

When the Spectacle Continues Backstage...

There are two Histories the official History, which lies, and is taught, and the secret History, where the veritable causes of events are, a shameful History. (Lost Illusions – Honoré de Balzac)

After having struggled for months against the inequity of the social distribution of economic capital, it has become clear that the struggle must from now on also continue on the terrain of other forms of capital: symbolic, cultural, political. It is the time to write History, laying the foundations of the legitimacy of accounts that already jostle each other, gently, of course, in a bookstore near you. Or at the Lion d'Or, site of the launch of *From School to the Street: Backstage on the Student Strike*, a book co-written by Philippe Éthier and Renaud Poirier-Saint-Pierre, elected respectively on the executive committee of ASSÉ-CLASSE, and press attaché on the media committee of the latter.

How did they do it?

According to its authors, the objective of the book, whose birth we celebrate today, is to disseminate the different practices put forth during the strike such that they can guide future generations. Different debates and internal conflicts were voluntarily erased to produce the most consensual account possible. Do we really imagine that what said future generations need is a heap of generalities, a factual chronology of events, and their technical organization? In order to avoid repeating the same errors and to permit a sound politicization, it is to the contrary essential to display the contradictions, the impasses, and the internal conflicts that marked the strike.

But this voluntary silence is not a first. Inside the strike movement (before, during, and after), critical approaches were for the most part devalued. It's then that this "consensual" production is disturbing in that it is built on the concealment of ideological debates between political tendencies, debates that became so difficult and disturbing. From the different perspectives that we occupied during the strike of 2012, it is impossible to advance a consensus around mechanisms that worked well to build a mass mobilization and a structure that supports and feeds it. The set of reflections and analyses concerning the political practices of CLASSE that the authors present, based on their specific position in the movement, is not neutral. It results from a selective operation that retains and ties together a very thin fragment of reality: that of the victors who today publish and privatize their account of the strike, with Éco-société[1].

The violence of a "consensual" history

In silencing the plurality of political realities, the lived suffering, and the strategies of internal repression of different political tendencies, the authors feed and encourage the propagation of a-critical practices within the movement. Quieting initiatives to transform historical social relations (of gender, of class, of race) is a fundamentally violent position.

Only one page of the book is dedicated to the feminist principles of ASSÉ-CLASSE, one page that hardly has time to take up the widely documented mass resignations from two committees for which the principal motive was the reproduction of relations of power. The book does not tell us why at the only feminist demonstration of CLASSE almost everyone was arrested. Neither do we learn how Philippe Éthier and Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois asked a member of a CLASSE committee to resign and to conceal her involvement when she faced criminal charges. Neither presented are the feminist critiques that were addressed to their executive team. In fact, the "feminism" section is so consensual that it no longer bears almost any resemblance to the experiences of feminist activists in the strike. However it is among others their initiatives that made it possible to give life to the strike, to mobilize people, to organize, to make sure to make it more inclusive. They are key actors behind the stage of the strike, a backstage of occasional turbulence between activists.

In brief, the authors fought on their own side, atop the pyramid that they built. It is not only tactical disagreements

that we have with them, but rather profound tensions between two different modes of struggle. But can we really be surprised that a women's History written by men sounds all wrong? We are not the first to say it: consensual History is a violent history of the privileged, where discordant voices do not have a place.

"C'est un beau roman, c'est une belle histoire..."[2]

In the book the absence of a culture of responsibility and of critical political approaches to practices and objectives has the consequence of participating in the mythologization of the authors. Around their heroic persons is constructed an aura of individual strength turned into the necessary token of the capacity to act politically on the world. For that matter the book's numerous romanticized scenes (like that in which the valiant warriors of CLASSE, armed with their walkie-talkies-crssh-crssh are in spite of themselves found in a harrowing but oh so heady race against the clock to provide the media with a count of demonstrators before the SPVM) participate significantly in this out-of-touch representation of the actors. Developing a reading of one's involvement in the strike as being profoundly and structurally part of the problem seems to be perceived as incompatible with the heroicization of progressive political engagement: one could not at once be part of the problem and want to contribute to its resolution. When issues are shifted in this way toward political practices and their consequences on the lives of others, we are accused of contributing to a depoliticization born of a Christian culture of culpability. Or, even better because so poignant, we are charged with *political intolerance*. If the questions and critiques of feminists, based on the idea that the private is political, among others, constitute *political intolerance* and interrupt the feeling of moral integrity and authenticity that certain activists feel, then so be it. We think it's a bare minimum if we want to transform social relations.

"CLASSE is literally disrupting the natural order of things"(The book in question)

It's not everyone that can produce a book like this one. It requires not only having contacts and the necessary resources, but having the free time. That two white male members elected in the structures of ASSÉ are able to submit a manuscript cleansed of these conflicts is not an accident. Their privileged position allows them to write about the strike as self-proclaimed specialists and by appropriating the techniques of organization of this strike that are based as much on the memory and practices of generations of activists as on varied experiences of self-organization. By the circulation of their vision of history as being consensual and homogeneous, the authors place themselves above all the activists who are fully actors of the movement, and who lack the spare time to write a book that recounts their vision of history according to their place, equally of interest, in the strike. Behind the consensual idea of the book, it is the voices and the legitimacy of all those persons which are crushed by the leveling of a dissensus vital to any political manifestation that aims at life.

In this dynamic, it is only the authors who win; who win notoriety, symbolic capital, and the imposition of their vision through time (and incidentally since they are selling their book). The History that freezes itself in time and space is completely standardized so that everything that was lived may fit into the well delimited compartments that the authors impose on us. Let's not forget that the choices of content in this type of book have an impact on what will be retained of the history of this strike. It appears to us essential to bring up all of the issues around the differentiation between the treatments given to a book that presents a consensual analysis and to the writings that present a conflictual analysis. In effect, there exist numerous works that develop on the theme of conflicts inside ASSÉ-CLASSE, but they will never be given the distribution and the respect that this book enjoys. The distribution of writings from a feminist perspective critical of the functioning of ASSÉ-CLASSE has even been in recent years an important political issue. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the uniform vision of *From school to the street* clashes violently with the reflections in the accounts produced by a diversity of activists, in view of the 2013 orientation congress of ASSÉ: <http://orientation.bloquonslahausse.com/>. Thus, their presented magical recipe for obtaining a large movement is a model that is bleached, wrung out, dried, completely emptied of its plural context and of the power dynamics that existed at the heart of the student movement.

From the image of the strike to the strike of the image

This formula started to circulate during the strike on the tongues of those who rapidly realized, with bitterness and anger, that CLASSE was losing its footing and succumbing to the *petits chefs* backstage. At the time, the spotlights were on Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, but many were already denouncing the speeches written by those other than the star of the spectacle of the strike. Today, the cameras turn backstage and film in close-up the insolent strings hanging still just above the clean but rumpled shirts of the dear GND.

By this critique, we refuse a homogeneous vision of History and of the cogs of events. The privilege of literary production must not be considered the authorized and neutral vision of the strike. To the contrary, the richness of experiences and internal conflicts is essential to a dynamic understanding and to a will of inclusion of different practices and ideas.

Going through mainstream channels to talk about a strike that they tried at all costs to render mainstream: there's nothing surprising here. May we not be attributed bad intentions, we are not playing the game of the indignant. But even so we applaud the coherence and we understand the perseverance: having worked relentlessly to make of the strike a spectacle, now's not the time to let up!

Other strikers...

Camille Allard

Jeanne Bilodeau

Dominique Bordeleau

Vanessa Gauthier-Vela

Vanessa Mercier

Iraïs Landry

Fanny Lavigne

Michelle Paquette

Camille Tremblay-Fournier

Yasmine Djahnine

Julie Bruneau

[1] A progressive Quebec publishing house.

[2] A 1972 lyric by French singer Michel Fugain.