CANNOT FIND FILE: pdftitlepage-accessible.princexml
André C. Drainville
Professor
Department of sociology
Pavillon Charles-De Koninck
1030, avenue des Sciences-Humaines
Local 3469
Université Laval
Québec (Québec) G1V 0A6
CANADA
Tel. 418 656-2227
andre.drainville@soc.ulaval.ca

André C. Drainville is professor of political science at Laval University, in Québec city, Canada. For two decades, he has been thinking from situated episodes about limits to world ordering and prospects for resistance. He has authored two dozen articles on this subject, as well as two books: Contesting Globalization: Space and Place in the World Economy (Routledge: 2004) and A History of World Order and Resistance: The Making and Unmaking of Global Subjects (Routledge: 2012). He has also published two novels: Les carnets jaunes de Valérien Francoeur, qui a crevé quelques enflés (L’Effet Pourpre: 2002) and Anxious Moments Before the Next Big Event (Skrev Press 2007). Presently, he is at work on a book about subjectivities, contending in places where world ordering meets its opposite.

Present in the world economy:
Québec’s students in the springtime

On February 13th, 2012, a coalition of student federations in Québec called for an unlimited general strike against government plans to increase university tuition fees by 75% over 5 years. In days and weeks that followed, student associations, gathered in general assemblies, voted on whether or not to answer the call. By mid-March, three

1 I wish to thank Paul-Émile Auger, Régis Coursin, Dimitri Della Faille, Martin Hébert, Mélissa Héon and François-Olivier Chené for their thoughts.

2 The 2012 strike was organized by four student federations: the Coalition Large de l'Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante (CLASSÉ), an ad hoc coalition assembled by the syndicalist ASSÉ; the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ) and the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ), both representative bodies; and the Table de concertation étudiante du Québec (TaCEQ), that federates student associations.
quarters of the province’s university and college students had joined the movement. Thus began what was the most significant season of social protest in Québec’s modern history.

The printemps québécois is an event that took place in its own time and fashion, in the context of a world-wide wave of protest against neo-liberal world order. In a critical juncture when a shudder of change was passing through many places where neo-liberal world order was encountering situated resistances, students in Québec defended their share of the commons against a local instance of primitive accumulation. So fused together have been local happenings and global sense of occasion during this episode that it has been difficult to think from it about the relation between, on the one hand, what belongs specifically to a situated meeting of power and counter-power and, on the other, the worldwide movement of resistance against neo-liberal world ordering. Thus has our understanding of a crucial event in the history of Québec been robbed of its share of universality. Dialectically, what we know of resistance to world order has been made poorer for being cheated of an opportunity to think from the manner in which actually-existing people struggle in places where they encounter neo-liberal discipline.

Structured for the most part around descriptive accounts, mindful of the unreclaimable truth of events, this text explores the manner in which the dialectical relationship between globality and locality unfolded in Québec during the spring of

---

3 In Québec, ‘college’ refers to publically-funded Collèges d’enseignements général et professionnel (CEGEPs) –what in the US would be called junior colleges. According to the Ministère de l’éducation, des loisirs et des Sports (MELS, Québec’s Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sports) 179,131 students entered CEGEPs in September 2011 and 220,222 entered universities. On the day of the first so-called ‘national demonstration’, of March 22nd, 310 000 were on strike.

4 The term printemps québécois was used by commentators to relate the effervescence of the moment to the so-called ‘Arab spring’ (printemps arabe) of the previous year. Wishing to nod knowingly to the sap of maple trees –that begins flowing in the springtime-- but succeeding only in painting event in an antiquated, neo-colonial, idea of Québécois as French-Canadians (represented by the maple leaf found on the Canadian flag), France’s media, Le Monde in particular, pushed the homonymy and popularized the term printemps érable. On this, see the blog of semiology student René Lemieux 2012. Brève traductologique sur le caractère parodique de la grève étudiante, du “printemps érable” aux manifestations de casseroles. In Trahir. http://trahir.wordpress.com/2012/05/28/lemieux-parodie/.
In the first part, I lean on existing literature to situate the history of Québec’s social movements in relation to historic waves of resistance to world ordering. In the second part, I look at neo-liberal attempts at commodifying higher education in Québec in relation to the making of a new, would-be global, knowledge society. In the third part, I discuss how, during the printemps québécois, a global sense of context helped carry a situated encounter between world order and social forces beyond what locality on its own would have borne. Charged by a sense of themselves as actors on a global stage, social forces in Québec made common cause of the struggle of university students; fearing the ghost of the global crowd, governments reacted with impolitic intransigence, leaving themselves exposed and with no other recourse but to reach out of the encounter and call a general election. In conclusion, I reflect on what this episode teaches us about resistance to neo-liberal world ordering.

Québec in the world

Trapped in the abstraction of Canadian federalism or, a contrario, wrapped up in the myth of its own authenticity, québécois history seems the spasmodic thing of a people at once unbelonging and sacralized. Properly situated, and contextualized in relation to power and resistances in the organized totality of the world, it regains both integrity and universality (Drainville 2011).

---

5 This text is part of a broad research program built on a conception of situation drawn from Jean-Paul Sartre and Alain Badiou, and on Walter Benjamin’s idea of ‘dialectical truth images’ (about which more below). In it, I try to think from situated episodes of encounter between locality and globality, about limits to world ordering and prospects for resistance. The first text, written before the research program had been deliberately articulated, was published in 2001: “Québec City 2001 and the Making of Transnational Subjects.” In Socialist Register 2001, edited by Leo Panitch and Colin Leys. London-New York: Merlin Press. In 2004, Contesting Globalization: Space and Place in the World Economy (London: Routledge), articulated the theoretical intent at the basis of historical research. Last year’s A History of World Order and Resistance: The Making and Unmaking of Global Subjects (London: Routledge), fleshed out some of concepts, developed the idea of ‘modes of relation to the world economy’ broadened the historical framework beyond neo-liberal world ordering, and drew some implications for politics. A close companion to the present text was published three years ago: “Present in the World Economy: The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (1996–2007).” Globalizations 5 (3):357-377. Two texts are pending: ‘The Moral Economy of the Global Crowd’ and ‘Between situations and shudder: The “question of the subject”, prolonged’.
During the world-wide wave of resistances that took place in the world economy between the end of the mercantilist world order and the settling of the world order of Pax Britannica (Chase-Dunn and Gills 2003), little resistances everywhere got charged with a broader sense of context. What was infra-political (slaves on plantations dragging their feet, feigning illness or poisoning their masters’ dogs, agricultural laborers committing ‘acts of darkness’, weavers working slow, etc.), came to be more open and collective: slaves rebelled en masse, the rural poor moved from poaching to riots and the Canuts rebelled (Craton 1979; Apthener 1963; Hincker 2011). Canadiens for their part, moved beyond quite little resistances (the grumbling of militiamen, peasants behaving in indecorous fashion, cutting the manes off horses, refusing to make themselves liable to corvées), to mass politics (Mckay 2000; Wallot 1990). There were political charivaris and riots against conscription; strikes (of carpenters and joiners, of pilots on the Saint-Laurence, of workers digging the Lachine and Beauharnois canals, etc.) took on a more social character; botched elections became occasions for public confrontation with British soldiers –who, in turned, seized pretexts to disciplined assembled others. Showing defiant internationalism, young Patriotes established chapters of Fils de la liberté (modeled on the American Sons of Freedom), and they carried the tricolored flag, singing a more radical version of the Marseillaise (Curtis 2004; Harvey 2005; Schull 1997; Wallot 1964).

Thus began eighteen months of intermittent skirmishing, ending with the defeat of Patriotes. A dozen were hung and a hundred sent to penal colonies, where they joined advocates of Irish home rule and sundry others banished from the core of the liberal/colonial world order.

After 1841, canadien society (‘…uninstructed, inactive, unprogressive…’ wrote Lord Durham in his Report on the Affairs of British North America), was made to settle into a near-colonial position, awkwardly fixed between white settlers and natives. ‘Cast behind slick walls of fear (the normal refuge of defeated peoples) …’, trapped in abstractions and reduced to survivance by ‘... a rotten confederacy of clerico-nationalist ideologues...’, it
was cut off both from itself and from its own universality. La grande noirceur (‘the long darkness’) lasted for more than a hundred years.

In the 1960’s, the ‘tricontinental revolution against US and European hegemony’ (Davis 2007) again charged social relations at the very core of the world economy, giving blacks and natives in the United States a sense of themselves as nations within nations (Woodard 1999), and avant-garde groups from the the Brigate Rosse to the Rote Armee Fraktion the swagger of radical subjectivity, inciting police riots and extra-judicial killings — or serving as their pretext. In Québec, the shudder made social movements understand themselves in tune with the politics of decolonization. Infra-political struggles (for independent cinema, against authoritarian urbanism and police brutality, for cooperatives and day-care centers) regained universality; collective actions against symbols of colonial power (the Murdochville strike of 1957, the McGill français movement of 1969, etc.) hitherto lost to the revolution (Vallières 1965), rapidly gained in breath, depth and resonance. The on-going, proteiform, struggle to preserve French language in the Americas reclaimed its share of performative violence (perhaps never more clearly than with Michèle Lalonde’s poem/manifesto Speak White). In tune with avant-garde groups and national liberation movements, Québec indépendantistes of very different persuasions (from the Front the libération du Québec to the Rassemblement pour l’indépendance nationale), recognized themselves as word-universal subjects and, as such, kin to similarly-constituted groups and political tendencies elsewhere, from the

---

6 ‘... Cast behind slick walls of fear’ is translated from the Refus global, a manifesto largely written in the style of automatists by painter/sculptor Paul-Émile Borduas and poet Claude Gauvreau, and co-signed by 15 québécois artists, men and women. It was published in 1948. A ‘... rotten confederacy of clerico-nationalist ideologues ...’ is translated from Nègres Blancs d’Amérique, a virulent charge against British colonialism in Québec, inspired from the black power movement in the US and from Frantz Fanon’s writing on the Algerian war of independence, written, ‘in one go, standing up...’, by Pierre Vallières, while imprisoned in the Manhattan House of Detention for Men in New York City. It was published in 1968.

7 Episodes alluded to here, and many others, are chronicled in Parti Pris, the better known militant review of the period. On Parti Pris itself as avant-garde see Malcom Reid, The Shouting Signpainters New-York: Monthly Press, 1971.

8 Michèle Lalonde’s ‘Speak white’ was first read at the Poèmes et Chansons de la Résistance event, held at the Gesù theatre in Montréal, October 1968. Readers unfamiliar with the resonance of the term in Québec, will want to hear it read by Lalonde herself, in a voice-over illustrated by a slide show put together by Québec film-makers Pierre Falardeau and Julien Poulin: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6I0l9ZJGYuU.
Algerian *Front the libération nationale* to the Bamako-based *Rassemblement démocratique africain*. Federalists opposing the movement of *Québécois* nationalism seemed every bit ‘white Rhodesians’ and indeed they behaved with the impunity colonizers habitually reserve for themselves when dealing with colonized: ‘Just watch me’ proffered scornful Canadian Prime Minister Pierre-Elliot Trudeau (a French-Canadian still rather than a *Québécois*, wholly stuck in abstractions), when asked by CBC journalist Tim Ralfe on Parliament Hill in Ottawa how far he intended to go to quell the movement of *indépendantistes*. Three days later, the War Measures’ Act was invoked -- for the first time since the Second World War, when it had been used to justify the internment of Japanese-Canadians. Straightaway, the Canadian army was sent to occupy the streets of Montréal. Five-hundred militants of every tendency were arrested in weeks that followed. Again, Québec society was ‘…put in its place...’ at the near-margins of Canada.10

To secure the social basis of global accumulation (Schwab and Smadja 1996), global regulatory agencies began working in the middle of the 1980’s to create more sustainable conditions for market society. Having entered into ‘social construction’ mode (Tabb 2000), the World Bank et al. began attacking corruption and inefficiency, encouraging ‘low intensity’ democracy’, furthering surveillance and discipline, working to dodge state-based regulation in order to mine existing societies for ‘best practices’ to generalize (Wolfensohn 1997). In the process, regulatory agencies reached more deeply into existing societies than ever did world order, undermining ‘…all particular life worlds, cultures, and traditions, cutting across them, catching them in its vortex’ (Zizek 2008), subsuming ‘…the entire realm of life’ to the exigencies of global accumulation (Hardt and Negri 2000). Never has world ordering (an unsure, contradictory process)

---

9. The *Front de Libération du Québec* was a direct action group formed in the early 1960’s. The *Rassemblement pour l’indépendance nationale* was a social-democratic independentist political party formed in 1963. In 1968, it merged with the *Mouvement souveraineté association* and the *Ralliement national* to form the *Parti Québécois*. The expression ‘White Rhodesian’ was used by MSA and PQ founder René Lévesque with relation to anglophones of Westmount, a near-colonial enclave in the heart of Montréal.

10. ‘I am trying to put Québec in its place — and the place of Québec is in Canada.’ Trudeau famously proclaimed during the 1968 election, his first as leader of the Liberal party of Canada. For context, see Robert Lewis et al. 1968. Trudeau, 30 Years Later, in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. 


reached so deeply and with such totalizing ambitions into every fold and recess of existing sociability; never, in turn, have so many struggled on such diverse terrains and with such a strong sense of themselves as world-universal subjects.

In Québec, a pervasive sense of globality has given context to varied resistances against the local ways and consequences of neo-liberal world ordering. From those so deeply buried in the infra-political that they barely register as resistances at all (shoppers choosing locally-produced foods, urbanites raising chicken in their backyard, autonomous camps, local solidarity networks, etc.), to more overt actions (the occupation of bank buildings and government offices, squats, tent cities, demonstrations against export-led development, direct actions and mass demonstrations) scarcely any part of the repertory of social movements that has constituted itself in Québec since the last referendum (1995) can be understood outside of the context of neo-liberal world ordering and resistances (Coutu 1999; Laville 1994; Sabourin 1997). As were Patriotes and indépendantistes, they are, in their constitution and in their subjectivity, at once, of Québec and of the world.

We have arrived at the threshold of the printemps québécois.

**Situated circumstances**

That the constitutional division of powers between the federal and provincial governments in Canada makes education a (contested) matter of provincial jurisdiction, and that the government of Québec is the sole legislative body representing the continent’s francophone population, has installed matters of language and education at the very core of struggles for Québec independence. It also defined the proto-state that would be born of Québec’s provincial decolonization a century after Canadian confederation, in 1867. The so-called modèle québécois --Québec’s take on the Keynesian social compromise-- was largely marked out by i) the nationalization of electricity companies (1962), ii) the establishment of the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec (the state-run pension plan manager, 1965), iii) the creation of the Service (1963), then of the Ministry (1965) of immigration, and iv) by the so-called réforme Parent (1965) –that secularized secondary education in Québec, created a new genus of
community colleges as well as a new public regime of ‘multiversities’, characterized by a concern for democratization and public access (Donald, 1997).

In this context, student associations in Québec played in the formative years of the Québec proto-state a role as privileged partners in the management of education (Gagnon 1960). This, significantly, was inscribed in the very manner in which student associations would be funded. As Keynesian unions were financed throughout Canada by mandatory dues collected by employers through paycheck deductions –through the so-called Rand formula-- Québec’s ‘Law on accreditation and financing of student associations’ provides that student unions and associations be financed from dues drawn directly off tuition fees, by universities and colleges themselves.

One of the legacies of this situation is a relatively public, relatively uncommodified, system of higher education. While Québec never moved to abolish tuition fees altogether as the Parent report had recommended, it has maintained them at North American low for thirty years. During that period, professors’ unions and students’ associations in Québec everywhere gave expression to the historic esprit de corps of academics (except at anglo McGill University; where professors are not unionized), and public financing, higher than anywhere else in Canada (Lacroix and Trahan 2007), stayed comparatively respectful of the relative autonomy of academic agencies. This gave Québec universities, the ancien régime feel of an independent community of mind and work.11

This is the commons, that neoliberalism in Québec, in tune with neoliberalism everywhere else, has sought to commodify. Plainest have been increases in tuition fees. In 1990, the liberal government of Robert Bourassa tripled fees, from the $540/year fixed by the Parent Commission to $1 668/year. In October 1996, Pauline Marois --then Minister of education for the social-democratic Parti québécois-- announced plans to increase fees by another 30%. Then also began a steady increase in various and sundry

11 The report of the Parent Commission (p.295) described universities as a ‘... communauté d'esprit et de travail’ (a community of work and spirit). The 1979 Report of the Commission d’étude sur les universités, presided over by Pierre Angers, defined universities in similarly communal terms. On this, see Comité de coordination, Commission d’étude sur les universités – Rapport final, Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1979, 228 p.
‘associated costs’ and ‘institutional fees’. In 2003, the Liberal government of Jean Charest, as part of its broad attack on the *modèle québécois*, increased tuition fees again to $2,168/year. Two years later, the Charest government announced a major re-engineering of the grant-and-loan system, converting $103 millions of student grants into loans. In October 2008, Michelle Courchesne, Liberal Minister of education, introduced in the legislative assembly two broad bills on the governance of universities and CEGEPs that purported to install more efficient and business-minded Boards of Directors as key governing agencies, thus bringing into academic institutions themselves a neo-liberal logic of performance (Sabourin, 2009).

Beyond upping the ticket price of education, the commodification of higher education in Québec has entailed an ambitious restructuring of the academic mode of knowledge production (Martin and Ouellet 2010). As elsewhere in the core of the global knowledge-based economy (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 1996), Keynesian-style public financing has been systematically put to question for its lack of transparency, inefficiencies and idiosyncrasies, and for contributing too little to economic growth (Legault 2000; Ratel 2005). By broad edicts and simple budgetary attrition, this financing has been replaced by more intrusive, targeted and contingent financing, slanted towards the research and development requirements of private enterprises and ministries who, having forfeited the relative autonomy of Keynesian years, now essentially function as problem-solvers for private concerns, to grow ‘human capital’ (Québec 2003, 2004), or insure the usefulness of social knowledge. Hitherto shaped by corporatist ideas on the autonomous, self-disciplined, meeting of thinking subjects engaged in *disputatio* and research, academics in Québec – professors and students both—now meet as individuals increasingly separated from one another, in places overseen by a small nebulae of would-be partners and quality control agencies (Martin and Simon Tremblay-Pepin 2011; Québec 2004; Sabourin 2008).

For the most part, resistances to this broad reinvention have been buried in infra politics or it has been channeled by Keynesian unions fighting rearguard struggles to protect privileges. As elsewhere at the core of the world economy, Québec professors, struggling against demotion as chosen interlocutors of the State, have dutifully participated in all summits and consultations, both exceptional and on-going, only ever
acting against the new order of things and thoughts in unassuming, confined, or individual ways (Hall 1993, Prichard and Willmott 1997: 288): ‘waiting out managerial fads’, drawing on popular images of absentmindedness to get out of administrative or clerical tasks (Anderson, 2008; Prichard, 1987, 2000), burning out quietly, burying themselves in the writing of academic novels (Showalter 2009; ______ 2002), jostling in the op-ed pages of Le Devoir or the Bulletin of the Fédération québécoise des professeures et professeurs d'université, or in publications of the Table des partenaires universitaires. Students, for their part, have absented themselves from classes or been there in appearance only, sleeping or texting. Falsifying bibliographies or buying ready-made assignments from paper mills, differentiated only by language from students elsewhere at the neo-liberal core of the new knowledge economy.

Exceptions have been student strikes – held in the spirit of collective bargaining: regularly, Québec students have engaged in collective actions against attempts at commodifying higher education. In October 1968, CEGEPs students, quite deliberately borrowing from the repertory of students in Paris, struck in favor of broadening the grant-in-aid system and to hasten the creation of a second francophone university in Montréal (what would become the Université du Québec network). This was the first student strike held in the regime set up by the Parent reform. In 1974 and 1978, CEGEP and university students struck against the new Test d’aptitudes pour les études universitaires (TAEU, an broad aptitude test), seen to curtail public access to higher education, in favor of broadening the grant system and in defense of electoral pledges to abolish tuition fees that had been made by the Parti québécois. In 1986, students struck against fee increases announced by then-finance Minister Gérard D. Lévesque. Two weeks into the strike, Lévesque came back on his decision and promised to freeze tuition fees for ‘at least a decade. Four years later, fee increases announced by the Liberal party precipitated a seven-weeks strike, led by the Association nationale des étudiants et des étudiantes du Québec (ANEQ) and the Fédération des étudiants et étudiantes du Québec (FEEQ). In 1996, a broad student movement – that drew inspiration and some of mannerisms from the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional—confronted the Parti québécois decision to increase tuition fees. Again fees were frozen, but a penalty imposed on students that had failed classes (what some called a tax on failure). In 2005, roughly half of the students in
Québec undertook a general unlimited strike in opposition of cuts in the provincial grant-and-loan system (Beauregard-Langelier 2007). This strike ended on a compromise largely understood as a rendition of the student movement.

In the fall of 2010, the Liberal party, drawing from the Parti Québécois’ propensity for summitry (Bourque 2000), summoned all partners in education to a summit on the future of universities, where the funding and performances of all institutions of higher education, and their contribution to the development of Québec, would be discussed. In the months and weeks that led to the summit, references were made to the Parent reform and the necessity to reinvent the modèle québécois in the age of the new knowledge economy. On December 6, 2010, the summit itself began, governance-style, with a broad discourse on the imperative necessity to forego politics and concentrate on the task at hand. As soon as the plenary session ended, student groups and professors’ unions walked out in protest. Thus ended, with nary a whimper, the last summit before the 2012 student strike. To date, no assessment has been made of this failed meeting beyond a terse communique, still posted on the site of the Ministry, in frozen testimony of a half-baked attempt at creating consensus on the commodification of higher education.

Three months after that, a provincial budget was adopted by the governing Liberal party which announced a tuition increase of $325/year for five years, to begin in the fall of 2013 (bringing fees from $2 168/year in 2011-2012 to $3793/year in 2016-2017).12 On February 13th, 2012, after months of preparation, a general unlimited strike was at last called by students associations at Université du Québec à Montréal and at Université Laval in Québec city (whence this is written). For the first time, a student strike in Québec would be waged by students whose entire run through the school system had

12 The tuition increase was only the most salient modality of the so-called budget Bachand of March 2011. The budget also called for a full quarter of public financing to be directed to the funding of publicity campaigns of universities, and for another quarter to be earmarked for private research. As well, a new $160 million Fonds pour l’excellence et la performance universitaire (lit. ‘Fund for university excellence and performance’) was established, with a quarter of that sum to be used to encourage private donations. On this, see Martin, Eric, and Simon Tremblay-Pepin. 2011. Faut-il vraiment augmenter les frais de scolarité ? Huit arguments trompeurs sur la hausse. Institut de recherche et d’informations socio-économique, page 3.
been shaped by the vocational ways of the new knowledge economy, against the most ambitious attempt at commodification.

*The printemps québécois*

So quickly, and at times in ways so overwrought by alluded-to meanings, did events unfold during the *printemps québécois*, that the season can best be approached—in the manner of Walter Benjamin—by way of dialectical *thought-images*, roughly ordered chronologically.13

Starting on March 26, and most mornings thereafter for the whole of the strike, architecture students from Laval University occupied the divide of Avenue Honoré-Mercier, the main thoroughfare into the city from northern suburbs. Wearing on their heads red cubes made of cardboard, they lined-up silently and solemnly for the duration of rush-hour (an event of short duration in Québec city). Mixing a very architectural sense of rigor in space and a very Dada disregard for instrumentalities, they installed themselves in a place bereft of presence in a way that both clarified and prolonged the ongoing struggle.14

On April 3rd, 2012, at Laval University in Québec city, an undergraduate course in anthropology was held under judicial duress following an injunction issued by judge Bernard Godbout of the Québec Superior Court on behalf of one Laurent Proulx, a former soldier in Afghanistan taking elective courses to qualify for admission in the law program who had argued against everyone (the university itself, the university-wide student association, the professors’ union, the lecturers’ union, the social sciences students’ association, the anthropology students’ association) that his individual right to an

---


14 For an excellent compendium of creative actions undertaken during the strike, see Maude Bonenfant, A. Glinoer and M-E. Lapointe, 2013, *Le Printemps québécois*, Montréal: Écosociété.
education had been violated by a collective decision of the general assembly of anthropology students to join the province-wide strike movement. Escorted to his classroom by security forces, Professor Hebert --ironically scheduled to lecture on conflict resolution (Allard 2012)-- turned judicial obligations into pedagogical opportunity. With security guards and media at the door lending something of an ‘occupation’ feel to the class, and assembled students behaving very much in the fashion of the moment (with ‘Up Twinkles’ indicating approval and ‘Down Twinkles’ disapproval), he drew on Quakers and Graeber (2007) and leaned on invited colleagues to give soldier Proulx a proper lesson on the specificities of academic situations. Forced beyond their pat defense of academic freedom by the very academic ‘give and take of a live community’ (Keller 2011), six gathered professors under siege lectured on dialogical teaching, invoking Socrates and Fanon and Freire, giving details of student strikes in Paris (that of 1229 and that of 1968), contextualizing the present juncture, lecturing on historical junctures in general, engaging in disputation with assembled students. Awakened to the intrinsic possibilities of their situation by the very threat that had brought them to stand together as colleagues, borrowing from defining practices of academia, they prolonged and formalized the circumstantial knowledge of those assembled, charging it with historical imagination.

On April 17, Thibault Martin, a sociology professor at the Université du Québec en Outaouais, was arrested for having interfered with police work. The previous day, he had stood in a human chain guarding the entrance of a university building occupied peacefully by students, under threat of invasion by police in full riot gear—who had been called on campus by Rector Vaillancourt, seeking the immediate application of an injunction issued an hour previously by Judge Suzanne Tessier of Québec’s superior court. Answering questions from journalists, Professor Martin had denounced the presence of police on campus. On that day, moderation won out: a truce was negotiated and students were allowed to walk out of the building without being charged. Going to his office the following morning, Professor Martin was summarily warned by police –that

15 Judge Tessier had ruled in favor of Ugo de Montigny, an MBA student whose lawyers (amongst whom was Lucien Boucher, a retired professor from the department of administration at UQO, and former head of the professor’s union) had pleaded for the immediate suspension of pickets.
had returned *en masse* to patrol the corridors of the university— to stay clear of the area. Arguing his pressing need to get a book for a conference he was to give that afternoon in Montréal, 200 kilometers away, he was forcibly tackled to the ground, under the approving gaze of both the secretary general of UQO and the Vice-Rector for human resources. Neither intervened. Handcuffed, Professor Martin was dragged out of his office building, his feet dangling in the air, into custody. Charged with having intervened with police work (a criminal offense), he was released a few hours later, in time to attend his conference. Asked by journalists to comment, Rector Vaillancourt disingenuously defended his decision to call police on campus by deploring its necessity. His resignation was subsequently demanded by both the professors’ and the student’s unions (Ebacher 2012).

Three days later, with a thousand students protesting at the door of the *Salon du Plan Nord*, Prime Minister Charest quipped drollly to assembled representatives of the mining industry, that students seemed ‘... so very keen to get in ...’.16 Egged on by the jocular laughter of the crowd, he followed suit with an improvised punch-line that made thinly veiled allusion to labor camps and spoke volumes of his scorn for students: ‘I will find them jobs ... in the North ... far from here’.17 Three days after, students in Montréal held a first nightly march through the city. The crowd’s leading refrain told of its indignation: ‘*Cha-rest de-hors, on va-t’rouver une jobbe dans l’nord*’.18 Nightly marches would endure to the end of the *printemps* (Asselin 2012).

16 The *Plan Nord* is an initiative of the Liberal government to open the mineral-rich northern part of Québec to foreign investors. To that effect, more than a billion dollars have been earmarked for infrastructural development over the next 5 years, and some 10 billion more in the following twenty years.

17 Videos of the Charest speech at the *Salon du Plan Nord* can easily be found with very little googling. See for instance: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXg6zHPaMEM. Readers unfamiliar with Québec culture will want to see this video alongside Pierre Falardeau’s *Le temps des bouffons*, a militant documentary filmed in 1985 on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the *Beaver club*, a private gentlemen’s club in the best colonial tradition, housed in what was then the Queen Elisabeth Hotel. It too is available on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0STEvvYZtY0.

18 Lit.: ‘Charest be out! We’ll find you a job up north’.
On May 22nd, 176 people were kettled-in by the Québec city police, on commercial rue Saint-Jean in the heart of the historic Faubourg Saint-Jean Baptiste.\textsuperscript{19} Enacting their part in the ritual of global confrontation, police held protestors for two hours in plain view of neighbors, passers-by and bars goers. In the coral, everyone was treated with equal mutism: protestors, passers-by who had just been caught by the unforgiving suddenness of police movements, an elderly couple out for their after-dinner constitutional, local panhandlers sitting on the curb, and one woman who was leaving the hair dressing salon, her hair still wet from the cut. Photographed and handcuffed before a crowd of hundreds, they were all put abroad buses and taken, the lights of motorcycle and police cars flashing, on a winding tours of the suburb which included, perhaps in homage to Humberto Micheletti or Augusto Pinochet, the Colisée Pepsi (home of defunct Québec Nordiques of the National Hockey League) and then to the municipal baseball stadium, before being summarily released under their own recognisance. Interpellated by police under the new emergency act (about which more below), arrestees would eventually be charged for minor traffic violations. At the time of writing, their appeals were still pending.

The dialectics of global presence

As Patriotes and indépendantistes previously struggled \textit{in situ} against local modalities of world ordering --borrowing tactics, strategies and vocabulary as well as a sense of occasion from other places also traversed by the global shudder of the moment, so did students in Québec struggled in the spring of 2012 against situated instances of neo-liberal governance, in ways shaped by the fashions of the day, animated by an undeniable sense of global propinquity.

What is distinct about the present juncture is the matter-of-fact folding of global context in situated events. Between the Patriote rebellion (1837) and the October crisis (1970), evermore complete ‘spatial fixing’ (Taylor 2000; Harvey 2001) made the world

\textsuperscript{19} A decade previously, the faubourg had been the heart of anti-capitalist protests during the 2001 Summit of the Americas. On this, see my "Québec City 2001 and the Making of Transnationals Subjects.\textit{Socialist Register} no. 38, 2002: 15-42.
economy an increasingly abstract terrain occupied by spectral figures (the proletariat, the women of the world, humanity itself) on whose behalf could be drawn programs that would grow in political rightness as they became more and more removed from bounded interventions into quotidian life. Sheltered and embedded into what E.H. Carr called “…the socialization of nations …” (Carr 1945), caught up in a “post-Columbian’ world order of closed spaces (Mackinder 1904), social forces saw the world as if from afar. In this context, the global sense of context became thinner and more intermittent.

In the current juncture, neo-liberal world ordering, drawn up as it was in exclusive sites far away from social relations, has sought to reach deeply into every fold and recess of existing sociability, labouring both to open up new terrains of accumulation (what primitive accumulation is in our times; Sassen, 2010), and to secure its own social basis. In the process it has opened up so many terrains of struggle and caused to be such a sense of global occasion that scarcely a situation can begin to be defined outside of it. So folded indeed in our thoughts have global context and situated happenings become that it is easy to pay insufficient respect to the critical role scale still plays, both in the process of world ordering itself and in the manner in which actually-existing people engage in struggles against it. Looking into specific instances of struggle, re-inscribing analyses in material time, we learn how linkages between situations and context actually operate. Thus, we move beyond an alienated understanding of global order and resistance –where episodes of struggles get abstracted from situations and made to line up besides other episodes equally abstracted, the whole immaterial lot labeled global by default more than knowledge —towards a more substantial understanding.

For a year and a half after they walked out of the December 21010 Sommet des partenaires de l’éducation, student associations --though they well knew themselves to be part of a global sequence of events-- conducted their struggle within the limits and possibilities of the situation they were finding themselves in. 20 This was, to borrow

20 Conscience of global context, and indeed all dimensions of consciousness, is difficult to ascertain. One measure of it might be culled from police attitudes. In June 2010, roughly 1,000 militants from Québec travelled to Toronto to participate in G-20 protests (amongst whom were executive from all four student associations that would later be involved in the strike). Though no official statistics were kept, it was estimated that 300-400 Québeckers were arrested. On May 16, 2012, the Office of the Independent Police Review issued a 286 page report dealing with G-20
Gramsci’s tactical language, the positional moment of the printemps québécois: information sessions were organized, discussions were held, position papers written, strike votes taken and summer schools organized, under hegemonical guidance from representative organizations of students.

Thus did the struggle remain for a year-and-a-half, and thus was it considered by the Charest government, that showed very neo-liberal contempt for situated social forces. Even after February 13, 2012, as the number of students on strike grew and social stakes began to be made of the rise in tuition fees, the struggle remained constituted as a war of position. As it gained in strength, the Charest government kept shunning students, breaching by its inaction the Keynesian social contract it had had with students and their associations. If Jean Charest did not quite show the scorn Margaret Thatcher reserved for miners and dockworkers, or threaten to karchériser students as Nicolas Sarkozy did the racaille in the French banlieue before the 2005 riots (Schneider 2007; Silverstein and Tetreaul; Kokoreff 2005), he did refuse to acknowledge them or their struggle, except when jesting orotundly to mining executives about sending protestors ‘... up north...’.

Even as the crisis grew to unprecedented proportion, the government was content to let policing which confirmed suspicions that French-speaking individuals had been targeted for their ‘...disproportionate ...’ involvement in anti-capitalist activities. A copy of the report, authored by Gerry McNeil, can be found at: https://www.oiprd.on.ca/CMS/getattachment/ Publications/Reports/G20_Report_Eng.pdf.aspx. Some media reports on the targeting of Québécois during the G-20 summit are posted on the G20 Justice site: http://www.g20justice.com/stories.asp?stypeid=6&sid=321. Another, more mixed, sense of québécois consciousness of global context, can be garnered from the ‘Occupy’ movement in the fall of 2011. While the movement did occasion tent cities to be erected in Montréal (more than 400 people in Carré Victoria) and Québec city (fifty people in the Place de l’Université-du-Québec), and while it did bring the aesthetics of the Occupy moment to Québec, it did not succeed in making common cause of the world-wide struggle of indignados (in French Québec, the movement was defined with reference to the occupation of the Puerta del Sol square in Madrid in the summer of 2011 rather than the ‘Occupy wall street’ encampment of Zuccotti park; thus it got to be known as the mouvement des indignés). The October 15, 2001 demonstration that was to serve as the launching point of occupations, drew a little over 3,000 people. By way of comparison, the February 17, 2003 demonstration against war in Iraq (by -26° celsius), attracted more than 150,000. The removal of occupy tent cities by police (on November 22 in Québec, the next day in Montréal), caused mere ripples of indignation. On this, see Breaugh, Martin. 2012. "Vers des pratiques émancipatrices." Relations (756):18-19; n.a. 2012. "Extraits de communiqués et de textes qui témoignent de quelques-unes des interventions ayant eu lieu lors d’Occupons Montréal à l’automne 2011." Inter:: art actuel no. 111:76-77; Sheldon, Alexandre. 2012. "Art et révolution. Le mouvement des indignés et la création d’espaces." Inter : art actuel no. 111:74.
courts arbitrate matters—as, literally, hundreds of injunctions were asked for, and granted, that forced open CEGEPS and universities. Never, significantly, was the prime minister himself present on very rare occasions when government representatives deigned meet students. Never, in fact, were there substantial negotiation until April 27, when an offer so measly was made to students that it could only be construed of as a deliberate attempt to underline their fall from grace—from privileged interlocutor of the state on strike to clients boycotting a state-tendered commodity: ten weeks into the strike, education minister Lynne Beauchamp presented students with an offer to spread tuition hikes over seven rather than five years, in the process upping the increase from $1,625 to $1,778.

‘A little insulting’ though it was (according to FEUQ president Martine Desjardins), the offer was dutifully taken by student representatives to general assemblies, and overwhelmingly rejected.

If a point in time can be identified when the struggle left positional confines and students risked strategic sorties, it would be the week beginning on Friday, May 18th, with the adoption by the Charest government of an emergency act bearing a very Orwellian title: *Loi permettant aux étudiants de recevoir l’enseignement dispensé par les établissements de niveau postsecondaire qu’ils fréquentent* (‘An Act to enable students to receive instruction from the postsecondary institutions they attend’). Against academic rights to association and in defence of the individual rights of students/clients to purchase a commodity called higher education, the broadest attack on the right of association was launched against québécois students since the federal government used the War Measures Act against indépendantistes in October 1970. By the *Loi*, the winter semester was immediately suspended, the right of peaceful assembly limited to gatherings of fifty people and less, and, most significantly, the funding of student association was made contingent on their obedience to the new order of things: student leaders acting in support of the strike became liable to fines of $35,000 for the first offense, doubling with each subsequent offense; for associations themselves, the initial fine was $125,000, also doubling with each subsequent offense. Professors, for their part, were threatened with liability for the content of their courses—and of their tweets as well, as was confirmed by education minister Michèle Courchesne (Lamarre 2012).
Immediately the *Loi* was denounced by the Québec Bar Association and the UN’s Human Right’s Commission as being prejudicial to the constitutional rights of Quebeckers. Within a few days, the emblematic red square of the student movement had been carried on the red carpet at the Cannes film festival by the entire crew of Xavier Dolan’s *Laurence anyways* (that won the Queer palm for best LGBT film) and on the set of Saturday Night Live by Montréal-based Arcade Fire; *Amnesty International*, the Canadian Civil Liberties Associations and the United Nations had made their concerns known (Brunelle et al. forth), and *Anonymous* had launched ‘Operation Québec’, a concerted attack on the web sites of the Liberal Party, the Ministry of Education and Montréal’s police. 21 In New-York, Berlin, Madrid, Taiwan, London and Paris, students marched in defense of *Québécois*’ right to demonstrate.

This agitation was picked up by all manners of news services around the globe, a fact that was immediately relayed to *Québécois* by editorialists and journalists writing in the politics or education section of newspapers, and also by those working in the entertainment and travels sections, and by many local media reporting not on events themselves, but rather on what the foreign media was saying about them (AFP 2012a; Xinhua 2012 n.d. 2012 AFP 2012b). Of course, Facebook postings and all manners of tweets added to the noise. 22 In Québec if nowhere else, the event was suddenly world-famous.

Quite in a rush, the war of position turned war of movement. Political organizations lost their hegemonical leadership, as infra-political, often intermittent, resistances (against increases in the price of electricity, the development of shale gas, 

---

21 The red square was borrowed by students from the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté* (lit. ‘Collective for a Québec without poverty’) that wore it first on October 5, 2004, on the occasion of their presentation to the *Commission des affaires sociales* of the National Assembly, in protest of cuts to social aid announced by the Charest government. On this, see Olivier Asselin. 2012. "Carré rouge. Le destin politique d’une forme colorée." *Theory & Event* no. 15 (3 (Supplement)).

22 According to *Influence Communications*, that monitors press activities in 160 countries, the student strike in Québec was featured in more than 3,000 original articles published in 77 countries between March 22 and May 28 (Blashford 2012). On this, see the pearl tree assembled by Florent Daudent for Radio-Canada http://blogues.radio-canada.ca/surleweb/2012/05/25/crise-Québec-revue-presse-internationale/, and the press review posted on the site of *Le Devoir*: http://www.ledévoir.com/societe/education/350798/la-crise-etudiante-dans-l-oeil-de-la-presse-étrangère.
political corruption, the *Plan Nord*, the Suroît gas-power station, etc.) surfaced to converge (Sauvé and Batellier 2011). Charged by a sense of global propinquity, the fight for tuition fees became constitutive of a totality in movement whose growth was soon outpacing everyone’s capacity to define or contain it. Gaining swiftly in numbers and resonance, nigh-time demonstrations came to be about themselves –the crowd *für sich*—both in the eyes of participants and for the media as well. News began to be made of the many blogs and twits that alone seemed faithful to the inchoate movement of crowds. The most prosaic questions, far removed from any finalities, came to overdetermine discourse: ‘Where is the crowd now’, ‘Where is it heading?’, ‘Where is the police’.

On May 20th, the *Classée* inaugurated its *Arrêtez-moi quelqu’un* web site, inviting people to post an on-line portrait of themselves holding up a sign vowing to disobey the new law (*‘Je désobéis’*). Willfully spiting bio-metric surveillance, more than 3,000 people responded in the week that followed, modestly and straightforwardly engaging all their humanity against the obliterating drive of the state. In this global moment, the quite ordinary, remarkably quotidian, nature of their *mise-en-scène* was eloquent. Some held pictures of Gandhi or Martin Luther King, some showed their cats and dogs, corralled their loved ones, or dressed up as Rosie the riveter. Others ‘chick-pict’ posed, alone or with friends. Many were at home, in their kitchen –the privileged site of québécois sociability. Separately and simultaneously, at home in the world, they participated in what was arguably the largest act of civil disobedience in Québec history.

On May 30th, a professor of political science at the CEGEP of Saint-Hyacinthe by the name of François-Olivier Chené called on his Facebook page for people to bang on pots and pans (... with all the wrath that [the *Loi*] inspires you ...), for 15 minutes, the following day starting at eight o’clock. For three days afterwards, the number of people

---


24 How casseroles came to be banged during the *Printemps québécois* is, in itself, a study of the coincidental manners by which ideas and modes of action circulate in the world economy. The idea of borrowing from the Chilean and Argentinian repertory of popular movements was not
'liking' Chené’s call grew exponentially, until it simply outgrew the possibilities of his account and a dedicated event had to be created: ‘*Nos casseroles contre la loi spéciale*’ (‘our pots and pans against the law’). As soon as it was set up, the new site itself became redundant, as the real-life, street corner, movement acquired enough momentum to shed its on-line incubator. For a month afterwards, the rough mocking music of casseroles, kin to *charivaris* and *scampanate* (Thompson 1992), was heard nightly throughout Québec. Where, exactly, were casseroles banged on, and by how many people, became, of course, a matter of media inquiry –with journalist at times being sent by their dispatchers to the unlikeliest places most removed from Montréal, to measure the depth of the movement by the engagement of rough-hewed rustics.

Animated by what, in pre-postcolonial times, Franz Fanon had termed ‘white fright’ –what translate in our time into fear of global crowds--, police corps everywhere in Québec began to activate strategies devised to deal with most visible resistances to neo-liberal world ordering. Nightly, crowds made up of individuals who had committed no crimes beyond simple presence were toyed with in cat-and-mouse fashion, pursued one moment, let go another, here divided, there brought together or careered, until police, as if acting on a whim, interrupted the movement they had given the illusion of provoking and kettled a part of the crowd in. Those caught were made to wait. Now time, not movement, would be the measure of police power. Sovereignly ignoring the pleading of those in the crowd who wanted to be allowed to heed their calls and disband, police would only afford spectacularly punitive release: one by one, everyone in full view of those gatherings outside police cordons, individuals were read their rights and arrested (151 in Gatineau on April 18; 518 in Montréal on May 23; 176 in Québec city the same

evening; 84 others on May 29, etc.). Tie-wrapped, they were sent to waiting busses and paraded around before being charged with arcane, oftentimes nearly inconsequential offenses, before being released.\textsuperscript{25} How capriciously and deliberately students were chastised is a measure of the strength and intimacy of the relationship being severed during the \textit{printemps québécois}; how capricious and spectacular the staging of all that was, how niggardly and totalizing, affords us a glimpse of the remoteness of global power: it is domination not hegemony that should serve as our reference point of in the analysis of world order.

On May 27, the government of Jean Charest called for negotiations to resume. For three days, student leaders from the \textit{Classé}, the \textit{FECQ}, the \textit{FEUQ} and the \textit{TaCEQ} met with education minister Michèle Courchesne. Unwilling to compromise on the principle of a tuition increase, the government made another measly concession to students that served as a signal of the government resolve: the yearly rise in tuition fees could be reduced by $35.00 a year. Dutifully presented by student leaders to their associations, this offer was immediately rejected. On May 31\textsuperscript{st}, the Charest government walked out of negotiations.

As the summer season of festivals approached in Montréal, \textit{Anonymous} released a video threatening to ‘... upset ...’ the Formula 1 Grand Prix, the most global of all tourist events. On June 3, Gilbert Rozon, director of the ‘Just for Laugh Festival’ (that bills itself as the largest comedy festival in the world), appealed to the reason of students and called for a meeting with their representatives. It was agreed that an off-festival benefit

\textsuperscript{25} What was perhaps the oddest episode of the \textit{printemps} took place in Québec city on May 29, 2012, when the municipal police arrested 84 people protesting peacefully at the door of a building where student negotiators were meeting government representatives. Two members of the \textit{Classée}, walking to their hotel at the end of the day’s negotiations, got trapped in the kettle upon opening the door to the building, and promptly arrested –to be released a few minutes later. At the time of writing, it was estimated that some 3,000 arrests had been made during the \textit{Printemps québécois}. http://Montréal.mediacoop.ca/story/les-faits-5-arrestations-massives-%C3%A0-qu%C3%A9bec-en-avril-mai-2012/11094; http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gr%C3%A8ve_%C3%A9tudiante_qu%C3%A9b%C3%A9coise_de_2012. A letter co-signed by nearly 200 lecturers and professors was published in \textit{Le Devoir} on September 19, asking for a public commission of inquiry to be held into police behavior during the \textit{Printemps}, claimed 3387 arrests during the \textit{Printemps}. By comparison, 1,105 were arrested during Toronto during G20 protest, most under arcane ‘breach of peace’ offenses (Parkes and Daniel 2011)
would be held, and that students would not disturb official carnivals. On the Thursday of the Grand Prix week-end, a naked demonstration (*Tous nus contre la hausse*) was held, attended by three thousand. Of ‘mere’ life itself --raw, pure and simple ‘bios-- standing against political reductions, there can be no more eloquent image.

**Conclusion**

Overdetermined by globality, the *printemps québécois* is an episode that could only find resolution outside of itself. On August 1st, 2012, Jean Charest called for a general election to be held on September 4th—the very day classes were due to resume at universities. The campaign was as short as is legally allowed in Québec (thirty-three days), and as unfocused as summertime politics can be. Indeed, it was hardly question during this campaign of tuition fees at all, of higher education, or of civil liberties. Even Léo Bureau-Blouin --hitherto the very visible spokesperson of the *FECQ*, now candidate for the *Parti Québécois* in the suburban riding of Laval-des-Rapides-- drowned issues related to the *printemps québécois* in asepticized references to youth and change. Against both tradition and the *Directeur général des élections*, the Liberal party opposed the installation of voting stations in universities or CEGEP buildings (Gervais 2012).

Orphaned by electoral politics, the *printemps québécois* dissolved in irresolution, concluding with the election of a minority government of the *Parti Québécois*, timid heir to the *indépendantistes* movement.

On September 5th, 2012, three seasons of sorts (the winter term, the *printemps québécois* and summer vacations) ended simultaneously in Québec. Student returned to class, some to finish courses interrupted by the strike, others to begin a new term. On the day she was sworn in as Prime Minister, Pauline Marois promised to abrogate the *Loi*, to cancel tuition increases (that had already begun to appear surreptitiously on student bills) and to hold yet another summit on the financing of higher education. At the *Université du Québec en Outaouais*, surveillance cameras were installed in the four departments where students had voted in favor of the strike. Resistance to that took the form of teach-ins, held under the panoptical gaze of cameras. On November 1st, 2012, *Classée* spokesperson Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois was condemned for contempt of court, by Juge
Denis Jacques of the Superior court of Québec, for having defied an injunction related to the by-then abrogated *loi spéciale*.

Consummated, the *printemps québécois* will be abstracted out of itself and to impressed into yet another list of would-be global events, besides the ‘pots and pans revolution’ in Iceland (Skalski, 2012) and the Arab spring, between resource wars, IMF riots (Walton 1987), and various and sundry anti-summit protests. To learn from these episodes, we have to see into events themselves, at the point of contact between world order and situated resistances.

Sources

Asselin, Olivier. 2012. "Carré rouge. Le destin politique d’une forme colorée." *Theory & Event* no. 15 (3 (Supplement)).

Beauregard-Langelier, Hugo. 2007. La lutte contre les coupures de 103 millions de dollars dans l’aide financière aux études (AFÉ). In *Collection Mouvement sociaux*, edited by Yvan Comeau: UQAM/Centre de recherche sur les innovations sociales.


Lamarre, Thomas. 2012. "Outlaw Universities." Theory & Event no. 15 (3 (Supplement)).


Wallot, Jean-Pierre. 1964. "Une émeute à Lachine contre la "conscription" (1812)."


