

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF “CASSEROLES”
textes qui bougent au rythme du carré rouge
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Dig Where You March: Scratching the Surface of a Student Struggle with Archived Imagery

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More than four months have passed since the first votes were cast in general assemblies across Quebec, initiating the current student strike against tuition increases. Since its onset, the unlimited general strike has emerged as a pillar of an international student movement resistant to the neoliberal austerity measures and the privatization of public commons synonymous with extreme capitalism.

LE CARRÉ ROUGE INCITE À LA **VIOLENCE**

*Ça doit être vrai,
maintenant on m'arrête dans
la rue pour me brutaliser.*



Red felt squares pinned onto clothing are now part of Montreal's moving landscape. They are resurfaced remnants of the 2005 student strike that successfully stopped the government's proposed transfer of \$103 million from the bursaries program into loans. As striking students, we have traded classroom theory for street practice to fight the government's "debt sentence" that would leave students squarely in the red.

"The red square incites violence. It must be true. Now I'm stopped in the street to be brutalised." Kew 2012.



“Our 50 anti-pepper spray products as selected by 1625 readers.

Politics: vote without dad’s interference.

Dossier: My boyfriend studies at Nicolet (police academy).

Testimony: Her boyfriend loses his eyesight.

Fashion: Be ready for back-to-school.

Comment: Avoid the batons.

Blogs: Making love after the demonstrations.

We love them: Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois (spokesperson for La CLASSE) His life, his loves.

To Win: a Trip for two to Northern Quebec. Be the first to view its destruction!!”

Artist unknown.



The casserole and the wooden spoon became dissentient symbols in response to the repressive Bill 78. This anti-democratic law gives special powers to individual ministers and, among other draconian measures, threatens students’ rights to association. The bill has encouraged a wider segment of the population to actively support the student movement. Borrowing from the 2001 *cacerolazos* demonstrations in Argentina and inspired by the 1973 *cacerolazos* in Chile, neighbourhoods have decentralized the protests and brought mobility beyond Quebec’s urban centres. As students, the solidarity helped us feel less isolated. The audible cling-clanging of an approaching casserole protest would draw others into its ranks – adding to the cacophony and empowering each ‘illegal’ assembly. Now when I hear a neighbour tap a spoon on the edge of a pot after stirring an afternoon meal, I momentarily become a *cacerolazos*. These household items have democratized resistance and given everyone the opportunity to publicly share their malaise.





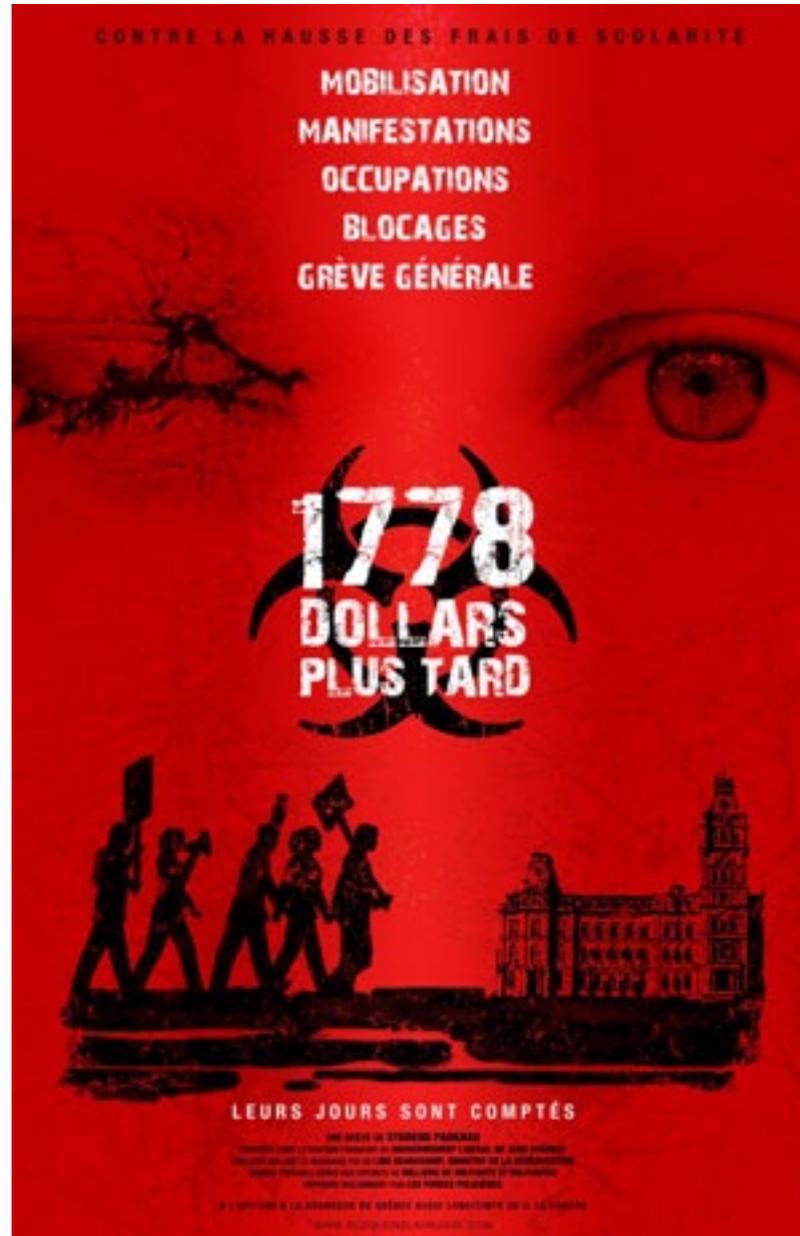
Beyond these two central representations of current dissent in Quebec, the strike's short four-month history has its shared moments and its collective benchmarks. The family demo on March 18 2012 with an estimated 30,000 demonstrators showed for the first time that we, as striking students, had a support base beyond the student movement. Four days later, at the 200,000-strong manifestation nationale, striking students and our supporters from all over Quebec united, confirming that the movement was not a marginal one despite government rhetoric to the contrary. The most common shared experience is the overwhelming police presence (often accompanied by gratuitous police violence) that has circulated through public discourse surrounding the strike. It has left us more distrustful of power, in the unveiling of its abuses.



On April 20 2012 at the *Salon Plan Nord*, Premier Jean Charest cracked jokes with his invited business guests at the expense of the student protestors outside who were at the time being tear-gassed and shot at with plastic bullets. Later, student representatives cancelled upcoming negotiations after (then) Education Minister Line Beauchamp denied one student association access to the talks unless its spokesperson publicly denounced student violence. Unified in their disapproval of bodily violence, and yet sensing an attempt on the part of the government to fracture the unity of the movement, the student associations closed ranks and collectively withdrew from the negotiations. Many that I have spoken with would agree that violence on the streets usually begins with charging battalions of riot police, wielding batons, and is occasionally preceded by volleys of sound grenades that explode just slightly overhead – close enough for shrapnel to cause eye damage. This was confirmed on March 7 2012 when one student lost the use of his right eye while protesting in front of the Loto-Québec building. The use of sound grenades for crowd dispersal continues.

Image of injured Jean Charest. Artist unknown.





Another benchmark is the protest at the Liberal convention in Victoriaville that saw a sharp rise in police violence, with 102 arrests. Twelve people were injured including one student whose left eye was blinded. Another lost several teeth after being shot in the face by a rubber bullet.

“Against tuition increases. Mobilizations. Demonstrations. Occupations. Blockages. General Strike. 1778 dollars later. Their days are numbered.”
Moïse Marcoux-Chabot.





Education Minister Line Beauchamp surprised everyone with her resignation days later, claiming that she was making the ultimate sacrifice by leaving public office after being unable to resolve the conflict. Others believe that she was unwilling to carry Bill 78 forward. In the eight days following the introduction of the new bill, protests in Montreal, Quebec City and Sherbrooke were severely repressed, resulting in a total of 1366 arrests. The neighbourhood casserole marches were a direct reaction. The City of Montreal passed an anti-mask bylaw further demonizing students for protecting themselves from the overzealous use of pepper spray and attempting to keep their identities anonymous at protests. The 2012 Summer tourist season in Montreal started with the Grand Prix weekend (June 8-10), which some student protesters promised to disrupt. The CLASSE student association claims that youth and anyone with a red square were politically profiled by police and dozens of people were arrested for “preventative” measures. [<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/story/2012/06/11/montreal-police-accused-of-political-profiling.html>]



Amid these benchmarks are personal elements of lesser significance that lack newsworthiness. Minor protest-related injuries include: deep purple contusions from rubber bullets or blows from swinging batons; arms and legs scraped after being shoved to the pavement by riot police running at protestors behind their shields; bruised or fractured ribs from deliberate jabs with batons to hasten retreats; and stinging eyes and bloody noses that linger for days from being pepper sprayed in the face at close range. Maybe these go unreported because they are subtle and increasingly commonplace. They are shared between students through images that get passed around social media – reinforcing the bonds of solidarity.

Serious leg contusion at the hands of Montreal police.





Posters and other representations like the ones displayed here are widely produced and shared via social networks to feed an insatiable online dialogue. Our creativity has become a ritual of affirmation: an opportunity for self-reflection and critical analysis that allows us to press onward through the mire of political wrangling. Such popular imagery offers a unique narrative of our current social upheaval. It is being simultaneously archived and shared through social networks so that it may be recycled back into the movement to fuel creative inspiration. “*Police partout, justice nulle part*” (“Police everywhere, justice nowhere”) is a regular slogan chanted to riot police who often flank the nightly demonstrations.

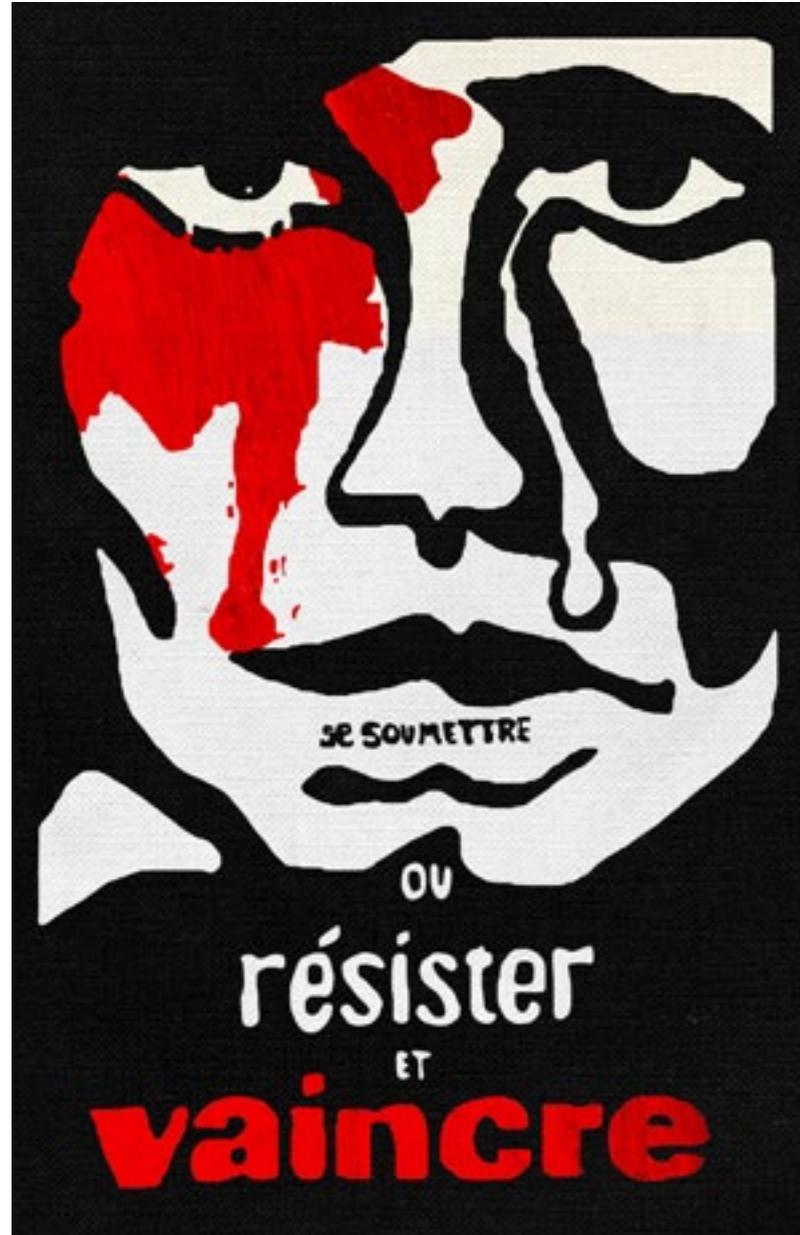
“No Justice.” A red square blocks out ‘lai’ in ‘Palais de Justice’ (courthouse).
Artist and photographer unknown.





Like Sven Lindqvist's (1979) suggestion to “dig where you stand” for workers intent on investigating their workplaces from their own point of view, rather than through the lens of the marketplace, social movements must dig where they march. I have begun digging through the landscape of the student strike and have amassed a collection of more than 1000 image-artifacts that represents an ongoing autobiographical narrative of a political movement filled with a nuance unavailable elsewhere. I've included here only a few of the images that address police violence. The balance of the archive can be viewed as a prototype at <http://facebook.com/affichessgiposters>.





“To submit or resist and vanquish,” Moïse Marcoux-Chabot.





“Arrested on May 23. Now returned to battle.” Photographer unknown.

References

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