

We Were Supposed to Be in Class by Ten

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The strike of Philosophy undergraduate students at McGill lasted one week. We had brought the war home and shut down nearly every class in our mandate and organized alternative classes with professors but the majority of our faculty voted to go back to class.

Strike mandates at McGill were generally hard fought and short lived, and student activists were marginalized as “a small group of radicals.” Confrontations against security agents and Associate Deans grasping the Handbook of Students Rights and Responsibilities had progressed from irritating to boring — before our strike, some of us had proudly returned from protests and waltzed into our Marx class with bandanas soaked in tear gas. We were inspired and committed to building a new world. We figured it was time to get back on the streets anyway.

And so, with our strike mandate over, four of us chose to meet in the morning to participate in a manif-action to disrupt the economy of Montreal. We had no idea who had planned it; no one needed to plan these. Calls for actions spread through listservs, social media, the CLASSE calendar — and people just showed up. We were those kind of people.

Under the first rays of daylight we drank coffee, smoked cigarettes, and waited. For a half-hour we sat in the

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public square, watching the small mass grow. We bet that most people — and the police — were at the other action which had started a half-hour earlier a few blocks to the east.

We had no idea as we donned our bandanas and hoods and began marching through the street chanting anti-capitalist slogans that others were already flipping buffet tables and shredding documents at the annual shareholders' meeting of the National Bank.

And we did not understand why the police descended out of nowhere and declared us illegal . . . until we turned around and saw 150 masked and hooded protesters in black shooting fireworks between the skyscrapers at eight-fifteen in the morning.

Our two groups met in explosive cheers and we marched north towards McGill until we were blocked by rows of police. We turned and entered the Eaton Centre and squeezed into the underground Métro en masse.

In the subway car I talked to my comrades, weighing the options of continuing the action or turning around and going to school. We were supposed to be in class by ten. Before we could come to a decision, a man dressed in black began shouting « on y va! » (“let’s go!”) Hundreds spilled out of the Métro in unison, sweeping us along as well.

We poured into the street and marched south onto an abandoned block and suddenly people started to run every which way. But it was useless: the militarized riot police

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surrounded the whole neighbourhood, with all their weapons and armour.

Fear was present, but repressed; I walked instead of running and tried my best to search the crowd for my friends. We had been separated in the chaos. I knew this was bad.

It's usually a better idea to keep your eyes on each other instead of the police. When the Pigs charge, you can hear them bashing their batons against their shields. The purpose of this is indeterminate. Simply to maintain rhythm or a display of dystopian sophistication meant to intimidate? No one knows.

This morning, however, there was no auditory cue. I had no idea that I was being charged. Without warning, the Pigs ran at us, even though we were already surrounded.

I am a small man, delicate and dexterous. Short and thin. A product of biological facticity, economic class, and nightly marches across the city. I weighed just a hundred and fifteen pounds when I was admitted for surgery.

I looked bigger. I felt bigger. I was wearing a lot of layers.

I must have been a laughably easy target for that Pig to knock in the air with his shield.

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While floating above the road, I thought briefly about the last time I had been hit from behind with a Pig's shield; how that time I hadn't even dropped my cigarette despite being on ice and wearing boots with the treads marched flat.

This time, I soared through the air for what seemed like an eternity — just long enough for me to use my arms to prevent my face from hitting the pavement.

And when I hit, I felt something change. I knew immediately that I was different.

My body melted flat against the ground. I could not move. My right arm had become useless. It felt both tight and loose, hot and cold. Both the most intense pain and inexplicable numbness engulfed me completely, until the officer kicked me in the back with his boot. This cleared my head.

I turned over onto my back after a second kick and begged «MONSIEUR!» I felt the first crick in my elbow as I raised my palms. White flags in black gloves. For a second, we made human contact — me with a red bandana on my face, him through his visor and sunglasses. He kicked me again.

His bright smile vanished quickly when he realized that I couldn't get up. I was kicked a third time, with less pomp. The others were corralled down the alley and getting beaten with batons.

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I still couldn't move, as the kicks demonstrated, so I was grabbed by my jacket and thrown into the closest kettle. I was shuffled to the back, protected from further assaults. I started to understand more about the state of my arm, feeling it crack and move as I struggled to untie and remove my bandana.

Most of the group I had come with were on the other side of the street, surrounded by more officers. Now that everyone's masks were off, I realized that I was here with more friends than I had originally thought.

We were split in half, one side penned against a nursery school, with three-year-olds observing from inside tinted windows. The group I was in was penned against the fence of a construction site. Journalists from CUTV tried to film the police at work, but got pushed back for "obstructing justice."

I thought "you can still carve a space for resistance," and I booed the CUTV cameraman's arrest while applying pressure to my elbow. I still didn't understand the severity of what had happened to me. It took twenty more minutes before I gathered the courage to beg a line of militarized Pigs to see the equally armoured paramedics.

Away from both kettles, I peeled off my layers on the sidewalk under the watchful gaze of everyone, except the video camera, which had been smashed in the earlier arrest.

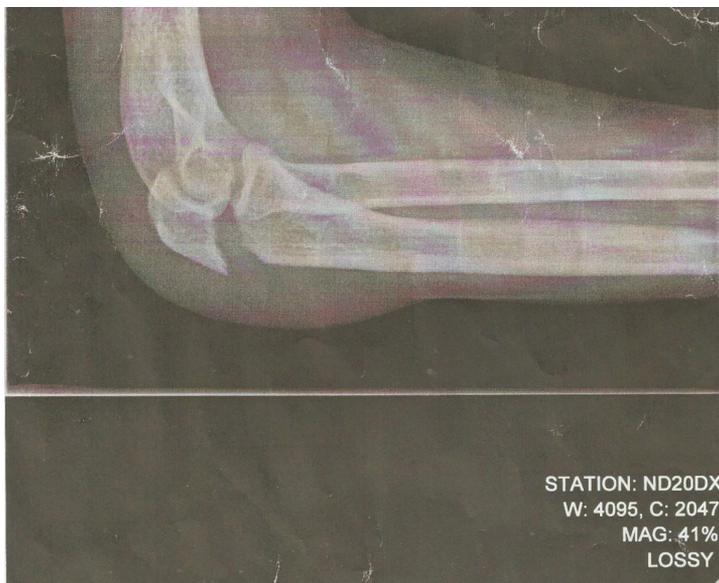
It was a cold morning — and lo and behold, my elbow was on display for the world, inflated and contorted.

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The medics reassured me that I was going to the hospital instead of being detained unlawfully for hours, but the Pigs wouldn't let me go to the ambulance until I pulled my ID from my bag and answered questions for them.

Even if the charges are dropped, the punishment lay in the process. They told me that the ticket would come in the mail. I had no fixed address, but I didn't say that. I had been illegally locked out by my slumlord a few days earlier. I gave my friend's address so I could go to the ambulance. The ticket never came.

I have been harmed many times by officers during the student conflict — We all have. Worldwide, the armed representatives of power have been drawing endless quantities of blood throughout history, starting well before the existence of the liberal democratic nation state.



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I got to the hospital alone, but comrades from across the city scrambled to support me and the others who were going to jail. The actions continued while I languished on friends' couches on painkillers. I watched other friends get beat down and tear gassed on live-streamed broadcasts.

Book learning does not give us the conceptual structure to understand this sort of solidarity. I will forever feel indebted to my known and unknown comrades. Forever uncertain that I am doing enough to show them the love I feel for those incredible people. The struggle continues.

A surgical team divided my arm with a scalpel and nailed my right ulna back together around eleven the next morning.

The surgeon who inspected me at the hospital said it was one of the worst breaks she had ever seen. She filed a police brutality report after seeing my X-rays. A lawyer later told me that the document she submitted was useless. All complaints filed through the police system are investigated by the police and they usually find fault with the victim.

I was supposed to be in class at ten.

