



**NO  
SECURITY  
IN  
REPRESSION**

**POLICING COLLECTIVE  
ACTION FOR JUSTICE AT  
CONCORDIA AND BEYOND**

## Acknowledgements

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## INTRODUCTION

Following a period of demobilization on university campuses during the years of pandemic lockdowns, recent semesters (in 2023 and 2024), have been times of heightened activism surrounding intersecting political struggles at Concordia University in Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal).

The escalation of genocidal violence by the Israeli state in Gaza has sparked a rising number of actions in solidarity with Palestinian that specifically demand Concordia divest from all companies and investment portfolios connected to genocide.

Locally, in Québec, a tuition hike for out-of-province and international students, that has hit Anglophone universities the hardest, particularly impacting racialized communities, has led to the largest wave of student strike actions that Concordia has seen in recent years.

This increase in political activism has been met by political repression and the securitization of campus by university administration. In this zine, you will find a series of texts written by Concordia community members, speaking to the ways that security forces are suppressing organizing on campus, in collusion with the Montreal police.

It is important for us to account for these actions of repression on campus. This zine amplifies voices involved in movements for social justice and human liberation who reject authoritarian securitized frameworks for campus. We hope that this project will help in our responses to this increasing culture of repression.

These texts embrace a spirit of collective action and point us towards a vision for university campuses that are free from surveillance.

We are deeply inspired by the late activist scholar Aziz Choudry who understood social action as a bountiful site of knowledge creation, a reality that the official powers that-be at Concordia seem blind to, when considering their recent actions, instead choosing the path of repression. This zine aims to lift up lived experiences and celebrate the knowledge creation that happens within radical organizing space. We hope to contribute to the perpetual sharing of ideas and experiences across movements.

Our hope is that this zine can be an important step in encouraging us to envision a university where “safety” is synonymous with care and solidarity rather than surveillance and punishment.

Thank you for taking the time to read this text, and to all the contributors.

- Stefan and John

Comments, suggestions, questions? Send us an email at [nosecurityinrepression@proton.me](mailto:nosecurityinrepression@proton.me)



Part I - Students

Night demo in response to dismantling of McGill encampment, July 10th.  
Courtesy of Jasmine (@jazzrocknroll)

It is a reality that student activism has often faced criminalization at Concordia and beyond. 2024 has made this clear, as students have risen up for Palestine in the millions, all around the world, the push to silence this movement has been violent and intense. This section shares voices of students refusing silence in the face of repression, and finding ways to collectively resist a vision for the campus that is coded by authoritarian frameworks of security.

## SCHOOL SOUSVEILLANCE: MASKING UP AND MAKING NOISE!

While I worked the door shift at UQAMs encampment one June morning a man came up to me and identified himself as an organizer of Montreal's 2010 Occupy protests. He had a lot of questions about our vouching system and our level of concern about security, expressing confusion at why we covered our a vouch. The difference between the attitudes of Occupy, with their open-to-the-people policy, and the Gaza solidarity camps is not just one of issues but, I believe, a reflection of an increasing willingness among activists to subvert and resist surveillance. There has been a normalization of active subversion and resistance to surveillance in Canadian activism over the past few years. This reflects the increased threat of surveillance and the increased awareness of this threat. However, it is not just awareness we are seeing, but active resistance, which I believe also reflects growing understanding of the magnitude of the issues we face, and willingness to subvert state repression.

Contemporary radical activists must be understood in the context of their adaptation to digital surveillance—through concealment practices and subversion of surveillance power relations. Tactics seen as definitional to the radical left, such as the use of code words, encryption, and anonymity, are all adaptations to the threat of surveillance and repression. Canadian contemporary radical activists' practices and principles are deeply shaped by their efforts within a system of state repression. Practices of repression and resistance such as these are iterative, each responds dynamically to the other.

This Fall, Concordia security practices have been upping the ante in response to their fears of student organizing in solidarity with Palestine. While their repression is clearly political (as evidenced by



the decision to ban departments from the long standing practice of issuing political statements), I want to focus on the securitization of their response, and particularly their expanded surveillance. As many people may have noticed, security has a much bigger and more visible presence this fall. New campus security guards in bright yellow vests are stationed by many of the exits, these guards are just there for surveillance, they are frequently seen photographing students. As workers they are doing a trial period before they are granted permanent security guard positions, presumably their full time employment is contingent on their effective surveillance of campus. As well, effective March 16, 2023, and newly promoted as of Fall 2024, Concordia policy states: "Using clothing or a mask to conceal your identity is not allowed under the university's Policy on Campus Public Safety and Security (VPS-20). If a Campus Safety agent asks you to identify yourself, you must do so." In this regulation they are recognizing the proliferation of concealment practices among student activists.

On Thursday September 12th a group of anarchists tested out the new climate of repression by holding an un-sanctioned discussion of the Gaza solidarity encampment movement. Their discussion circle was met with an escalated response from security, who physically intervened by knocking a table out of the hands of someone trying to set up the event, and by fiercely guarding the stack of chairs that might be sat on by discussion participants. Security quickly requested the back up of SPVM officers who attempted to read an eviction notice but were drowned out by anti-police chants. Luckily, most of the attendees had the foresight to arrive masked up, this reflects the understanding among student activists that we are in a hostile environment, one that is increasingly (with every renovation more cameras are added) designed to surveil.

That evening, where the police and security were resisted through a steadfast commitment to collectively hold the space, was a powerful exercise of collective action, of asserting: despite the surveillance and repression foisted against us we will stand our ground. We will move like water, around the campus and into the streets, pushing always at the cracks of our containment.

## FREE THE MEZZ!

### CONCORDIA SENDS RIOT COPS TO SEPTEMBER 12 DISCUSSION ON ENCAMPMENTS

On September 12th 2024 a discussion was held at Concordia's Hall building Mezzanine titled "Gaza Solidarity Camps: Discussion and Report Backs from a Hot Montreal Summer", organized by the "West Downtown Anarchist Group", a loose network of anarchists studying, working and living in the West downtown. The event had been subject to much scrutiny in the lead up to it. The week before the event, one of campus security's high-ranking employees and the Dean of Students had come to the anarchist zine table. Despite the anarchists clear dis-interest in engaging with them, they insisted on getting information about the event and its organizers and informed the anarchists that the event would not be tolerated, because it did not go through the correct bureaucratic authorization process for on-campus events.

The admins attempted intimidation tactics only hardened our convictions of the importance of maintaining campus autonomy and keeping the Hall mezzanine a free space. Just in the past few years at Concordia, the Hall Mezz has been an important site of many student struggles: it was transformed into headquarters of the week-long student strike in Winter 2024, many teach-ins have taken place there, and a 3-night long occupation took place as students returned back to school after the pandemic restrictions in Spring 2022. We knew that, if we let the university bully us into moving this event, this generation of students could quickly forget that the Mezz is an important site for organizing. We knew that this event was being particularly targeted because of the subject and its anarchist affiliations. This reaction from the University is part of a larger trend of a crackdown on pro-Palestine organizing on campus. The number of security guards have doubled since this summer's campus occupations, and also this September, the admin suddenly removed all Palestinian solidarity statements published by various departments on the school's website, without warning. Needless to say, we decided to go through with the event, and not allow the university to scare us with its threats of repression.




Several Concordia Security guards (both plain clothed and in uniform) were at the Hall Mezz waiting for organizers to show up. Despite the space being otherwise empty, Concordia security opted to physically intervene by violently throwing a table out of the hands of a person trying to set up, and grabbing and throwing chairs out of attendees hands. Threatened by the use of school space to hold open discussion, security called in the SPVM for backup on roughly 30 attendees. Officers attempted to read an

eviction notice, but were quickly drowned out by chants of « tout le monde déteste la police ». When the Dean of Students tried a more gentle-voiced approach, there was hesitation at first but, before long, "Free Palestine" chants began. The discussion continued as more police from the Specialized Intervention unit (riot cops) gathered in the Mezz, pacing, drafting an eviction notice, and generally doing anything they could to seem like they were about to intervene. After the eviction notice had been given, a friend led a "vibe-check" on whether the group felt like holding space or changing location. The overwhelming majority felt good about holding the space.

A few comrades had texts prepared, and others shared spontaneously in break out groups and spoke about the highs and lows of the summer, and the many lessons learned. The group discussion continued as planned, and wrapped up after 90 minutes of fruitful exchanges. Attendees then marched out of the school, past 14+ cop cars, chanting "free free Palestine," "No Justice, no Peace! Fuck the Police!" and "oink oink piggy piggy, we goin' make your life shitty". We took the streets in a spontaneous demo, creating traffic behind us and thus, space between us and police vehicles, and finally dispersed into the night.

Student space was successfully defended that night. We kept each other safe by staying together, and kept ourselves safe from Concordia and the state's surveillance by masking and covering up well. Afterwards, many of us shared feelings of happiness with each other, that we had not rolled over and capitulated as soon as a few security guards and later, cops, told us we had to leave. We understand how important it is to retain autonomy over student spaces, and we acted accordingly that evening. Universities are, and should be, publicly funded, free spaces. We won't be convinced otherwise by the school's professional-class that attempts to control them.



**Fuck the police. Fuck the snitching security for trying to intimidate us out of using public spaces on campus. Everything for everyone!**

**- some anarchists**

Attendees take De Maisonneuve, discussion becomes direct action.

## **THE INSTITUTION WILL NEVER RECOGNIZE US**

ken.dra downe, July 20, 2024



I have always been critical of academic ceremonies. Not only do these ceremonies reinforce institutional norms of competition, superiority, and unbiased objectivity, but as a neurodivergent person, I simply do not want to sit indoors for several hours with a crowd of people I don't know. Even so, I had mixed feelings leading up to my convocation ceremony at Concordia. Completing my degree was a seven-year process marked with health crises, financial instability, pandemic isolation, and housing insecurity, all exacerbated by discriminatory institutional policies and apathetic administrative staff at Concordia. In our eurocentric settler-colonial culture, convocation is framed as a right of passage. I wanted to leave these struggles behind and worried that I would regret not having had this experience if I opted not to attend convocation. In the end, I decided that I deserved to be recognized for my achievements. This was important to me because I had been denied this recognition throughout my degree due to discriminatory scholarship and awards policies that disproportionately impact disabled and low-income students who cannot maintain a full-time course load. While I had my own personal reason for attending, **I knew that convocation could also be an effective platform for standing in solidarity with the marginalized social groups targeted by settler colonialism and further disempowered by the academic industrial complex.**

This year, during the ceremony's opening remarks, Israel's occupation of Gaza and its escalating genocide of Palestinians was presented by co-chancellor Gina Cody as an issue of political polarization. In 2018, Gina Cody made a \$15 million donation to the

university, part of which went toward “a special fund for equity, diversity and inclusion programming” [1]. Six years later, it is clear that Concordia’s efforts to implement the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion have been inadequate. As Gina Cody’s opening remarks demonstrate, **the university’s administrative and governing staff do not apply the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion to the analysis of ongoing political violence that directly impacts members of Concordia’s student body** [2].

A number of students, including myself, planned to cross the stage carrying a Palestinian flag to denounce Concordia’s affiliations with Israeli institutions and its investments that directly or indirectly fund the Israeli occupation [3]. Knowing that I would have to be discreet, I tucked the flag into my gown and waited while we were corralled through Place des Arts. Just before walking onto the stage, a non-uniformed man to my left asked me if I had anything hidden under my gown. **Before I had the chance to respond, he reached into my gown without my consent and forcibly removed the Palestinian flag that I was holding there.** As I verbally challenged this violation, nobody around me said anything. None of the many Concordia staff in the vicinity acknowledged the harmful interaction.

I was left to walk across the stage feeling stunned, ignored, and enraged. This violation of my privacy and bodily autonomy effectively ruined my experience at convocation, and it will impact my sense of safety on campus moving forward. Unfortunately, I am not the only graduate who was made to feel this way. It has come to my attention that this same scenario happened to a significant number of graduates at several of the convocation ceremonies throughout the week. I also heard from a friend who had witnessed Concordia staff withholding diplomas from students who refused to have their flags confiscated. **For many students, and especially those who have experienced sexual assault or identity-based violence, these were traumatizing experiences.**

While it is true that graduates were told that any unapproved items would be confiscated by security, the harm caused by these violations is in no way commensurate to any hypothetical harm that could have been caused by peacefully crossing the stage with a

Palestinian flag. Afterward, I was told by a staff member backstage that security services had considered adopting frisking as a security measure during the ceremonies, but had decided against it as it wasn't considered a justifiable practice in the context of the event. Given this decision, it is extremely concerning that security personnel went ahead anyway and searched graduates without their consent and without justification.

I spoke with Darren Demoulin, director of Campus Safety and Prevention Services, who asked that I send him an email summarizing what had happened that night. In his reply, Demoulin admitted that “the vast majority of articles confiscated were harmless” [4]. I was told that he had spoken with his team and would be “debriefing with the convocation organizers and reviewing how best to address the issue of unauthorized objects” and that he would “keep [my] comments and concerns top of mind when [they] are planning for these events.” He did not, however, indicate whether security staff were authorized to search graduates without their consent. Demoulin planned “to have a woman as part of the team to hopefully mitigate some of the issues [I] raised”. In my opinion, **this is a concerning instance of tokenism that would transfer part of the organization’s responsibility to implement policies that uphold the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion onto tokenized and marginalized staff members.** In the interest of accountability, I requested that Demoulin issue a statement summarizing his team’s debrief and the decisions that were made about how best to address the issue of unauthorized objects. This request was denied and Demoulin was “not sure what else [he] can offer at this stage”. **It is revealing that Concordia’s Campus Safety and Prevention Services does not have a clear protocol for handling and implementing reports of malpractice by security personnel.**

Concordia students have a long history of supporting movements for social justice, and we had hoped to use our platform to celebrate this [5]. As co-chancellor Gina Cody explained during her opening speech, Convocation is meant to highlight our achievements and values as a student body. It is ironic that the lessons I learned about care, solidarity, and social justice with mentors and peers at the



university have not also informed the institution's policies and practices. The following statement is posted on Concordia's website:

*"As a next-generation university, Concordia sets its sights further and more broadly than others. We align the quality of learning opportunities to larger trends and substantial challenges facing society. We pursue technology without losing sight of our humanity. We find inspiration through narrative and dialogue."*

**Concordia's treatment of its own students is fundamentally disconnected from the institution's stated mandate.** Our learning opportunities have **not** been aligned with "larger trends and substantial challenges facing society" (e.g. the ongoing genocide of Palestinians). The university has **not** "[pursued] technology without losing sight of our humanity" (as illustrated by Concordia's indirect investments into major weapons manufacturers like BlackRock, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and Elbit Systems). The university has **not** provided a platform for narrative and dialogue and has instead opted to silence, violate, and steal from its own students.

I have now adjusted my expectations: **we will never be recognized by this institution because we are seen as a threat to its existence, although we are, allegedly, the very reason for its existence.** This is one of the many internal contradictions of capitalist institutions, and one that is escalating within institutions of higher education around the world. Locally, this has also manifested as the recent forceful eviction of pro-Palestinian student encampments at McGill and UQAM by police and private security forces employed by the McGill administration [6]. We are faced with the settler-colonial culture of repression as the crises of capitalism intersect and converge with increasing visibility. What gives me hope, though, are the concrete efforts of community members to self-organize and mobilize around principles of care and solidarity. The writings in this zine are an attestation to that collective power, and our radical practices will ensure that this power outlives the institutions that work to weaken and undermine it.

## Notes

1. Desjardins, Sylvain-Jacques. "Gina Cody makes historic eponymous \$15M donation to have Canada's first engineering faculty named after a woman." Concordia University, September 24, 2018.
2. Diane Yeung and Abby Cole. "Confrontation between Israeli and Palestinian Students Turns Violent." The Link, November 9, 2023.
3. Concordia University Alumni. "Concordia Alumni Letter in Solidarity with Palestinians." The Link, January 17, 2024.
4. Personal communication, June 17, 2024.
5. Iness Rifay. "50 years of Concordia student activism: a timeline." The Link, September 5, 2023.
6. Sabrina Jonas and Matthew Lapierre. "McGill dismantles pro-Palestinian encampment, ending months-long protest on campus." CBC News, July 10, 2024.



## RECOUNTING TABLE WARS

On November 10th, 2023, a day now referred to on campus as "table wars," I walked into Concordia's Hall building to find Israeli 'hostage' posters put up everywhere on the first floor and mezzanine. As a few other people and I started to take them down, only myself wearing a COVID mask, Zionist students ran up to us with cameras out in an attempt to get our faces recorded. We huddled close with our faces so no pictures could be taken, eventually the cameras walked away - and I handed out masks. We continued taking down the posters and watched as a large group of Zionist students and security guards gathered by the 1st floor - mezzanine escalator. This was when a security guard then approached me suddenly from behind, grabbed the back of my arm, and shouted "we're dealing with it." For several reasons this was shitty - one of the main ones being how unexpected it was that I was physically grabbed by security, as to all of our knowledge prior to this happening, we had been told security guards are not allowed to touch students.

Later in the day while students were lined up for the SPHR Keffiyeh sale, myself and another student printed out hundreds of flyers for the next day's walk out and distributed them to the line and passing people. Once again, a different security guard came up behind me and grabbed my arm, saying we weren't allowed to distribute materials in the mezz (obviously false because that's entirely what the mezz is for). We continued to distribute materials for the duration of that morning, until the police showed up and started aggressively forcing people outside. At this point a "no cops on campus" chant was started by a group of about 8 of us, and some elected 'student leaders' very quickly attempted to shut us up - policing by proxy.

Watching security guards walk around on the first floor while a full police barricade was made in front of the Hall building felt all too predictable, when late that evening when we got the notification from SPHR that Concordia Admin had threatened disciplinary action against anyone who participated in the action planned for the next day. Taking direction from SPHR, we agreed to direct people to McGill's student action in the morning.

Arriving at the Hall building the next day in our 'normie bloc' we were greeted by a bus of riot police sitting across the street (which stayed there for about 3-4 days), half a dozen cop cars sitting up and down Maisonneuve, and the first and second floor crawling with security - at least 10 per floor. We split up to cover more ground and hopefully reach more students wanting to participate in the action, not knowing about the location change, and sending them to McGill. I chatted briefly with some folks and as they walked away to head to the demo, a security guard approached me. She didn't say anything, but stood behind me. As I moved and went to sit at the tables, she stood behind me. Eventually with her walking away, I went into the women's washroom and she quickly spun around to follow me in, her trying desperately to avoid eye contact as I stood there washing my hands and staring at her in the mirror.

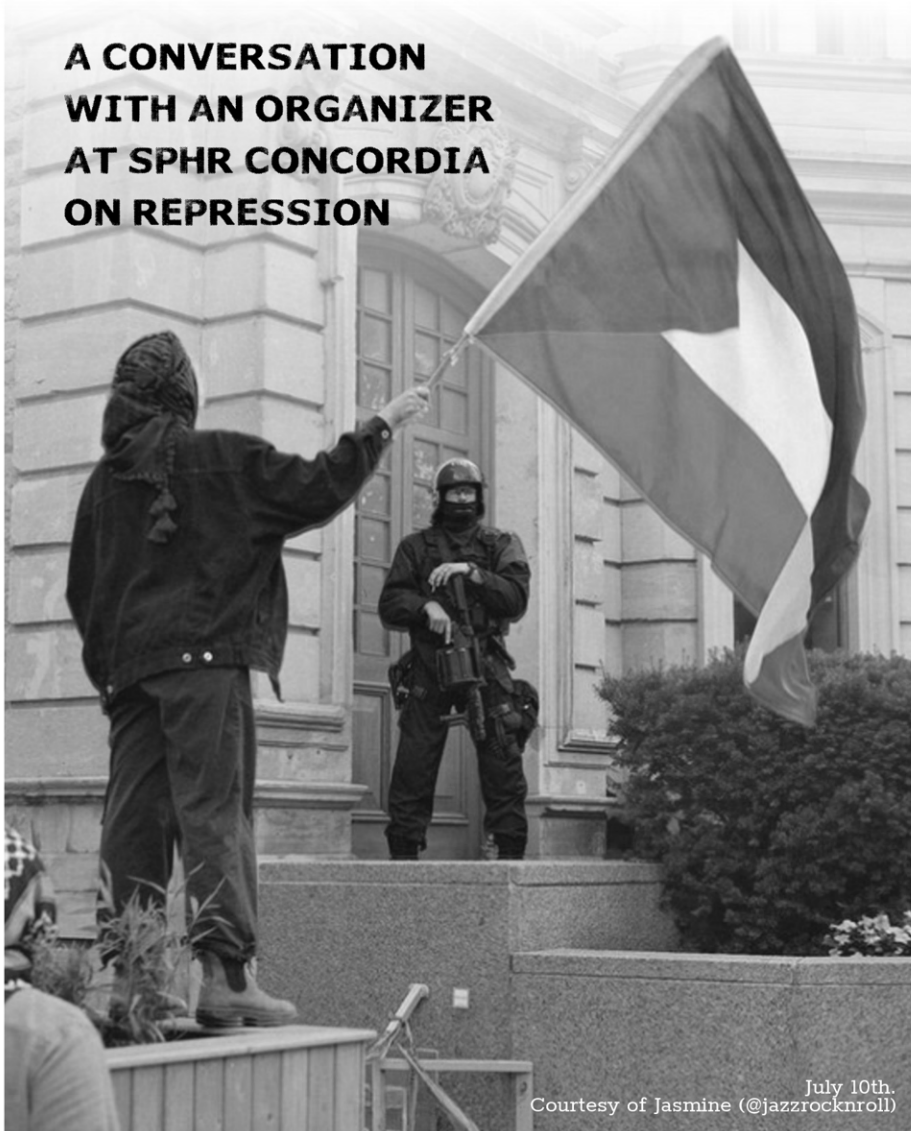
These two days at Concordia are representative of student solidarity actions in the face of repression from security, police, and in a few instances, other students. Security on the day of table wars escalated the whole situation by poking in, grabbing arms, and showing cops the way. Security, we are told, is here to keep us safe, and of course, if you are reading this zine, we know that we keep us safe, and that's exactly what we did in our bloc, in our masks to protect one another from COVID, in our human chain, in our "cops off campus" chant, in our buddy system, in our check in to make sure everyone was okay. Repression has a long history at Concordia, and as we return to campus in the Fall of 2024 following the summer of the encampments and continuing the student intifada, we will be prepared to respond to the (what I'm sure will be) creative new ways that admin and security have worked together to plan the continued repression of student activism.

Blessed be the flame!  
Long live the student intifada!  
Free Palestine!

- C



## A CONVERSATION WITH AN ORGANIZER AT SPHR CONCORDIA ON REPRESSION



July 10th.  
Courtesy of Jasmine (@jazzrocknroll)

I felt it was important to include a discussion with a member of SPHR at Concordia in this zine, so I spent a bit of time speaking with one of the organizers in the group on the ways that repression on campus has impacted SPHR and beyond. Here is a transcription of our conversation. Thanks for reading. - Stefan.

**Stefan Christoff:** I am standing just outside of Concordia University where over the past year there has been a lot of activism on campus to support freedom in Palestine and to oppose the genocidal military actions of the Israeli state in Gaza and now in Lebanon. In this context, a lot of student activists have faced repression.



Today I am with a member of Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR) at Concordia, an on campus group that has for many years supported Palestinian freedom. I will first speak to you about your experience.

So today you're on campus, you are trying to speak about what is happening in Palestine, which isn't easy to take time between studies and everything else to find the energy to support and be active on the issue.

Please speak about the fact that on top of all of that, which is a lot, you also have to deal with repression, right? Clearly the fact you have to deal with this is bullshit, but if you could speak about the effects that repression has, the emotional impacts, the organizational impacts.

**SPHR member:** Repression has always created an emotional rollercoaster because there are some people who are willing to take more radical action and some who aren't. Despite this, it is important to hold space together and try to deal with repression in a way that keeps a positive spirit in the movement.

For example, we were called Solidarity For Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR) but we have changed our name now to Students for Palestinian Honour and Resistance recently. That is an important answer to the repression because if your answer is positive, and you become more radical it means that you are more firm on your stance. It means that we are affirming that we will not be moved by the repression, whatever it is, and we will be willing to keep going until divestment.

**SC:** A big focus of SPHR has been to educate students because there are a lot of people on campus who are not following what is happening in Palestine with any depth. So I know that a big part of the work of SPHR has been focused on educating people and informing people, doing just this work takes a lot of time.

Unfortunately, most people in Canada don't have a good sense of what is happening in Palestine, although that is shifting, more and more people do understand. So I am wondering if you could speak a bit more about the fact that on top of your mandate, which is to educate people and take action in support of Palestine, but beyond this you are also dealing with repression. Could you speak about this?

**SPHR member:** It is quite a tricky process because when you educate someone they might perceive it in a different way than you do [as a Palestinian or Lebanese student] and you have to find a way to encourage people to go in line with the larger movement.

Now we see videos coming out, these pictures coming out, all of these atrocities being committed by the Israeli state explicitly in front of the world. I think that a lot of the educating now, on the basic issues is being done through people witnessing the intense genocide that the Israeli state is carrying out. The magnitude of the destruction, the massacres, makes everything very clear.

I think over the past year the Israeli state has been really pushing a lot of people to get involved because of the intense horror of what the Israeli military is doing. So over the past year we have more been trying to create contexts for action, people are more aware, but before this last year we did have to make a big effort to motivate people to get involved.

**SC:** On a positive level, the work that you do to encourage students to take action and get informed about Palestine is really important, so could you speak about what motivates you to take action and spread the word?

**SPHR member:** Definitely there is a personal motivation and also there is contributing to the larger student movement. After the encampments specifically, the issue became such a prominent thing across many campuses. One of the motivating factors that keeps us going strong to support the Palestinian cause and specifically to call for divestment is that this has now become an official and strong movement.

Another motivation is personal, I was there in 2006, the war that Israel did on Lebanon, I was a kid. The Israeli state carpet bombed Dahieh, in ways that are very similar to now. They also tried to do a ground invasion. I lived in Beirut at the time, I was very small, but my family always talked to me about what my reactions were as a kid when a bomb dropped, they told me about how I reacted, because I was very small. So these stories you hear from your family in Lebanon, over time, you begin to relate it to what you see in regards to the situation in Gaza. It becomes personal because you don't want to let the people of Gaza down like many in the world let you down during the 2006 war in Lebanon.

**SC:** Despite the repression on campus the amount of students who are engaging with Palestine, not just in Montreal but all around the world, is unprecedented. Often people don't talk about the fact that there is a lot of student activism happening also in places across the Global South, in Brazil, in South Africa, in Indonesia, all over, as a side note. Can you speak about the fact that despite the repression, at Concordia and beyond, there are more and more students involved?

**SPHR member:** I think that along with the repression came the fact that the west and their institutions exposed themselves. People didn't know that the west and its institutions could go so far in repression, and could be very demeaning toward students who are involved in Palestine work.

The presidents of Concordia and McGill always speak badly toward student activists and try to create fear around organizing for Palestine on campus. This actually I think has created motivation for

more students to get involved and defy this type of repressive framework as a concept, around Palestine but also beyond Palestine. So the repression grew the movement because one thing after the other came down on students and people got angry, after that, many people joined the movement.

**SC:** One point about this that people don't really get is how that type of dehumanizing language that you are referencing, really echoes across so many structures of power, from the highest levels of government, down to a university administration. I think that people don't realize, well of course people deeply involved get it, but I mean in the mainstream, there isn't an understanding of the fact that if these institutions spoke about Israeli people in the way that they speak about Palestinians, or even activists supporting Palestine, there would be outrage, it would be seen as unacceptable.

Of course this occurs within a global context where people in south Beirut, or in Gaza, are so deeply dehumanized at a cultural level. I wanted to underline this because I know that a lot of your work addresses this and this type of dehumanization.

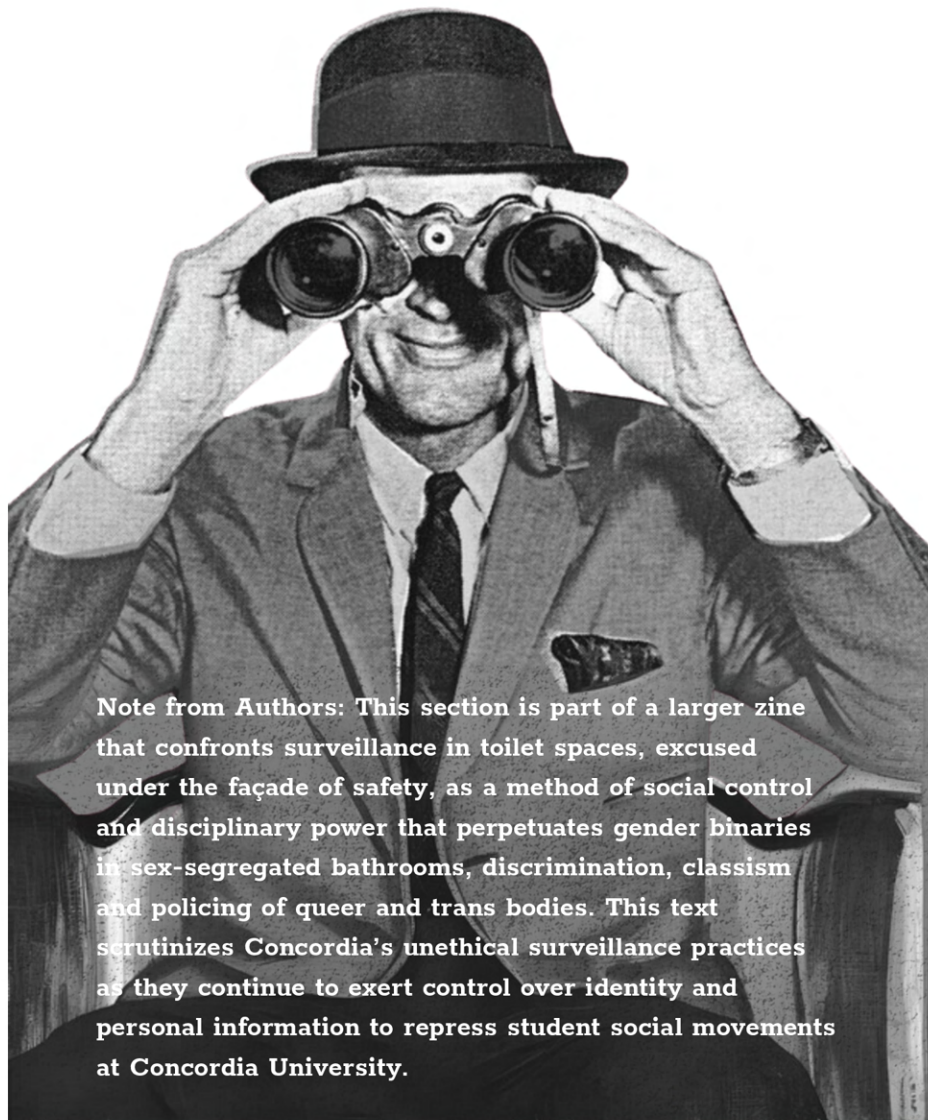
**SPHR member:** It is a challenge that we are doing, as activists, to challenge this dehumanization that is embedded in the institutions. Take for example the video of McGill's President Deep Saini speaking to a McGill student and calling them "uncivilized," while the student was confronting him about the investments that McGill holds in weapons companies. This type of language is just unacceptable. I think that a lot of students who see a video like that end up questioning the legitimacy of a figure who supposedly represents the university where we study and the name of the institution on the diplomas that we will have.

**SC:** It opens up space in a way to think about how many of the cultural frameworks of power, from the university level all the way up to the government, are still so deeply shaped by colonialism. Thank you for the conversation.

**SPHR member:** Thank you.



**I  
SEE  
YOU  
PEE**



**Note from Authors: This section is part of a larger zine that confronts surveillance in toilet spaces, excused under the façade of safety, as a method of social control and disciplinary power that perpetuates gender binaries in sex-segregated bathrooms, discrimination, classism and policing of queer and trans bodies. This text scrutinizes Concordia’s unethical surveillance practices as they continue to exert control over identity and personal information to repress student social movements at Concordia University.**

## **WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF CAMERA SURVEILLANCE ON VIOLENCE, BEHAVIOUR, AND PSYCHE?**

Surveillance is a generative force, in washrooms its existence directly translates to violence, stigmatization, self-policing, and othering of certain types of bodies. Sex-segregated bathrooms are an example of binary systems that force people into choosing to categorize themselves as colonial understandings of “female” or “male.” This requires gender non-conforming individuals to do “self-surveillance of how they are presenting their gender” and decide if they will be safe entering a public restroom (Bender-Baird, 2016, p.986).

The violence that many trans people have experienced in bathrooms shows that they are sites of heightened tension for those whose existence confronts the fragility of cisgender norms. Instances of violence perpetrated against genderqueer and trans people reinforce the reality that using these facilities means putting one’s safety at risk.

At Concordia, they have claimed that the surveillance installed was to “reassure certain people who may not be comfortable using that space [gender-neutral washrooms]” and stated, they “don’t want to give people the impression that somebody’s sitting there and watching” (Daldalian, 2023). This is false. We have witnessed two instances of security guards watching the EV bathroom cameras. Again, the people whom this space was supposedly built for are the ones most affected by this breach of privacy. Not only does this measure come alone without any other measure of safety for genderqueer and trans individuals, but it further constructs fear and gives Concordia an excuse to collect data. It also conveys the idea that tech can solve any issue, known as “tech solutionism,” ironically the director of Campus Safety and Prevention Services himself said that there is no assurance that the cameras are preventative (Daldalian, 2023). All these cameras seem to achieve is to cloud Concordia’s responsibility to keep gender-neutral bathrooms safe spaces for all students.

## CONCORDIA SURVEILLANCE

Concordia University, a publicly funded institution, operates within a power structure that uses surveillance as a tool for control, echoing Foucault's insights into the productive nature of power in producing knowledge and identity categories. As Beauchamp (2019) notes, power is not merely repressive but also productive, shaping categories of identity and managing behaviors. Surveillance practices within institutions like schools contribute to the production of discursive categories, such as transgender identity, rather than identifying predetermined deviance.

In this context, surveillance at Concordia University takes on both visible and invisible forms. Visible surveillance, represented by security cameras and physical monitoring, is evident in spaces like the campus grounds, the metro tunnels, and buildings. As Foucault articulated visibility serves to assert control and enforce norms, stating "their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them."

Another surveillance tool used by Concordia security guards is the asking for identification as a way to legitimize your right to be in the space. Former student and Haitian community activist Chantal Lapointe's experienced surveillance by Concordia security guards at the University in July 2013, is the reality of how surveillance at Concordia has reinforced power dynamics and constructs categories of identity. Lapointe was racially and socially profiled by Concordia security while accessing the EV tunnels. Security demanded her ID, violently choose to call the police when she couldn't provide it; the police then forced her off campus. The discrimination was also evident in the Concordia security report, labelling her as "Madame Voodoo," and "black female homeless" (Miriam Lafontaine, 2017).

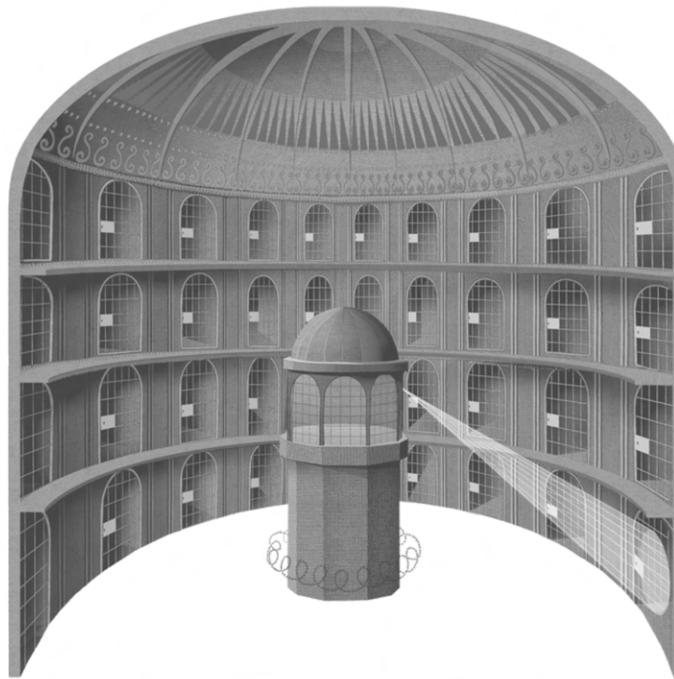
The Quebec Human Rights Commission, led by the Centre for Research-Action on Race Relations, charged Concordia University and the Montreal Commissionaires to pay Lapointe \$33,000. This case highlights how surveillance enforces control and perpetuates racial, class, and gender violence.

Concordia uses invisible surveillance through data collection, digital monitoring, and AI technologies, shaping behaviors and constructing identities subtly. The lack of transparency in Concordia's data and privacy policies regarding the extent of digital surveillance is concerning.

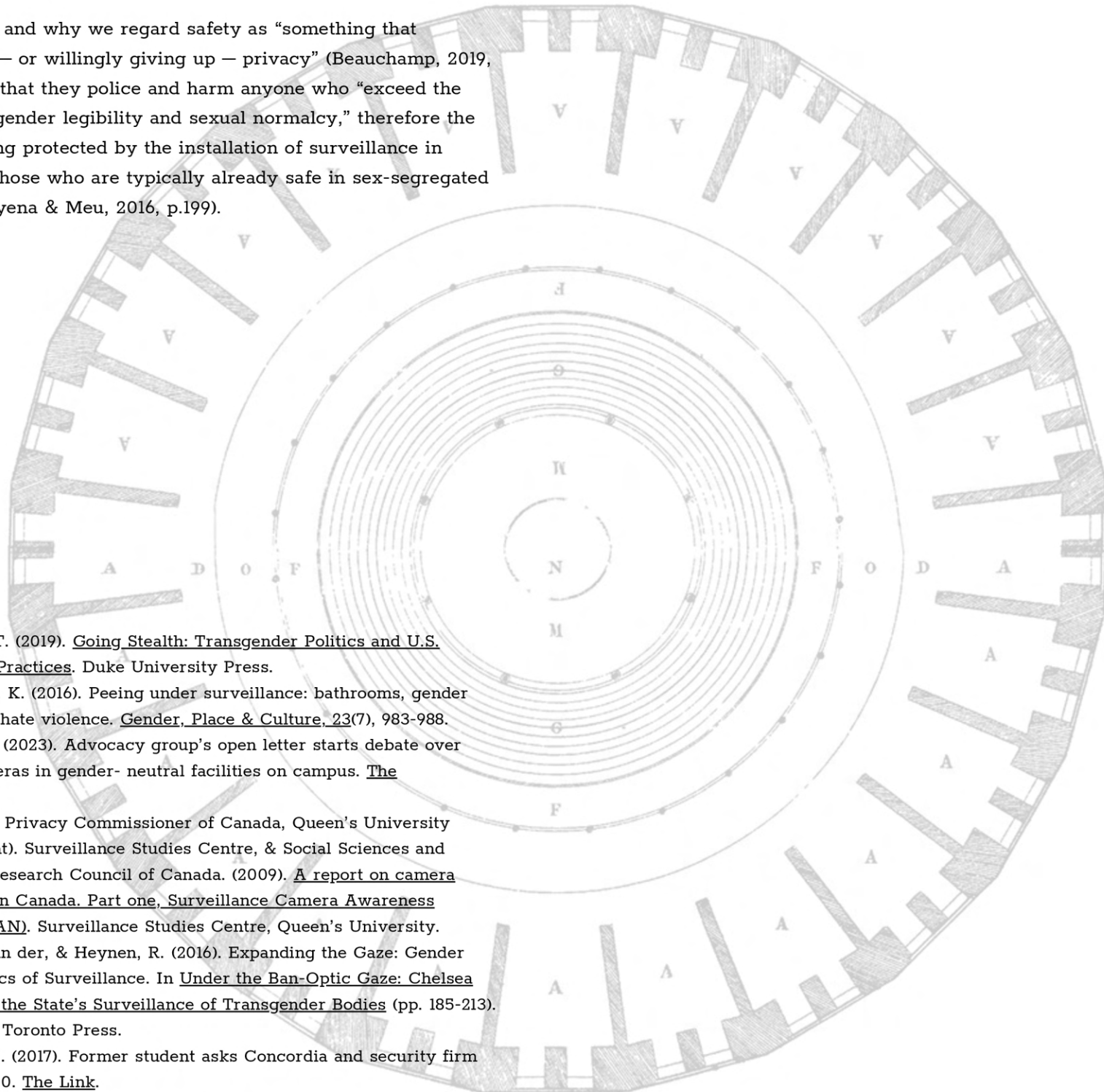
## GUISE OF SAFETY: FEAR, HYSTERIA & DESIRE IN BATHROOM SPACES

The imposition of surveillance onto gender-neutral spaces brings into question the effectiveness of these systems and their reason for continuing to exist. The use of surveillance in 'Canada' has increased rapidly after 9/11, driven by fear of others and an assumption that surveillance creates safer environments. Research in Montreal and Kelowna instead find that the use of camera surveillance has "far more to do with its symbolic value in fostering the belief that something is being done about the problem" than the actual effectiveness of cameras which has yet to be significantly proven (Deisman et al., 2009, p.17). Moreover, the very foundation

of these technologies is based on the flawed trust in technological determinism which falsely interprets connections between identity, gender, and identification from gender markers that are tracked in their systems (Heyena & Meu, 2016, p.194). This false use of data also generates the othering of anyone whose gender expression appears foreign to the camera surveilling them. Apart from the ineffectiveness of these surveillance methods, we need to ask who they are meant to




be keeping safe and why we regard safety as “something that requires losing – or willingly giving up – privacy” (Beauchamp, 2019, p.10). We know that they police and harm anyone who “exceed the borderlands of gender legibility and sexual normalcy,” therefore the only people being protected by the installation of surveillance in bathrooms are those who are typically already safe in sex-segregated washrooms (Heyena & Meu, 2016, p.199).



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## Part II - Educators

The role of educators in activism that happens on campus is essential. When the energies of both professors and students unite to speak out for social justice and against colonial violence, the results are inspiring. Going back to the September 2002 protests against Netanyahu's planned presence at Concordia University, which was blocked due to collective action, both students and professors were meaningfully involved. Certainly students played the leading role, but professors also joined the protest in significant numbers.

Additionally, as we witnessed from activist scholars like Aziz Choudry, the collective learning that takes place in spaces of student activism is major and has an impact for years on the activist and learning trajectory for many. The formation of critical ideas is, in mainstream frameworks, often linked to narratives around individual genius and ingenuity, however the reality is that ideas emerge from collective contexts most often, even if in history these collective contexts of both learning and action are not often acknowledged.

This section features educators who are refusing silence and are joining the frontlines of pushing radical critiques. Through this process, they are envisioning new worlds rooted in collective learning and action.



By Nalini Mohabir

1969, 2002, 2012, 2024. These are our years of protest, our years of bitter memories, our years of subversive triumph, and of hope (better mus' come). These are not stand-alone events, rather they ripple across time, demanding we reckon with the radical, creative, and insistent voices of student activists.

2024 disrupts silence and refuses complicity with ongoing genocidal violence built on the foundations of apartheid, settler colonialism, and imperial machinations. At a time when it is still risky to speak in solidarity with Palestine, media reports were making connections between the present and the protest traditions of the 1960s, a period that emerged out of anti-colonial Third World struggles for independence, as well as the struggle for Black, Indigenous, women, and LGBTQ civil rights. Student organizers within Palestinian solidarity encampments were also making these comparisons, drawing strength—and critiques—from previous revolutionary times. Below are some fleeting observations:

- On April 26, 2024, [The Guardian](#) newspaper centres students' perspectives, including the experiences of McGill student, Rania Amine. Amine went on a hunger strike for 34 days. Hunger strikes are highly symbolic of peaceful anti-colonial protest (think Gandhi) and is also a tool of the powerless that allows the body to speak when voices are not heard (e.g. Bobby Sands). Amine was demanding that McGill divest from companies selling weapons to Israel and compared the collective student protest to the anti-apartheid movement of the 80s.
- On April 29, 2024, Quebec-based news outlet, [Pivot](#), quotes a student leader, Ali: "Concordia est fière des actions similaires à la nôtre qui ont eu lieu dans les années 1960... Je vous garantis que dans quelques années ils seront également fiers de ce qu'il est en train de se passer aujourd'hui." The reporter then gives a brief history of the Sir George Williams student protest against anti-Black racism in 1969, and notes (with a hint of irony) that the university proudly describes it as a "watershed moment" and has apologized for the racist mistreatment of student protesters.

The first time the riot police were called on students was 1969, the second time was 2002, when many students protested an invitation to Benjamin Netanyahu (former and current prime minister of Israel) to speak on campus. The psychic toll of that confrontation lives on in the memories of many of that generation.



As the student newspaper, The Link reported, Concordia funded a \$9000 trip to Israel for the president in 2022 to build ties with Israeli universities. Two years later, all universities in Gaza have been destroyed in what several are calling a “scholasticide.”

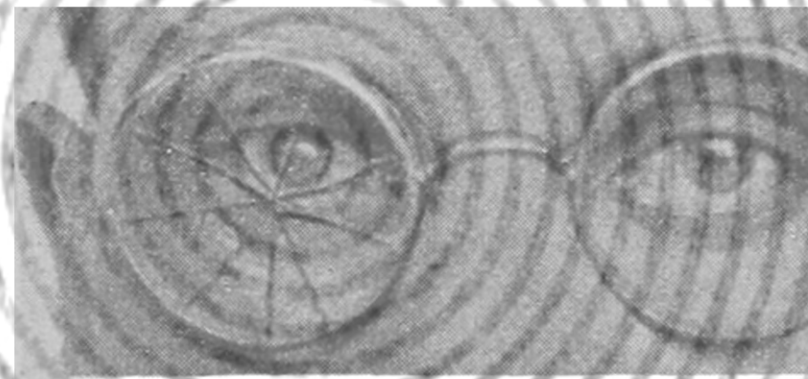
Will Concordia ever achieve a post-apologetic future?

- On April 30, 2024 The Guardian notes protesters at Columbia University have renamed Hamilton Hall, Hind’s Hall, “in honor of Hind Rajab, a six-year-old Palestinian girl from Gaza City who was killed by Israeli forces earlier this year.” Hamilton hall was occupied in 1968 as part of a civil rights and anti-Vietnam war protest.
- Also reporting on Hind’s Hall, NBC quotes a student protester “Let’s finish what they did in 1968.” Time is elastic.
- May 2, 2024, The Times, tells us that student occupiers of Hind’s Hall were singing the civil rights anthem “We shall not be moved” as police violently entered the academic building to expel them. Lessons from the 60s on fortitude in the face of power.
- A 65 year old Jewish professor at Dartmouth University, Dr. Annelise Orleck was “knocked to the ground” by police (The New York Times , May 3 2024). She was attending a protest against the violence in Gaza, in support of her students. In a reflection written two days later, she notes “Earlier that afternoon, I had taught a class on the history of the civil rights movement. ... [and after her May 1, 2024 arrest] We sang as we were driven to jail ... civil rights songs “This Little Light of Mine” and “We Shall Not Be Moved...We continued singing in the holding cell.”
- La Presse reports (May 4, 2024) that the encampment at McGill University is screening the 1966 film The Battle of Algiers. The film portrays the fight for Algerian liberation from French colonial oppression including surveillance, violence, and torture.
- UC Irvine professor Tiffany Willoughby-Herard was arrested, alongside her students, on May 15, 2024. Asked by an ABC reporter about repercussions to her job, she replied "What job do I have if the students don't have a future?"

There seems to be two orientations towards demands for change, even in sympathetic media, one is a turn towards tragedy, the other a turn to romance. However, we must not forget the concrete transformations collectively brought about by protesters. For example:

- York University (UK) agreed to stop investments in weapons and arms manufacturers linked to Israel, following pressure from students
- The Senate of the University of Florence (Italy) approved a statement calling for a ceasefire
- The University of Copenhagen (Denmark) agreed to student demands that they cut financial and institutional ties with Israel
- Ghent University in Belgium severed ties with Israeli universities, “as they no longer align with its human rights policy”

If university campuses are meant to be places of debates and struggle (including the struggle to free ourselves from the coloniality of the present), Palestine cannot be the exception to free speech on campus—this is the legacy of the encampment.



## HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHAT YOU DO DECIDE?



From Art History Decolonial Action Group  
and Academics for Palestine-Concordia

How is it decided by those in power that which action requires a reaction?

A reprimand?

A denouncement?

A tribunal hearing?

Do they ever realize that their reaction equally exposes their hollow commitment to Land acknowledgements?

Decolonization?

Next-Gen University?

The events that transpired on the morning of 3rd June 2024 exemplified both the hollowness and that some lives are worth less. After 8 months of ongoing and well-documented genocide, after countless protests, direct action, letter writing, memorials, and vigils, which were consistently responded to with silence, gaslighting, misinformation, harassment, anti-Palestine racism, congressional hearings, pointless meetings, students responded by attempting to take over the GM Building of Concordia University.

The attempted occupation corresponded with increased attacks on Rafah, a densely populated area in Gaza. It corresponded with the administration's refusal to recognize or negotiate in any meaningful way with SPHR or anyone else after months of meetings and protests. It corresponded with its refusal to have a meaningful discussion on divestment and the historic failure of the administration to negotiate in good faith with students.

It is in this context that the statement below was written and circulated, as a way to acknowledge the side that the university refuses to see.

Today (4th September 2024), it is 3 days shy of 11 months to the genocide in Gaza and the silence of our university.

The Art History Decolonial Action Group and Academics for Palestine-Concordia. This statement was written just after Concordia called the cops on students who were attempting to occupy the Administration building.

We, as Concordia's students, faculty, staff and academics, are shocked and disappointed by the reaction of Concordia University to the events that took place on the morning of 3rd of June 2024.

We are disappointed that the University deemed it ethical to call the police to respond to students' right to protest. We are disappointed that the email detailing the "Incident in the GM Building" simply identified them as "masked protestors" without also acknowledging that they were Concordia students.

We are disappointed that the University fails to acknowledge students' demands, and that instead of engaging with them, the University sends in police, endangering the lives and futures of students, while simultaneously celebrating the graduating class of 2024.

We are disappointed that the University thinks that business can continue as usual while we mark 8 months of a genocide, and more than 40,000 people killed in Gaza.

We are disappointed to see that instead of recognizing the pain we experience watching violent images, and the worry we endure thinking about our families, colleagues, fellow academics, children, women and men are almost more than we can endure, the university administration further endangers the lives of students by converting their protests into records that would follow them around.

We are disappointed that the University refuses to Disclose and Divest when its own academic community - that it deems as world class - has consistently urged it to do just that, and instead the University refuses to listen to them.

We are disappointed that the University can consider the drop in enrollment as a tragedy, and yet call the cops against Concordia students, making it clear that it is not students that it cares about, but just the financial value they bring to the institution.

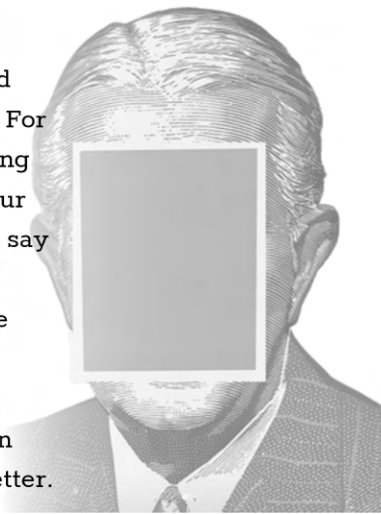
We are disappointed to note that the graffiti bothers our university administration more than its complicity in a genocide in Gaza and the violence in the West Bank, condemned by the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

We once again ask the university to engage in a sincere and honest dialogue with students, and to listen to their call to Boycott and Divest. We call on the university to recognize that students are not just clients and paychecks, but are stakeholders in a future that requires that we take an ethical position.



A note from the editors. The timeline included in this submission is a window into one of a myriad of grassroots responses on campus expressing solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for freedom. Although the timeline is focused on a specific period (fall 2023 / winter 2024), this text has been included because it illustrates one of many meaningful collective responses at Concordia expressing support for Palestine despite repression on campus.

The Art History Decolonial Action Group (AHDAG) came together in a moment of heightened anger and emotions following the events of 7th October 2023 or "the situation in the Middle East." The following is an excerpt from our living archive which contains a timeline of our multiple exchanges and actions that had taken place leading to the creation of AHDAG and onwards. At this initial stage, members of AHDAG consciously chose to remain anonymous for safety and solidarity. The concerns for our safety emerged from the silence and actions of faculty members when it became clear that calls of neutrality were a façade to hide behind.



Appendage: We have been asked to add why we think these actions were important. For us, these events and our need to do something are evidence of an embodied education, in our fundamental belief in what we do, learn and say in our classrooms, in a praxis that can't be divorced from action. It is a testament to the fact that for us 'decolonization,' 'next-gen university,' 'critical pedagogy' were not just buzzwords. We have faith in what they mean and represent. A possibility of something better.

**Wednesday, October 19th, 2023:** Amidst the expanding violence against Palestinians, members of Concordia University's art history group collected signatures for a letter of support which called for the academic protection of students attending the global strike for Palestine (Friday, October). In the letter, we demanded, "We know administrative complexities are at play here, but the undersigned group of art history students in the department ask for the support of a general strike on October 20th to join city-wide organizing for the decolonization of Palestine. **WE ASK THAT YOU FOLLOW SUIT FOR A GENERAL STRIKE, INCLUDING ARTS ORGANIZATIONS LIKE TRINITY SQUARE VIDEO.** While Concordia's support through their statement is a good **FIRST** step, **we demand solidarity and support for the general strike to alleviate reprimand for missed classes, work, and labour in support of the protests taking place. This is decolonization in real-time.**"

**Friday, October 20th - Saturday, October 21st, 2023:** several student members who had signed the letter were approached by a faculty member to follow up with the email. Guised as a "check-in," the students felt the faculty reprimanded them for their actions rather than supporting their initiatives. In one meeting, a student vocalized their unease with the approach the faculty member was taking through these check-ins, and in response, the faculty member highlighted the missteps the students took with regard to their letter. The supposed "check-in" was a reprimand for speaking publicly about Palestine.

**Sunday, October 22nd, 2023:** Founding AHDAG member wheat-pasted Pro-Palestine Artist Statements with a QR code around Concordia's Faculty of Fine Arts. These posters were quickly removed, and the incident was never shared at any faculty-level meeting or discussed with students. The event was treated as a non-event and thus invisibilized.

**Monday, October 23rd, 2023:** Postering continues on Monday, October 23rd. Students who had sent the email to the department received a response agreeing to their demand for the right to protest. The faculty also received emails informing them of no academic reprimand on the day of the strike.

**Tuesday, October 24th, 2023:** Members of Concordia's art history department met to discuss their issues and goals for the department regarding Palestine. The meeting concluded with the formal launch of AHDAG.

**Tuesday, October 31st, 2023:** AHDAG meets to plan the group's next steps, including a statement, open letter, launch of an Instagram page and archive, and a film screening through the Visual Collections Repository.

**Tuesday, November 7th, 2023:** The first film screening by AHDAG of the film Tantura (2022, directed by Alon Schwarz).

Reflection from one viewer: "It is amazing to see how systematic the collapse of any Israeli criticism has been as early as the 1970s. It scares me to think that if they can do this to 'one of their own', how would they punish us?"



**Wednesday, November 1st, 2023:** A Brown Bag Lunch is announced via an email sent by the Department of Art History titled “**Activism at Concordia.**” It reads, “Today’s generation of students is on track to be the most well-educated yet as well as the most politically engaged by far. What are the positive pathways for supporting civic engagement and political activism in the academic context? Please join us for an informative conversation with special guest Aisha Topsakal, Director of the Office of Rights and Responsibilities, about activism at the university, followed by a Q&A. All graduate students in our program are strongly encouraged to attend.”

**Friday, November 10th, 2023:** The Brown Bag Lunch.

During the event, students shared their frustrations with not having the language and tools to discuss the events, for wanting to talk about Palestine and what was to become a genocide, and support for countering the environment of fear about having these discussions in the classroom.

One faculty member advises: You can call security.

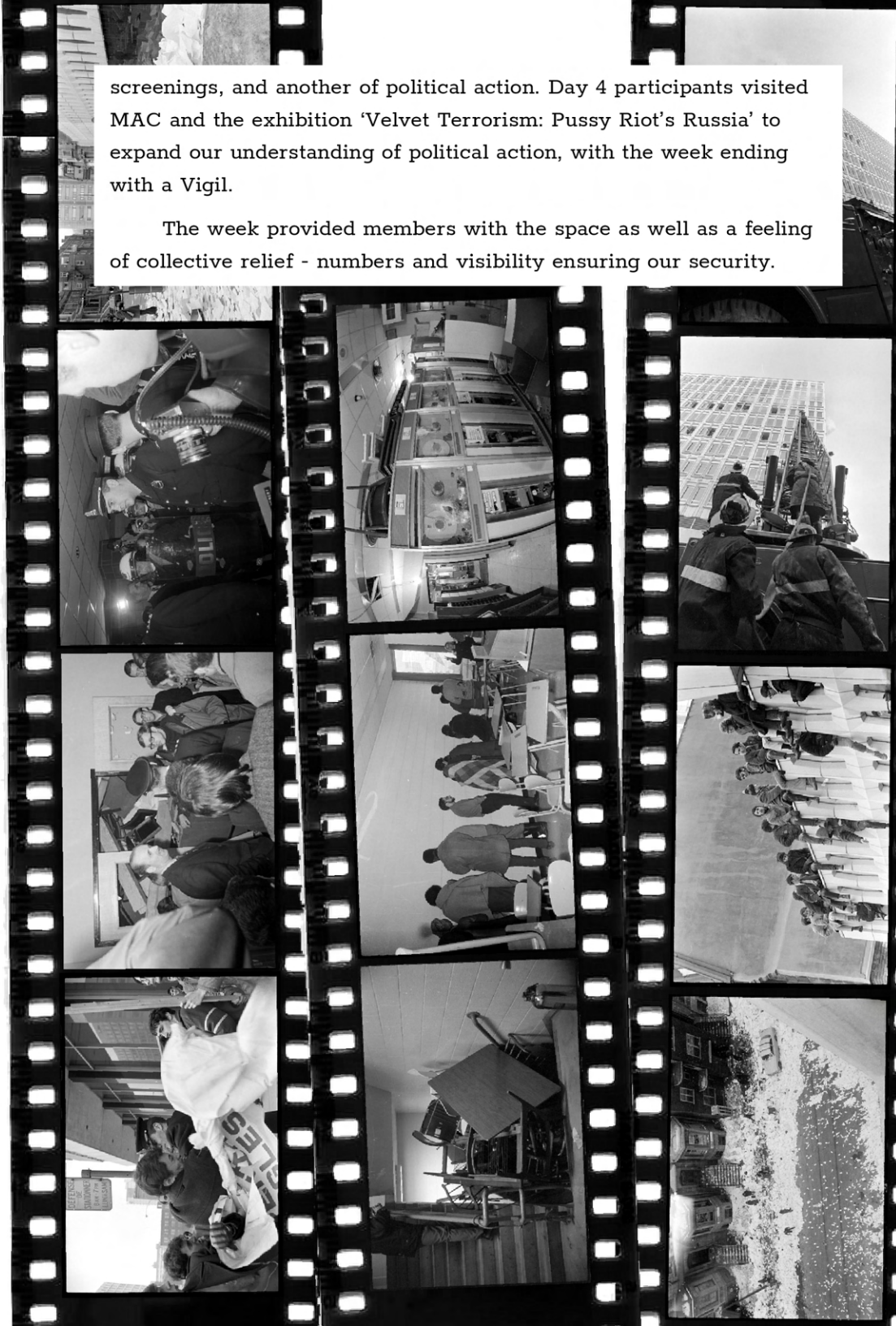
Students and AHDAG members leave the meeting and note there was a general misunderstanding of student experience and gaslighting by the professors doing the silencing.

**Tuesday, November 14th, 2023:** AHDAG releases their open letter, which is shared with all departments and professors. A student and faculty member confirm the hostility of some faculty members who ask for the names of the students who sent this letter and AHDAG members to be revealed.

**January 29th - February 2nd, 2024:** Members of AHDAG launch their Pro-Palestine Week long Program, ‘Here to Listen: Solidarity is Horizontal,’ in collaboration with several groups and as a cross-discipline and faculty action. The program centred around listening, re-learning, action, accountability and reflection and included a discussion with Palestinian artists Jenin Yaseen and Sameerah Ahmad, who had been censored by ROM, readings, a day of film screenings, and another of political action. Day 4 participants visited

screenings, and another of political action. Day 4 participants visited MAC and the exhibition ‘Velvet Terrorism: Pussy Riot’s Russia’ to expand our understanding of political action, with the week ending with a Vigil.

The week provided members with the space as well as a feeling of collective relief - numbers and visibility ensuring our security.





### Part III - Community

One excellent element to the grassroots activism at Concordia that has happened across generations is the existence of a fluid relationship between campus activism and community organizing happening more broadly in the city. The communication and sharing of ideas between campus activist hubs and community organizing milieus is essential to the rise of various important events of protest on campus. Long-standing spaces on campus that serve activist life at the university, including The People's Potato and Cinema Politica, were established not simply by students, but through an active exchange and collaboration that included community activism.

This last year there have been many attempts to criminalize and denounce, on the part of university administrators, particularly at McGill surrounding the Gaza solidarity encampment, the presence of community activists being framed as “outside agitators”. This unjust framework attempts to ridicule both the capacity and intelligence of students who are making active, accurate and meaningful choices to collaborate with community activist networks. This collaboration between community and campus is something to celebrate and not criminalize.



## A NOTE ON REJECTING THE REPRESSION OF COLLECTIVE POSTERING AT CONCORDIA

A note from Stefan Christoff appealing for a written account of Concordia security intervening in a street art workshop in April, 2023.

This text is first a thank you to all who joined the workshop on art and activism that I facilitated in March 2023 in relation to my street art practice. The workshop was hosted at Concordia by the School of Community and Public Affairs Student Association and The Geography Undergraduate Student Society.

After giving the workshop inside the Hall building we all went outside to place the cut out lettering up with wheatpaste, Concordia security intervened. A couple of points to consider, Concordia security agents physically engaged with me and pushed me, attempting to force me to remain there until police arrived.

It should be noted that placing posters up with paste was deemed illegal for some time, but that law was struck down in 2010. In July 2010, (500-10-003080-056), the Quebec Superior Court invalidated the city's anti-postering bylaw, declaring it illegal and inapplicable (in relation to the law being unconstitutional as reported by CBC).

The decision, as set out by the Court, affirmed that if the city did not provide space for public postering by its residents, any bylaw limiting postering on public property would be an infringement on its citizens' freedom of expression. This issue hasn't been fully resolved legally, the law is still up in the air, although security agencies and police continue to claim that it exists.

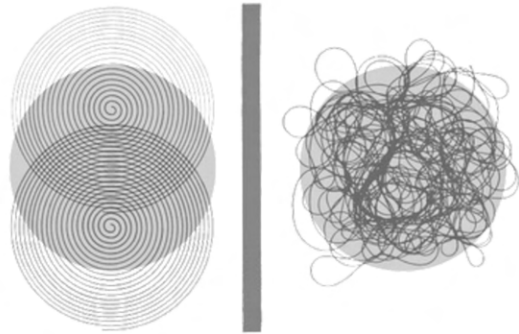
Given that Concordia security intervened physically and grabbed me, trying to detain me, also that they confiscated an art portfolio of prints that I had collected from a group of local artists for a benefit effort to support both the Kurdish Red Crescent and Lubunya Deprem Dayanışması / LGBTQ Earthquake Solidarity, I can say clearly that this was an act of unprovoked repression.

After having grabbed my portfolio off the street, they held it for a number of months. I only got the portfolio back after a number of professors intervened with both the Dean of Students at the time and security forces at the university.



## INTERVIEW WITH MAY CHIU

COORDINATOR OF THE CHINATOWN ROUND TABLE



What follows is an interview with long-time social justice organizer and friend May Chiu. Stefan and I felt it was important to highlight how narratives of safety are being used as excuses to repress people disrupting the “social order” all over the city, not just at Concordia. May explains how this thinking is alive and well in the neighbouring community of Chinatown. - John Nathaniel

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**John:** Could you begin by explaining briefly what the Chinatown Working Group and Round Table are?

**May Chiu:** Well, I’m representing the Chinatown Round Table but the Chinatown Working Group kind of disbanded a couple of years ago. The Working Group was a group of volunteers who came together in the face of the crisis of losing chunks of Chinatown to gentrification. We had asked the city for a development plan and the city put that into place. One of the objectives of the development plan is to organize a platform where the different stakeholders in Chinatown can get together and interact with the City and be able to participate in decisions that affect Chinatown.

**J:** And you sit on that Round Table that was created in that aftermath?

**MC:** Yes, I’m the sole employee. I’m the coordinator of the Round Table.

**J:** The idea of this zine is to talk about the idea of security on campus and how the university is using this idea of safety to repress and surveil the Concordia community. We wanted to get different perspectives on this and were thinking about how those kinds of similar narratives play out in communities that are right next door to the university as well. So, could you talk a bit about how the idea of safety is being used in Chinatown and what the reality of policing, surveillance and repression is like there?

**MC:** The concept of security and safety for the past few years has been automatically linked to homelessness and marginality. Chinatown, like many areas in Montreal, has been hit by the housing crisis. But historically there had always been a number of shelters on the outskirts of Chinatown, and for 20 years now, there has been an Indigenous shelter inside Chinatown’s territory. Or, as I prefer to say, Chinatown has surrounded an Indigenous shelter for 20 years now.

Chinatown, like many other neighbourhoods, has seen expressions of homelessness become very evident to the point of provoking lots of outright social tensions on public space, just because housed and unhoused people have to share the same space and things don’t always go well.

So for the past almost two years, there has been an organization, which ironically is an anti-racist organization, they’ve done really good work in terms of anti-racism, but they’re a very liberal organization, and for two years they’ve been organizing distressed housed residents and merchants in Chinatown to be extremely pro-police. Which is fine! I don’t have an issue with people being pro-police. What I do have an issue with is proposing increased policing and surveillance as the **sole** answer to a hugely complex crisis, such as the housing crisis, mental health crisis, addiction crisis, the crisis of poverty. Policing is being used to instrumentalize people who are

looking for an immediate and quick fix. For example, last year these groups of residents held four press conferences to demand the city close a shelter inside Guy Favreau.

We in the Chinatown Round Table try to offer other long term sustainable solutions, but they aren't sexy. Our position was, if you want to ask for the closing of the shelter, fine, but that is a vastly insufficient solution to these multiple crises happening in Chinatown. So what happened? The shelter got closed, people got kicked out on the street, and this year the press conferences started again saying "We want to dismantle all these tents!"

So this is our frustration, if we are going to put effort into finding solutions, let's find lasting solutions. Solutions that also center the safety and security of unhoused residents, along with the housed residents. Because I think we can come to a consensus on that. This is where the class prejudice comes out. Because when people talk about "safety" and "security", they always think about it for their social class. They don't look at the reality in terms of: Who are the people who are actually dying in Chinatown, and all over the city? Who are the people who are getting stabbed, robbed and beaten? They are the people who are the most marginalized and the most vulnerable, but we never talk about that discourse.

They've been courting the police with such passion for two years now. Personally, I don't think bubble tea with cops, or mooncakes with cops is going to fix the multiple crises.

**J:** It's going to displace people, maybe at best right? Or criminalize people.

**MC:** What will happen is we'll push them out of Chinatown, they'll go to the [Gay] Village, and then the Village will protest, and they'll come back to Chinatown. We're just playing ping pong with human lives. We need to live up to our capacity as human beings to work together and find solutions that are sustainable for everyone.

**J:** It's interesting hearing you talk about all this. Even though it's a largely publicly funded university, we see Concordia deal with the local homeless population by just kicking them off campus. And this is part of their surveillance apparatus. They're codifying who's supposed to be here and who looks like they fit into the campus space. They then push away any sort of deviance, whether that be people that need a place to rest, or social movements.

**MC:** It's the NIMBY phenomenon! This is the liberal approach of "oh ya we have to take care of these people so, we need more housing, but we just don't want to see them here, in front of my house".

**J:** Are there other alternatives to repression and policing that you'd like to see people turn to when faced with these issues you've spoken about in Chinatown?

**MC:** I think we need to have community discussions, to try to figure medium and long term solutions. Long term solutions are political mobilizations to get the political class to step up. In the short and medium term, we can build solidarities between different kinds of marginalized communities. One of the narratives that the pro-police camp have taken is that "we need to speak for those that can't speak for themselves", and that "all these vulnerable Chinese seniors who are afraid to call the police, we need to protect them".

They are pitting one class of vulnerable people against an even more vulnerable people. This summer there was an example that exposed some of these possibilities for solidarities. The pro-police group called for a demonstration against food distribution happening in Chinatown every Sunday by an NGO. On the day of the demonstration I went, and I observed who the beneficiaries of the food distribution were. Yes, there were unhoused people, there were refugee claimants, there were ALOT of Chinese seniors, there were youth. So food security is something that is a common issue that can unite people.

**J:** Hmmmm so realizing that there's more in common than we might think.

**MC:** That's it! The seniors, even though they are housed, they are also hungry. They are on a fixed income. I know people who pay more than 50% of their pensions on rent [...]. Those are common needs that both housed and unhoused people have and it just makes more sense for us to mobilize together.

How do you get more food on your plate by chasing unhoused people out of Chinatown? It doesn't work! But if the two of you work together and say "hey we need a program to address food insecurity in Chinatown, where everyone will benefit", then you're one step ahead of where you were previously.

Another project we have is a garden. And we are really proud of this. It's very basic. We can't say we grow enough food to feed people seriously, but one of the goals is to build solidarities among the different communities that live in Chinatown. It's the only Asian, Indigenous garden that we know of. It's got a beautiful Medicine Wheel in the middle.

Recently we had a workshop where we invited an Indigenous health expert with a Chinese traditional medicine doctor. There were lots of Chinese seniors who attended. One of the objectives was to show that Indigenous peoples are not only people that are in need, or on the street and consuming, but Indigenous people also have very valuable knowledge and expertise. They are interested in traditional healing, just as you are! It's just a garden, and it's not going to solve the multiple crisis points, but it's an example of something we can do together!

**J:** Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish, May?

**MC:** Because the Round Table is a platform of diverse stakeholders, we actually don't take a position on policing. Because we have people who are for Defunding the Police, and we have very pro-police people on the Board and among the membership. So we don't take a position, but I think that publicly asserting that you cannot take a position is powerful in breaking the stereotype that the Chinese community is

pro-police. In fact, for the past two years, we've been supporting the family of Ronny Kay, who was shot and killed by the SPVM. That's part of the reason why there is no consensus on having coffee and mooncake with the cops, who killed one of our community members.





By David Bernans

After the 1969 Sir George Williams computer centre occupation – an anti-racism fight that ended with a police raid, a fire, one protester dead from head trauma and \$2 million in damages – Sir George Williams University made some reforms to reduce tensions. In the aftermath, administrators did not take any serious action to dismantle racism on campus but did see fit to allow student representation on university decision-making bodies and establish an Ombuds office – sensible, although very modest, measures that allowed students to express concerns within established structures. Protestors were arrested, expelled, imprisoned and deported in the immediate aftermath and in the months following the occupation and police raid. However, with the passage of time, Concordia University, the successor institution to Sir George Williams University, thanks to pressure from anti-racist militants and the 2022 President’s taskforce on anti-Black racism, has come to recognize that protestors were expressing legitimate grievances. In 2023, Concordia even officially commemorated the Hall Building as the site of “Canada’s largest student protest against anti-Black racism”.

Fast-forward to 2002 and the aftermath of the Netanyahu rebellion, which saw pro-Palestinian students clash with police protecting the Israeli war criminal’s public-relations event on Concordia’s Sir George Williams campus, resulting in broken windows and the flooding of the Hall building’s ventilation system with pepper spray. What reforms did Concordia institute in the wake of this confrontation? Should we expect an official commemoration of the struggles of Palestinian solidarity activists any time soon?

If there were any post-Netanyahu “reforms” at Concordia, they essentially amount to an even larger crackdown on activism in general and pro-Palestinian activism in particular. The suppression of campus activism had already begun in September of 2001 as Concordia authorities embraced the post-9/11 “war on terror” mentality, targeting Arab and Muslim students and their allies. The anti-imperialist student handbook produced by the Concordia Student Union called “Uprising” was labeled by B’nai Brith the “blueprint for Osama bin Laden’s youth program in North America.” Concordia administrators fed the flames of post-9/11 hysteria by calling for three government departments to investigate the CSU and put it into trusteeship. In fact, the planning and attempted implementation of the 2002 Netanyahu event itself must be considered as part of the post-9/11 reaction to the Palestinian solidarity activism that had been prevalent on campus in the early 2000s. So it is hardly surprising that Concordia would decide to intensify its repressive measures after the Netanyahu debacle.



September 9, 2002

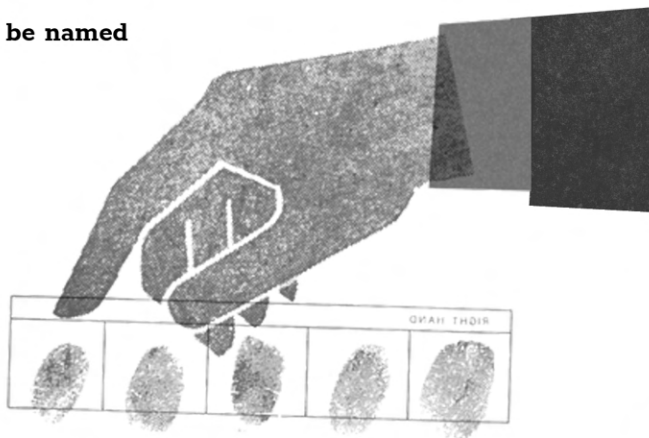
## The committee that must not be named

Post-Netanyahu, there were no reforms to increase student representation and there was no new forum established for filing grievances. In the immediate aftermath of the confrontation, there was a

ban on all public events dealing with middle east issues, but the ban was widely protested and ridiculed and was ultimately short-lived. A more lasting measure was the “Risk Assessment Committee.” The committee was formed with the University’s Vice President Services Michael Di Grappa at its head with a mandate to evaluate security risks associated with campus events on a “case-by-case” basis.

The case-by-case evaluations were never made public, but they seem to have led to many last-minute cancellations of Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR) event bookings. It appears that many events highlighting the crimes of Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestinian land and the treatment of those living under occupation are considered security risks by the committee. Yet those last-minute cancellations were never made in the name of the committee. It was always the VP Services himself who cancelled the events due to vague “security concerns.”

That is why I was so surprised in the summer of 2006 when I received an email announcing that my own room booking was cancelled by order of the Risk Assessment Committee. The committee had apparently decided that a public reading of my novel, North of 9/11, on the fifth anniversary of the 2001 terror attacks was a security risk. Ironically, the fictional plot of the novel takes place against the nonfictional backdrop of post-9/11 security overkill on Concordia’s campus.



The email was the only official acknowledgement that I am aware of that establishes the risk assessment committee’s involvement in shutting down campus activism. It proved to be very useful in publicising the committee and my novel. It was written confirmation of the mysterious committee’s involvement in the censorship of a Canadian author. I carefully filed the email away, made the first in a series of official access to information requests, called PEN Canada and then called my publisher.

PEN’s support made all the difference. It is not every day that the writer’s freedom organization takes time out from helping jailed poets in Iran to write a letter of support for an author targeted for censorship by a secret committee at a Canadian university (on the fifth anniversary of 9/11 no less). The story made the front page of The Montreal Gazette; it was picked up by news services and student newspapers across Canada and even internationally (The Guardian ran a piece in its Books section).

Still, the Risk Assessment Committee remained shrouded in mystery. The University even bizarrely claimed that the committee that banned my event doesn’t even exist. It took three years at Québec’s Access to Information Commission to learn anything more about the mysterious university body.

The following are some of the facts established at the 2009 Access to Information hearing:

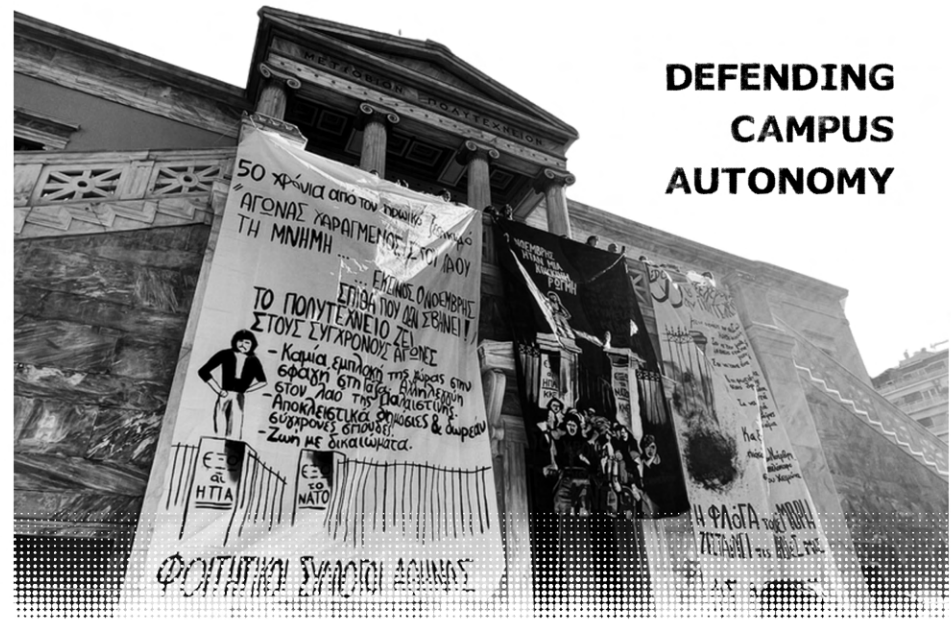
- The Risk Assessment Committee exists, but according to an affidavit from Concordia’s legal counsel, it is an ad hoc committee that meets at the pleasure of VP Di Grappa. It does not keep minutes or record its decisions in any way.
- The names of past and present committee members have never been recorded in any form. In short, it is a secret committee that leaves no paper trail whatsoever. It is therefore impossible to access a list of members under Québec legislation because those laws only apply to documents held by public bodies; if Concordia does not make records of the committee’s dealings, there are no documents — nothing to be accessed.

The access request also yielded some troubling information about Concordia's use of an investigator to follow my September 2006 on-campus movements leading up to the book reading that ultimately occurred off-campus. If you are an activist and you think your on-campus movements are being observed, you might just be paranoid, but then again...

Does the risk assessment committee still exist in 2024? Given its built-in plausible deniability, it's hard to say for sure, but it seems likely that something like it must continue to this day. Today's post-October 7 environment bares an uncanny resemblance to the post-9/11 environment of the early 2000s in the demonization of pro-Palestinian activism. It appears that a good many more years and much more activist effort will be required before Concordia positively commemorates the struggles of its Palestinian solidarity activists.



David Bernans is a Québec-based writer and translator. He is the author of Con U Inc.: Privatization, Marketization and Globalization at Concordia University (and Beyond) (Concordia Student Union, 2001) and the historical novel, North of 9/11 (Cumulus Press, 2006). In a past life, David was a faculty member in Concordia's Political Science department, a researcher and archivist for the Concordia Student Union and a translator for Concordia's Education department. Follow him on X @dbernans.



## DEFENDING CAMPUS AUTONOMY

### Introduction

I have had experiences with security at Concordia in two capacities. One, as the friend of a person who sets up an anarchist table. The second, as an organizer or everyday anarchist. In both roles, I've participated in or witnessed showdowns with campus security. Above that, I've realized how fear or anxiety about campus security and surveillance limits where we table, flyer, put up stickers, or perform direct actions - if we do at all. This fear doesn't even require campus security to be right next to us when we are acting.

To be clear, I don't think campus security is exactly the biggest priority for the student movement or a huge problem in Montreal, but if we are to have a combative and autonomous student population we will increasingly be going head-to-head with security. One fact to remember is that potentially the world's strongest and long-lasting forceful student movement, the Greek student movement, made it so that police were legally forbidden from entering campus (until recently) because students would physically fight policing or surveillance. Without security or police, campuses can be turned into autonomous spaces of refuge, politicization, community organizing, and occupation. Lecture halls can be used freely, and tables can be set up and literature made readily available and left out at key campus junctures.

The point of this text is to highlight that security serves a political function on campus, whether individual security guards or the people who oversee them are conscious of that or not. This political function is to enforce limitations on how organizing happens on campus, and to call the police to intervene when necessary or — even — to take on vigilante roles themselves and attack activists.

When I put up stickers or posters on campus, I think about campus security and surveillance when I choose not to brazenly put up posters on plain walls that aren't designated for posterage. At UQAM (one of Montreal's major Francophone universities),



students have managed to spray paint and colour massive anarchist murals that give a sense of militant culture to some of the university's walls. I don't imagine many people would dare to spray paint on campus — unless they are fully masked up — because of the massive surveillance and intervention apparatus Concordia has set up. More on this all later: first a discussion of tabling.

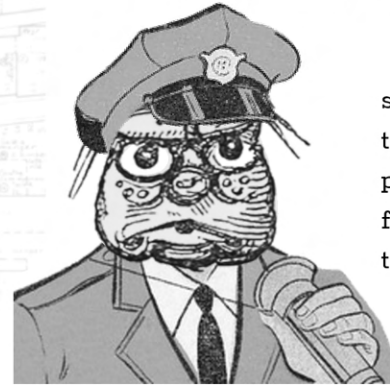
#### Four Feet South of Zine Slinging

The anarchist table that my friend puts together with the help of a small crew, has booklet versions of texts written on a variety of struggles: from Shut Down Canada, the George Floyd uprising, to Iranian anarchist resistance. There are stickers, bookmarks, flyers for upcoming actions, and Resistance Montreal calendars which document some of the month's upcoming actions in the anarchist milieu. The table has a banner in front of it that reads "Organize" with a big anarchist A and O.

The table used to be set up outside of the Hall building on the intersection of Mackay and de Maisonneuve. It was set up on what is technically Concordia property, but in no way blocking any exits,

entrances, or clogging foot traffic. Unless you're into "tabling culture" — if that even is a thing — you probably don't care to hear about the perfectionist impulses of finding the very best place to set up your table. Ideally, you want your table facing as many key points of foot traffic as possible so that people notice you, so you avoid wind tunnels, and you have cover from rain. Anyhow, it turned out that the best place was on the tiny stretch of pavement of the sidewalk, technically private property of Concordia University.

Tabling at this location, security would regularly harass my friend and their crew. Initially, they were slow on picking up on their tabling habits, and they tabled a few times with little or no interaction with security. Eventually, they showed up more and more regularly, insisting my friend move their table off of "University property." They would enter into absurdist arguments — because, on my friend's end as well, I often questioned why they cared so much about continuing to occupy that same stretch of land. These arguments literally centred around my friend being demanded by security to move their table four feet south so that they were no longer technically tabling on University property, and my friend, on the other hand, refusing.



One day, the arguments continued until security decided to call the cops on the little tabling operation. The police eventually pulled up. At that point, however, my friend's crew had conceded and moved their table four feet south.

The point of this anecdote is not to complain about this singular experience — which in the grand scheme of things, or even the small scheme of things, is one notch above stubbing your toe. This experience was my friend's first encounter with university security and it illustrates how they function with regards to student activism. The university decides which spaces students can use. When students or non-students try to use other spaces for activist purposes, campus security intervenes. Campus security makes use of a widespread network of surveillance



which identifies problems, and especially repeat problems. My friend's anarchist table became a repeat problem — eventually, in fact, security moved from taking hours to arrive at their table to arriving within minutes despite the table date and time being decided spontaneously and without notice. Campus security carries with them the threat of harassment, and, ultimately, the threat of calling the police which can spell legal trouble or worse.

In this way, it is hard to set up tables at spots in Concordia where you will get lots of foot traffic. The technically designated areas aren't exactly ideal for all purposes, sometimes you want to table elsewhere. The same thing goes for placing stickers, or posters. What's more, at UQAM, until this year, students were able to maintain for years a 'table de mob' in the middle of the highest foot-traffic area on UQAM campus. A 'table de mob' or mobilization table has stickers, flyers, posters, and new journals that keep people informed on all upcoming actions and events. The 'table de mob' would be setup 24/7 and people would autonomously drop off texts, leaflets, and other printed material for passing students. At UQAM, a stack of hundreds of flyers could quickly be emptied by passing students within a few days. Unfortunately, the eviction of a student association in 2023 served, equally, as a pretext for the eviction of UQAM's most central 'table de mob' by security. There are no central 'table de mobs' at Concordia.

### **Campus Activism is Banned**

As an activist, when occupations or actions are being planned, "how will university security react?" is the pressing question. Basically, it is a commonly held view that university security can shut down our actions. This became clearer after the "Table Wars" of November 2023 when Zionists threw down against Palestine

solidarity crews. Security became paranoid after these events and ramped up their monitoring and presence at Palestine solidarity related events, and made sure the Montreal riot police were also always nearby when rallies were held. Something as basic as a Zionist tabling session is now guarded by close to a dozen security agents. The threat of repression or expulsion for bolder Palestine solidarity actions has now increased substantially, though it was always higher than average.

As an example of this dynamic, I once witnessed an Arab person holding up an anti-Zionist sign and handing out flyers in the Hall building get reprimanded by a crowd of security agents, and asked to show his student ID. I found out from these security agents, and it was later confirmed by friends, that flyering is in fact banned from campus, but this rule is selectively applied.

This is not so bad as some Canadian or USA campuses in which, through the use of security and surveillance, universities have literally enacted policies to ban any kind of organizing around Palestine or the Middle East.

### **The Future of the Student Movement**

The opportunities for repression by security grow as politics in the territory ruled by Canada focus more on anti-leftism, repression, and surveillance. In almost every Canadian province, a focus on cracking down on "leftist" or "woke" trends inside of schools has become the platform of almost every right-wing premier — each elected at an increasing pace. The federal Liberal party was quick to, after the "Table Wars," shine a spotlight on the need to police universities. It is very far from memory the last time that the Prime Minister of Canada called-out students organizing at a specific University, but Justin Trudeau did so nationally in November 2023. Footage and news reports of the events at Concordia even played in the metros for tens of thousands of travelers to see. Scarier opportunities for repression are opening up with the federal Conservative party's inevitable upcoming electoral victory.



Today, what campus security allows, could easily be what they try to crack down on and prevent in the future. We should just assume that campus security will share information and surveillance data with police on activist activities. This isn't just something a conspiracy theorist would think up. For instance, after the "Table Wars" it should surprise no one if all of the footage gathered by campus surveillance was shared with police in an effort to sustain criminal charges against one arrested student activist who is Arab.

Abolishing campus security and its replacement with a grassroots and organic method of mutual aid is not yet possible. Concordia's student movement does not yet have the power to challenge the campus' security force and force the administration to cut down on dozens of jobs. However, this is not to say that a coming future where campus security is abolished is not unimaginable. But first, the Concordia student movement will need to grow its strength, and, not just that, it will need to grow the strength of an anarchist or libertarian culture within its movement. This text is hardly a good place to give advice on the right directions for the growth of a student movement with a strong libertarian culture. However, important directions for action include developing a culture of striking, direct action, sabotage, risk-taking, solidarity, non-hierarchy, common coordination spaces, and the creation of campaigns that reach outside of the university and join popular or neighbourhood struggles elsewhere in Montreal. We need to train and pick up tools to become better at occupying, blockading, and pushing out actors from our campus before we can be able to kick out security.

In the meantime, our attitude towards security should be realistic but not debilitating. Campus security hardly has the same capacity or power as the police to control the mass of the student population. During the student strike of January 2024, Concordia's campus security was not able to stop or even be present on the ground for all of the blockages, small barricades, and hard pickets that were set up. The multiplication of actions across a wide geography made things unmanageable for campus security.

When we are planning actions or tabling, I would encourage people to push the limits a bit. Especially if there is nothing really illegal planned, the worst that can usually happen (barring, of course, a security officer going rogue and getting violent) is tension with security reaching a boiling point such that they call the police. At which point, you can wrap up the action and leave before the police come if that is your plan. For some people, the fear of expulsion seems important, but expulsion is a rarely used tool against university activists and should be viewed with realism and the confidence that other Concordia students will fight back against the individual targeting of specific organizers.

Don't be afraid of security. There are more of us than there are of them!

- An anonymous anarchist



First hours of McGill encampment, April 27th.  
Courtesy of Joseph Dahdah (@dahdah.mtl)

