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Autoethnographie du Printemps érable Revisiting Strike Narratives 10 Years Later

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LATER

Audrey Dahl and Renée Jackson

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AUTOETHNOGRAPHIE DU PRINTEMPS ÉRABLE: REVISITING STRIKE NARRATIVES 10 YEARS LATER

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Abstract

Over a decade ago, Québec witnessed the Printemps érable, a general student strike that emerged in early 2012 and transformed into a social movement with broad mobilization throughout the summer. This paper is based on two narratives written by the authors about our experience in what is known today as the biggest student strike in Canada. Using autoethnography, we return to our 2012 writings (“I am Going to Meet Audrey” and “L'accident démocratique”) to reflect on our past and present learning. We ask ourselves: what comes to mind, looking back at these texts 10 years later? We discuss the interconnection between the personal and the political and how friendship developed our understanding of learning about solidarity. Overall, this autoethnographic practice brought us to significant realizations through critical engagement with our past perceptions.

Résumé

En 2012 avait lieu au Québec le Printemps érable, une grève étudiante générale amorcée en opposition à une augmentation substantielle des frais de scolarité. Cet article est basé sur deux récits écrits par les autrices racontant leur expérience de cette grève aujourd'hui connue comme la plus grande grève étudiante au Canada. Faisant appel à une méthodologie d'autoethnographie, nous retournons à nos écrits de 2012 (« I am Going to Meet Audrey » et « L'accident démocratique ») afin de réfléchir sur nos apprentissages passés et présents. Nous nous demandons : que ressort-il de ces textes 10 ans plus tard? Nous discutons les interconnexions entre le personnel et le politique et le rôle de l'amitié dans l'apprentissage de la solidarité. Cette pratique autoethnographique nous invite à poser un regard critique sur nos perceptions passées, ce qui nous amène à faire quelques constats.

Keywords

Friendship, student strike, activism, solidarity, feminist pedagogy, autoethnography

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Mots-clés

Amitié, grève étudiante, activisme, solidarité, pédagogie féministe, autoethnographie

In 2012, the province of Québec witnessed the Printemps érable, an unprecedented student movement fomented in response to the government's plan to hike university tuition by 75% over five years. With a massive student mobilization early in the year (February), numerous university and college/Cégep student unions voted for general unlimited strike mandates. After months of striking (not attending classes) and protesting, the government didn't move from its position and used different tactics to repress the movement. Among them, a special law that restricted the right to assemble and protest was adopted (May). The broader population responded to this infringement on the fundamental basis of a democratic society by joining the protest, creating "Le mouvement citoyen des casseroles" (Coman, 2020). Facing a polarized public opinion, the government called for early elections and was overturned (September). The new government cancelled the tuition hike as proposed, and a few months later increased tuition fees following indexation to the cost of living.

This paper is based on two narratives written by the authors about our experience in what is known today as the biggest student strike in Canada. Using autoethnography, we go back to our 2012 writings to reflect on our past and present learning. This reflection led us to discuss the interconnection between the personal and the political (de Beauvoir in Puig de la Bellacasa, 2003) and how analyzing the personal embodiment of knowledge developed our understanding of solidarity. Although we were in higher education at the time of the strike, we want to clearly frame our experience as adult learning outside the higher education institution, given that we were on strike from higher education. As a form of protest, we developed our own informal learning (Foley, 1999; Livingstone, 1999) outside the context of higher education, despite the fact that our physical headquarters were within our higher education building.

This autoethnography is bilingual in nature to respect and reproduce the original narratives and experiences. Sharing our paper as a bilingual text is a gesture that we deliberately chose to acknowledge our own lineages as Franco- and Anglo-Canadians working in collaboration, while also choosing to cause misunderstanding for the reader, who may be anywhere on the spectrum of francophone and anglophone, in order to echo the layers of misunderstanding (Anzaldúa, 2009) that took place broadly during the strike itself. Misunderstanding was embedded within our experience of the student strike, and we have chosen to embed it conceptually in our paper. It was infused in our experience within an anglophone university in a francophone context, bringing together Québécois, English Canadians, and international students with different takes on and knowledge of student movements. Furthermore, the Québec student movement faced fraught misunderstanding in public opinion from other Canadian provinces that have higher tuition fees and may have little knowledge of the historical and political reasoning behind the financial functioning of Québec's higher education. For these reasons, the bilingual format is a metaphor that encapsulates and echoes our experience of the strike riddled with misunderstandings, where no matter the language the reader understands, certain elements are more understood than others. Just as an iterative, reflective autoethnographic practice teaches us that we

cannot learn everything from one lived experience, we also cannot grasp everything from a first read.¹

Méthodologie

Cette autoethnographie est en quelque sorte un voyage dans le temps qui nous ramène à une période charnière de notre vie adulte. À partir du point de vue de qui nous sommes aujourd'hui, professeures d'université, l'une travaillant dans une université en contexte états-unien et l'autre en contexte québécois, nous analysons nos sois passés-qui nous étions comme étudiante en éducation dans le contexte de la grève de 2012. Nous nous basons sur deux récits écrits quelques semaines après la fin de la grève: « I am Going to Meet Audrey » et « L'accident démocratique. » Pour Tedlock (2011), les récits sont fondamentaux : ils nous permettent d'imposer un ordre dans ce qui serait autrement un amalgame d'évènements et d'expériences déconnectés les uns des autres. Ils nous permettent aussi de faire sens et de donner forme à nos expériences tout en faisant ressortir de quelle façon le soi est symboliquement intégré dans le cours du récit.

En 2012, nous savions que nous avions pris part à un mouvement qui était d'une ampleur historique et que cette participation nous marquerait à jamais. Nous ressentions le besoin de faire le récit de ce que nous avons vécu. Nous voulions aussi publier quelque chose à partir de notre expérience. Nous avons alors écrit ces récits chacune de notre côté, les avons lus et en avons discuté. À l'époque, l'exercice n'a pas été poussé plus loin, sans doute manquions-nous le recul nécessaire pour analyser et interpréter ces expériences. Dix ans plus tard, lors des commémorations du Printemps érable, nous avons eu envie de revisiter ces textes, d'abord dans une volonté de mémoire. En les relisant, nous nous sommes replongées dans cette grève étudiante et nous avons échangé sur nos souvenirs et interprétations provoqués par ces récits. L'exercice de mémoire s'est alors transformé en processus de recherche. Nous avons croisé les récits avec les artefacts que nous avons conservés de cette expérience : notes, courriels, matériel de mobilisation, procès-verbaux d'assemblée, en plus des notes et des photos qui avaient, tout au long de la grève, documenté notre participation au mouvement. À partir de ces différentes sources de données, nous avons interprété et réinterprété ces récits à travers un processus itératif de lecture, de discussions et d'écriture.²

1 For further examples of scholars who write in multiple languages for political and aesthetic reasons see Anzaldúa (2009) and Hausfather (2017).

2 Une version antérieure de cette autoethnographie a été rédigée dans un article de conférence et présentée dans un colloque conjoint entre l'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes (ACÉÉA) / Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) et La société canadienne de sociologie (SCS) / Canadian Sociological Association (CSA), intitulé « 10 years after the 'Maple Spring': Legacies, strikes, and movements for change in the education system and beyond / 10 ans après le Printemps érable : quel héritage pour les grèves et autres mouvements de transformation en éducation et au-delà? »

The Original Narratives

We present these narratives as intertwined, with each voice commenting on key moments. Nothing has been rewritten,³ though the following excerpts have been shortened for the context of this paper, and some parts have been left out. We have consciously chosen to share this raw data in order to involve the reader directly and actively within our experience at the time of the strike. This enables the reader to see and participate with our past and present selves to some degree. This approach contributes to the spirit of our conceptualization of the strike as an "Expansive, Complex Learning Space" (see below), inviting the reader directly into our "soul archive" (see Conclusion). Autoethnography is both "process and product" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011), and we attempt to bring the reader into this process.

L'accident démocratique. Le 6 mars 2012, j'étais dans l'autobus Chicoutimi-Montréal dans un drôle d'état d'esprit. J'étais inquiète et me demandais si j'étais au bon endroit au bon moment. J'avais quitté Montréal en urgence à la nouvelle de l'accident de patinage artistique de ma mère et je devais rentrer précipitamment à Montréal pour le premier vote de grève du département d'éducation de l'Université Concordia. J'étais inquiète de quitter Chicoutimi où ma mère y était clouée à un lit se remettant lentement d'un traumatisme crânien, mais j'étais aussi inquiète que l'assemblée que j'avais initiée ne se déroule pas bien. Ma mère était dans un état stable et mon département était en grande carence démocratique. Il s'agissait de la première assemblée générale à laquelle j'avais été conviée depuis que j'étudiais dans ce département, soit depuis 2007. Y en avait-il eu d'autres avant? Mon ambition n'était pas tellement d'obtenir un « oui » à la grève, mais plutôt d'encourager les étudiants de mon département à se prononcer sur la hausse des frais de scolarité. Après tout, nous étions des étudiants en éducation. Pardon, des étudiants des cycles supérieurs en éducation! J'étais quand même optimiste quant à l'échange que nous aurions entre nous dans cette assemblée. Quand j'arrivai dans la classe qui nous servait de lieu de rassemblement, il y avait foule. Mes collègues avaient en mon absence tout organisé et tout semblait rouler comme sur des roulettes.

I am Going to Meet Audrey. The chance occurrence of a student strike during my PhD studies was extremely revealing. Before the strike my colleagues, my department, my professors, all wore cloaks that I hadn't even noticed were there. The strike stripped off the cloaks, and what lurked beneath was surprising. The strike became my bigger-than-a-class in the absence of class.

The first general assembly brought together 63 students, many of whom I had never laid eyes on. So the first reveal came in the form of droves of colleagues. We came up with two statements, one regarding our position of disapproval regarding the tuition hike, and the second that we agreed to strike until such time as the tuition hikes were cancelled. We easily met quorum during this first meeting. We voted to strike by just over 50%. I remember thinking at the time that I would have been embarrassed had we, as an education department, decided not to strike. I hadn't imagined it would be this close. Reveal #2.

3 En 2012, nous ne connaissions pas l'écriture inclusive. C'est pourquoi le récit en français utilise le masculin pluriel pour désigner un groupe de personnes sans égard à leur genre. Aujourd'hui, nous pensons que cette forme d'écriture n'a plus sa place. Ceci dit, nous avons décidé de conserver la forme originale parce que cela démontre une évolution dans notre pensée qui va de pairs avec le développement de notre pensée féministe.

Oui, le vote de grève passa. J'étais abasourdie et heureuse. Je n'étais plus inquiète, ma mère sortirait de l'hôpital et à l'avenir porterait un casque pour patiner, et moi, et mon département, nous prendrions part à un mouvement social qui marquerait à jamais la face du Québec. L'euphorie ne dura qu'un bref moment. Ce que j'étais loin de me douter, c'est que moi aussi je venais d'être impliquée dans un accident. Un accident démocratique où même un casque n'aurait pas su me protéger de ma conscience collective qui se retourna contre moi. Le 8 mars, alors que j'invitai naïvement mes collègues doctorants à une réflexion collective sur le visage de notre grève, je me retrouvai dans un imbroglio de courriels où on parlait de vote de boycott de cours, de respect des choix personnels de grève ou de non-grève, de peur d'avoir l'air paresseux si nous ne reproduisions pas la classe en d'autres lieux, de liberté citoyenne, de solidarité individuelle, d'individu démocratique, de démontrer de la solidarité de façon confortable, de citoyens autonomes qui exercent leur liberté démocratique selon leur zone de confort, de respect du jugement des individus, etc. Tous ces concepts et ces idées interprétés et ré-interprétés me donnaient comme message, que mes collègues avaient une tout autre compréhension de ce qu'était une grève étudiante, qu'ils n'étaient pas prêts à se regrouper pour autre chose qu'un cours et surtout, que mon insistance à vouloir collaborer dans ce que je croyais être une aventure éducative était perçue comme un non-respect des choix individuels. Je regrette qu'en ce 8 mars, je ne pus constater dans la bouche de mes pairs doctorants, le triomphe de la rhétorique capitaliste des libertés individuelles sur le pouvoir collectif de changement social, grâce à qui, femme ou homme, nous parlions en cette journée commémorative du droit des femmes, d'égal à égal. Si j'avais eu une telle présence d'esprit, peut-être aurais-je pu rappeler que ce gain pour les femmes ne s'était pas fait en préservant l'ordre normal des choses. Et que leur lutte n'avait rien eu de confortable. J'aurais aussi pu répondre à mon collègue masculin qui affirmait avec une touche de mépris que marcher dans les rues n'était pas un moyen très créatif de prendre position, que si j'étais en train d'échanger avec lui, c'était bien parce que des femmes, avant moi, avaient marché dans la rue. Mais non, je n'y pensai pas sur le moment, mais ces idées eurent bien le temps de me venir à l'esprit dans les mois qui suivirent, puisque cet accident démocratique dura plusieurs mois.

Following this strike decision, between the PhD students in my cohort, the idea surfaced that in place of going to class, we should meet informally during class time somewhere near the university, and invite our professor. At the time I thought this was a good idea. When the invite was sent out, an extensive conversation ensued. My friend Audrey, whom at the time I knew I really liked but hadn't yet forged a full friendship, suggested that meeting during class time, outside of class, wasn't so dissimilar from actually having class, and that being on strike meant investing time in the strike. She suggested we come up with creative ways of protesting. Audrey is a Francophone. Her email was direct—a clear invitation to fight tuition hikes. In response to her, the conversation turned very quickly to themes of autonomy, individual choice, and democratic freedom. Banding together to plan and protest was an idea that only Audrey ever brought up. All other colleagues (there were 7 + us) involved in the conversation defended their individual right to approach the strike in any way that felt right to them...this seemed to be the definition of democracy that everybody else adhered to. Audrey responded to every email in detail. Her voice was clearly alternative to the rest. Audrey explained that striking meant sacrificing something and working together on the cause.

Colleagues pointed out that emotions were running high, and Audrey responded that of course emotions were running high, getting to the point of a strike meant that serious things were happening, and that there would be something wrong if emotions weren't running high. Other colleagues grabbed on to the idea being spread by the universities and media that it was not a real strike (a collective democratic decision to cease regular daily endeavors) but a boycott (individual choice to stop buying a product). And that a student strike was illegal, and we had no "power to withhold any resources from our institution" because we are not tied to the labour code.

Audrey's final email informed the class that perhaps it would be better to continue discussions in person, and that the next day she would be heading to our graduate student house to round up markers, poster boards and supplies, and then would head to our department to prepare for a first action. Audrey's ideas were very clear to me. A strike means that we are not going to class, and instead will replace class time with strike action. I felt that this was my duty. It seemed straightforward, yet all of the email noise was a clear indication that it wasn't so clear. In all of it, Audrey seemed to be standing alone. Up to this point I hadn't joined in the conversation, but now I was ready. I very consciously decided to keep my response simple:

"I am going to meet Audrey at the FRC at 12h on Monday"

The best poetry offers the universe in a beholdable size. If the emails were a blizzard, I wanted my statement to be a steel pole. I distilled everything I was feeling into this statement. I am standing beside Audrey. You're either going or not going, in or out. I am going to meet Audrey. And I did. And I was the only one. Reveal #3.

Ces échanges entre mes collègues doctorants ne furent pas les pires incompréhensions auxquelles nous fûmes face. Je dis « nous » parce qu'une étudiante répondit à mon invitation et nous fûmes finalement trois à mener un combat contre l'ignorance, l'apathie et les choix individuels.

À trois (Renée, Judith,⁴ une étudiante à la maîtrise, et moi) avec quelques supporters satellites, nous n'avions pas le courage de piquer nos cours et il aurait été impossible de piquer plus que deux classes à la fois. Alors il ne nous restait qu'à être visibles dans notre département. Tous les cours en éducation pour les étudiants de maîtrise et de doctorats se donnent sur le même plancher, ce qui nous permettait de nous promener avec différents slogans et tactiques pour informer les étudiants. Toute la journée nous tentions d'écrire des prises de position et de les faire signer par nos collègues. Plusieurs étaient inconfortables et certains demandaient de faire retirer leur signature avant les envois aux professeurs. Nous demandâmes à nos professeurs de notre département de prendre position. Après un long silence, nous les relançâmes et apprîmes qu'un des cinq programmes du département nous enverrait une lettre de support. Une joie mitigée nous servi quand même à entrer dans les classes, dont les professeurs avaient publiquement manifesté leur appui, pour distribuer la lettre aux étudiants qui continuaient à assister à leurs cours malgré le mandat de grève renouvelé deux fois. J'eus avec des étudiants mécontents de tout ce dérangement des conversations qui me semblaient pour le moins surréalistes :

Me : Ello, this is to inform you that you don't have to attend class, you're on strike. And ere a letter signed by your professor who said that e supports us and you will not be academically penalized for participating in this action for accessible education.

A student : Read animal farm!

Me: What?

A student : Animal Farm, George Orwell wrote this.

Me: I know the book, I just don't understand why you're telling me this.

A student : Read it!

Me: Ok, I will, but could you tell me what's the relationship you're seeing here.

No further answer.

It became immediately apparent that Anglophones had no idea how to strike, (me included) or what it really meant to strike. Though our vote was close, we had collectively voted to strike. The mandate of the strike was to cease going to class. Without solidarity, the power of the striking students was obviously compromised. I soon realized that this extreme individualism that had first reared its head in our emails, was widespread. Everyone was concerned first and foremost with their own situations. The striking French universities and CEGEPs were really on strike. They were picketing, and making noise, everyday. They were letting the government know what they were thinking. Concordia's soundtrack became "what about me?" I was shocked that an education department could be so disconnected and self-focused during a strike about accessible education. Reveal # 4.

The students of one particular professor felt they had no choice but to go to class. In order to work on this problem with the students, we decided that we would ask this professor if during break-time, we could briefly address the students, in order to be sure that they were well informed and could have the opportunity to voice their opinion by voting on the strike mandate. During their break time, we saw the professor. I approached him by politely saying hello and introducing myself, and, mid-sentence, I was met with complete dismissal. Not a conversation, not an "I would prefer you didn't", but a complete decapitation of my question, with the swipe of a hand followed by the wake of the speed-walking away from me. I was shocked that a professor in education, could be so rude and close-minded. Reveal #6. I explained to Audrey what had taken place and immediately followed in his wake, entering the classroom. As I stepped in I heard a student say, "have you seen those hippy people outside protesting?" To which I replied "I am one of those people. If you are not interested in continuing the strike, then you are in need of the information required to vote at your next general assembly. If you disagree with the strike, this will be your chance to say so." And I started writing the information on the board while Audrey started to tell people that if they felt afraid not to come to class but wanted to express their support of the strike, then they should come to our strike headquarters for a red square to wear to class. And, would you believe, some people did drop by. They had questions about our position, and about the strike in general. Many great conversations ensued. The office was actually buzzing, Judith, Audrey and I all engaged in conversations with different people. One man, unsure at first about the strike, left with a red square. This was one of my favorite moments. Sometimes, people actually do want to engage in conversation, and are affected. Reveal # 7.

Quand dehors, 200 000 étudiants se battaient pour l'éducation contre les politiques néo-libérales de notre gouvernement, nous, au cinquième étage dans un corridor de tapis

gris, nous nous battions contre nous-mêmes, les étudiants en éducation. Résultat: la plupart des cours eu lieu avec une bonne assistance, notre grève devint un boycott, je m'aliénai une bonne partie des étudiants et des professeurs de mon département, je fus menacée d'être coulée par celui qui fut mon directeur de maîtrise et je dus ravalier tous mes principes et me retrouvai en classe à la session d'automne, face à mes collègues scabs malgré un mandat de grève jamais défait.

Analysis

The Strike as an Expansive, Complex Learning Space

The unfolding of the strike itself, through our autoethnographic writings, created a spatiotemporal pedagogical space that has continued to expand into the present. Since the strike, our knowledge and understanding of feminism has deepened. This work has provided a clearer feminist lens through which to examine our past texts, further emphasizing the idea that the personal is political. Looking back, it is obvious that serious embodied learning was taking place, and that our participation in the strike was the enactment of radical pedagogy (Freire, 1968/2000) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1994) from a social movement learning perspective (Chovanec, 2004; Clover, Butterwick & Collins, 2016; Hall, 2006; Holford, 1995; Holst, 2002; Roy, 2007; Walters, 2005). It is also obvious to us now that the strike revealed the power of the patriarchy to divide, where we would like to highlight the power of friendship to break habitual perspectives, come to understand new perspectives, and enable solidarity. Although both original texts can be characterized differently in terms of tone, they echo similar sentiments, while highlighting the significant role of friendship in learning and solidarity. In feminist, adult education, and social movements studies, friendship has been characterized as necessary to feminist movements (Comer, Ha et Ruault, 2018; Dahl, 2022; Roseneil, 2011) and to counteracting the modern liberal emphasis on individualism (Friedman, 1997). Our return to our autoethnographic texts from 2012 is a second layer of reflective practice in which we activate learning in the light of the present.

Reading Emotions Between the Lines

Un premier constat qui ressort de l'exercice d'écriture d'intercaler nos deux voix est la concordance de nos récits. On retrouve dans les deux récits deux événements que l'on pourrait qualifier de déclencheurs: le vote de grève et les échanges de courriels entre pairs doctorants. D'ailleurs, les titres de chacun des récits font référence à ces deux événements: le vote de grève est « L'accident démocratique » décrit par Audrey et « I am Going to Meet Audrey » est le message que Renée envoie à ses pairs et qui met fin aux échanges de courriels. Au-delà de la concordance des événements, les récits révèlent une lecture différente de l'expérience partagée transpirant dans la forme et le ton donné à chacun des récits.

Un deuxième constat est celui de l'ampleur de la charge émotive de l'expérience. À l'instar des travaux de Hausfather (2017, 2021), nous reconnaissons la place prépondérante des émotions dans une expérience de grève étudiante. À la suite de ce constat, nous pouvons penser que cette charge émotive est à l'origine du besoin de faire récit et peut-être celui d'en faire une autoethnographie afin de mieux comprendre ces émotions. En s'appuyant sur plusieurs écrits à propos de l'autoethnographie (Bochner, 2001; Ellis, 1997, 1995; Jago, 2002; Spry, 2001), Holman Jones (2005) nous rappelle qu'il s'agit d'une méthodologie dans laquelle

les émotions sont d'une grande importance pour comprendre et théoriser les relations entre le soi, le pouvoir et la culture. Les textes autoethnographiques nous permettent de créer une expérience d'émotions palpables en nous connectant tout en nous séparant d'autres façons de savoir, d'être et d'agir sur le monde.

On peut lire dans « L'accident démocratique » la déception d'Audrey de ne pas avoir vécu l'expérience de solidarité qu'elle espérait avec ses pairs et la frustration de ne pas avoir été comprise. La trame de fond du récit est celle du malentendu et le ton sarcastique exprime l'amertume. Le sarcasme est présent à l'amorce du récit avec la comparaison entre le vote de grève et l'accident de la mère-le dénouement de l'assemblée générale, un oui pour la grève, étant présenté comme un accident, quelque chose qui ne serait pas arrivé si les membres avaient été prudents, s'opposant ainsi, à une prise de décision éclairée. Tout au long du récit, la frustration de la protagoniste est tangible. Nous pouvons l'attribuer à un sentiment d'impuissance face à des injustices, mais aussi face au sentiment d'être mal comprise. Mal comprise par ses professeur-es, son institution et son groupe de pairs dans sa perspective de ce qu'est une grève étudiante, mais aussi dans ce qu'elle est : une Québécoise francophone socialement impliquée qui étudie dans une université anglophone en contexte québécois. Une émotion souvent ressentie dans le cadre de ses études lors desquelles cette identité, à la fois portée et perçue, la positionne comme celle qui doit représenter et expliquer le point de vue des francophones sur des enjeux sociopolitiques. Une posture qui peut entraîner un sentiment de solitude devant une majorité qui penserait ces enjeux autrement. Le message de Renée, « I am Going to Meet Audrey », vient interrompre l'incompréhension qui a pour effet d'isoler Audrey et ouvre ainsi la possibilité de créer de nouvelles solidarités.

Le récit de Renée est sous le signe de la révélation. Elle ponctue les événements racontés en les nommant Reveal #1 jusqu'à Reveal #7. Dans chacune des révélations se trouvent des situations qui s'avèrent être des occasions d'apprentissage. Elle fait des découvertes, tantôt joyeuses, tantôt difficiles, comme le geste du professeur qui la balaie de son passage, ou encore les discours individualistes de ses pairs qui l'amènent à réaliser que l'université rassemble différents positionnements politiques qui ne sont pas toujours progressistes. Ces apprentissages se produisent sans rancœur ni abattement. Au contraire, ils sont un moteur qui la pousse à agir. À la suite du geste du professeur, elle entre dans la classe d'un pas décidé, et ce, sans attendre de permission, et elle s'identifie comme gréviste malgré les commentaires désobligeants d'un étudiant. Ce récit se termine sur une note d'espoir avec des personnes étudiantes qui viennent s'informer et discuter de la grève. Même si les deux récits contiennent des leçons à tirer, l'expérience de Renée semble somme toute plus positive. Après tout, en plus d'être l'histoire d'une grève, « I am Going to Meet Audrey » est aussi une histoire d'amitié.

Breaking Habits through Friendship

Many elements of our experience during this time provide evidence of the power of modernity to perpetually fuel actions, behaviours, and opinions that worked against solidarity. To make this connection we apply two of the eight circular patterns of modernity/coloniality described by Vanessa Machado de Oliveira (2021), in her book *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism*, as analytical tools. Machado de Oliveira tethers modernity to coloniality as a reminder that it is a system maintained by processes that are inherently violent and unsustainable, and reminds us that modernity/

coloniality "cannot exist without expropriation, extraction, exploitation, militarization, dispossession, destitution, genocides, and ecocides" (p.18). Modernity is a part of all of us, and it "predetermines what can be heard" (p. 25). Drawing from Sharon Stein, Machado de Oliveira describes eight pre-cognitive circular patterns (continuity, innocence, recentring, certainty, unrestricted autonomy, leadership, authority, recognition) that prevent us from seeing other possibilities for living and being because these patterns are deeply engrained and thoroughly normalized. Of these eight patterns, we would like to draw attention to the especially significant role of *continuity* and *unrestricted autonomy* in our surrounding context at the time of our writing. Looking back, we argue that these patterns worked against solidarity, and the key factors that interrupted these patterns were feminist notions of friendship and radical imaginings.

Continuity and Unrestricted Autonomy. The circular patterns of *unrestricted autonomy* and *continuity* help us understand the deeply embedded rhetoric of individualism from which our peers were operating. The pattern of unrestricted autonomy turns people away from interdependence and responsibility, and toward free choice, where situations are seen through a cost-benefit analysis (e.g., "I am not accountable to anyone but myself, unless I choose to be" [Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 27]). The dominance of free choice was perpetuated through the desire for continuity, or the security, certainty, and entitlement promised by the existing modernist system, therefore interfering with any choices that could compromise individual advantage (e.g., "I want to transcend colonialism without giving anything up" [p. 27]). It remains quite striking (pun intended), the degree to which the rhetoric of individualism drowned out the possibility of collectivity among our peers.

A certain degree of openness is necessary when engaging in dialogue across divides, to help step out of the deep grooves of these habitual circular patterns. This involves a willingness to listen authentically, and to take the time to reflect on the perspective and opinion of another. Thinking back through the portal of our texts, we remain convinced that the hegemonic stranglehold of individualism, and the accompanying fear of loss, steadfastly held closed the openness needed to receive a contradictory perspective on behalf of our peers. Arguably, friendship was an element that contributed to the interruption of this habit as it allowed for this openness and willingness to listen.

We now see that there was also lack of imagination on behalf of our peers—imagination that can be sparked by this openness to difference. There is some teamwork necessary between openness, listening, and imagination. Most were not able to see any other way of being or engaging outside of what was right for "me." Susy Zepeda (2022) foregrounds the role of imagination within feminist solidarity movements when she explains that the "goal is not unification or homogenization; instead, the vision is to honour differences that create possibilities for radical re-imaginings and ancestral rememberings" (p. 217). Friendship and the capacity to listen to the other across difference can break circular habits and enable radical re-imaginings.

Understanding White Privilege

We now apply two more of the eight circular patterns to our own problematic embodiment of modernity. The statement from Renée's written text, referring to the emails from our peers as a "blizzard" and her desire to stand out from this like a "steel pole," reeks now of a self-righteousness that resonates with both the circular pattern of *recognition* and

that of *authority*. Recognition seeks “affirmation of one’s righteousness, redemption, and exceptionalism” (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 28). This pattern relates to the desire to be perceived as being and doing “good” and is described by Machado de Oliveira as a distraction from the real work necessary to interrupt harmful behaviours. Authority stems from appointing oneself (in this case both Audrey and Renée) as the arbitrator of justice—the one who knows the truth and can discern the transformative path (p. 28). These two patterns characterized our main sentiments at the time of our original reflections, and emanated outward from us, interfering with our own capacity to understand our privileged positions.

What was not so evident at the time of the strike was our privilege as white graduate students with Canadian citizenship. We felt that everyone should join this cause without giving specific consideration to the situation of students of colour, and international students, who may have been in more precarious situations on a variety of fronts. The circular patterns of both recognition and authority are also evident here, as we were fuelled by our own sense of righteousness, while failing to see beyond our own sense of justice. Racism, colonialism, and sexism were components of the discourse within the strike movement, but they didn’t constitute embodied learning for all, while being harsh realities for many. Although power and identity are embedded in our narratives, privilege and inequality are absent.

Pedagogy of the Strike and Transformative Learning

We borrow Pico’s idea of the pedagogy of the strike (1982, in Gerónimo-López & Tormos-Aponte, 2021) and conceive the strike as a pedagogical space that reorganized social relations (Tormos-Aponte, 2019, in Gerónimo-López & Tormos-Aponte, 2021). As pointed out by Gerónimo-López and Tormos-Aponte, who engaged in and theorized about the Puerto Rican student movement, the strike “becomes a commoning act when it produces new practices of sharing, knowledge production, and the development of solidarities that capitalism must constrain in order to reproduce itself” (p. 16). We can draw a parallel with our own experience where the means of production and sharing of knowledge were transformed, passing from the formal classroom with a professor and students to the informal interactions with professors, administration, and students in such physical spaces as department hallways, strike headquarters, and streets, and in virtual/written spaces through emails, administrative directives, and social and mass media.

The pedagogy of the strike has the potential to develop and deepen critical consciousness about fundamental issues. Learning to resist the commodification of education and neoliberalism comes with learning about repression, contempt of political elites, and dynamics of power. In the microcosm of our department, we were dismissed and depicted negatively, which echoed the broader picture represented by mass media: students are violent, spoiled brats and a threat to democracy. The rhetoric of individualism opposed our reality. We were coming together and learning about democracy in student assemblies. We learned about solidarity in the streets, established relationships with other social struggles, and thereby began to recognize and address colonialism, sexism, and racism. Democracy and solidarity, in this case supported through friendship, are the fundamental basis of feminist social movements. Our experiences taught us that solidarity is a necessary part of democracy because it played a key role in transforming our perspectives (Mezirow, 1994). This was needed to unlearn circular habits related to modernism. And it was a necessary

ongoing shift for white female graduate students who wished to take part in social transformation for social justice.

In Conclusion: Autoethnography as a Soul Archive

Autoethnography is what allowed us to dig into our representations of reality in our given context. Like a soul archive, this practice can bring understanding of actions, emotions, and consciousness. From a radical-feminist-adult education perspective, a better understanding of the development of critical consciousness (Freire, 1968/2000) from a strike experience could make an important contribution to nurturing future mobilization. The idea of the soul archive is a poetic concept that perfectly encapsulates what we have come to think of as a treasured gift from our past selves. The autoethnographic accounts "I am Going to Meet Audrey" and "L'accident démocratique" made our emotions and perspectives of the time concrete (in this case through written documentation, though such concretizing can take different forms), opening this spatiotemporal portal to a moment in the past that we can continue to work with and grow from over time. In this sense, the soul archive is a living thing, and a gift that keeps on giving.

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