it's quite the contrary, people should see that politics are everywhere and that everything is political and [we should] base our lives on the decisions we want politically. Politically do we want a system that's anti-oppressive, anti-colonial, emancipatory, that's humanizing, that's liberating, absolutely, and I think that everything, work, education, family life, would follow that naturally.

Interview #3 – Josiane

Background:

Josiane invited me to join her at her home to chat while she was watching her son. Considering herself to be a “political girl” in high school, Josiane has been involved in student activism in Québec since about 2004. While she was a member of a faculty student association and ASSÉ during the 2012 strikes, parenting her son made participation in the association through general assemblies and committees more difficult compared to when she first became involved. A bilingual francophone, Josiane chose to conduct the interview mostly in English.

TA: How long were you involved with student movement/strikes? The most recent or others before that as well?

Josiane: In the student movement I'm involved since 2004, in high school.

TA: Were you involved with ASSÉ later on?

Josiane: Actually I started a bit later. I started in CÉGEP, I started in 2007. I was the organizer of mobilization in CEGEP de Vieux-Montréal. So, Vieux-Montréal wasn't a member of ASSÉ but we participated in the C.R.A.M (Conseil Régional de l'ASSÉ à Montréal), it's the regional council of ASSÉ. As a member I was going to meetings and organizing mobilization on my campus. In 2007, unfortunately there was an increase in fees [though there was mobilization against it]. We didn't win it but there was a strike, we had an occupation and everything at CEGEP Vieux-Montréal. For me it was the peak of my involvement at that moment. I was really full-time into student politics. I was getting into the office at 8 and leaving around 10-11 at night.

TA: Exhausting.

Josiane: Yeah, it was my life there, even weekends sometimes. [Discussing CRAM] I really love that organization, I think we should have more of that sort of thing. So it's the association where we get together to organize actions. But if you are a student association, or an environmental group, and you want to get involved, you just have to attend the meetings. You become a member and you have a vote after three meetings. Even though my CEGEP association wasn't formally affiliated with ASSÉ, we could participate, we had great participation. We had great participation at a local level that permits for [ASSÉ] to connect a lot with the local movement.

TA: Why did you get involved in the beginning?

Josiane: Well the first thing in 2004, we were organizing a bit for the 2005 strike, so we did very small actions, I was kind of the political girl in high school. In 2005, so basically what we did was, I was in a girls' only school, we got all the girls going out and joining the university students. There was not a very high involvement but a bit. But when I got to CEGEP, basically there was people from the union saying they were looking for people to participate and I was like, yeah cool, I'd be into that. So that was in 2007, so just after that I became mobilization organizer.

TA: So this already aligned with your politics?

Josiane: Yes, I was already left. Actually on the political level... well lets call it, I'm a red diaper baby. Personally my first big attempt to mobilize was for the [FTAA] summit in Québec City in 2001. I think around that time there was the first UFP election, Union de Forces Progressiste, that later became Québec Solidaire, I was participating in the election of, one of the first members...

TA: AFESH uses direct democracy? And they obviously voted in favour of striking?

Josiane: Yes, and yes, it was the same for Vieux-Montréal [in terms of using direct democracy] and I think that's the way to organize, you have a [double-edged sword] in terms of getting people involved you have much much more power, the organizing is kind of alive. But at the same time when you 'rule' this way, when you don't do your mobilization, when you don't get the majority of students participation, well your organization [can] just fall apart. You cannot run an administration committee or whatever, you need to have mobilization non-stop.

TA: And you feel that, general assembly/direct democracy style is the best way to do that?

Josiane: Yeah, yeah, I do but at the same time I can understand that there is not only one way to organize. I've been in different organizations and movements and I don't there is a magic recipe, I think what's important in any case is that you have mobilization, in any kind of process of democracy you have the dynamic of hierarchy and there's always things that will stop you to get things done in time or to have a full discussion. So there's no magic recipe. You always have to look at what people can do, what they are ready to do and always have the political discussion going on. I think that's the most important.

TA: If by chance your student association had voted against participating in the strike, would you have participated anyway in the strike? Or would you have followed the mandate of your student association?

Josiane: I would have followed the mandate of the association. I would not have stopped my classmates from going to class or coming on campus. If there's a vote taken I would not [be able] to change that but my participation into the political event that is going on wouldn't have stopped. I know I would have went to the demonstrations and put posters on campus,... but a vote, well on some campuses there was no vote, but that doesn't mean the people or the discussion about the event is off, it just means the strike won't happen on that campus. And, yeah, it's really important to respect the majority decision [of the assembly]. I've been in situations where that was not respected and that destroyed [the union] for years.

TA: Do you mind elaborating on those situations?

Josiane: Sure, it was in 2008... Yes, so the context was there was a vote for a one-day strike [at Vieux-Montréal]. There was a vote and there was a vote for not having barricades outside because there was an agreement with the administration and it was negotiated and accepted at the Assembly. Some students didn't feel comfortable with the barricades, but some others felt that it was important to have them anyway. So they did it. There were two consequences. First one, then, the next strike, we couldn't negotiate any agreements with the administration [because they felt we had not respected the previous agreement.] But that was the minor thing, the very bad thing that happened was that after that, a series of articles were published in the campus talking about how the left [doesn't respect anything] we need to kick out the anarchists because it was the anarchists from the association. So then the [somewhat] right wing groups tried to get into the union... This created a big problem, because some students were frustrated that their decision was not respected when it was discussed in the assembly.

TA: So you would say those students lost trust in the assembly?

Josiane: Yeah, exactly. But also the students lost trust in those people in the association, so there was a division between the assembly and the people kind of running the association, so it basically undermined all democracy. Another moment, a bit different, we have a constitution, we have a certain quorum. And there was going to be a strike vote in 2008, it was a small strike, like a one-day. There was not quorum, so we couldn't technically vote on the strike, so we were

following the [statute] it was supposed to go into a referendum but some people were saying “No, no, no, if it goes to referendum, we’re going to lose the vote.” So someone came and said, “I’ve got a motion saying we don’t respect our constitution and we’ll just vote [anyway].” So basically the people [in attendance] said, “yeah, sure lets do that.” It failed, so the people who did want the strike were basically screwed over by their own tactic. But after that, what happened was, again anger from the students about the association, asking, “what did you do?” The association has a series of committees,... so we had to rectify situation because the member making that recommendation was an elected member of the association. But then we had all these committees coming and saying well we didn’t have quorum but we also won’t respect [our] constitutions...

TA: Lets just mobilize instead!

Josiane: Yeah, which is the easy way to go, but what happened was people were not mobilized. And then it was much more difficult to mobilize for the next political strike or activism.

TA: Any political thinkers, activists, who inspire you?

Josiane: The people themselves are inspiration. In terms of ‘big people’, I love to read Marx and Lenin, but they are kind of old... I think in the movement you find a lot of great people and I don’t think I can think of just one person. But umm, there are the political people in the media, even Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois is someone we can think about. We can admire him but there are so many people that do all sorts of work and great jobs. Everybody is passionate, even when there is defeat, people will continue.

TA: So what about public space?

Josiane: Public space, except inside of your home, everything is a public space. The home is private, at the same time there’s so many things of social interest inside but we need to have a private space. I do not mean that there’s no social ‘enjeu’ [issues].

TA: You brought up the word social, is social space different from public space?

Josiane: Yes, I guess in this case the home would be also a social space.

TA: So the home can be both a social space, at the same time as being a private space. Could you give some examples of conventional public spaces?

Josiane: Well we have the street, we occupy them. All public facilities like universities, hospitals, schools... Where people go and connect, connect with people in the rest of society. Also where you buy things, stores. They are kind of private property, for your job, but at the same time they’re very social because this is where you connect with most people. If you’re not a political person, where do you actually connect with the rest of society? At your work or workplace, which many are private or privatized.

TA: So they're considered private anyway by our society. But they can be public in their function?

Josiane: Yup, in their function and in their utilization, [it's where] we reproduce social good, they are working [through] a long list of people.

TA: What about political space?

Josiane: Oh, everywhere! Nothing cannot be political.

TA: You wouldn't necessarily define political space differently from public?

Josiane: Well, I guess you can have the middle of the desert, it won't be very public but certainly political.

TA: In what way would you say the middle of the desert is political?

Josiane: Why isn't there anybody? What can you do with it? What is politics? It's everything about organization. So everything that society can reach. The absence or presence of society. So basically the universe could become political at some point...

TA: As soon as we could reach it?

Josiane: Yeah exactly. Once we have the spaceship and everything.

TA: How would you define private space... or even economic space?

Josiane: Oh, economic space. The economy is the production of what we use, how do we transform... I would say that a lot of things can be economic. In the house as I cook, it is economy... certain things... we have private space, we have public space that could be used without producing anything. It depends on the use, it's not the space itself it's the use of the space. Private space... Well we need to have space where nobody can tell us what to do. When there is no demand on us. Or we can share with one person. We can share a public space. That's the purpose of private space... at the same time a society needs to determine what's the private and what's the social or the public. Inside a private space, we are [supposedly] the only ones to decide but the society will put limits anyway. So for example, I can have a partner in my private space and do whatever I want with that partner but I cannot be violent.

TA: So there's limitations on what you can do in private space?

Josiane: Yeah because what you do in private space can impact outside of that space.

TA: How would you define the university in terms of space given the definitions we've talked about?

Josiane: Oh the university, the university is a lot of things, certainly public, certainly social, economic too. We produce knowledge, and a workforce. It's not very private.

TA: What/who would you define to be a citizen?

Josiane: I know it's very popular right now but I hate that expression. Because what is a citizen actually? Technically the word comes from Rome, to have the right to participate in democracy. It's still true today, that's what it is (so it comes with rights), it's a privilege basically right now. I prefer to talk about the people, regardless of whether you have the right to participate in democracy or not. Technically, having privilege in and of itself to participate is itself against democracy.

TA: Would you say that during the Québec Student Strikes and during the movement there were some people who identified very strongly as citizens of a certain space? Maybe as citizens of Montréal or citizens of Québec, or maybe even Canada though unlikely?

Josiane: I don't know if it was prevalent but certainly it exists. This feeling of being a citizen so I have the right to decide here... citizen of a nation... those feelings or 'appartenances' ['belongings'] it's difficult to deconstruct them, if you find them in the way of a resolution to a debate.

TA: If you were going to look at citizen as more of an empty word, one that you could actually make or change, what would it be?

Josiane: Citizen movement, or citizen revolution, I guess we call it... in the sense of the opposite of an elite, whether it's political or economic, so in that context the word will have become interesting, so it would mean non-elite. Right now, even though we have the sentiment that it is non-elite, citizenship is maybe a majority but not the bottom of the pyramid.

TA: So a lot of the things we've identified to do with citizenship is that its exclusive, certain people get to be citizens, certain people get to participate, so we have that right but we also have the right to exclude...

Josiane: It's not exclusive anymore.

TA: And would you say that that form of citizenship, even if people weren't using the word citizen, was a sentiment that people shared during the student strike?

Josiane: Yeah, I guess in the context of direct democracy, everybody had the possibility to participate in the assembly. Even if you were not a student, somehow you had the possibility to participate in so many meetings and you could [contribute] what you think was a way forward. So in that context this movement wasn't exclusive. Even for me as a mother and I couldn't go to so many meetings, I felt I was really welcome and had a space there. We had the 'parent occupation,' I loved that... Parents and kids occupation. Yeah, we did a couple [of those]. But basically, I went to two. There was the baby block in the [demo] but the one I'm really thinking of was the 'kids occupation' at UQAM, we occupied the administration office with our kids.

How could you launch security onto kids? And they did it! Yeah, actually they tried to push us and they came close to hurting a kid, we were very scandalized. But we got them calmed down at least and they stopped. It was security from the campus, police weren't called or anything, so we stayed there all day. We had a lot of toys and made a lot of noise.

TA: That's a great way to occupy something!

Josiane: Exactly!

TA: We often talk about the critique of certain forms of protest, that they aren't accessible to everyone...it's cool to hear about trying something new.

Josiane: Well that's the thing, our movement was so broad... to me, the 'leadership' or organizers, I don't like to use the word leadership, need to have this in their head that they need to create space. I think in the 2012 strike this was a lot more open, this movement, a lot of different people from different situations. Maybe they weren't in the big demonstrations seen in the media but there were a lot of small actions, [that maybe others didn't hear about in the mass media] but they did happen.

TA: Back to specific actions that were happening, out of your experience, what types of demos and strike actions do you think were the most effective?

Josiane: That's interesting, what is 'effectivity' [effective] in that case? Is the effectiveness [or goal] reaching people? Is it disturbing? Is it...raising consciousness? So in that case, most effective, well the strike has many goals and had many goals to reach to win so all actions were effective in some way. It depends on what we are trying to achieve there.

TA: Were there any in particular you thought were more effective in reaching certain goals?

Josiane: Yes, I think all the 'art actions', there was postering, there was theatre, there were sit-ins... they were very good to outreach to people. The mass demonstrations were excellent to scare the government a little bit but [more so] to show the power of the movement, like to make a threat to the government or any kind of decision-making power.

TA: A show of force...

Josiane: The threat was the number but at the same time, the actual democracy, was shown to have a very big [obvious] limit. It showed that even with such a movement it was difficult to move anything. And so the threat with a demonstration is that we have so many people so we can disrupt more. But having the smaller actions, maybe because the mass movement wasn't ready yet, was [a way] of putting the threat into reality. One thing that was totally inefficient though, was lobbying.

[Lots of laughter from us both.]

TA: So you said the mass demonstrations were effective at showing force, at slowing things down, they had an economic impact...

Josiane: Well about the economic impact, I think there were a lot of people who would focus on the economic impact, that that was what pushed the strike... I would say this is a false analysis. In that context I would say well, [if that's true] the most radical part of the strike was the construction workers because they always block traffic. I don't think that's the most... [important]. We'll go back to Marx, what produces the value, it's the workers, the real economic disruption is when the workers go into the action world, strike or will stop working and producing what makes money for the rich and you know the rich are in power. But thinking that blocking the autoroute, the street, if it's not going to help you to get the workers in the balance [in the street], it's very limited. That's why a demonstration at this point will not, at this point, create an economic disturbance it's when there are a lot of workers [participating] that it becomes a real threat. A small group blocking a street for a day or two, it's limited in time.

TA: So actions like this are more effective if people are being convinced to join?

Josiane: Yes. If it's narrow, the movement, then it's having the opposite effect... the economic disruption is good but the big thing is always is it narrowing the movement or is it making it broader? Without changing the demand of the movement, the idea. That's another question. But that's talking about the tactic, that's not talking about the political program. That's another question, if you change a political program to make it broader, that's just opportunistic and it's not going to change anything.

TA: So if you don't stay true to the original mandate and position then that's just being opportunistic.

Josiane: There's the opposite too where if you're going in small groups and doing actions [and not trying to broaden the movement]... it's hard to convince people, it's easier to go in small groups and do small actions.

TA: Do you think taking to the streets is a form of political participation?

Josiane: Yeah, absolutely.

TA: Would you say that our society considers it to be political participation?

Josiane: Yes, I think so. When you do that... we are so used to following all the laws and there's a procedure for everything. At some point, we lose ourselves in those procedures and those limits. You realize that the only limit society has is the one that society causes [or makes itself]. So if the majority of people decide to take to the street, well yeah it's political participation. And I think that taking the street itself, people realize on the one hand how it's easy to break those limits, but also how there's an illegitimate answer from the state because the repression was quite high, for things like, walking in the street... Blocking traffic, really? Talking about the future of young people and all of our generation, and blocking traffic?

TA: Would you also maybe say that it was useful? The kind of high repression reaction?

Josiane: Yeah. To see whom the state was defending. When the police start to beat up people it's because the association, les marchands [the merchants], the business guys are upset because they aren't making money anymore. This was a way for people to realize that yeah, the state, I'm not owning it, it imposes those limits on me. And whether or not my argument is valid, it doesn't matter.

TA: So specifically in Montréal, would you say that certain citizens were ranked higher than others? In the public space.

Josiane: Yes, absolutely. Just looking at the spokespersons of ASSÉ, Gabriel, I don't have any critique to make on him but in the media... [it was forgotten that] there was another spokesperson, she's a woman [Jeanne Reynolds]. That was very shocking, there is a lot of sexism. Discrimination played there too. Did you see a lot of non-white people talking or [participating] in the movement?

TA: No.

Josiane: So yes, those hierarchies, whatever the movement is great and broad, are not disappearing. And about sexism, there were those night demos and many people came to it, and sexism came out. There were two women, ministers (government ministers) who came to it, and they started to say bad things about them but not about what they do or their behaviour but about being a woman. So, no, it wasn't good, we didn't want that. There were two reactions possible. You fight it, you go to the people saying that stuff and say no, or there was another reaction to that, people started to leave the demonstration. Saying, "that's disgusting, I'm not joining that anymore." I think that question of sexism and racism, still [played into] the leaders, the public face.

TA: Would you say there were any particular events or actions that were better at changing that or challenging that?

Josiane: General assemblies were better for that, but at the same you time you see it happening there, always white men on the microphone talking. In the forum, in that context though, it was possible to fight it, to pose the question and have a real debate. Otherwise, it wasn't in the media you were going to fight for those things. Even though there were things happening, you heard about the humorist show, the benefit... [note: the benefit was a comedian show planned to raise money for the movement, ASSÉ chose to withdraw support and acceptance of monies raised at the benefit for the defense fund because there was going to be sexist, homophobic humour] But this was a result of democracy right, direct democracy, there was a general assembly, a convention every weekend, and they discussed it and they rejected it. It succeeded to make a couple people realize humour is pretty sexist and we need to think about that.

TA: One more question about citizenship, would you say the police and state agents responded to citizens in the street... would you say that students were seen as the same level of citizen as maybe somebody attending Formula 1?

Josiane: No.

TA: So people going to Formula 1 get more protection than students in the streets, they are more valued. Also, would you say there were spaces that were more legitimate for political action or of being political?

Josiane: Legitimate to who? Is the question. For the media, the right wing etc. The good space, the legitimate space is the election, or space where you don't have disturbance... Why don't they just vote? "Why do they take the street, I'm in my car." Well if you do actions that don't disturb anybody, nobody knows you're doing it. So the political is about reaching other people, so that means you need to say "Hey, were here, this is happening!" You can do as much petitioning as you want and vote as much as you want but when you vote, first, you vote for a group, you don't say why you are voting, and I think the last election quite opened their eyes about that. What does a vote mean? It can be useful, the silent channel, are silent, they don't say much and they're not permitted to have any kind of debate.

Interview #4 – JoséePhine

Background:

JoséePhine and I chatted over beer on a patio in the summer. She got involved in activism prior to the 2012 student strikes and participated in many actions and demonstrations including protests of the Summit in Montebello in 2007. She also has been involved with her student association at CEGEP. She got involved in student strike organizing in December 2011, and was involved in activism in Outaouais, Montréal, and Victoriaville. She was a member of a student association but one that remained independent (not a member of ASSÉ) after their earlier disaffiliation from FEUQ in 2011-2012. JoséePhine shared with me some of the tensions that arose in her own family regarding her choice to participate in the strikes including being on the opposite side of the picket line facing a sibling. A bilingual Francophone, JoséePhine chose to conduct her interview mostly in French with me, the text of which I have translated here.

TA: What factors influenced your choice to participate?

JoséePhine: In fact, its questions of rights, rights of students, rights to education...[the hike] was completely unacceptable to me. There was a small group that formed [here] and I participated and stayed with them until the end.

TA: And your opinions already aligned with the strikes prior to?

JoséePhine: Yes, [although] at the time in terms of spirit, I was not quite in favour of striking at the university but of [I was in favour of] creating pressure, to change the government. I was not yet in favour of striking at the university. That came later.

TA: During the strikes, did you use direct democracy to make decisions?

JoséePhine: There were two types of situations... We used it [direct democracy] to obtain a strike mandate to stop our courses. Then all the actions that were suggested were put forward by the strike committee and there we used direct democracy. There was a pretty open structure, we didn't have a president or director... so every time we met, we named a new spokesperson [or chair]. It was often the same group of people who chaired, but in any case, we listened to a new chair each time. For example, we had several discussions with media and each time... it wasn't a president or leader, it was a member. It went really well. At first, people really didn't understand... but we succeeded in breaking that, and to make things as inclusive as possible, so everyone would have the right to speak.

TA: So the structures you were using, do your associations use them now?

JoséePhine: No, when the strike ended, the strike committee dissolved, and we returned to our old association structures using the Morin Code¹⁵⁴.

TA: Did your association vote in favour of the strike?

JoséePhine: Yes but it was difficult to get it [the mandate] passed because... the first vote, the association did not wait for more people to participate in the assembly, so it was much too small. It was organized in an absurd fashion... There was another group, [composed of students in favour of striking] that organized a new assembly. This assembly took place in a large room that everyone knew about and could participate in and that vote passed.

TA: What was the percentage of votes in favour of striking?

JoséePhine: I think it was around 60-70%, it was pretty well won overall and all the votes that followed were won. There's a special dynamic at UQO. Programs, particularly administration, human resources, and finance programs, it's all those programs that have the smallest number of students in favour of striking. Assemblies often took place in the afternoon when these students usually couldn't attend because of their class schedules. There was a big debate regarding online voting, but it never took place, it was always votes at the assembly... [we succeeded] in mobilizing enough people to participate and win the strike votes.

TA: If your assembly had voted against the strike, would you have participated anyway?

JoséePhine: Me, personally, yes I probably would have participated in the strike, but it would have been a lot more difficult to mobilize other students to participate because... Ah right! I completely forgot about this, the first strike vote that we lost because it was so badly organized, the second vote, we also lost, and then we entered into strike by department [module] because at UQO we don't have 'faculties', we have modules [departments], so the department of education had a strike vote, and as I am a student in education so I participated in that vote, and we went on strike [tombé en grève]. Next, there was the social science module that also succeeded in winning a strike vote, so at the beginning I think there were three departments [modules] on

¹⁵⁴ Le Code Morin is a procedural 'rules of order' similar to Robert's Rules of Order that many general assemblies and student forums (as well as labour groups) use. For more info see the following link: http://www.le995muir.com/assemblees_generales/les_procedures_d_assemblee_resume_du_code_morin.html

strike. And from there, we held an UQO wide general assembly and it was that vote that was won. So, a module can hold its own strike vote, but the inverse doesn't happen [meaning just because one module votes in a strike doesn't mean others are on strike.] We were able to go picket education courses but for the other courses we had no mandate to do so. Professors would show up to teach their course and if they saw us [there to picket] they were not obligated to conduct their course but if there was no picket there, they were obligated to teach the course. So, this system obligated us to do pickets. So...for three-quarters of module that went on strike at first, there were profs who pushed a bit in their classes but we succeeded anyway in having pickets.

TA: Any activists, thinkers, theorists who have influenced you?

JoséePhine: At the very beginning, when we were considering going on strike...we were talking with students, discussing the impacts of tuition fees, and then later we invited folks, economists, from IRIS¹⁵⁵, to come explain the impacts of rising tuition fees. Personally, during the strike, there was a current of anarchists in our group, in our strike committee there are many students who identify as anarchists who really influence our committee. There were folks who spoke a lot and had a lot of influence so I learned a lot during the strike and after that I read and asked questions, I chatted with others...When I look at the intensity of actions that I proposed during the strike, they became more and more intense, whether it was the circumstances or the people I was spending time with.

TA: Do you identify as an anarchist now?

JoséePhine: Yes, I identify as an anarchist.

TA: How would you define public space?

JoséePhine: Public space, is space that is accessible to everyone. It touches the media, social resources...it touches as many people as possible.

TA: Do you think public space applies to a particular community, like a state, etc?

JoséePhine: No and during the strike, we really saw...In South America, there are many movements that were happening at the same time...there are struggles happening before, during...and there was a lot communication between the movements and they were talking about public space. So, no, for me, it's a state or a province. It's certainly possible that it might be managed [regulated] by a government, state or province.

TA: Would you define social spaces as different from public spaces?

¹⁵⁵ IRIS – Institut de recherches et d'informations socio-économiques/Research institute of socio-economic information, a progressive research institute a bit like the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives that often publishes research materials related to the impacts of austerity and the impacts of tuition fees, <http://www.iris-recherche.qc.ca/mission>.

JoséePhine: A social space can be enlarged based on me, like our strike committee, it was a social space that could expand to include anyone. We had members who were not students at UQO who came from the CEGEP, some who weren't students at all.

TA: What about political space?

JoséePhine: It's a zone of government influence or political party, or a political structure. If I use the government of Québec, for example, that wanted to put in place a tuition fee hike, that had an impact beyond just Québec. We were talking about it everywhere...influence can be much bigger, because the hike there could be an example for other governments, other political spheres.

TA: Do you think public spaces can be political spaces?

JoséePhine: Political spaces are public spaces.

TA: By definition...

JoséePhine: well, they should be but often [politics] is done more and more in hiding.

TA: Private spaces and economic spaces, do you think they are separated or different from political or public spaces?

JoséePhine: Private space should stay completely closed in my opinion...During the strike we tried to create private spaces to organize actions on facebook. It's paradoxical as a means...I found it a bit absurd, facebook is not at all private. Private spaces...there is a very stable number of familiar people who know the information.

TA: So it doesn't have to be family-based?

JoséePhine: But yet, it could be me. It could be only me, my person. The space can grow based on the desires of the person managing that space.

TA: Do you think that economic spaces are private spaces? Social spaces?

JoséePhine: In this moment...if we take economic space in the general sense, it's public. By contrast, if we take an economic space like a business, it becomes more and more private. In a general way, it should be a public space.

TA: Universities or colleges, how would you define these spaces using the definitions of space given earlier?

JoséePhine: At this moment, it's really going towards an economic zone. Particularly, the hike is bringing this on. In fact, I think it already is an economic zone, because we speak of the university in economic terms, terms of profitability, of debt...We speak more rarely of the exploits of universities in research. It's a public space, for the most part universities and CEGEPs

in Québec, are public spaces. Obviously, it's a social space, a social space that is finding it hard to stay public.

TA: So it's already an economic space instead of a social space...

JoséePhine: Economic space takes precedence [premium 'prime'] over the social space.

TA: Do you think it should be like that?

JoséePhine: No.

TA: So how do you think it should be?

JoséePhine: It should be a completely social space...because economic space affects social space and social space should be the base of each university...it's at that level that we develop new ideas, new discoveries, so the economic side should be as small as possible. A public, social space, [everyone should be able to participate in this "brainstorm".]

TA: And for you should it be a place for democracy?

JoséePhine: Yes, for me, I really loved the experience of direct democracy. At UQO, I discovered as a first experience, that it was really fun, but there are always improvements to be made, notably for the place of women and for immigrants...we did not leave enough space. The majority of the time, it was white men who were speaking...even with direct democracy, because men took the place of women...[it was about] 40% women, 60% men... and there weren't people of other nationalities.

TA: So it was better than the Code Morin, but the same structures of privilege were still there?

JoséePhine: Yes, it's really difficult to break. [It would be good to see] more space made for women, for other groups, but it wasn't done at UQO because I think the installation of direct democracy was such a big change...maybe with more time we would be able to integrate more groups a bit better.

TA: What's a citizen?

JoséePhine: Beh, a citizen is someone... During the strike we talked about students versus citizens. I did not really like that distinction because we are also citizens, we are not a separate group...a citizen is anyone.

TA: Do you think the rights we give to citizens, the privileges, do you think it's something we should give to everyone?

JoséePhine: In my opinion it should be given to everyone...rights of human beings.

TA: What types of actions were the most effective in your opinion?

JoséePhine: Direct actions. I really liked the way we operated at UQO. During the most intense moments, like barring entrance to the university... We were starting to decide who could have access to the university. What we did was, every morning, we met in a park and then together we all decided what we were going to do. What action we wanted to suggest... for sure, it took time... People who didn't want to do it [the action]... If it was a question of whether or not an action was radical enough, folks who wanted to be more radical grouped together and went to do their action on their own. So it didn't involve other participants in actions like that. There were lots of actions like that. There were grasshoppers unleashed in the university, there was glue put in the door locks... actions that were done totally in secret versus actions like occupations of the university, we held the university for an entire day. It was covered by the media, it was a turning point for the strike in Québec. Actions were decided in a democratic fashion with direct democracy. The actions that were less effective were the manifestations in the streets, and banners, except for the first one that we did. The first march that we did, it was the first time we had a manifestation so big made up of students marching in the downtown of Hull. We entered government buildings, we entered the justice building, we blocked the main arteries, we did not give our itineraries to police. It was the first time that an action that big happened in Hull... there were all sorts of marches, games, etc, but a manifestation where we entered buildings without permission, where we didn't give our itineraries to police, where we shouted, made noise, it was the first time... that we confronted the police, that we blocked access, that we were pushed around. That had never been seen in Gatineau, ever. That brought on a lot of people... we were just doing justice and we were getting beat up, we were getting attacked [by police]. We had only entered [the buildings] to shout slogans, we didn't break anything.

TA: Why do you think direct actions are the most effective?

JoséePhine: It's most effective because it corners the police, it corners the authorities. It destabilizes them completely. When we occupied the university, it forced the university to completely revise its strategy, to change tactics because [theirs] weren't effective. We succeeded in entering the university even when they had locked everything. Even the pickets we did [resulted in a guard at every door]. At each door, there was a guard who sent people to the main door, and there guards would verify students' ID cards. And based on the look, the face, the person... they decided whether or not to let them in. So they let some people enter the university, some were protesters who weren't well-known, they succeeded in entering the university, we then succeeded in having an action and the next day there was the complete closing of the university. So it went from an occupation of part of the university, to us entering even if we didn't have the right to, to the university being closed to everyone. So, our actions intensified the reactions of the authorities... [It became a question of] do we let the police enter the university? Up until then, the university is a sacred zone. Police didn't enter there without 'a go' [order] from the director. And, then, 'le go' [the order] was given. At a given moment, we are confronted with the decision of do we go further or do we stop and retreat?... The goal was to get the university to close its doors, because they were letting people in who wanted to take their courses, so the goal was to have the university closed. Because if we weren't able to picket in front of the university in a "civilized fashion" how they wanted us to picket... it doesn't work, so you have to intensify [actions] to make the strike effective. We succeeded in our actions by always intensifying our [tactics].

TA: In your opinion, do you think there are reasons to have demonstrations in the streets?

JoséePhine: Reasons to do it..to be seen, so in Montréal, with demonstrations of 300,000...but if we stay in Outaouais, we had manifestations every night, we met in a parking lot, then we changed our route every night and during the marches, there were direct actions, paint thrown, graffiti, the march would hide the person who did it. Most of the time when there were large night demonstrations there were more radical actions taking place [as well].

TA: Are there spaces or places that you think are more legitimate for political participation?

JoséePhine: Up until now, I have not seen any form of political participation that works. Whether it is in a political party, in a student association, in the municipal council...during the strike, we went to the municipal council, we had the council in front of us and we wanted to speak to them about the police violence against us, and it was completely useless.

TA: So you mean no conventional political action is useful?

JoséePhine: Not really because there is so much corruption, it's so badly done, and it favours accomplishing nothing. It doesn't work, it just doesn't work outright.

TA: So, do you think the actions taken during the strikes are legitimate political actions? Not in the eyes of the state but according to you?

JoséePhine: Yes, in my opinion, all actions taken during the strike were legitimate political actions that aimed to change government politics...even vandalism, etc. What I experienced, it was windows of banks, government buildings, that were broken, they were all institutions linked to the conflict...if there was a window broken of an individual without any connection to the conflict, that would not be legitimate...but everything that was done had the same goal of putting more pressure on the government. The only illegitimate violence is the violence of the police.

TA: Why do you think actions like breaking windows are legitimate and/or effective?

JoséePhine: They are effective because they make people react. People want it to stop. People, regardless of whether they disagree with the conflict or just do not understand it, they see that, and they want it to stop. It increases pressure from public opinion (one), and secondly, it shows that our rage is very high...when you commit vandalism, it really shows rage towards the government.

Interview #5 – Sophie

Background:

Sophie and I met to chat in a mostly empty Montréal café and moved to the sunny patio to conduct the interview. Sophie was involved in activism for about 7 years in Ontario prior to her involvement in Montréal. In Ontario she was active in awareness ('sensibilisation') work for Franco-Ontarian culture and language. In Montréal she has been involved in her student

association at UQAM (a member of ASSÉ) and with ASSÉ more broadly. She has held various elected positions within her student association and ASSÉ. A bilingual Francophone, Sophie chose to chat in French, which I have translated here.

TA: For how long were you involved in the student strikes and activism?

Sophie: Manifestations, actions, for about a year and a half to two years. But I was also active before, not really in direct actions, I was involved in Ontario in a student association that visited high schools to do outreach and awareness (sensibilisation) for Franco-Ontarian culture and language...there was a lot of discrimination against Franco-Ontarian culture and language...

TA: [Following some discussion of her involvement in various positions and associations...] So generally, the faculty associations are more “political”?

Sophie: Yes for the most part. There’s only one association at UQAM that isn’t very political and that’s AG, Association Gestion [the Management Association]. They are a bit less political...They were the only ones not on strike at UQAM. There’s often friction between AG and others [on campus]...they are members of FEUQ, so they are still a bit politicized but much less than the other associations. They hold more parties and things like that.

TA: For you, what factors influenced your choice to participate?

Sophie: I think it’s something...it’s militancy [militantisme]...I really don’t know where my life would be without that. But, when I started getting involved, it was in Ontario, the association organized leadership camps, it was outreach and awareness [sensibilisation] towards students to show them that we could do things fun in French, that French isn’t lame... I participated and I really liked it. But still, I have a different relationship to the French language compared to most Franco-Ontarians because I was brought up in Québec before moving to Ontario. I lived with my mom and at home it was all French, it wasn’t that French was boring, but still...at schools, with my friends, we spoke English. It’s fine but it’s too bad, it’s too bad that we have so few places, especially in Southern Ontario, where we can speak French...[Returning to why she got involved] But, I think it’s just something that has become part of me since I came here... I’ve always been really busy, so I’ve spent more time involved in activism than with school, so when I came to university, I said, “ok, I am going to take a year to focus only on my studies.” It took about a week for me to change my mind [about that] [we both laugh]. [Mentions how people told her there was an opening in the association and it seemed fun]...When I heard about the hike, I had never heard people talk about something like that in Ontario, I had never done CEGEP. At first I was a bit suspicious of striking, striking!? It’s such a big thing...Then finally the mobilization was working, I was fighting for it anyway. It took months before I really had concrete ideas...I was brought up with a left ideology, not extreme left, but still left. I always worked to fight against injustices... I’m an anarchist today and I always was but I just didn’t know it [laughter]. I think it comes with education...when we see a person implicated for the rest of their life, I think it’s just something natural [for them].

TA: Your association used direct democracy?

Sophie: Yes, certainly. Before the strike... there were about two or three assemblies per year only because we never had quorum and then because of the strike, there were more and more general assemblies, and there was a change in ideology at the executive committee and new militants coming from other associations, associations who were more supportive of direct democracy. It's a long history, in this association, it was often the same executive council each year, and yes they were for direct democracy but only more or less, they made a lot of decisions at the executive council level... they'd mobilize for a month to get just 30 people... it's tough. The year of the strike in 2011/2012, there were some people from CEGEP who knew people and they got elected to the council and they really worked to change the ideology because it wasn't the same people and their friends [anymore]. There was a confrontation of ideas and with that confrontation, there's a debate... everyone was in agreement about more consultation but people didn't know how. They decided to take their chances and did a lot of mobilization. I don't really know how they did it... they came to every class... the year before the strike it seemed so hard, spending so much time mobilizing people. It worked pretty fast, there were more people... it was very open so if you came one week and missed some others you could still go again, no problem. Quietly, the ideology changed, and last year I think there was only one GA [General Assembly] that we didn't have quorum and during the strike, I think there were maybe two... and with the change in ideology at the executive level we also saw a change in ideology at the assembly... At the start of the strike, we had close to 25% of members participating in the strike votes. At CEGEP it's easier to get a high percentage of participation, at university it's rare except for small associations... we had 4000 people [members] and it got close to 2000 people [participating]. It was the GA for the strike vote. There wasn't enough space in the room, we had to set up microphones outside, there were people sitting on the ground. For sure that was the biggest GA, but during the strike, it was normal to have between 400-600 people, for most of the strike it was like that. It was huge. Our quorum was only about 34 people I think. At each GA, we were so happy. The more we had GAs, the more folks understood how it worked, the more people were interested in the debates, the more people participated, and with all of this there was a change because direct democracy has now become the most important principle, or at least one of the most important principles of the association. [After the strike] participation has diminished, I think that we missed quorum twice last year, but still we have GAs each month I think. It's still very good, to succeed in having so many GAs. It's great. Last year we had an executive that was almost all new people so it was difficult. We had several executive members who have never sat on an executive committee before. It's hard for that because it's a complete learning process... it's inspiring in a way [to have new militants] but it's also difficult to work with because at the same time you are working to mobilize the membership you're also working to mobilize the executive committee. It was a tough year for that. We still had GAs where we had a high enough quorum but there were a couple GAs with less than 100 people. We had two GAs about the Education Summit, where we were deciding whether or not we would participate and we decided to participate in the first meeting, we are members of ASSÉ and that's where ASSÉ was going to participate, and at the same time it was a GA for international [strike], there was an international week of strike in November [2012], we decided to go on strike for one day during that time. We tried for a week and it didn't work, so a day is still good. The second GA that was very popular was the one where we were deciding if we were going to participate in the summit and if we wanted to go on strike at the same time, but we only had 150 people... I hope this is going to continue in the same vein, direct democracy, ... it's a foundational principle. There are always waves of participation in associations... personally I don't understand why people

wouldn't want to come. It's something I just totally don't understand. It's about an hour, two hours, maybe three...but we could vote anything with only 30 people there! I get the impression that for the most part, the people who come to the GAs, for the majority, want to see the association...continue to mobilize correctly, so things like that [voting in ridiculous things] don't happen, but I don't understand why people wouldn't want to come. [We engage in a tangential conversation about why people don't seem to want to participate, especially in Ontario] I often have debates, my best friend who lives in Oshawa,...after the student strike, he asked me, "but why are you fighting? You have the lowest fees in Canada...?" But that's why [we have the lowest fees in Canada] Because we fight!

TA: Yeah, you have the lowest fees because the PQ are just so nice [sarcasm].

Sophie: No, it's not a question of the government being nice with us. It's just that we fight, that's all. [It's very high in Ontario] but it's because very few people fight.

TA: It seems like an uphill battle.

Sophie: I admire those who try anyway, those who fight.

TA: So your association voted in favour of the strike?

Sophie: Yes, and I think we had a participation rate of about 70%, and the strike was voted by about 60% [in favour]. But we voted in the big GA of 2000 people, we voted to have a referendum for GGI (unlimited general strike), and for 24 or 48 hours of referendum, where there was a line out the door of the association office of people who wanted to come vote, it was very interesting to see that. And in the language and communication association, we have a lot of immigrants, there to learn French, who were coming to GAs and were trying to understand, so during many GAs we reserved a part of the room for those students and we had people there to do translation because we had two executives who were studying in other languages. We had one doing a certificate in Spanish and another in Arabic so we were able to do a bit of translation, and if not they were still there to help explain because the procedures can be a bit complicated. But they [international students] ended up creating their own associations. At the beginning of each GA there were people [from the association] who would come and say "No, our situation is different, we don't want to go on strike, we are here to learn French." and then the next GA there were people who would come say "No, this is exactly the way that we will learn the culture, by participating, so we want to go on strike"... so at one moment we told them we would help them organize their own GA where they could vote as a group, I think there were around 300 people there out of 600. Their GA did not have decision making power [so to speak]...so after that we brought their proposition, what they decided to the larger GA... It was complicated because many were risking losing their visas...it required that we engage in a lot of processes with professors and others, because half of the professors were saying, "we will respect your choice, we won't give courses no matter what happens" which helped us enormously, but there were many folks who had to return to their home countries and didn't want to lose their terms. They paid for it, so there was a lot of [negotiation] to do, often it was dealt with one on one with professors. Most professors were really nice to us for the most part and tried to make things work, but there are always problems with some professors. There was one professor... she sent

an email to all of her students telling them there would be an exam, and then we arrived [to disrupt] and when she saw us, she was very angry. She said to her students, “alright, my students, you now have to choose, it’s the exam or the strike.” Me, if I had been sitting in that class, I would have felt really bad to get up [and leave]. She was very serious, and we stayed there for three hours of her class, talking, to ensure that the exam didn’t happen.

TA: If your association had voted against going on strike, would you have participated anyway?

Sophie: Ah yes. Always. [jokes about how her grades would have taken a hit had that happened] I was getting up at 6am to do an action, and then we had night demos until midnight or 1am, it’s long...I kept my agenda where I wrote down all the actions I wanted to attend...it was so coloured in! I had a colour system for different types of actions, for direct actions, for manifestations, for meetings because I spent so much time in meetings planning for GAs, the GAs lasted six hours [sometimes] and we had about 8 hours of preparation... we discussed what would be decided, we looked at what the different propositions we wanted to bring forward and how we were going to defend our points and all that... We spent entire days and nights preparing for the general assemblies. I don’t understand how we did it...I don’t know how I did that in a day, every day, it never stopped, ever, ever...the preparations, it’s long... It’s always to see all the possibilities, how the police will act, how the protesters are going to act...for itineraries, if we know the cops are going to be here, how are we are going to get around that. So lots of preparation and then we head out into it...[sometimes] I think it was another life, living in another world. It’s strange in fact.

TA: Any important thinkers, activists, theorists, etc for you?

Sophie: [I’m not a communist] but Karl Marx, it’s inspiring the level to which he theorized. It’s someone who changed the way we see the left, the way we see society, of seeing capitalism. I don’t agree with his means/methods, of what he thought was ideal and how to get there, but I consider him regardless. He has advanced militant culture enormously, and though we have lots of theorists on the left, it’s him that’s the most solid in his ideas... There’s definitely many militants/activists who mobilized/influenced me [m’ont mobilisé], overall it’s others [activists] I was militant with, who influenced me. They helped me to find my own path. It’s funny because in my group, we’re very tight, we had anarchists, communists, our debates were so enriching. We were all in agreement about means, but not the necessary end and after the strike, we talked about idealism... A conversation with someone who has the same ideology as me, yes it’s fun, but it doesn’t bring much... it’s fun to have conversations with people and to know, ok, I’m not in agreement with you but I don’t yet know my alternative. I really admire the debates, I find it to be a really beautiful thing, we should really have more [debates]. I also find that we [debate] too much virtually, facebook debates, they aren’t real debates. I’ve never seen anyone on facebook say “Ah yes, you are probably right.” They hide behind their computers. [Others] Rosa Luxemburg. Noam Chomsky, I don’t know how to react [to him]. I’ve read some of his stuff on propaganda, and he has published tons of things on the media, etc...I find that the majority of his ideas are good, but he vulgarizes some things so that almost anyone can understand. That’s great but I’m not convinced that...some things he doesn’t always take the external context into consideration. He thinks, in terms of propaganda, that it was the only thing that let Hitler [to do the things that he did]. It wasn’t the only thing, I take that example because I studied the second

world war quite a bit and fascism in Germany...on one side, I find him very inspiring but on the other I find him frustrating [Chomsky]. I really admire almost all militants. [conversation about being utopian, admires peoples for the simple fact that they fought for their principles...] Not everything they fought for was utopian but a lot of things were. Maybe one day those things won't be utopian...but it's hard to get up each morning and to say to yourself "I am fighting for something so vague/fuzzy [flou], for something I will never achieve in my whole life. I am fighting for anarchism and I will never see that, I tell myself if I can at least advance things, all the better. [Ça vaut la peine]/It's worth the trouble... I admire militants enormously for being able to apply themselves so much for things that are so vague[flou]. I think for the majority of activists on the right...it's not the same thing, because the right is already in existence! Capitalism exists, it's there, it's concrete, we're in it. It's easier to fight for something that already exists, to advance it, then to try and fight completely against a system, an ideology...I think that's why I admire activists and their ideologies as long as it's thought out... Even if it's an ideology I don't agree with...like I'm not a very pacifist person. I am for a diversity of tactics, I am for pacifism in the sense that you have to have peaceful actions in the movement but not only peaceful actions. I have ideas about where, for me, I will stop, but diversity of tactics, it makes sense...but you, if your pacifism is founded and you've really thought about it...then that's ok. I will still have discussions with you but I still admire that the person has reflected and it is has brought fruit.

TA: How would you define public space?

Sophie: For me, it's not something that is concretely tangible. It's just a place, a location, a virtual space, even a moment in a day, in a year, where there's an exchange, in the community. I'd say that Habermas, he moreso had the idea that there are spheres, you have the political sphere, the government, the sphere of the base, of the citizens, and these spheres, they overlap, and in the middle, there's public space. In the beginning, I agreed with that sphere, and at a given moment, I had a change of ideology, where I had the impression that there is not necessarily an elite sphere. I think public space is really at the level of citizens, the government can be part of that sphere, but it's not necessarily just elites, government, citizens...I was inspired by Habermas to form my ideology, it's him that really made me think [about it] and all that, but public space can be anything. It's public space on facebook, during the lunch break at work, it's not something concrete, tangible, the second that there's an exchange, it's public space. I find that we don't use public space enough, we don't have enough...I don't mean to say that we don't have any discussions, we do and they're important, not everyone holds the same things as important. For myself, and this comes from Chomsky a bit...the media is a key element of public space. There was a time when media were opinion based, anyone could have a journal...According to Chomsky, there were a lot more debates because you could grab a newspaper and because newspapers had different ideas on things, different perspectives, you could go and read different newspapers and find out different opinions on the same thing. This made people capable of having debates about lots of things, they were much more informed socio-politically, and when I speak of socio-politics, I'm not talking about governments [politicians], what the state will do, I'm talking about everything that is political...Today there's a convergence of media, there aren't the same debates.

TA: The same opinions circulate...

Sophie: I think in Québec, it's 97% of the media belongs to two companies, it's Québecor and [another company, couldn't recall the name]. With two companies controlling the media, for sure you're going to have the same facts...you compare le Journal de Montréal to 24h...it's exactly the same thing. Even worse, today we have press agencies, an article, the same article word for word by the same person can be recirculated in forty different media outlets, by everyone...I've really changed my mind about this, at first I thought media, it was for informing [only], there should not be any opinions. But...of course we have opinions, it will bring out debate, if I only give you facts, naked facts, you might think about it but you might not.

TA: So what types of spaces? Examples?

Sophie: Today there are lots, but [if we think of Ancient Greece], there was literally the Agora that was *the* public space. We didn't think that there was a public space other than that because when you wanted to talk politics...you went there. Today, it's everything and it's nothing. Facebook, it's a public space when we're chatting...there are debates that happen, they are real. If you look at online journals today, they have comments sections, they are a form of debate, there are opinion letters sent, things like that, on the radio, on the television, all calling in to give their opinion even if it has nothing to do with the subject sometimes. At the office you talk, in line waiting for your newspaper in the morning, you chat with your colleague, it's everywhere, you cross someone in the street...

TA: So like you were saying before, it's really the exchange...

Sophie: Yes, it's the exchange that is public space, it's a place, it's really the discussion that forms public space.

TA: Do you think political spaces are different or should they be different from public spaces?

Sophie: I have the impression that there are several types of political spaces. You have places like the Chamber of Commons, but there it's reserved for an elite, but it is a type of political space, but you also have political spaces that are more general. The university, school, they are political spaces...what else? Because everything can become a political space, it really is not related to the importance we give it and the role we give it. I have a colleague at work who is also an anarchist so when we talk all the time, if we're taking a break together, that becomes a political space, but it's the space, it's the break and my work. But it can become [a political space.]

TA: What about private or economic space?

Sophie: Definitely right now, in capitalism, the private is economic, but at the same time,...like I have my property at home, my little apartment, yes technically it's private, but I pay to have that place, so economic in that sense, but it's not economic in the larger sense. Normally...the private is economic in capitalism. It doesn't have to be...the less private, the better things will be...I think it would be better if it was more social, the economy is something we unfortunately don't talk enough about and it's so complicated. Economics, I really don't know that stuff well, but it's

the base of our society, so we should really inform ourselves. It's difficult because it's complicated and in the case where we don't inform ourselves enough, it becomes private, at the level of elites, who then tell us what to think and what to do. Today, it [the economy] affects everything, [where we live, who we live with, what we do for work, etc]...I live with roommates because, yes I like living with other people, but it's most of all because it costs less.

TA: Is the university public or political?

Sophie: Yes, both, ...university, yes, it's the building, but most of all, it's the ideas that circulate inside, it's ideas, it's learning, it's the sharing of knowledge. Yes...the university is UQAM, it's McGill, and you go to university because you pay tuition fees, and you sit in a classroom...The university is really an exchange of theoretical knowledge, the exchange of ideas. But in reality, the way we think of the university today, it's the building. When I leave I am still learning.

TA: Yes, you're no longer paying but you're learning still...and do you think the way we think of the university now, should it change?

Sophie: Yes. We have to change a lot of things about the university...and about the education system. It's true that there is a big difference between the colleges, the universities, the high schools, and everything. The university is a space for learning theoretical knowledge and it's becoming less of that, there are a lot of [bachelor's degrees] that are very practical. Personally, I am very disappointed in the learning, there's not enough...thinking. We learn information, we put it on paper, and that's it. [Discusses importance of reflection, critical thinking, analysis etc] What is the link between all aspects of society. It's a bit different with communication [studies] because communications is a field that touches all the other fields. But if you do the management program...you will not see what is the link between politics, etc...In education I find there is a problem with the fact that we have a prof in front of a class who says "there, here's my knowledge, now spit this on your exam paper." There are so many of my courses where I don't really know what I learned because there was no place for me, for what I think. The manner in which universities are managed...there's [a representative] of SunLife [Financial] who sits on the council [equivalent to the Board of Governors] of UQAM, what is SunLife doing there?! Money. SunLife has no idea what student life is like at UQAM, we are lucky if the person [on the council] even studied at UQAM. There's a big chance they studied somewhere else and have no idea what the reality [of UQAM] is. I find it ridiculous that at UQAM we are 'lucky' to have only two [student] representatives on the council. It's ridiculous to them that we could govern from the base by the people who know what's really happening. I have never sat on the [governance committees] of the university but, it's like we have one vote, but we have to say the right thing to the right person. The student committee is the committee closest to the student body, so there we have more voice, but for something to pass there has to be a majority among students and amongst everyone else, so [us] against profs, etc. [discussion of everyone who is part of the university community, ongoing discussion of how the decision making is thrown off, the Student Life Committee has a small voice compared to everything else and there has to be majorities everywhere for something to pass.] The committee for Student Life is for students, not for Professors or Administrators. Then after that, we take our [proposals] to the CA [Board of Governors] and there we are only two students amongst SunLife and everyone else.

TA: For you what does citizen mean?

Sophie: Ugh, I don't know. Personally, I don't really like the term citizen because there are a lot of people who are not considered citizens. So right off the bat, there is a problem that not everyone has the right to citizenship but they live in the same place, eat the same things, spend time with the same people. It's complicated, it's a term I have a lot of trouble really grasping. I think that...what we want, the general idea of a citizen, is a good person who follows the law, who feeds their children, goes to bed at night...

TA: So it's responsibility?

Sophie: Yes. When we talk about a criminal or a protester we never speak of them as a citizen.

TA: Do you think protesters should be considered more as citizens?

Sophie: But, it's problematic because some people are and some people are not. If one person is [a citizen] then everyone is. The principle of the citizenship, it's something that goes completely against my values because it's something you can close off, it's something that is decided by your place of birth, after that your work, already the borders, there's a problem with that in my opinion, but if I want to move to France [I have to get all this documentation to do so]. Why do we have to delimit places like that? You put one foot in the United States, you haven't changed, you are not really in a different place aside from the fact that someone else decided you are...Overall, I don't really like the term.

TA: What if we could change the definition...or write your own citizenship?

Sophie: Beh, once again, we have the problem that you can be a bad citizen, if you don't take on your responsibilities, according to society and according to elites, it's the fact that if you make a decision that goes against, you're not a good citizen, we don't even consider you as a citizen, so I think that categorization is very problematic. And yes, it's just a word but when it's part of our ideology, of what we think, it's still very important, words.

TA: So for you, would it be better to keep the word and remake it or to change the word completely?

Sophie: We shouldn't have a word. You're a person, you're a human being and so am I, why go any further.

TA: What actions, manifs, do you think were the most effective?

Sophie: All of them! The complicity among all the types. I organized some actions that were very direct, like one was an awareness [sensibilisation] action, like one time my friends and I, we entered a metro [car]. We had big red squares, we had confetti, we went in two [cars] at two stations and put [stuff] everywhere, everywhere! It was very easy, we maybe didn't even reach

that many people, but it made people happy, [well not everyone was happy], but that's alright.¹⁵⁶ It's always like that. We cut out a huge red square and put it on the window...there were kids playing...many kids were asking their parents "why are they doing that? Why red squares?" It didn't reach tons of people, it's one car...but a month later we were still finding red feathers. We had sparkles and things like that. It was beautiful. [lots of laughter from us both] But I think it really was the complicity of different types of actions that was important. I have preferences but...in the majority of large movements, contestations, revolutions, ones that worked or at least ones that were able to last, had complicity among diverse actions. We should never limit ourselves to online one kind of action. Everyone has preferences, there are people who are ok with more direct actions but are not yet ready themselves to do them. And that's ok. The only thing I deplore is when we start condemning others, when we start saying that some methods are not valuable. There are means that are more effective than others but it's complementary...outreach/awareness, actions, if we take the two extremes, outreach actions and extremely direct actions like blockades, you can't have the radical direct actions without awareness [sensibilisation] because no one will know what you're talking about.

TA: Is taking the street a form of political participation?

Sophie: Yes, obviously [laughter]. Of course. It's probably the most well-known form of contestation. There's disruption, even if the manifestation stays totally peaceful, there's disruption in the streets...there's police who want to supervise the manif, there's always people asking why people are there, it's ok if they don't agree, but the question has to be asked. People should not just be sheep...I will never hate someone because they have a different ideology from me. I won't like them because they're too closed-minded, because they haven't questioned or, if they're cops [des flics]. All opinions are valuable if they are sensible, it's important to stay open. I think it's difficult with syndicalism, at a certain point, you've debated [something] 45 times, you know what your ideology is, it's difficult after that to stay open to other ideologies. It's possible to change your mind... because you've had the same debate 45 times, I don't want to have the debate anymore, because if you spend your days having debates, you have the same arguments coming out, the same people saying the same things, at a given moment, it becomes long, it's becomes a tape [on repeat]. That's what is hard, to not become that cassette tape, to stay open, to accept that there are other ideologies, that it is possible that one day I might also share that point of view. For sure, there are enormous differences between the left and the right, [and it's hard to imagine my ideas will change that much]. I think on the left, there are so many people who go from communists, to anarchists, to nihilists, everything, it's difficult, that change. There are a lot of people in syndicalism who are shocked when you change your ideology. It's important to stay open to other possibilities. I think that's what is hard.

TA: Are there certain places that should remain exempt from politics?

Sophie: I've never asked myself that question because it's impossible. The way you will talk, the way you will act, it's political. Politics is life, politics is everything, it's your way of thinking, your way of dressing, everything, everything! It's impossible even to say there are zones of neutrality...if you work in a public space, like a public place [public building or service],

¹⁵⁶ You can find some information and photos of this action at this link: <http://boiterouge.net/2012/03/29/un-wagon-de-metro-le-28-mars-photos-et-article/>.

normally people will want you to be as neutral as possible, but it's impossible. [Sophie tells a story of where she works and there's paper and crayons left out for people to draw with, she'll walk by and see drawings of anarchist signs or des carrés rouges, etc, how she would likely talk to them because they have similar ideologies) We all have something in common.

Interview #6 – Andrew

Background:

Andrew and I met in a public park in Montréal on a sunny afternoon to chat (it seems the sun was almost always shining on my interviews!). He remembers getting involved around March 7th, 2012 in the student strike actions and 'tagged along' to many other actions before that dating back to the beginning of the Iraq War. He was not a student at the time but chose to participate in solidarity with students. Our conversation was mostly in English.

TA: How long were you involved in the student strikes or activism?

Andrew: March 7th (2012?), there was something and I went and I remember it was the first time the police were a bit overly intense. They threw flashbangs, which was super intense and pretty shitty. That's the first thing I remember from the student strike. The students were doing nothing as well, they were trying to block the doors or trying to get in (somewhere). The police were really heavy handed and awful. I kind of tagged along to a lot of stuff before that... probably back to the beginning of the Iraq War, a lot of random manif.

TA: What led you to participate... that can be in activism in general or in the student strike particularly?

Andrew: For the student strike, there was something happening and I wanted to be in solidarity with them and it was [also] an outlet for generalized unhappiness with [everything].

TA: So generalized views, it was in line with your views to begin with?

Andrew: Yeah, I was just happy to have an outlet to kind of fight back in general. That's just one thing among many that I care about, it's not even necessarily high up on the list.

TA: It's just one avenue?

Andrew: Yeah, like free healthcare would be just as important, a million different things. I think there were [quite a few] people in the student strike that it was similar [to my view]... Yeah the fees were important and it was terrible what they were trying to do but it's also [part of a] bigger thing and it's just one outlet for something bigger.

TA: I agree, tuition fees were not really the core issue etc...People outside Québec were very confused about that... "like why would they care so much about tuition fees?"

Hypothetical then. Had you been part of a student association and they had voted against going on strike, would you have gone on strike anyway?

Andrew: Whoa, going on strike without other people going on strike with you...

TA: Knowing that other people in other places were going on strike, but your association wasn't?

Andrew: Would I have left my semester potentially? I don't know... I would have gone to all their manifos if I could and I would have helped out as much as possible... but I don't know, if I'm being honest? Striking as one person, I don't know. I'd try and get people in my classes to participate but I don't know if striking as one person [makes sense]? I don't know means no [laughter].

TA: Thinkers, theorists, militants, that are influential to you?

Andrew: Chomsky, he's good for media stuff. David Graeber, CLAC Montréal (Convergences des Luttes Anticapitalistes)

TA: How would you define a public space?

Andrew: I was thinking about it and I would say that, it's a place where anybody can go with the least amount rules restricting what you can do or your behaviours. A park is a pretty good one, but even then you can't stay forever in it, like Occupy, so how public is it? It's pretty good but still... So streets, it's a public space, technically, kind of, but you can get kicked off of it quite easily like if you're doing anything... Places people can go without many rules attached, like who can enter and what you can do when you're there.

TA: In terms of who gets to go there, do you think that will hinge on your membership in a community? So citizens for instance, of Montréal for example, do you think parks, public spaces, etc, should have those kinds of limits on who can go there?

Andrew: No, no definitely not. Anybody can go, anyone can stay as long as they want... I say do whatever you want, but within reason. I think when it gets more mixed, like public/not public space is when limitations on how long you can stay or how many people can go at once, or who can go.

TA: So, some of what you've described is how we use public space in society right now, if you can change that, how would you change how public space is used or how they access it?

Andrew: Make more of it, make it more accessible, make it easier for 'citizens' to plan around using it... Just more of it. It's awful how little of it there is and even the space that is there, it's mixed and its use is quite limited as well.

TA: Less rules?

Andrew: Maybe, not generalized less rules...it's more [to do with] homelessness, length of use, how many people... more so things that are saying you can only use it in a very prescribed way, like to relax you know? And any other use isn't allowed.

TA: What about social space, is that different from public space?

Andrew: Social space is more where you get to assemble together and you know you get to and it's more designed specifically for that, whereas a park it's not necessarily meant for people to come and group.

TA: Can you give me an example of what a social space is?

Andrew: A union local, the internet, a forum even facebook, even though it's private, people know that's it's there... you can poke your head in there and know what people are up to, it's super fucking useful. A private social space...

TA: What about political space?

Andrew: Political space? I'd say anywhere you want it to be. It's not like you can say that the polling booth, the union local, or the NDP conscription office

TA: (laughing, about the use of conscription) I like how you used it... it would usually mean signing up for the military...

Andrew: (laughter) Well I guess it's kind of similar. It's anywhere, you can't not be political... I'm of the persuasion you're always being political. By choosing not to be political you're being political. There's kind of a battle for that kind of space as well... like I remember at uOttawa I was in a class and Idle No More people came, some First Nations people came and people were like this is a place you can bring your kids, 'cause it's an education and you can come and we can show you our culture and they got into the history and how fucked up it is. Afterwards some people were like "uhh you know, I don't think they should have gotten political." People just want the dress, and the food and whatever... and to me this was a good example of kind of this, I don't know if it's a new thing but [the idea] that if it's political [we should] keep it separate and this was a good example of how awful it is because [people] want First Nations to come and show them [their culture] but not the parts that are controversial which happen to be a big part of it...for educating people. Anywhere you go people say you shouldn't get political, but it's not like if it's not "voting", if it's what you believe [it's not political]. Even people in an office setting, you could be choosing you're next meeting, maybe you want a woman to chair, or... It [politics] is everywhere whether you want it to be or not.... I think a lot of private interests benefit from the characterization of 'political' being something you do separate and individual because it benefits them to make decisions on their own and have people be ignorant.

TA: What about private space?

Andrew: Well I'd say it's not owned by the people or the government obviously. It might be mixed public, or mixed social... but it's definitely them that say "get the fuck out" when you haven't bought enough shit or whatever.

TA: Would you say economic dominates?

Andrew: Yeah for sure.

TA: Should it?

Andrew: No, it would be great if it didn't. I think it's maybe naive to think private space could exist without that...

TA: Do you think there are private spaces that exist outside the economy?

Andrew: Private, like owned privately?

TA: Like your house for instance?

Andrew: I don't think it's outside the economy. I think there are arguments to be made that if you *own* something, it's not outside the economy. Like home ownership, it sounds all well and nice, but I've heard stuff where... it kind of gives you an interest in capitalist preservation. You're not really making money off of it, some are with speculation on housing prices, you can't separate price increases from why people buy.

TA: So some of the things we associate with private space, in our society anyway, like the home, private businesses, do you think some of those same activities could be public?

Andrew: Oh for sure, definitely. Our natural resources being one of the biggest things. A huge chunk of it could be co-op or mixed, or something different or completely public. Like home ownership could be different as well.

TA: And if we thought about economics as something broader than just buying shit at the store, that could be public as well?

Andrew: Yeah definitely.

TA: What kind of space is the university?

Andrew: I know it's supposed to be a public space, but I remember even during the student strike I was confused about who owns it and who has the right to change it, or set the rules. I find it kind of complicated...like I know it's public space but a lot of stuff is done by the Board of Governors which are [represent] private interests for the most part, corporate people. You could say the rules are set by the government in general, hence by the public but... one is so caught off from the other. Lets say at Concordia they said, "ok you're not allowed having tables at the front, because this is for Palestine or whatever." That wasn't the decision of the public... was it the

decision of the government? No, it was the decision of the school... [the decision making] is very opaque, and I would say it's definitely a mix... It shouldn't be that way, it should be a public institution but it's definitely mixed with private [interests] in a bad way. I'm still confused whether it should be the people going to university, like this is 'what should it be', should it be the people going or the public at large [making decisions], the public at large who knows what's best.

TA: Like is there a public interest that should be served?

Andrew: Because there is a public interest in the university but it's the individuals that go to it who have the most stake in it. I think it should probably be the people who are going, the teachers and staff as well who decide. I'm not sure.

TA: First time someone has brought up the types of interests at stake, and the way you say it's almost as if it's the type of interest that decides or dictates what type of space it is. So you said there's a board of governors who make decisions that don't necessarily serve the public interest, so do you think that changes the space then?

Andrew: Yes, definitely does. Like I said, it should be the government that decides and it should be the people through the government who decide but there are so many layers in between and by the time it gets to the university, a lot of it seems... the day to day is dominated by the Board of Governors and their interests, and the overall mission of the university it's the government who decides, and they often, more and more, have a neoliberal conception of what an university is. It's more about keeping their budgets ok, with foreign students, getting more, managing money more than anything then having a vision of anything in particular.

TA: What do you think a citizen is?

Andrew: I think I might even pass on this question. I don't use that terminology. What does it mean to be a citizen of Montréal? You live here, I dunno. I don't really identify with Montréal, Québec, or Canada, unless it's in opposition to something. I'm not really comfortable with saying this is a citizen, this is what you have to be.

TA: So do you think then the current way citizen is used is problematic?

Andrew: Yeah, I mean, the way you that you go and vote and then you go and consume for the rest of your life and that's it. I dunno, the student strike definitely polarized everyone, and you look at people and say, are you working towards making things better or are you just someone who does nothing and just wants to consume and live their lives, this is me maybe being a bit of an asshole. It definitely polarized people who want to work on stuff and people who, leave the decisions to people who are experts. I think that [has to do with] citizenship maybe... people who want to make more decisions, wanna be in on it and some people just want to pass it off.

TA: ...and that's not necessarily bad?

Andrew: I'm not sure, it seems a bit bad to me.

TA: Would you say this is the predominant type of citizen, if you were going to use it, the consuming, letting things go, not really participating?

Andrew: Not really, when I say citizen, I mean someone who has citizenship.

TA: What types of actions were the most effective?

Andrew: First of all, effective at what? There was the tuition increase and to me there were other goals, that maybe came up as things went along or some people had them to begin with, like empowering people and showing people there's a way to fight, which was super fucking important and pretty awesome, the strike went a long way to showing people their strengths. What else...showing institutions for what they are, like the media, the courts, the government, it showed their true nature. When everything is chill, they can pretend to be a lot of things, like democratic, but when push comes to shove, when things are escalating, that's when you see their true nature, which is not democratic at all and pretty authoritarian at times, and a lot of bad things. So that's another goal... Other goals...Effective at winning the election? First off what was effective in winning the election? Who knows. Was it capital, was it mobilization... I would argue that if people just did protests that were boring, it would have petered out and it wouldn't have been on their election radar. So a lot of the ASSÉ stuff, like mobilizing people giving them a structure that keeps them mobilized, is super important, but... things are very difficult to disentangle. It's easy to say, "oh the casseroles were stupid," but maybe they weren't. I think for other goals, like empowering people, it was definitely the structure of ASSÉ, the way they kept it open for other people to join, their website, where people could post whatever manif/demo they wanted, they could publicize, that was a pretty big deal I think. The types of protests, the fact they were escalating, it showed people that they can actually fight, stronger and longer as they were, whereas other people are used to protests, where you show up you protest, you hear a speech, you go sign a petition, you go home. It's super demobilizing. And you never often get results. The Iraq War, peaceful protests, like they were big, but nothing happened. Exposing institutions for what they are, I think the escalating politics were important, the riots, blocking bridges, the disruptions, I think the disruption stuff was super important. That's me speaking from my politics.... It radicalized so many people including myself.

TA: So different [tactics, different capacities] empowered different people in different ways... Blocking streets, disruption, why were they effective?

Andrew: I just think it's in opposition to the whole 'I need to convince people in the nicest way possible', I just need to have enough protests, enough petitions, letters to the editor... which is super useful and important [in its own way] but I think that stuff was not very effective... [It's effective because] you can't ignore it. The only language people speak is money. If you can't reason with people, look at Harper, look at Charest, even my borough... every single level of our government were fucking assholes, who don't give a shit about anything you're going to say, they have their thing ready to go, democracy for them is like, 'I won the election, now all of you, se débrouille.' [make do, or get by]. So it's not by rational arguments that you're going to win, and the media is against you the whole time. You're arguing what you think is the truth but the media is going to be arguing the opposite the whole time, so you're going to pretty much lose,

public opinion, you're going to have a heck of time. If you give up on that then the only thing you can do is block [and disrupt]. If people want to like you then they'll do a 'like' [he was referencing facebook, 'liking' things I believe]... I feel that's the Canadian way, I feel, "I believe in human rights... I will do nothing at all." Don't blame the rest of Canada though, [for seeing the QUÉBEC student movement this way] they see it through the media, how else are they going to see it? Through facebook maybe...but that's not the same as when you're here. It's like my parents or anybody, they read the media, they read the Gazette and that's their main thing, how do you expect them to have a [different] opinion on anything?

TA: Is protest (disruption) a form of political participation?

Andrew: Yeah, definitely. Participation, trying to change things that are political... so yeah.

TA: Do you think it's a form of citizenship participation?

Andrew: I think it makes you a good person.

TA: Are some places more legitimate places or spaces for political action than others?

Andrew: I remember back at the beginning I was pretty confused about legitimacy in general. What gives you the right? So the Board of Governors for instance at uOttawa, what gives you the right to go and disrupt their meeting because you disagree, when there are plenty of people who do agree? So if you're in the minority, what gives you the right to go and disrupt, be an asshole, and I asked someone that because I was confused about it. And they said it depends on how important the cause is and the majority is often wrong about things like slavery for example. I guess that kind of gives you legitimacy to disrupt... but I think it should be proportional. I think after Charest ignored everyone for two months, it gave people the legitimacy to escalate because the issue was no longer just student tuition it was actually democracy and actually listening to people and living in a democracy with people and not just the rich. So back to the original question, what spaces are legitimate? I think it depends on how important it is. Like for instance, I don't think it's legitimate to go into a hospital and set it on fire because you're upset about paying taxes, it depends on how important the issue is and how strongly you believe in it.

TA: That's an interesting way of looking at it, that the issue/context actually defines how legitimate the space is.

Andrew: I would say everywhere is legitimate for political stuff, but proportional.

TA: Are there any spaces that you think should be completely exempt from political action?

Andrew: An example?

TA: So maybe the private home?

Andrew: It depends, if it's a super awful CEO who's responsible for something awful... maybe it's legitimate. I would never say never. [Tells the story of seeing a certain important political

figure at a restaurant and just wanting to say something and sitting there glaring at him, but he was with his family, so he didn't act...] Lets say harassing peoples family members, I would say that's not even the right person.

Interview #7 – Monica

Background:

Monica and I met in another public park in Montréal, on a sunny afternoon before she had to go to work. We sat in the grass surrounded by some families enjoying the day including a festive gathering and picnic near by. She brought some tasty bagels, cream cheese, and smoked salmon with her and shared the snacks with me while we chatted. Monica got involved in helping organize the strike when she got to Montréal in 2011. A bilingual Anglophone, we chatted mostly in English.

TA: Were you involved in other types of activism before?

Monica: Yeah, like what people traditionally call activism, what other people call activism. I came from Ottawa, I went to the University of Ottawa, so I was involved there. I grew up in Toronto and was involved in activism there. It was right before I was legal drinking age, so 18? Since then, I've been doing what people call 'activism'. I was involved from younger but the stuff I did in elementary school people wouldn't traditionally call activism. I see it as part of a continuum and I consider it part of activism...By the time I got to Québec I had been organizing for four years in two different cities.

TA: Around the same kinds of issues or different ones?

Monica: Indigenous solidarity, Palestinian Solidarity, anti-Olympics, anti-gentrification, alternative media, and a tiny little bit of prisoner solidarity stuff.

TA: What led you to get involved in Québec?

Monica: To be perfectly honest I didn't know anyone. The way I came in... the undergrad is shorter here, so it's more important for people... everyone is in first year, second year, and so on at the same time, there's less jumping around like there is in Ontario. So I came in 2nd year, I didn't know anyone and everyone knew each other so I was like fuck, OK I'm going to organize because that's what I know how to do and I can't not organize, it's part of me. On top of that it's a great way to meet people. It was just something to do, I had time and I wanted to understand and get involved. I started organizing to meet people and enlist myself. That's how I got to know people when I first went to university anyways and it's what I love to do.

TA: It lined up with your point of view anyway coming in?

Monica: Mmmhmm. Yeah. I had a lot of time to offer. And it's also accessible here, in some ways. In some ways, it's a lot less but in other ways, it's a lot more [accessible]. So, there's the Comité de Mobilization, and that comité [committee] is open to anyone and everyone [note: referencing CRAM I think]. They're just like, "Come out, do you have an agenda?" The agenda

was super important because it was written by the student faculty, by several different faculties, and people already knew about the strike. That was the theme of the agenda,... you have to understand making this agenda takes about 3 months. You have to really think about the amount of effort and the amount of planning... People were already anticipating this as the big push.

TA: You were part of a faculty student association? AFESH?

Monica: Yeah. Well you're a member right? If you pay your dues, you're a member. Like a union. If you work there, you're a member unless you go through this awkward process to get out of it. It's really useful to think of the student association as a union, even though they can't call themselves that.

TA: AFESH uses direct democracy?

Monica: Yeah, whatever that is [laughter].

TA: Like general assembly style, right?

Monica: Yeah, general assemblies, direct democracy, yeah in one of its forms. Like a union, a more traditional western, like union style organizing. When I think about the mobilization that happened in the 70s, specifically in Montréal, this is something I've researched. The way people participated at the union assemblies, the GAs of the CSN, in the 70s after the quiet revolution, there was this huge explosion of the state and this welfare state was founded in the 60s, and affirmed itself in the 70s. And then you have the communist movement, which was so important in Montréal and in general the feminist movement, les mouvements communautaires [community-based movements]. So all these different things made the union activities very important. And I see it at the general assemblies. It's like there's this echo, because the 80s and 90s were so depressing for everyone. So I see with the anti-globalization stuff that started in 2001, it has kinda started going up again since then.

TA: What would you say are the key differences between the types of mobilizations in the 2000s and in the recent Québec mobilizing of students, compared to the 60s and 70s?

Monica: Well first of all, in the 60s and 70s there was usually a political party, revolutionary political parties competing with each other for control over the unions. And there was a whole world and uprising, people were convinced there was going to be a revolution. Now I think people are less convinced of that. Even though they are still willing to fight for it... the disillusionment that came from the 80s is still very present in our generation. One of the concrete ways in which this is shown is that people are very weary/wary of political parties first of all. In some ways, in other ways, they are looking for an answer, people are realizing you need a bigger solution. You can't just join AFESH and expect to start the revolution. And this is with the understanding, for the research project I guess, this is important to understand, we're talking about people with a revolutionary [base], the core base, is a lot of revolutionaries, who are fundamentally opposed to how the system works. I take that for granted when I'm talking to other people, people don't understand that. There is a certain base that everyone starts from. Another way it might be different, the student movement is one of the only places I feel like this

stuff is real, it actually exists, like that echo [of the past] still exists. There's still some kind of that in community organizations but you don't have area-based organization, maybe working on housing, like community organizations are partially funded by the state now. And those were much more grassroots in the 70s, these were founded in the 70s, like the daycare program in Québec was founded in the 70s by people who were just like, fuck this! It was cooperatively run daycares that started the 7\$ a day thing, and then they got the state funding and then it became a lot more like a social service. The unions don't practice this shit anymore, our general assemblies are way better than the CSN's general assembly at this point. [Ours] are way more radical, we have a sincere mass of students who want to see change and who aren't ready to settle for shit that won't work. That's not true for the unions, the unions are bought and sold you know. There's more a sense of going it alone, and really going against the grain [in the student movement] and also the police state is just so much more advanced, they have so many ways of identifying you and fucking you over, how closed we are... The way we act is different, it's easy to make mistakes now. Before if you used a pay phone and watched your back, didn't say the wrong thing to the wrong person you were probably ok. Now it's just so much more complicated. There are cameras everywhere. I think those are some major differences.

TA: AFESH voted in favour and that was continually ratified with the GAs, so would you have gone out anyway if they hadn't voted to go on strike knowing others were going out?

Monica: No, there's no way, you can't do that. It's impossible. A strike is not something you can do individually. A boycott is not something you do individually. Everything that you do has to be this collective process that's what makes it so fucking annoying, that's where the work comes in you know? That's what makes it hard to do, these are collective processes. A strike necessarily implies that this is a big enough collective, a majority that has decided on... And when the strike did fall, the whole reason why scabs are so hated is because they are not respecting the will of the majority, and when we, our wills, our decisions are not respected, I say we as in the extreme left factions of the general assemblies, if our wills, or what we want to pass, is rejected and people say fuck you guys and want to end the strike then we respect that. You know what I mean?

TA: It's the will of the Assembly.

Monica: That's right it's the will of assembly. That was never an option, so it was like 'we have to make this work [win the votes in assembly/convince people] or we're fucked, you know? And that's how people came at it. It was a lot of pressure and people are still recovering from the pressure, the stress that it induced, but that's kind of what made it work, it's sad to say but sometimes that's the case, those types of unhealthy workplaces are the only things that make things work.

TA: A person earlier was talking about how they don't understand how they packed everything into a day but they did somehow.

Monica: Well everyone was doing it that's the thing. Everyone was doing it so when you come and say "Oh I haven't slept and I have dah dah dah..." everyone else is like "Yeah, me too." So you learn to never fucking mention it, and you don't talk about it.

TA: You don't sleep.

Monica: You never talk about it and you don't sleep, which is kind of unhealthy, but there's also this whole thing of not complaining, I think is partially important. Because if you take a big step back and look at people without papers and like live-in caregivers, those people are really fucked up too and they manage to survive so on the greater scheme of things, we're ok you know? Even though we're not ok. Or that, if we can continue to work, we know that we're capable of working this hard, and if we can give ourselves enough time to be sane, then we can make this happen. I just think that people didn't give themselves enough time to be sane. It's hard. But the more people who join, the easier it gets. That's the major solution unless you just want to give up.

TA: I suppose some people will burn out...

Monica: Yeah, you just don't want them to burn out too hard you know? Burn out to a certain extent is normal, but you don't want suicidal tendencies and stuff, you don't want it to get to that point, that's where it gets dangerous.

TA: Have you encountered people who have burnt out too far?

Monica: Well, they probably have histories... if it's going to get that bad, they probably have other things going on, it's probably not just a political burn out. But part of what burn out is, is not winning. I think that's partially why people felt they could keep on going was because they felt they were winning or gaining major ground. And one of the major reasons why the burn out happened is because the strike ended so terribly and people really were dreaming, people were dreaming of a different world.

TA: (talking about how it's so sad that people really were thinking they could change things, people were hopeful who hadn't been before...to see that hope crash.)

Monica: ...to see [that hope] disappear. You know what though, I said that to someone who had been very heavily involved with high level actions, and also involved with affinity groups. You have to understand how many [there were], I remember going to a congress at ASSÉ and someone saying that there were at least 50 underground affinity groups that were functional that people were part of, when shit was real. You have to think about that. These are people who are organizing blockades of bridges, and who are organizing occupations and blocking banks and shit you know. But I think that where a lot of people got fucked is with the occupations, because what the cops did was they targeted people who have probably been involved in leadership positions of organizing other actions and fucked them on the occupation. So their charges represent something way bigger than what they are actually being charged for.

TA: What do you think public space is?

Monica: That's a really good one. Can I just tell you the first thing that comes to my mind? I've been organizing, I've been arrested multiple times at this point. I've organized with people who have spent time in jail. I've organized with them and then they got fucked while I was organizing

with them, I've organized with an undercover police officer. So this is coming from that context, so when I used to go to demos and people would do that chant, I have this weird connection with the chants, the things we would yell in the demos. And I used this as an indicator of where we were at, and I looked into this probably more than I should but that's just what I do. So when they would say "À qui la rue? À nous la rue!" ["Whose streets? Our streets!"] I never really felt like that was true. I like saying stuff like "Migrant workers under attack! What do we do? Stand up! Fight Back!" I like that because I feel like we are standing up and fighting back, or saying "Free Palestine!" I know what that means conceptually. But for 'Whose Streets, Our Streets?' It's not true. I mean if I was walking up Yonge Street and big corporations are blaring their ads at me, I never felt like that [slogan] was true. Until the student strike. We were on the streets so much that it was impossible, those were actually our streets! I really did feel like that! "À qui la rue, À NOUS la rue!" It's like "No, guys, we're taking this shit!" You're not passing with your car, this is our street and we're not going to give it up until we fucking get what we need. And then you have to ask the question, what are streets and what do they represent? Freedom of movement. And I think freedom of movement is one of these things that's really underestimated... it's really important to control peoples movement when you want to repress them. So reclaiming that was very important. So that's the first thing I think of when I think of public space. So I'm thinking about, is it really occupying these spaces? Not just occupying them like we are here in the park being physically in the spaces, which is also a part of public. But really using your body as an action to reclaim space, but also with this political agenda, of disrupting business as usual and letting people know that this is not going to be taken with silence. This abusive relationship that we have with the state is not going to be taken with silence. We are denouncing this and what they're doing and standing up for ourselves until we get justice. Public space is tricky because not everyone feels as comfortable as others in public space because we have these stratifications of how much different people can participate, that I think were very visible in the student movement. There was not many... Montréal's black population is pretty high, and it was not reflected in the demos at all in the student movement. But why, why is that?

TA: There's some pretty good reasons...

Monica: There's a ton of reasons. Some are just above and beyond. If you look at AFESH there aren't a lot of black people who are members... but I think it also takes us back to a bigger question about what are the class barriers that separate, to take Mao's words, that separate manual labour from intellectual labour. Why are those two separated in our society, you know? And if we can bridge that gap, then maybe we'll be getting somewhere... but right now... there were definitely some major things, [from people who weren't] reclaiming that public space and people who felt very threatened about other people reclaiming that space... But in general the response was very positive. Um, reclaiming public space... that just depends on what you think of as public. Like when we were blocking a bank I never considered that public space.

TA: It's automatically private?

Monica: Right... public is stuff that you can share. So when we were blocking a bank it was a direct economic disruption. It wasn't about reclaiming that space. Well it kind of was...

TA: Like maybe there could be something else here.

Monica: Well it was just showing them that hey, we can fuck you over, we're more than you, fuck you guys! It was funny because some of the employees totally have like Stockholm Syndrome [with their Employer, the bank], like secretaries who don't get enough [pay as is] were pulling my hair and pushing my mask down because I'm not letting them go to work. It's like come on dude... but it's ok, it's really ok. It's part of the process, these struggles have to happen.

TA: They do... but they're uncomfortable.

Monica: Yeah, fuck. Seriously. Ugh, that was ridiculous. I have this like adrenaline junkie side to me though so part of me was just like 'Bring it on bitch!' but it sucks... We were so much more similar, me and that woman, than we were different, you know?

TA: Does public space have to be physical?

Monica: What else is a space if it's not physical? I'm really all about the concrete. An idea, isn't public space, an idea can be the beginning to working toward a public space but public space ultimately has to be something that can be shared...and a conversation? Sharing a conversation doesn't create public space. You need the 'where' and the 'when', you need that to make it concrete, and then... you can't have one without the other. You can't have just the concrete. You need that ideology, you need to push to create that space, but it doesn't exist without the concrete. You can't separate it or make it abstract from the concrete. You have to be able to touch it.

TA: So in terms of space based on how you've already defined it, how would you define the university?

Monica: It's not public space to me.

TA: Do you think it could be?

Monica: I think that's a huge misconception, people think the university is public space and it's like 'guys, have you seen the security push homeless people off the university?' and at the end of the day, it's a shortcut [cope out] for people to say, "aw they're so mean, we want all the homeless people on our campus" but you guys don't want all the homeless people on the university. That's a population that has so much going on, that needs so much attention and resources, that the university and students can't handle, so no, that's not a public space, fuck no it's not a public space, are you kidding me? I have this thing with universities... universities are great if you can be a part or if you're connected to people who are connected to them, but they're not public space. And that's why it was important for me to take it [the struggle] out of the university. And one of the major differences between 2005 and 2012, from what I understand because I wasn't there in 2005, was that 2005 was a lot about occupying the university and there were a lot more occupations but 2012 was all about demos and blockades. That really made it a public affair, and ultimately when we couldn't do it anymore and Law [Bill 78] passed, and

everyone was on the verge, just couldn't handle it, all of sudden the public just responded with this upsurge [of support] and it was one of the most powerful things I've ever experienced. Just having that support when you needed it the most, that was great. That moment... I don't know if it'll ever... Hopefully I'll be able to have it again. That's some real solidarity, you know?

TA: Do you think universities, could or should change?

Monica: Oh my god yes. First of all if they were free... and when I say free and state-funded. I understand that the state is my enemy, I understand that, so I'm not promoting this social-democratic idea that we should just make everything state-run, unless we can address the fundamental problem of the state protecting capital right. That's a really important thing for me... the state has to change. But, it would be great in the mean time if university was free first of all. Second of all, until we don't have to push people off of our campus, we can't call the university public space. A homeless person can come here [the park we're in] and chill and be in peace, no one needs to bother him. Umi Café [in Ottawa], when it was like beautiful, even though it was a business, homeless people could go there and just be chill, they wouldn't be bothered, they wouldn't be kicked out... and that was part of how, that line got blurred with Umi Café, it used to be a cooperatively run space, a worker co-op, and during that time when it was a co-op, before shit hit the fan, there was a blurring of private and public space. That was really about people reappropriating that space and people from all walks of life being able to share that space without necessarily having to connect with each other. You don't have to talk to everyone there or share the same ideas as everyone there but everyone can be respected as a human being in that space. And also, that doesn't mean there are no rules. Respect is a rule, right? You can't take it for granted that everyone is going to respect... so public space has to have rules, and that's the tricky part, what are the rules?

TA: Coming up with the rules, and who picks the rules...

Monica:... and who enforces them, all that. It's tricky but they have to exist.

TA: So I guess from what you've said, you think public space can be political space?

Monica: Oh my god yes, public space is political.

TA: Are there any spaces that you think should be exempt from being political?

Monica: That's a tricky question. I struggle with that one. Everything is political for me. But it doesn't have to be like that you know? Like the fact that somebody farted, doesn't have to be political. Where can you just let it go? And where can you just be? People get so turned off, and say "oh, politics. I don't know anything about that." And they are talking about politicians and not realizing that what they represent is political, who they are, your values, are all political. I think it's kind of this western tendency... which is fine it's where I'm from... but I went to Venezuela, and it was just different, the way that politics were dealt with. It's so engrained in the way people live. It was understood that babysitting is political, maybe that's the wrong way to say it, but it was part of collective action.

TA: Part of living with people in the same space, it won't be separate, politics is not a sphere outside of our life with other people...

Monica: No, anyone who says that, it's bullshit.

TA: In terms of citizen or citizenship, what do you think of those words?

Monica: I don't know what the fuck they mean. Well that's easy for me to say that because I'm a citizen right? That's part of my privilege. I'm sure someone who maybe doesn't have citizenship could much more clearly describe it.

TA: So first off we can say it's exclusive?

Monica: It's exclusive... citizenship is... part of the reason I don't entertain that idea is because I have it so I don't need to be preoccupied with it but for me, my encounters with different levels of citizenship have almost always been about what the law says it is as opposed to what it might actually mean to me if I could conceive of it. So I don't conceive it because it's never been relevant. Citizenship, I think, refers to a sense of belonging and that is more important to me than the actual defining of citizenship. People don't believe, or people don't feel like they belong or are made to feel like they don't belong or if people are told they don't belong because they're not citizens, right? But you can also be pushed out if you are a citizen. Citizenship... is about being born here and getting it is super hard, especially if you're not European. So we're talking about generally, people who are children of immigrants, people who immigrated young or of... European descent, generally, and even immigrants, generally those that come here have a good amount of money where they are from... Citizenship allows you to have a certain freedom of movement and a freedom of action that people without citizenship don't have. That's still something that I think people don't get here. Like just being a poor person of colour in Montréal North, is a crime and you can get killed for that by the police. In Toronto, they kill people who are brown and black, and native or who have mental illness and homeless people, all the time. That's what the police do. Your ability to do these actions... it was never really put in perspective, and it still doesn't happen that much, so people saying "oh we're being politically profiled, and calling the police the SS" they don't even know the fucking half of it dude. If you look at a cop, you're not scared of losing your life, you're scared of going to prison, or of being charged and them saying colourful words to you, and treating you like an asshole which sucks. But your physical self... [is not necessarily in danger of being killed]. Part of fighting oppression, what did he say... This is an Israeli soldier who spent three years in prison because he publicly refused to fight in the army because of the occupation of Palestine. They're [called] refuseniks, because they publicly refuse... so you can either find an excuse... but if you publicly refuse, and say fuck you guys, this is awful, then you spend whatever time you would have served in the military in prison. And he said, "Sometimes in order to lessen the oppression of others you have to go through oppression yourself." Right? So this confrontation with the police and the state, maybe alleviated some of the pressure in other places, right? Because there was a concentration of oppression on the students and that might have alleviated the pressure on other places. On top of that if we're fighting for a [more just society] then the unfortunate part, and it is unfortunate, I'm not trying to glorify it, I take for granted how unfortunate it is and expect people to understand that, that this is the shit we have to go through and part of the shit and the

surveillance that students had to go through is part of the daily life for some people who are just living their lives. Their existence is political. I guess that kind of goes back to what is political. Their very existence is being persecuted. So us taking a stand and actually confronting the state, we got a taste of what those people have to deal with... Or whatever in their lives, maybe not every day.

[Note: We broke off on a tangential discussion of privilege in activism... discussion of how the people who were affected were fighting it, comparison to Aboriginal people in Canada fighting but not having a lot of privilege... Monica poses the question that if we see activism as having privilege or certain really privileged people are involved maybe we're not organizing with the right people or we need to change the way we're doing things and what we're organizing for and why...]

...Because I've never organized with so many parents in my life. UQAM, these students are not rich. I heard a statistic that 80 percent of students at UQAM work. These are kids of working families... and that's why this strike really affected them materially, excuse my Marxist language.

TA: I think the sacrifice is incredibly real for a lot of people. Which required a lot of agency, which is also what makes it so effective, your agency, you're in control.

Monica: Yeah, exactly. Also you have to remember Québec experienced the Quiet Revolution, you have kids whose parents are like 'I remember when... you better go out there and protest!'

TA: In terms of types of demonstrations and types of strike actions do you think some were more effective than others?

Monica: Oh yeah. Bridges! I keep bringing them up... I was a big fan of blocking the bridges. Blocking the banks was good too. The occupations... were good but they're high risk. Sometimes I don't know if they're worth it. The demos were one of the most important ways for large groups of people to get together... but I think for people who weren't students and who weren't very involved, they have this conception that a social movement is a demonstration. And the reflections people have had since the strike, are like 'I don't know what to do, should we just have a demo?'... There were so many and that's how people connected and they were so important, they were essential. Political actions that I find less effective? I personally wasn't a big fan of smoke bombs in the metro. It's whatever... I felt like it was targeting the public... it was targeting our potential allies more than it was targeting our potential enemies. I stand by those activists and I'll never turn my back on them but that's also out of a principle of solidarity but I would call that into question within certain contexts. In general, I think it kind of got into this... have you heard the term riot porn? In that sense... one of the major weaknesses of the strike was that there was not enough political education going on... Your question that I kind of saw about theorists and political thinkers. Whatever I am more a centralist than other, and I would have a more regimented, ideological and political education vision but there wasn't [much of that]. The good thing about having something that's more regimented and organized is that you can implement it more easily... you don't have to agree on it just because you read it. It's not like this is some kind of indoctrination... you can decide whether or not it's right or wrong. There was less of that and I felt that when you are not actively bringing up the political consciousness of people and changing the culture then these actions, I don't know how long lasting they can be.

It becomes an adrenaline rush and people trying to start a war by smashing a window, you know? A protest is not a war. When people were coming back from... Victoriaville, where that guy [lost] his eye... I wasn't there and I was freaking the fuck out... I had this talk with a friend of mine who was Chilean who was part of the first generation after that terrible coup d'état, like the mass torturing of political activists, so it's very real for him, what those people and his family went through and what that reality can look like, what imperialism can look like. So for him he said you have to be able to differentiate and that's why I think political organizations are good, yes people should be wary of political parties and wary of getting indoctrinated or too into political parties but I think they serve the purpose of being able to separate a campaign from a political program. I think when you wanna fight cops too much in the demo, not only are you excluding a whole shitload of society that isn't ready to go there with you, you're also mixing things. Like you can confront the state and have your political campaigns, you need to figure out what's what... in your mind you need to be able to figure out what's what you know? ASSÉ can't lead the revolution, it's a student organization, we need a political organization, a coalition, something. But it has to be a political. That's how I feel. I don't really give a fuck if you want to break a window, I really don't. But you may be potentially criminalizing yourself for something that's not worth it. I wish at the beginning that more care had been taken as to what kind of demo this was going to be, like was this appropriate for certain populations or was it not? It's hard to control that stuff. You can't control what's going to happen when you're out there. But you do, and I think people need to be accountable to each other... not like "Oh I hate it when other people get mad at me because I wanna do what I want at the demo." It's like fuck off dude. It's not like you're separate from the collective.

TA: Any particular political thinkers, militants, etc that influence or inspire you?

Monica: Well just knowing that people were part of other actions and were part of underground political organizations [explicitly concerned with overthrowing the state], organizing with those kinds of people and seeing those people on a daily basis and not knowing what they do specifically but having the feeling that they're probably up to some really important shit, that they are responsible, that they are really trying to make it happen, they're not fucking around, they're serious. I love that, I don't want to fuck around anymore, I don't wanna do this because it makes me feel better, I wanna do this because it works. Our lives are on the line dude, Mother Earth is gonna fuck us up if we don't change something. Really and truly. Man, indigenous organizing taught me so much... there was this [quote] that really fucked me "You don't inherit the earth from your ancestors, you borrow it from your children." In that sense, even though I have more privilege than other people and the urgency of needing to change this society is a little bit less for me than others, I understand my survival and my children is based on [our struggle] so knowing there are people out there putting their shit on the line, their flesh and their bones. You know, I work with someone who only has one functional eye, that's something that he can never get back, ever, ever, he's never going to get that back and that's a physical sacrifice that he made, and other people broke bones and got messed up in all kinds of ways, can't sleep at night, paranoid and all this shit, those are sacrifices that people made. And one thing that my friend said about the dreaming...and she's very cynical, "I consider myself lucky for having had that moment... to having really, really believed." Like to actually have had [that], to be able to believe she actually considers herself lucky. Those kinds of people I'm just so happy I know them. Those are the people who are organizing in the student movement and outside, and those are

some heavy hitters. Political thinkers, I'm a communist, so I try to take direction, and learn from that... I'm really happy I was formed and came up around a lot of anarchists because it allows me to be very critical and very wary of different things. The way I see communism is much more fluid and less rigid than I think a lot of people conceive it, so it allows me to maneuver. Communism isn't about a label, it's not about anything...if you have the fundamental dialectical materialism, you try it out, it doesn't work, then you think how I can change how I can think to make it work. The relationship between practice and theory, that is what is more important overall. It's not about state or no state, it's about what's going to work. The whole idea of having a socialist state is because people thought that it was going to work and that was based on the fact that capitalism is going to fuck you up if you're not organized in a state structure after revolution. So I would say Marx, Mao, and Lenin have been very influential. People like Norman Finkelstein, an anti-Zionist Jew. He's hilarious [he loves Hamas]. I like Black Panthers, reading about them, writings of the Black Panthers, Malcolm X, was a huge influence for me. Various Indigenous leaders... I went to Venezuela for a bit, the woman I stayed with was amazing. All the anti-colonial, anti-racist, the blogs that have been coming out over the past couple years that have helped me a lot in deconstructing a lot of shit, to help me understand how we can move forward and how we can organize together despite the terrible systems of racism and oppression we all have internalized because we have to work together, otherwise we're fucked! So what that might look like, you know? I don't always agree with everything, but I love having those perspectives and those thoughts. Clutch magazine... Christine Delphi for feminist perspectives.

Reflections

Monica's answer to the question regarding which thinkers/activists/theorists she found influential reminded me why I chose to include it. This project and these interviews were about learning and unlearning and finding out what ideas and people my participants learned from was certainly useful for understanding their opinions. It goes without saying that I learned far more from my interviews with these seven participants than I did from reviewing the various commentaries, interpretations, and theoretical analyses of the events and relevant political theory for my study. Each conversation opened up another avenue of inquiry, another theme I wish I could have considered more thoroughly here, another facet and another problem. I was surprised to find that almost every question elicited such considered answers from the participants. I originally expected that at least some of the time a question would fall flat but instead even when a participant disliked the very content of the question, such as the question on citizenship, they

were still interested in at least communicating their ambivalence. Their words speak for themselves, sharing the tensions, convictions, and realities far better than I could and more authentically than would have been possible had I chosen to highlight the answers I found to be most coherent or thoughtful. While this chapter is meant to showcase the voices of others, my voice is still present throughout the interviews as I chose to develop certain points more in our conversations. For the final portion of this chapter, I would like to instead focus on the subject my participants seemed to be the least coherent, and the least comfortable discussing, which oddly enough turned out to be the very theme I had originally planned to study most closely through this work: citizenship.

The Myth of Citizenship

I will be using selected comments from the participants as backing for my reflections. Their comments are presented here in the context of how it made *me* think, not how participants themselves thought. I was intrigued by their reactions to citizenship as a concept. From the onset of this project, I set out to see if the student strikes were in some way linked to an appeal to a more progressive or even revolutionary version of citizenship, a version more welcoming of others, more encouraging of political participation and agency, of equity and so on. After all, there were certainly instances of Québec nationalism and citizenship claims prevalent in demonstrations and commentary on the strikes. Instead I discovered an ambivalence and disillusionment with the very idea of the citizen, and their reactions led me to thinking about citizenship as a form of disconnect, a concept evoking cognitive dissonance and rejection. As a reminder, here is a brief summary of some comments on citizenship from respondents:

Mathieu: "...I don't know what a citizen is, I know what citizenship is... Maybe we should just go back to calling ourselves humans? How we interact with each other as human beings. The citizen is the political institutionalized part of the human being..."

Jean-Marc: “It’s a question of where you feel your ‘belonging’ I guess... I personally don’t feel very much attachment to the Québécois or the Canadian flag. I know I’m a citizen of both of them, I know it on paper, I have a Canadian passport, I have a Québécois drivers license, I guess that qualifies me for being a citizen but it’s not because I want to be. It’s administrative... it doesn’t mean anything...”

Josiane: “I know it’s very popular right now but I hate that expression. Because what is a citizen actually? Technically the word comes from Rome, to have the right to participate in democracy. It’s still true today, that’s what it is (so it comes with rights), it’s a privilege basically right now...”

JoséePhine: “Beh, a citizen is someone... During the strike we talked about students versus citizens. I did not really like that distinction because we are also citizens, we are not a separate group... a citizen is anyone...”

Sophie: “Ugh, I don’t know. Personally, I don’t really like the term citizen because there are a lot of people who are not considered citizens. So right off the bat, there is a problem that not everyone has the right to citizenship but they live in the same place, eat the same things, spend time with the same people. It’s complicated, it’s a term I have a lot of trouble really grasping...”

Andrew: “I think I might even pass on this question. I don’t use that terminology. What does it mean to be a citizen of Montréal? You live here, I dunno. I don’t really identify with Montréal, Québec, or Canada, unless it’s in opposition to something. I’m not really comfortable with saying this is a citizen, this is what you have to be... the way you that you go and vote and then you go and consume for the rest of your life and that’s it.”

Monica: “I don’t know what the fuck they mean [words like citizenship and citizen]. Well that’s easy for me to say that because I’m a citizen right? That’s part of my privilege. I’m sure someone who maybe doesn’t have citizenship could much more clearly describe it...”

When reviewing these reactions I could not help being struck by the dislike, confusion, and disillusionment regarding what the words themselves *mean*. Certainly, as their answers show, their expressions did not mean they did not understand in some way what citizenship *is*. For most, citizenship *is* a legal fact, an institutional category under which they all have the privilege of being identified. Most expressed discomfort with the fact that citizenship is exclusionary, a privilege not fully afforded to everyone. I found Monica’s response especially insightful when she noted that for her, citizenship is a given, functioning like many aspects of privilege in our society, as an almost invisible and unsaid advantage, one that she need not really think about because she already *has* it. However, what citizenship might actually *mean*, caused puzzlement. For Jean-Marc and Andrew, they acknowledged that it appears as though citizenship should mean some sense of belonging, usually to a nationalism, but neither one felt that meaning was

true for them and if anything, was only useful in oppositional terms, to identify what and where they did *not* feel any belonging. Instead, respondents expressed an interest in appealing to something more universal and not constructed through institutions, appeals to others as fellow human beings, as ‘anyone or someone’ like Joséphine said, another person who at once shares something in common, but who’s difference is unencumbered by institutionalized privileges and legal categories. This is reminiscent of Hardt and Negri’s ‘multitude’, a concept I introduced in the introduction to this work. The multitude encompasses difference among unity, rather than diversity being subsumed and overcome by the concept of the “people” or the “citizenry”. This tension of being part of a larger collective without sacrificing difference played out in the student strikes and in the interviews. The student strikes were effective because a mass amount of people found unity in action to achieve a certain goal without sacrificing heterogeneity and autonomy. In the interviews, the participants were all in agreement on at least some issues and all chose to participate yet there’s ample diversification amongst them and their opinions on various issues. Placing an idea like ‘the multitude’ in opposition to concepts of citizenship obviously exposes tensions based on the use of citizenship to either subsume and homogenize or exclude difference all the while playing into a vision of social membership that depoliticizes and distances political subjects from their own power.

This interrogation of what citizenship *is*, what it *means*, and what it *could be* is reminiscent of Barthes’ work on myth as a form of speech. Barthes identifies myth as a form of

depoliticized speech...[one that] has in fact a double function, it outs and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us...Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Roland Barthes. “*Mythologies*.” Selected and translated from the French by Annette Lavers. (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1974.) 117 & 143.

As a depoliticized form of speech, myth can abstract itself from context and contradiction and from the explicit expression of power associated with politics. If we were to place citizenship into this model of myth, we can easily identify the ways in which it at once makes us understand something while at the same time imposing a reality or given on us. The participants noted that they knew what the words meant, that certain physical objects demonstrated or performed a fact of citizenship (e.g. a passport, a driver's license) but they also identified the second function, the second layer of meaning as being beyond that initial fact presented by legal documents. For Jean-Marc, citizenship is meant to evoke belonging, despite the fact it does not evoke that in him. For Monica, citizenship means membership and privilege and privilege can go unsaid and unseen, it exists beyond just the plastic identity card identifying a person's name, address, and legal status.

The strong reactions of disillusionment from respondents points to the depoliticized nature of citizenship as mythical speech. Political here should be understood "in its deeper meaning, as describing the whole of human relations in their real, social structure, in their power of making the world."¹⁵⁸ Citizenship denotes a prescribed and imposed form of 'politics', that of recognized political membership and limited participation in a political community, but it is also decontextualized of its wider political implications. It is this 'depoliticization' to which I think my participants were in part reacting so strongly. Their opinions on political participation usually presented a far more inclusive notion of community membership, expanding a qualifier of commonality to human beings and those sharing their spaces. Political action and politics themselves often included a limitless range of actions, thoughts, and importantly, relationships. The myth of citizenship that they currently read is "purified" of their politics, notably its exclusion of others they would consider to be in common with themselves. Citizenship dictates a

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 143.

limited range of acceptable behaviours and characteristics as part of being a citizen. It imposes a sense of attachment to mythical structures, the nation and the state, a feeling few of my participants experienced as real or even wish to experience. The impediment and discipline of myth is stifling;

...Every day and everywhere, man [sic] is stopped by myths referred to them by this motionless prototype which lives in his place, stifles him in the manner of a huge internal parasite and assigns to his activity the narrow limits within which he is allowed to suffer without upsetting the world: bourgeois pseudo-physis is in the fullest sense a prohibition for man against inventing himself. Myths are nothing but this ceaseless, untiring solicitation, this insidious and inflexible demand that all men recognize themselves in this image, eternal yet bearing a date, which was built of them one day as if for all time.¹⁵⁹

The participants I interviewed seemed to express a lack of recognition of themselves in the myth of citizenship they feel forced to read, the version of politics, of identity, of society that is pressed onto them by realities and powers divorced from their own autonomy to “invent themselves.” I share their disdain and their rejection of such imposition while also remembering the contradiction of at once benefitting from the privilege of citizenship while at the same time necessarily rejecting the very foundation of that categorization. Knowing that citizenship is of course linked to many other myths at play in our current capitalist reality, reminds me of the importance of *reading* myths, of identifying their hollowness borne from their necessary construction and depoliticization. This project has largely been a study of myths; where they came from, their outright rejection, and the attempt to create different spaces, different worlds, and realities not bound by myths serving such an unequal reality. It also reminds me of the struggle associated with the choice to actively take such things apart and to then fight to build different worlds, one’s often deemed far too utopian to be realized. Earlier in this chapter, Sophie’s remarks pointed out the drawbacks of such a struggle and her profound admiration for people engaged in it:

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 155.

I really admire almost all militants...Not everything they fought for was utopian but a lot of things were. Maybe one day those things won't be utopian...but it's hard to get up each morning and to say to yourself "I am fighting for something so vague/fuzzy [flou], for something I will never achieve in my whole life. I am fighting for anarchism and I will never see that, I tell myself if I can at least advance things, all the better. Ça vaut la peine/It's worth the trouble... I admire militants enormously for being able to apply themselves so much for things that are so [out of reach/flou].¹⁶⁰

Fighting for something deemed so unattainable takes courage. It requires a rejection of many myths capable of bringing comfort. To pretend that students took on such struggles based on some sense of entitlement as "des enfants gâtés" as they were often called in the media, is to be blind to the level of dedication and courage of militants fighting to change society and such condemnations come from the very places of myth creation, the official media, the powerful, and the privileged elite. It is my hope that my own attempt to create space for students to speak their own truths has succeeded in disrupting such myths.

¹⁶⁰ See page 110 of this work.

Conclusion



Figure 1

A picture of contrasts. March 22nd, 2013

After ridesharing to Montréal from Ottawa, we dropped our stuff off at our hostel a couple short blocks from Berri-UQAM metro station and Parc Émilie-Gamelin. After packing water and Maalox mixture in a backpack, we let my uncle know we were heading to the parc for the demo, just in case things got rough. Our last night demo in Montreal had been intense to say the least but we had escaped without getting arrested and felt brave with anticipation. It was still light out when we arrived but the atmosphere was already tense. Riot cops and police vans lined the streets around us, appearing to already outnumber the few hundred students, protesters, and media beginning to group together, unfurl banners, chat, chant, and test the waters by moving into the street near the police lines. Shortly after arriving we moved into the streets following the lead of banners and the march took off away from the police lines in front of the Banque Nationale and Archambault.

The chants got louder and we marched quickly but within minutes police were closing in on the group on either side. Sensing the impending cornering maneuver, tension rose and

our pace quickened. The group pushed on, with some peoples voices betraying some panic at the quickened pace of the police lines, and we turned another corner onto Maisonneuve heading towards an intersection with a Shell station on the right side. In what seemed like seconds the police had rushed the front of the march, some people screamed as a line of riot cops charged them and we immediately panicked. The group was quickly divided and police came from all sides. Panicking, my partner and I and a few others ran sideways, away from the Shell station and the charging line of cops, searching for an exit. We saw a set of glass doors on a building that looked like it might have an alternative exit. Hoping to escape the kettles and charging police our group ducked inside and sprinted down a short hallway where we were confronted with a locked set of doors and older man (maybe a janitor). We pleaded with the man to let us through to an exit. He looked at the riot cops now visible in front of the glass doors we had entered through, looking in, waiting for us. The man looked at us with disdain, shrugged, and muttered something about us making do with our lot, in French. We were cornered. I felt helpless and frightened. One of the cops entered and ordered us to leave, the threat of being physically forced to do so by the group of cops with batons was obvious, if we didn't comply. We cursed and moved unwillingly toward the doors where we were pulled out and across the street into the group of students already kettled in front of the cheery travel agency Club Voyage.

For a few moments I didn't want to speak. My partner, more experienced in these sorts of encounters with forceful state discipline, eyed me with concern. I stared dejectedly and with disbelief at the lines of police encircling us, more police behind them some on horses, some in vans. For a few minutes one of the police commanders instructed the cops encircling us to push in, narrowing the circle, shoving students, being more forceful with a few 'rambunctious' ones. I stared at the face of a few of them, willing them to meet my eyes, stunned, wondering if they would flinch, smile, frown or betray some sign that they were in fact a person like me, that we shared something in common. A couple looked scared. Later, as our kettle sang songs, danced, jumped, and made jokes, I noticed a few young ones crack a smile, then quickly looking away to reaffix their stern frown. Remembering the actions I had witnessed a few weeks earlier when they violently broke up the March 5th demo and I was almost hit with a plastic bullet, I accepted that they really were not the same as me. I turned away and faced my fellow detainees.

From the moment they began to encircle us and rush the crowd a few minutes earlier, the police had exposed more loudly than ever before their true character, a character I had lived the majority of my life with the privilege of not seeing. At that moment any residual belief I may have had in the permanency of certain rights or protections afforded through citizenship were irrevocably destroyed. Separated by an arbitrary wall of force, I could see people outside the wall, going about their business, stopping to look with curiosity and even concern at a new space configured by the police. I had known this in theory and I had seen their brutality a few weeks earlier in the violent cat and mouse games of the night demo, it took them taking away my right to move for me to really understand. The state and its agents decide when you are a citizen and when you have rights, and they equally decide when you do not.

We had the good fortune to be kettled with a festive bunch (many probably already experienced with waiting out police discipline). We had a couple of drummers, singers, and Anarchopanda (a rather infamous figure now, a professor from Montreal who dresses up in a panda costume, attends protests, and often gets between police and protesters, often aiming to protect students). Taking in the combination of my partner's comforting words and the resiliency of our group, I snapped out of my moment of shock and sad disappointment. Every few minutes the drummers would count out a beat encouraging us all to jump 30 or 40 times and chant together to keep warm. They would start up a French song (I later found it – 'La Tribu de Dana, by Manau), with many joining in, until it seemed the entire group was singing and dancing a long.¹⁶¹ Someone else would start a chant (often against the police, "No Justice, No Peace, Fuck the Police", "Police Partout, Justice Nulle Part!" (Police Everywhere, Justice Nowhere!)) and others would join in. Eventually, when the police had decided we had frozen in the cold long enough and the STM (Montreal transit) busses where we would be processed had arrived, we changed our slogans to match the messaging on the bus headings ('Évènement Spéciale/Special Event' became 'Évènement spéciale, juste pour nous! Special event, just for us!'). They eventually processed us, assigning each person to a bus window where a police officer took our information and gave us our \$630 ticket for having walked briefly in the street that night. As soon as my partner and I had been processed and were free to go we were greeted by people who had been waiting outside a bar close-by watching the kettles, many expressing their wish that they could have helped us or at least brought warm blankets or drinks to the groups. Many asked if we were alright and needed help. Too cold to chat for long, my partner and I stepped into the nearest dépanneur (convenience store), purchased a couple tall boys of beer with hands clumsy from the cold and opened them immediately as we walked the four short blocks to our hostel.

Returning to the photo taken by friends we met up with in the kettle: It demonstrates the contrasts I felt so rattled by during our 3 or 4 hours in the kettle. If you blocked out the police from the frame you could attach any number of pleasant back stories to the photo: waiting to see a local band at a bar close-by, a funny night out with friends where we encounter a fun-loving individual in a panda suit and stop for a photo... We're laughing and smiling. Of course in any of those other contexts, we are free to move around, free to leave, to stop and get warm. In this picture we are not. We are arbitrarily forced to stay, to conform, to be still, to be cold, to not use the washroom. It had been surreal watching other people come and go as they pleased from behind a line of police officers. At times, while laughing and singing with our new friends, I realized I could almost forget why I was standing in the cold for so long. I could almost imagine just stepping through the gap in police and heading off into the dark to find a warm place to sit and have a drink. I envisioned removing the police from my mental frame, even looked out past them, mentally closing them out of the frame. It felt good to do that. It felt good to laugh, and jump and sing. That was disruption enough. We were forced to stay there in the cold but they couldn't force us not to chant funny slogans at them, jump up and down, and discursively paint them out of our picture. That picture above is a picture of contrasts, a

¹⁶¹ Here is one video among many of that night (of the singing in particular) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rxIn4t-LIA>.

picture of refusal to control everything in that frame. We may not have been allowed to move but we made our own space.

This project has been an ambitious attempt to tell a story. By writing this story I have tried to bring together knowledge, theoretical insight, history, and the learning experiences of myself and others in order to provide a rich picture of a moment of social upheaval, of rupture, of contestation, and of freedom. I naively began this project with the hope that I would provide some novel interpretation of citizenship theory, that citizenship theory would be the most interesting way to approach a study of these events. I planned to poke and prod the evidence and analyses already being published, to question the participants, pulling apart useful tidbits of insight confessed unknowingly, that would fit nicely into my framework. As I progressed in my research, I came to realize that any project where I had already decided the outcome or ‘thesis’ argument prior to even sitting down with a participant would not only be offensive to the very subject matter I had decided to study but would also leave me feeling dishonest, academically, politically, and personally. The interview process challenged my approach to academia and my initial theoretical interests in public space, citizenship, and politics. Most of all, though, it challenged and broadened my own personal politics and convictions, taught me innumerable lessons, and reminded why it is important to fight. It’s no surprise then that this process of reflection and learning accompanied my own increasing involvement in radical politics, leading me to participate more directly in protests in Montreal and Ottawa, one story of which I recounted above. This process might best be characterized as a battle against all myths I had grown accustomed to and found comforting. This project, too, is a step outside my comfort zone. I never anticipated I would do interview research for my thesis work nor did I want to dwell much on historical events. Here is a project that has relied heavily on both of those components

and attempted to also incorporate a third theoretical element. It is only by combining these three different components that I felt I could offer a study of the student strikes.

The events of the 2012 Québec student strikes have, for the most part, been curtailed off in time, given a linear timeline with a beginning and end. Collapsing these events and the various forces at play within them into a span of a few months is inadequate and reductive. To start breaking apart that encapsulation of an unfinished movement, the first chapter provided two condensed histories focusing on signpost events and influential ideological and discursive shifts in the evolution of PSE and student activism, all of which must be seen as dialectically linked to the events of 2012 and present in the continual efforts of students and activists to oppose the imposition of a reality controlled by others. By charting the major changes to PSE in Québec and the various ideological arguments underpinning such changes, we are able to see the actions of Charest's Liberals as part of an ongoing process aiming to consolidate a neoliberal hegemony of post-secondary education and other social services as commodities, and public spaces as discretionary state spaces, heavily regulated and available only to those abiding a certain exclusionary and privileged vision of citizenship. The introduction of that history provides the necessary backdrop for mapping a condensed history of student activism and organizing in Québec by identifying the key opponents of many student activists: actors and interests (e.g. the state, capitalist elite actors, police enforcing the colluded interests of both) and ideologies (e.g. neoliberalism, austerity, racism, sexism, representative liberal democracy). By exploring the history of student organizing in Québec I was able to identify core concepts and political ideals characteristic of combative student syndicalism that set student organizing in Québec apart from organizing in the rest of Canada. The strong adherence to more directly democratic forms of political decision-making, and the valuation of political autonomy, mass participation, and social

solidarity, have been important factors enabling the intense level of commitment to mass mobilization and direct action that resulted in the strikes and protests of 2012. The social history of the Québec student strikes is made through the constitutive social relationships between all of these ideas and actors.

Having established these timelines and key themes, I was then able to explore the theoretical implications of some of the ideas in the second chapter. Starting with a discussion of the regulation of public spaces, I extrapolated ideas of regulation, political agency, and political space in order to then return to the theme of representation first mentioned in the introduction. By discussing how certain socio-political structures and ideologies regulate space, it was possible to identify how neoliberalism specifically artificially separates certain zones that constitute ‘the social’. By pulling apart the spheres of politics and economics and relegating the former to certain privileged zones of representative liberal democracy, neoliberalism enforces a view of society and its members that delegitimizes and disempowers direct political agency and action. This results in more and more spaces being heavily regulated in terms of function and redefined as economic spaces of consumption, automatically considered illegitimate for political action or ‘public’ use. All of these dynamics play out in the space of the university and the city, the spaces in which students took direct political action to intervene in the ‘visible and sayable.’¹⁶² By understanding power as not only repressive or regulatory but necessarily productive and creative, students sought to reclaim their political power to disrupt that cycle of hegemonic space production and rearticulate different socio-political spaces, open to different forms of movement, function, and legitimacy.

The third chapter demonstrates an acknowledgement that we can and should speak for ourselves. I learned that in order learn about the Québec student strikes, you need only ask. Some

¹⁶² Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics”.

respondents gave detailed explanations of the functioning of general assemblies, mechanisms for accommodating problems of exclusion, the failures, triumphs, and challenges of direct action oriented mobilization, the organizing structures of ASSÉ. Some mentioned the ongoing dilemmas they face in terms of systems of privilege associated with race and gender. Some discussed the on-the-ground realities of being part of blockades, being arrested, facing police brutality. They all generously offered me their thoughts on public space, on political legitimacy, on democracy, the university, diversity of tactics, discussing their nuances and contradictions. We talked about why they chose to get involved, why it is worth fighting for a different world, for things we likely will never see in our lifetimes.

Indulging my questioning even when they disliked the subject, they gave me their ambivalent thoughts on citizenship. I began studying the Québec student strikes by asking (and answering) this question: Is citizenship a useful concept for thinking about radical student politics and the student strikes? Busy reading thought-provoking work on citizenship theory, I began this work thinking it was. I was, in some ways, quite wrong. The ambivalence and disillusionment that respondents shared with me led me to think deeply about how wrong I had been about citizenship as a novel and relevant theme for theorizing about the student strikes. Like a few respondents said, lets not even use it. It is off the mark, it is the wrong word. Let us not reform it, remake it, expand it, or rename it. Citoyenneté, on s'en câlisse! (Citizenship, we don't give a fuck!). Let us be human beings, let us be someone or anyone. Citizenship is just another category of meaning full of imposition and representation, predetermined and preconfigured, already too full of empty meanings to be a word worth creatively redefining. While I was certainly wrong about the relevance of potentially revolutionary citizenship claims, I did learn that thinking about citizenship as part of a problem of representation, a problem of the

imposition of power aiming to subsume difference and autonomy, to regulate and enforce, *could* be useful. For me, and perhaps for others, radical politics, politics that aim to fundamentally challenge and change the current system of power dominating our lives, begins with a process of myth reading and rejection. It is the process of unveiling the accepted reality of certain parts of our world, of deciding that certain things are not givens, and are not common sense. It means politicizing all speech and embedding it in relations of power. It means refusing to allow myths to represent you. It means demanding the right to reject them and to author your own truths, to make your own space. To me, this is what the Québec Student Strikes were all about. They pulled off the masks, they exposed the hollowness and irreality of the myths that dominate our lives, and they authored their own visions of the world. They stayed in the streets, blocked the banks, turned left when they were told to turn right. They made their own spaces.

Appendix A

Timeline of Important Events in Evolution of Québec Post-Secondary Education

Year – Event

- 1635 – Inauguration of Jesuit College in Québec City (French)
- 1663 – Québec Seminary opens (French) (precursor to Laval University)
- 1821 – Founding of McGill University (English)
- 1851-52 – Founding of Université de Laval (French)
- 1853 – Founding of Bishops’ University in Lennoxville (English)
- 1867 – British North America Act establishes education as a provincial prerogative, and enshrines rights to separate religious education institutions in Québec, (Protestants and Catholics). Establishes Confessional School Boards, which maintain control over education until 1960s.
- 1878 – Founding of Université de Montréal (becomes autonomous from Université de Laval in 1920)
- 1940s – First university bursaries are introduced
- 1946 – Union Nationale des Étudiants de France (UNEF) adopts La Charte de Grenoble, a charter declaring, among other things, students are first and foremost “intellectual workers” (“L’étudiant est un jeune travailleur intellectuel.”)
- 1947 – Founding of Sir George Williams University
- 1948 – Slight increase in provincial spending in universities due to returning soldiers receiving tuition (this decreases again in 1951)
- 1949-1951 – Massey Commission: reflects importance of universities for development of Canada, recommends increased grants and bursaries, funding for universities and students
- 1952 – Federal funding program for universities goes into effect.
- 1953 – Québec refuses the funding. Duplessis uses BNA Section 93 rights – provincial autonomy for education, as a rationale for refusing any federal funding for education.
- 1954 – Founding of Université de Sherbrooke. Tremblay Commission (Royal Commission at the provincial level to investigate constitutional problems, especially divisions of powers between the federal and provincial government). Introduction of provincial taxes (supposedly to avoid the federal government stepping into provincial territory of spending)

- 1957 – Commission Gordon (Royal Commission at Federal Level) final report focused on “economic aspects of university education” and the importance of universities to the development of the country
- 1959 – Death of Maurice Duplessis
- 1960 – Liberal Government under Jean Lesage comes to power, Publication of *Les insolences du Frère Untel* – Jean-Paul Desbiens
- 1961-1966 - Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education in the Province of Québec – Chairman Msgr. Alphonse-Marie Parent (1906-1970), known as the Parent Report “The influence of [Msgr. Parent’s] report would forever change the financing of Québec universities, so that a totally new, totally public university network would be founded.” (CADEUL document, 2)
- 1962 – August, Québec university student associations make moves to disaffiliate from NFCUS/FNEUC (National Federation of Canadian University Students)
- 1963-1964 – Formation of Union générale des étudiants du Québec (UGEQ) (officially formed in November 1964), promotes students right to strike as a key principle and attempts to embrace worker and trade unionism in student syndicalism.
- 1964 – Implementation of secularization of education in Québec following the Parent Report. The Ministry of Education is established with Paul Gérin-Lajoie as minister, state takes control of private/religious education system. Financial aid of students is placed under the control of the Ministry of Education.
- 1966 – Parent Report volume 5 calls for the eventual realization of free post-secondary education in order to effectively realize the democratization of education. Calls this a long-term goal.
- 1967 – Creation of CEGEPs (free tuition at CEGEPs)
- 1968 – First general student strike. Occupation of CÉGEP Lionel-Groulx at Saint-Thérèse by 200 students, a general assembly vote with 824 participants voted in the occupation and strike The General Union of Québec Students (UGEQ) supported the strike and encouraged other students associations to join in.
(<http://bilan.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/pages/evenements/1918.html>)
- 1968 – Effective freezing of university tuition fees (Ratel, p.15) “Signpost year: ‘sees the end of a university that was small-scale, elitist, relatively cheap for the state’ (Université Inc (Martin et Ouellet) 47) Creation of Council of Universities (Conseil des universités)
- 1969 – Creation of Université du Québec network (low and frozen tuition, grants and loans available)

- 1971 – The “Historic formula” for funding Québec universities is established. (“This method of financing... owes its epithet... because of its base financing amount established by sums spent the year before which are then increased based on certain defined parameters.” Ratel, 29)
- 1972 – Massive ‘wildcat’ general strike in Québec, over 300,000 workers participate including some towns and factories coming under ‘worker control’. Three major unions formed a ‘Common Front’ the QFL, the CNTU and the teachers’ union, CEQ. Three major union leaders (as well as many others) are jailed.
- 1974 – Student Mobilizations against TAEU (University Aptitude Tests) with many CEGEPS and university departments going on strike.
- 1975 – March, Association Nationale des Étudiants et Étudiantes du Québec (ANEQ or ANEEQ) is formed to replace Union Générale des Étudiants du Québec (UGEQ)
- 1978 – Another general strike regarding loans and bursaries with 40 different institutions on strike at its peak (initiated by the Cégep from Rimouski)
- 1978-1979 – First relatively small cuts to post-secondary education funding (see Ratel, Henchey & Burgess, Martin & Ouellet, etc)
- 1978-1986 – Budget cuts: Henchey & Burgess: “...if we take inflation into consideration, there have been a continuing series of budget cuts: -3.4% in 1978, -4.1% in 1979, -0.4% in 1980, -9.7% in 1981, -2.6% in 1982, -5.0% in 1983, -3.8% in 1984, -1.1% in 1985, and -3.4% in 1986.”(177)
- 1981-1982 – Camille Laurin, PQ Minister of Education, calls for a “decline” in spending on education, citing an era of austerity and budgetary constraints. (Laurin, Ministère de l'éducation. *L'Éducation en 1981-1982: discerner l'essentiel*. Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère de l'éducation, 1981) PQ raises tuition fees for students from outside Québec to ~\$4,128.
- 1984 – ANEEQ leads 3-day strike with occupations of CEGEPS.
- 1986 – Cuts continue, QUÉBEC government under Robert Bourassa publishes government budgetary document titled *L'urgence d'un redressement* (An urgent adjustment) calling for the reduction in spending on public services and the size of the ‘state’. Gobeil Report (May 1986) calls for a reduction in government, and the closing of at least 20 committees et councils. Recommends raising tuition fees, “between three and four times, depending on the program of study.”(Ratel, 51) Students strike to protect ‘status-quo’ for bursaries and grants.
- 1986 – Winter: Following comments from Education minister Claude Ryan regarding the abandonment of a promise to maintain a tuition fee freeze, ANEEQ mobilizes a protest of 5000 students.

- 1987 – Dissolution of RAEU and FAECQ (Fédération des associations étudiantes collégiales du Québec). In the Winter, students occupy Claude Ryan's Lachute county office. This is then followed by a massive occupation (over 200 students, led by ANEEQ) pressuring the government to be transparent about their planned reforms of student financial aid.
- 1988 – In the fall there is a three-day student strike that meant to be followed by a general student strike. The strike fails due to at least 14 CEGEPs and student associations voting against the strike and ANEEQ. The government then reneges on its promise to maintain a freeze on tuition fees.
- 1989-90 – Movement for a student strike against the unfreezing of tuition fees fails.
1990-1991 – Unfreezing of university fees by Bourassa's Liberals: \$500 to \$1,600 —a \$280 annual hike over four years
- 1991-1993 – FECQ and FEUQ form out of FEEQ.
- 1993 – Johnson-Lévesque Report *Les finances publiques du Québec: vivre selon nos moyens./The Public Finances of Québec: living within our means* The report recommended, in general, continued 'rationalisation' of public finances and the 're-orientation of the role of the state to one of generating wealth rather than a mechanism of redistribution'. (<http://www.ling.uqam.ca/ato-mcd/documents/dnl-com-pro-jol93.txt>, introduction)
ANEEQ dissolves.
- 1994 – North American Free Trade Agreement comes into effect. After years of decreases in federal transfers (HSTP) to post-secondary education, caused by net increases not keeping pace with inflation, the Axworthy reform of 1994 further reduced federal transfers to provinces, therefore to post-secondary education.
- 1995 – Formation of MDE, which organizes a demonstration of 12,000 people January 25th against Axworthy Social Reforms.
- 1996 – PQ with Bouchard at the helm and Pauline Marois (future premier) as education minister, proposes tuition hikes of 30%. Organized by MDE, General Student Strikes, erupt again with ~100,000 students in the streets, the strike lasting a month. The government retreats and freezes tuition again but raises fees again for students outside of Québec.
- 2001 – ASSÉ officially forms February 25, 2001. The organization is born out of mobilization efforts to oppose the Free Trade of the Americas/FTAA pact being proposed at the Summit of the Americas in Québec City. April 20-22 sees protests and actions targeting the fence built around the summit area. Mobilization is led primarily by the Montréal based Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitalistes/CLAC and Comité d'accueil du Sommet/CASA.

- 2005 – Charest’s Liberals decide to transfer many bursaries given to students into loans. The major student federations and organizations FÉCQ, FÉUQ, and ASSÉ all oppose this move. ASSÉ along with other independent student associations form CASSÉE, an enlarged coalition to mobilize for the strike against Charest’s reforms. In response to this move by the government, student strikes break out, beginning with the Anthropology Students Association at Université de Montréal. By February 24th, 30,000 students were on strike. With FÉCQ et FÉUQ joining in early March, 100,000 students were on strike across Québec. The 2005 strike also marked the first use of the red square, a symbol appropriated from other direct-action poverty activist groups. (<http://www.crimethinc.com/texts/recentfeatures/Montréal1.php>)
- 2007 – The Liberal government under Jean Charest announces a tuition hike of \$500 over five years, (\$100 each year). Disorganized strike attempts by some student associations and blocking of classes (notably at Dawson College) fail, the \$100/year hikes continue.
- 2010 – December 6th, Liberal government representatives, CRÉPUQ, and representatives of the three main student organizations (FÉCQ, FÉUQ, and ASSÉ) meet in Québec City. Large numbers of students bus to Québec City to protest outside the meeting. The government announces that starting in 2012-2013, tuition will increase by \$325 per year for five years.
- 2011 – November 10th, FÉUQ, FÉCQ, and ASSÉ group together to organize a demonstration in Montréal and the presentation of an ultimatum to the government threatening strike if they do not concede to their demands.
- 2012 – February 14th, the government ignores the ultimatum. Jean Charest moves to hike tuition fees by \$325 per year for five years. Massive protests and student strikes erupt; CLASSE, a coalition formed by ASSÉ to organize an unlimited general strike, is formed, (much like the formation of CASSÉE in 2005). The largest and longest student strike in Québec’s as well as Canada’s history erupt.

Note: The sources used to compile the two different timelines (Appendices A&B) that accompany Chapters 1 and 3 respectively are listed at the end of Appendix B.

Appendix B

Timeline: 2011 to 2012 Important Events

This timeline is by no means comprehensive but it offers a general sense of the variety of actions and the overall timeline of the strikes. I have attempted to cover some key events in Montréal and Gatineau to frame the events discussed by my interview participants. There were of course any number of smaller actions and disruptions happening almost constantly during the height of the strikes. For more detailed recounting of various events see the Crimethinc “While the Iron is Hot, Part 1” cited throughout as well as the collectively authored history of the strike in *On s’en câlisse: histoire profane de la grève, printemps 2012, Québec* (Collectif de Débrayage, Sabotart & Entremonde, 2013)

In *On s’en câlisse*, the authors break down the strike into phases that are useful for framing this timeline (the first two phases of the book focus on history and context). The book should also be reviewed for its comprehensive discussions of anarchist positions and actions during the strike as well as its review of debates and criticisms within CLASSE and ASSÉ. I have reproduced the basics of their phases here for reference:

Phase 3: February 13th - March 22, 2012 “La grève commence ici/the strike starts here” The beginning of strike mandates and actions in Québec.

Phase 4: March 22nd – April 20th, 2012 “L’effet GGI/the GGI effect” Prolonged actions, general unlimited strike mandates, disruptive actions.

Phase 5: April 20th – May 10th “Négocie, ostie!/Negotiate, goddamnit!” Attempts to negotiate with the government. Ongoing actions including dramatic events outside of Montréal in Gatineau and Victoriaville.

Phase 6: May 10th - May 14th “Nous sommes tous fumigènes/We are all smoke” Referencing a slogan of support for those accused and held on charges of terrorism for using smoke bombs (to shut down the metro as well as to respond to tear gas and pepper spray from police).

Phase 7: May 14th – May 22nd “L’exception confirme la grève/The exception proves the strike” Reference to ‘la loi d’exception’ the special law (78) invoked by Charest’s Liberals to criminalize dissent and assembly in Québec. At a time where the energy of students was beginning to wane under the weight of arrests, police violence, injunctions, and so on, the special law resulted in an outpouring of support from non-students including lawyers.

Phase 8: May 19th – June 10th “La cacophonie plébéienne/Plebeian cacophony” The rise of *les casseroles* and continuation of nightly demonstrations

Phase 9: June 10th – August 1st “Suspension de la suspension/Suspension of the suspension” Acceleration of political profiling, ongoing night demos, some disruption of Grand Prix events...

Phase 10: August 1st – September 4th “Contre-offensive/Counter-offensive” Demonstration celebrating the 100th night demo on August 1st. As the potential school year nears, CLASSE and ASSÉ bases work to mobilize for new strike mandates, many fail. The strike essentially ends by September 4th.

Events

March 2011 – “Finance Minister Raymond Bachand announces Québec’s intention to raise

tuition fees, beginning in September 2012. Plan is to raise tuition by \$325 a year over five years. Total increase will amount to an additional \$1,625, raising Québec tuition to \$3,793 in 2017.”

March 24th – The finance minister’s Montréal offices were briefly occupied, and a disruptive march spontaneously followed.

March 31st 2011 – During a “national” demonstration called by FEUQ, FECQ, and ASSÉ, militants associated with ASSÉ briefly occupied the offices of CRÉPUQ in the Loto-Québec building on Rue Sherbrooke.

August 2011 — “Students formally begin campaign against tuition hikes, trying to convince government to back down.”

September 2011 – Occupy Montréal distracts from some student organizing.

November 10th 2011 – With FEUQ, FECQ, and ASSÉ all agreeing to work together, an ultimatum was presented to the government demanding that the proposed tuition hikes be withdrawn. There were various soft and hard pickets on campuses in Montréal, followed by demonstrations and marches in the streets. November 10th also marked the first time in 42 years that Riot Police entered McGill Campus.

February 13th 2012 – The strikes begin. “Two departments at Université Laval and one department at UQÀM voted to go on strike and join CLASSE. From this point on, the number of students on strike increased every day for about a month and a half.”

February 17th – Occupation of the CEGEP du Vieux-Montréal. Students at this CEGEP voted to go on strike online and to join CLASSE. After the results of the online voting were announced a General Assembly of students taking place in the cafeteria voted to occupy the building. Students continued the assembly, socialized, made barricades, and called to other militants to come join. Due to a fairly significant amount of surveillance (by security guards inside, well-intentioned participants, and surveillance cameras), some students were charged.

February 23rd – Blockade of the Jacques-Cartier Bridge following a march. Police in riot gear intervene and arrest protesters using force (pepper spray, etc.)

March 7th – Students converged to try and enter the Loto-Québec building (the same one that had briefly been occupied the year before). Police responded with force to disperse the students, using flashbang grenades. Shrapnel from one of the grenades hit Francis Grenier in the eye, blinding him in that eye permanently. Another demonstration followed that night with some militants using crowd-control barriers to push against the SPVM headquarters.

March 11th - On the second day of CLASSE’s congress held in Montréal, the forum where direct democracy is used to make key collective decisions, CLASSE’s members voted to endorse the March 15 anti-police demo and encourage militants to attend in large numbers.

March 13th – CLASSE organized another night demo and others announced an Unlimited Creation Night at UQAM. UQAM security and administration attempted to stifle the event by heavily guarding the building where people had planned to “democratic art” but activists instead went to another building, Pavillon J.-A.-DeSève, and had a large open party.

In Gatineau, CEGEP students voted to go on strike.

March 15th – Likely stemming from CLASSE’s unexpected support and publicizing of the Anti-Police Demo, large numbers of activists demonstrated in Montréal with police struggling to control various groups marching through downtown. 226 people were arrested later that night.

Mid-March in Gatineau: Things start ramping up across the river in Gatineau with mobilization efforts resulting in successful strike votes: At UQO a new “SGA [general assembly] was convened in mid-March, after an already large number of student associations across the province had already joined the strike. Over 1 500 students participated, with fifty three percent of them voting to go on strike. “In the meantime, departmental associations had already taken the lead and convened their own SGAs, with four of them obtaining a mandate to go on strike by that time”, remarks Antonin Bouret. By that time, the over 4 600 students at Cégep de l’Outaouais were already on strike...” Originally the administration was unwilling to respect the strike mandates and pickets were used to block entrance to classes.
(<http://guelphpeak.org/vol52/2012/09/the-battle-of-red-thursday/>)

March 20th – Pont Champlain was blocked. “Obviously well prepared, the group arrived by bus around 7:30, by the access ramp to Highway 132 in Brossard. The protesters placed concrete blocks on Highway 10 towards Montréal.”
<http://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/education/201203/20/01-4507259-pont-champlain-bloque-plusieurs-etudiants-arretes.php>

March 22nd – Montréal: The first “massive 22nd” where another ultimatum was issued to the government threatening economic disruption, CLASSE taking the lead in pushing for economic disruption. The 22nds of each month would become key mobilization days marking the continuation of the strike. 200,000 people flooded to streets and the march was about 50 blocks long at its peak.

*By this time, the number of students on strike in Québec reached 304,242, the height of involvement.

March 26th – Economic disruption starts in earnest: “The defining characteristic of the manifestations of the 2012 strike was that they began very early in the morning, usually between 5:30 am and 9 am, but most often at 7 or 7:30. Their usual purpose was to disrupt the workday, either by delaying commuters trying to get to work or by preventing them from entering their workplaces when they arrived. There were many variations on these general themes. Once CLASSE called for economic disruption, there were suddenly a lot more early morning actions: many more people were getting up to participate in them, and space opened up for people to plan their own efforts.” <http://www.crimethinc.com/texts/recentfeatures/Montréal1.php>

March 27th – Montréal: Head offices of SAQ (provincial alcohol commission) blocked.

March 28th – The port of Montréal was successfully blocked by about a thousand militants with police unable to move them for about two hours.

March 29th – A colour coded march with four different groups, La Grande Mascarade, encouraging students to wear masks.

April 1st – Red paint was used to cover the Montréal offices of the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Leisure. Incidences of paint, graffiti, property destruction would intensify throughout the strikes.

April 2nd — “The outside of Beauchamp’s Montréal office is painted red. The building becomes popular rallying point during marches.”
(<http://metronews.ca/news/canada/121473/timeline-of-Quebecs-tuition-protests/>)

April 4th – Montréal: National Bank, the only Canadian bank headquartered in Montréal, shareholders’ meeting at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel was disrupted, resulting in the first mass arrests on the Island of Montréal since the evening of March 15: over 70 people altogether.

April 5th – Montréal: SAQ distribution centres were blocked.

April 11th – Montréal: Demonstrations each with different targets leave from Victoria Square each hour.

In Gatineau, a small group of UQO students obtained one of the first injunctions from a judge in order to attend classes. Students responded with strong blockades on campuses resulting in the cancellation of classes.

April 16th – Montréal: “Co-ordinated effort sees city’s subway system shut after protesters threw bags full of bricks on to the tracks. Offices of four Québec cabinet ministers vandalized, some with Molotov cocktails.” (<http://metronews.ca/news/canada/121473/timeline-of-Quebecs-tuition-protests/>)

In Gatineau on April 16th, “students barricaded themselves inside the Alexandre-Taché campus and forced the university administration to suspend classes. One student was injured by police and sent to hospital after the university rector ordered food not be delivered to students barricaded inside.” (<http://www.mediacoop.ca/story/riot-police-kettle-uqo-students-make-dozens-arrests/10572>)

April 17th – A professor from UQO was arrested for supporting students on strike. The campus of UQO was locked down by police to prevent a repeat of the blockade the day before. The union representing professors at UQO called for a mass demonstration the next day in support of students and the arrested professor.

April 18th – In Gatineau a demonstration of about 200 people helps to shut down classes and marches from one UQO campus to the other. It was then kettled by police in front of the Brault campus. 163 people were held in the kettle and ticketed.

April 19th – Montréal: “A morning manif-action billed as ON SHUTDOWN LE CENTRE-VILLE (“we are shutting down downtown”) started at Square Phillips, immediately breaking into two contingents. One proceeded to the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce’s Montréal offices and blockaded them to prevent employees from entering; the other remained mobile, wandering around downtown to cause chaos and distract the police. Eventually, the mobile contingent joined the blockaders; they were finally forced to disperse from the building by the police.”<http://www.crimethinc.com/texts/recentfeatures/Montréal1.php>

In Gatineau, April 20th has become known as “Red Thursday” where students once again faced off against police. About 3 busloads of students came from Montréal and Valleyfield to support students Gatineau, events turned violent and students stormed city hall. Students were heavily repressed police and eventually kettled en masse and arrested. Around 200 students were arrested.

April 20th – Montréal: Four demos opposing Le Plan Nord (Northern Plan, a development plan for the North of Québec proposed by Charest’s Liberals in 2011) are called for bringing together student strikes with CLASSE, No One is Illegal activists, Innu Women walking from Côte Nord to Montréal, and one by anarchists. The demos from CLASSE, Innu and Anarchist activists were all targeting Jean Charest speaking at the Palais de Congrès whereas the No One is Illegal demo was targeting federal immigration minister Jason Kenney at a speaking engagement. Dramatic protests and confrontations with police occurred throughout the day and evening. At one point protesters were successful in causing large numbers of police to retreat.¹⁶³

April 22nd – Montréal: Mass demonstration with about 300,000 students in the streets. (A notable photo of the demonstrations shows the marches congregating in such a fashion as to make an aerial middle finger with the mass of students and participants.

April 23rd – The government finally agreed to sit down with student representatives from all three associations (CLASSE, FEUQ, FECQ). Prior to this point, the government had refused to negotiate with CLASSE or ASSÉ, a tactic used in past student strikes to divide the students, often resulting in FEUQ and FECQ agreeing to negotiate without ASSÉ. This time the three groups maintained solidarity. CLASSE also mandated their executive to publicly condemn certain forms of violence (particularly interpersonal violence), a position they had been unwilling to speak on in the media due to not receiving a mandate from the membership to do so. Prior to the negotiation students also had to agree to cease disruptive actions during negotiations, a controversial position for CLASSE but they tentatively agreed. A demo that was not organized by CLASSE or the other federations occurred on the night of April 24th resulting in the government accusing CLASSE of “playing both sides” and walking out of negotiations. FECQ and FEUQ maintained solidarity this time and walked out with representatives of CLASSE.

¹⁶³ * (see ample video coverage of various actions here: <http://www.crimethinc.com/texts/recentfeatures/Montréal1.php>).

April 23rd – Offices of the Journal du Montréal owned by Québecor were vandalized by groups of individuals.

April 25th – Montréal: “Two smoke bombs went off on different metro lines, and then another smoke bomb went off in Complexe Desjardins, a shopping center home to many business offices.”

May 1st – Large May Day demo supported by students and endorsed by CLAC with a sizeable anarchist contingent.

May 4th – Protests in Victoriaville at the Québec Liberal Party’s Convention with many serious injuries including one militant, Maxence Valade, losing sight in one eye and 106 people arrested.

May 10th – Four smoke bombs went off in some of the city’s major métro stations.

May 16th to May 18th – Special Law 78 contained three main pieces: “the reorganization of the academic calendar, limitations on the right to protest, and criminalization of ‘blocage’” (*On s’en câlisse*, 163 (Blocage: disguising yourself or “bloc-ing up”, wearing black or covering your face to protect your identity or your safety against tear gas, violence etc.)

May 18th – The special law took affect resulting in a violent night protest (69 arrests). During this time, the municipal bylaw, P6, was also modified to follow in line with bill 78. Hundreds, if not thousands by the time of this writing, of demonstrators have been ticketed under P6 (myself included).¹⁶⁴

May 21st – More or less the beginning of the nightly *casserolés* (inspired by the traditions of *cacerolazos* in Latin America, specifically, Chile) night demos where people banged pots and pans in the streets and on their steps. This began with a call to people to bang their pots and pans every night at 8pm to show their anger with special law 78. The demos spread to neighbourhoods all over Montréal, and later across Canada and abroad

May 22nd – Commemorating 100 days of strike and protest and in response to the passage of Bill 78, masses of people take to the streets. Numbering between 200,000 and 500,000 participants, (not counting solidarity demonstrations in other Canadian and Québec cities), it is considered the largest demonstration in Canadian history. (*On s’en câlisse*, 209.) It was heavily repressed by police with many injuries and at least 113 arrests during the night demo.

As of May 25th, over 2,500 students had been arrested.

¹⁶⁴ A short summing up of P6’s content and application, referencing the March 22nd, 2013 kettling and ticketing of 294 demonstrators, including myself: “Last night’s shameful spectacle came courtesy of Municipal By-Law P-6, the little known municipal counterpart to the universally denounced, and now repealed, Bill 78/ Law 12. The municipal bylaw shares the requirement that protests must submit their route for approval by the police 24 hours in advance. Among other goodies, it also allows Montréal’s Executive Committee to prohibit any peaceful assembly indefinitely, at their discretion and without notice. It should be noted that this almost certainly unconstitutional bylaw was passed by a municipal government with all the credibility and moral authority of a turnip.”
<http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/ethan-cox/2013/03/there-no-right-protest-Montréal-police-deny-charter-rights>

June – Fearing protests and disruption of the Grand Prix in Montréal, police profile people, especially students, searching them in metros, especially if seen wearing a red square. This happened throughout the strikes accelerated during this tourist event.

June 7th – MaNUfestation demo, CLAC demo against the Grand Prix, several pre-emptive arrests of student activists.

June to August – Nightly demonstrations continue with various forms of disruptions. Solidarity Casseroles occur in Ottawa and other cities.

August 1st – Québec election campaigning starts and the 100th night demo occurs.

August 13th to 20th – Many strike votes fail. The strike ends a few days before the provincial election.

August 26th-27th – Classes resume, a few small departments at U de Montréal try to strike but are disciplined and chased out by Riot Police.

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Appendix C

Interview Questions:

General involvement/background on participation:

- 1) How long were you involved in the demonstrations/strike actions?
- 2) What factors led you to participate?
- 3) Were you part of a faculty/student association? If so, in your student association, did they use general assembly-style direct democracy as a form of decision making for participation in the movement/strikes?
- 4) Did your student association/council vote in favour of strike actions?
- 5) If they had voted against participating, would/did you participate anyway?
- 6) Are there any particular political thinkers, activists, theorists, etc that you are particular influenced by?

Political/Public Space:

- 1) In your own words, what do you define to be “public space”? What about “social space”?
- 2) What about “political space”? Would you define it differently than “public space” or “social space”?
- 3) What about private or economic space: how might you define them?
- 4) How would you define the university in terms of space?
- 5) What do you think it means to be a citizen?.. Follow ups: Of Montréal? Québec? Canada?
- 6) What spaces would you define as being public? Political? Social?

Participation as Political:

- 1) What types of demonstrations and strike actions do you think were most effective during the Québec Student Movement? Why were some more effective than others?
- 2) If you considered it effective or important, why was it important to take over streets/parks/offices/campuses as part of the actions during the strikes?
- 3) Do you think taking to the streets is a form of political participation? Citizenship participation?
- 4) Are some places more legitimate forums of political action than others? Are there some spaces that should be exempt from ‘political voices/actions’?

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