Remapping Academic Embodiment:

A Phenomenological Perspective to Center Queer Students' Experiences

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Abstract

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In a contemporary academic landscape increasingly influenced by neoliberalism, this study highlights the enduring significance of university spaces for student queer communities as sites for both the reproduction of heterocisnormativity and queer community building. Within this context, the present research centers the embodied experiences of queer students to explore the presence and impact of power dynamics inscribed in academic spaces. Queer (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Johnston & Longhurst, 2010) and trans geographies (Nash, 2010) are at the forefront of this research due to their exploration of the tension between the body as a site of multi-scalar power dynamics and the intimacy of embodied queer emotions (Knopp, 2007). Ahmed's queer phenomenology (2006) is indispensable for its interpretation of orientation, disorientation, desire and embodiment as vectors of movement, action and experience in/of space. Focusing on two Montreal universities, the research seeks to answer a fundamental question: what does the embodied experience of queer students tell us about university spaces? This study uses sensitive and cognitive mapping (Gieseking, 2020; Olmedo, 2015) to center the embodied experiences of queer university students. Interpreted through the lens of queer phenomenology, the maps and qualitative interviews serve as creative research methods that contribute to the reconsideration of geography's theoretical and practical horizons. Key findings include unique campus trajectories shaped by the students' identities, spatially perceivable tensions between the student body and the Administration, shared experiences of comfort and discomfort within specific contexts, and the utmost importance of student-led community spaces within universities.

Key words: Embodiment, queer orientation, academic spaces, student perspectives, LGBTQ+, heterocisnormativity, Montréal

Summary

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Ce mémoire vise à mettre en lumière le rôle que jouent les universités pour les étudiant-e-s queer à la fois en tant que site de reproduction hétérocisnormative et en tant qu'espace consolidation de liens communautaires Cette étude centre, plus précisément, les expériences corporelles des étudiant·e·s queers afin d'y explorer la présence et l'impact des dynamiques de pouvoir spatialement vécues. Les géographies queer (Bell & Valentine, 1995 ; Johnston & Longhurst, 2010) et trans (Nash, 2010) sont centrales à cette recherche en raison de leur exploration de la tension entre le corps comme site de dynamiques de pouvoir multi-scalaires et l'intimité des émotions queer corporellement vécues (Knopp, 2007). La phénoménologie queer de Ahmed (2006) est mobilisée pour son analyse de l'orientation, de la désorientation, du désir et de la corporalité en tant que vecteurs de mouvement, d'action et d'expérience de l'espace. En concentrant l'analyse sur deux universités montréalaises, cette recherche souhaite répondre à une question fondamentale : qu'est-ce que l'expérience corporelle des étudiant·e·s queers nous apprend sur les espaces universitaires ? S'appuyant sur une méthodologie qui inclut entrevues qualitatives et cartographie sensible et mentale (Gieseking, 2020 ; Olmedo, 2015), les résultats mettent en lumière des processus créatifs qui contribuent à remodeler les horizons théoriques et pratiques géographiques. Les résultats incluent des trajectoires uniques sur le campus, certaines tensions spatialement perceptibles entre étudiant·e·s et Administration, des expériences partagées de confort et d'inconfort, et l'importance primordiale des espaces par et pour les étudiant·e·s au sein des universités.

Mots clés : Expérience corporelle, orientation queer, espaces universitaires, perspectives étudiantes, LGBTQ+, hétérocisnormativité, Montréal

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Dedication

À celleux qui transforment notre monde à tous les jours.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Despite the neoliberal push towards the commodification of higher education in Quebec universities since the 1990s, university spaces remain strongly significant to student communities. In the context of higher education, neoliberalism implies the promotion of educational entrepreneurship, the redefinition of students as consumers, the reduction of school services, expansion of student fees, and ever-growing disparities in funded fields of study (Giband et al., 2020; Rustin, 2016). The university, while built on exclusionary practices that reinforce power dynamics and social inequalities through the (re)production of social norms within and outside of its walls (McNeil et al., 2018; Pinar, 2012), continues to be an epicenter of opportunity for community building and identity exploration, a point of convergence between queer struggles and social or queer studies, and a place where students feel empowered to ground their desire for social change (Borghi et al., 2016).

In Quebec, the history of queer presence within universities has been under construction for decades, as demonstrated by the *Lesbian Studies Coalition* at Concordia University (1987-1993), and the 1992 colloquium *La Ville en Rose : lesbiennes et gais à Montréal – Histoires, cultures, sociétés* orchestrated by the *Université du Québec à Montréal* (UQAM) and Concordia University (Chamberland, 2020). In contrast, inclusive measures and practices towards LGBTQ+ population in schools have been met with resistance in recent years, notably by elected politicians. Among other events, one should note the Quebec Minister of Education's opposition to the installation of an inclusive toilet in a secondary school, in September 2023 (The Canadian Press, 2023). While contradicting the minister's own guide of recommendations regarding the inclusion of LGBTQ+ population in the educational system (Ministère de l'éducation du gouvernement du Québec, 2021), observers interpret this decision as part of a Canada-wide backlash against LBGTQ+ rights, that impacts all societal institutions, including universities.

My research is rooted in this site of queer community building and institutional power relations to advocate for safer campuses and to hold academic institutions accountable for their promises on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). By focusing on the spaces of Concordia University and the *Université du Québec à Montréal*, this master's research project aims to center queer student perspectives to document the sexual and gendered spatial dynamics of academia. Framing this project through the perspective of students' embodied experiences (Weiss, 2013)

in two Montreal universities, my research foregrounds the ideas and voices that come directly from queer communities. This project not only centers perspectives that are often suppressed and excluded (Valentine, 2007), but also challenges mainstream and top-down geographical epistemology and methodology (Wyly, 2009), and ultimately aims to contribute to social justice by fighting against discrimination and inequality in our learning and working environments.

Establishing the foundations of queer geographies, Bell and Valentine stated that "any geographical thinking about sexualities must begin by exploring how sexual identities are constructed and performed across space" (1995, p. 2). Inspired by their words, I wish to weave a memoir detailing experiences of navigating queer identity both within our[1] bodies and through the intricate, academic structure to bring to light the implications of the construction and performance of heterocisnormativity on our quotidian student experiences. Relatedly, I aim to assess how our embodied experiences impact our use of shared learning spaces in an effort to anchor this research in a movement towards reappropriation of academic spaces and campuses. This desire requires the cross-mobilization of critical, feminist, and queer geographical perspectives that focus on marginalized communities in order to work towards a reduction of social inequalities. Social justice issues are thereby central to my research, notably the freedom to express our identities in public spaces, equal access to education and to social life, and participation in public politics.

Queer theories (De Lauretis, 1991; Éribon, 2003) are fundamental to this project as their core principles and notions intervene at every step: this research is about queer bodies, queer experiences in public spaces, and also a potential queering – as in the deconstruction, "a discursive strategy involving the displacement or the placing into doubt of foundational assumptions" (Seidman, 1997, n.p.) – of academia. As the term 'queer' is in constant recomposition, the present research generally relies on Browne and Brown's definition:

> We understand that some people use queer as an identity to move beyond lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or trans (G. Brown, 2007a), whilst others see queer as a mode of thinking that questions how social norms are formed and created (see Giffney, 2004; Browne, 2006; Browne and Nash, 2010; Oswin, 2008; Podmore, 2013a). Queer has questioned the normalization of certain genders (male/female) and also sexualities, including some forms of lesbian and gay sexualities (what can be termed homonormativities […]). (2016, p. 2)

[1] I use the term 'our' when speaking about 'our bodies' or 'our embodied experiences' to situate and include myself as part of the subject of study, as I am studying queer experiences as a queer person. More on situatedness and positionality can be found in the Methodology section.

As such, this project is queer as much in the sense of considering queer experiences as central as it is in the sense of questioning and confronting academic and public norms regarding gender and sexuality that shape academic spaces. Drawing on the notion of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988), this research is conducted *by* & *for* marginalized communities and prioritizes, within both French and English academic communities of Montreal, the voices of LGBTQIA2S+ students.

Concretely, my research therefore centers queer student perspectives to ask: what does the embodied experience of queer students tell us about university spaces? By approaching this question from the angle of embodied, situated experiences, I document the relationship between queer students, their bodies and these public spaces – whether they are indoors, outdoors, formal or informal – in order to shed light on the sexual and gendered spatial dynamics inscribed in academic spaces. On the one hand, the relationship to the body influences the relationship to university spaces insofar as the former is impacted by multiple identity components (gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity as they intersect with these) that influence the way we perceive, use and occupy public space. On the other hand, the institutional structure within which we function seems to set an unavoidable context or frame for orienting oneself, that could furthermore impact our felt, embodied experience in academic settings. This hypothesis is partly inspired by Ahmed's approach to the concepts of queer orientation and direction, the latter representing "a relationship between body and space" (2006, p. 13). Indeed, this relationship (and its modulating particularities) between our bodies and academic spaces is overall central to this study, and can offer a different account of university spatial dynamics. By understanding our bodies as orienting devices that allow for geographic experiences, as theorized in queer phenomenology by Sarah Ahmed (2006), the institutional structure can be interpreted as an unavoidable set of references for orienting oneself that modulates our felt, embodied experience in academic settings. Because of queer students' divergent gender identities and sexual orientations, we experience the university's heterocisnormative public spaces through our queer bodies, resulting in a relationship that is inseparable from the institutional processes of stigma and social marginalization (Lane, 2021).

The present research question is thus supported by a theoretical framework that centers queer phenomenology to explore the themes of institutional heterocisnormativity, academic embodiment, queer identity and community building. To do so, the first chapter presents a literature review that relies on queer geographies and queer phenomenology, while also

borrowing notions of educational studies and other critical perspectives concerning institutional spaces. While feminist and critical geography provides insight into the spheres of public/private spaces and of spatial dynamics of power, queer geographies have generally focused on queer urban presence and sites of resistance, such as gayborhoods (Hess & Bitterman, 2021) or 'space[s] of difference' (Podmore, 2001), where lesbian desire and identity formation takes place. There have also been many studies done on queering the academy in the educational literature, but they often lack spatial or embodied analysis. On this particular intersection, the words of Stacey Waite in *Intersextionality: Embodied Knowledge, Bodies of Knowledge* (2018) are of great importance. Though they focus mainly on their teacher's position, reading their work made me wonder: how can we map our – similar, and mostly undocumented – student experiences? An equivalent desire to contribute to the discussion as a student remained with me while reading DasGupta, Rosenberg, Catungal and Gieseking's queer epistolary (2021), which brings into light the positionality of queer scholars and professors teaching critical perspectives. This thesis consequently aims to fill a certain gap in literature at the crossroads of the body, of student perspectives within academic spaces and of queer geographies in Montreal by mobilizing cognitive mapping as an alternative, *by & for* queer students, as a form of documentation.

The methodology chapter follows, creating connections between the theoretical composition of this research and its chosen methods of data collection. Applying the methods and methodology of queer studies (Browne & Nash, 2010) to practices of geography and cartography, the data collection of this research takes the form of open-ended interviews and the creation of sensitive mapping (Olmedo, 2015), the combination of which aims to expand possibilities in terms of expressing and representing queer embodiment. The section on methods presents the details concerning sampling, recruitment, interviewing and map creation, while also addressing the implications of situatedness regarding both myself and the participants. The methodology chapter continues by offering an overview of the data analysis process, for which I used mapping to draw links between – and form a structure based on – the main themes that emerged from both the maps and the interviews. The structure of this map (figure 5) relies on an inductive division of the data into three main categories, which are carried to the analysis itself.

The analysis, chapter three, begins by defining central concepts (the queer, the body, the university) according to the participants' perspectives. This common terminology allows us to

build a multiscalar understanding of academic queer embodiment that progresses from individual experiences to collective experiences and solidarity. Following this logic, the results are then outlined in the analysis through the thematic structure of six observations (key findings) that characterize the specificities of students' queer experiences within academic spaces.

First, student's queer trajectories are outlined through the daily pathways used by the participants within the heteronormative setting of the university. This speaks to the ways in which students navigate campus based on their habits and past experiences with certain spaces, notably in reference to Ahmed's queer orientations (2006). The second section addresses the negotiation of the students' queer identities through their trajectories, including the dynamics of concealing (Valentine, 1993) or revealing different parts of their identity depending on the academic context. With this lens, the following observation focuses on one particular context, classrooms, notably to explore the theme of academic participation. The fourth observation of the analysis concerns specifically embodiment related to navigating academic contexts and spaces as queer students. This section thus focuses on the felt experiences of the students and the bodily implications of being at the university, which includes, without being limited to, implications of chronic pain, the expression of gender through style, and the notion of the body as a site for institutional-related stress (Lane, 2021). The fifth section turns to spaces of discomfort and those avoided by students. This section also addresses a feeling of dissonance or disconnection that was shared amongst many students interviewed, and some aspects concerning the universities' impacts on our bodies. The final observation of the analysis is a community reading of queer presence within university spaces, notably by illustrating the importance of student-led spaces on campus. This section closes the analysis on the note of solidarity and collective resistance by the students. Recalling the context of this research, the thesis concludes on this note of the queer resistance and transformation of academic spaces. The conclusion reviews the central question of the thesis, its main contributions and reflects on the implications and limitations of the research.

Chapter 2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The theoretical framework of this research primarily lies at the crossroads of queer geography and queer phenomenology, while also borrowing notions of feminist and critical geography, educational studies, and even some of interior design. At this intersection, the role of our socially marked bodies is centered in the navigation of social spaces (Kinkaid 2019; Lefebvre 1991). Building on this foundation, the notion of the body is explored in the sections that follow as a political and geographical entity, notably through the concepts of gender, race and abilities, but also emotions, violence, and resistance. Defining the body as such allows us to centre felt and embodied experiences in regards to institutional spaces in a way that broadens our perspectives concerning academic possibilities. In the literature regarding the particularities of academic spaces, the university is explored through the concepts of dynamics of power, institutional violence or pressure, elitism, productivity and normativity, inclusion, and (in)visibility, (Borghi et al., 2016; McNeil et al., 2018; Pinar, 2012) to name a few. In sum, this chapter shows how these are linked in order to create the framework to analyze the meeting of bodily-, identity- and institutional- experiences, thus offering the theoretical tools for interpreting the data collected through both the interviews and the maps. This portrait of multi-facetted queer academic experiences is also insightful for shedding light on the need to work towards stronger communication channels between critical phenomenological and geographical contributions.

2.2 "Queering space & spatializing the queer"

Queer geography is foundational to this research, as it suggests we conceptualize the production of space in profoundly critical, political, intersectional, and even destabilizing ways (Gieseking, 2020). Challenging traditional geographical practices, this sub-discipline is defined by Gieseking as "queering space (using queer theory to read geography) and spatializing the queer (using geographical theory to read the queer)" (2013, p. 15). First and foremost, queer geographies disrupt heteronormativity through the triad of sex, gender and sexuality, which strongly implicates the spatialities through which this system of norms unfolds. By challenging the binary of gender, queer geography breaks the barriers of gender identities in order to study the power dynamics thus inscribed in space (Wright, 2010).

When approaching queer geography, Bell and Valentine's collection *Mapping Desire* (1995) is quite fundamental, as they are the first to tackle sexualities from a geographical perspective,

which they do to address issues of queer bodies and identities in urban spaces. Geographies of sexualities emerged in the 1980s and 1990s to investigate the creation and reinforcement of (hetero)sexuality through the production of space (Brown & Browne, 2016; Browne, Lim and Brown, 2009). In contrast, queer geographies focus more on the "oscillating intersections between identity/subjectivity, sexual desire, embodiment and spatial organization" (Nash, 2010, p. 581). Within this field, Gieseking's (2020) article *Mapping lesbian and queer lines of desire: Constellations of queer urban space* demonstrates a clear, original, sensitive and authentic illustration of what can be done through queer geographical lenses. By bringing to our attention the unique utility of mental mapping in order to visually represent queer realities, Gieseking navigates in-between the notion of existing as a queer person in the urban social, political and economic fabric and the notion of resisting the oppressive system set in place.

As queer geographies speak to the diverse connections between gender, sexuality and space, trans geographies offer – in complement or in response – important insights on the performativity, experience and embodiment of what are now referred to as queer spaces (Nash, 2010). Trans scholarship confronts hostilities within gay communities towards gender-ambiguous bodies and transitions, or concerning erotic desire, social power and resistance to a gendered regime (Knopp, 2007). This work sheds light on the reproduction of cisnormative practices within many queer spaces, such as the exclusion of some trans people that do not correspond to queer expectations; they are often considered to be "transgressing spatially specific gendered, sexualized and embodied expectations" (Nash, 2010, p. 579) when present in 'lesbian', 'women-only', 'feminist' or 'gay' spaces. Attention to trans geographies, therefore, raises questions about inclusive spaces and practices, which are often criticized for reproducing the marginalization of people who are situated at the intersection of oppressions (cf. Fox & Ore, 2010). Trans geographies therefore constitute a crucial perspective to consider as we approach queer – and/or normative – practices of inclusion in space, as well as the embodied differences that influence our experiences of a range of different spaces, from institutional to queer 'safe spaces' (Hartal, 2018).

In North America, studies in the field of geographies of sexuality have generally focused on gay and lesbian experiences within the urban fabric (Nash, 2010). In a similar way, links between queer issues and public spaces in Montreal have been addressed particularly through the lens of sexual orientation and of LGBTQ+ activism, visibility and creation or appropriation of spaces (Podmore, 2001, 2015 ; Prieur, 2015). While Podmore's earliest work touches on the presence of lesbians in Montreal and their (in)visibility in many of the city's neighborhood,

Prieur's thesis examines queer 'safe' spaces ("*espaces bienveillants*", (Prieur, 2015)) between different spheres of Montreal and Paris, including both traditional gayborhoods and alternative, ephemeral spaces (Prieur, 2015). Despite these contributions, there remains a certain gap in Montreal's queer geography literature concerning embodied experience, or queer bodies navigating spaces that are not conceived for gay, lesbian and queer communities. Chanady's (2021) research on lezbiqueer woman in Montreal, however, highlights the link between queer phenomenology and the work of several geographers. Although not strictly speaking a geographical research, but rather one of communication studies, this thesis nevertheless highlights the link between phenomenology and geography, as well as the relevance of such an approach to furthering queer studies in Montreal. With a focus on the body and embodiment, feminist geographies disrupt masculinist perspectives in geography and dismantling of the mind/body and sex/gender binaries (Longhurst & Johnston, 2014). This literature is considered in the following section, in dialogue with a variety of contributions regarding embodiment, in order to weave together the themes of the body and the institutional spatiality of heterocisnormativity.

2.3 The Body as a Phenomenological Site

When approaching the relationship of our bodies in spaces, the phenomenological framework is unavoidable because it enables us to investigate the complex layers of both embodiment and the specificities/components of spaces. Therefore, it is necessary to revisit classical and critical phenomenology. Bridging the gap between the mind and the body, Husserl distinguishes the lived, subjective body (*Leib*) from the objective body (*Leibkörper*) (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2020, p. 152) to furthermore enhance the difference between: "1) the unthematic prereflective lived body-awareness that accompanies and conditions every spatial experience, and 2) the subsequent thematic experience *of* the body as an object" (Zahavi, 2003, p. 101). Husserl speaks to the double-sensation we can experience (when one hand touches another hand for example), and the "two-sidedness of the body" (Zahavi, 2003, p. 103) that exposes both the interiority and exteriority of the body perceptions (Zahavi, 2003, p. 103). Their work is unavoidable to study the way our experiences of the space we find ourselves within are "influenced by our embodiment" (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2020, p. 152) (or, perhaps, how our experiences of academic settings are informed by the movement of our queer bodies).

Although both ways of understanding the body could be addressed by the participants of this research, the living, experiencing, subjective body (*Leib*) might find more resonance within

this research, as the latter focuses on the felt experience of academic spaces by their queer users. Husserl's analysis of the relation between the world and the body (*Leib*) can further be interpreted as such:

> The world is given to us as bodily investigated, and the body is revealed to us in this exploration of the world (Hua 5/128, 15/287) […]. The body only appears to itself when it relates to something else – or to itself as Other (Hua 4/147) (Zahavi, 2003, p. 105).

Husserl's analysis does not simply express that our embodiment has a mere contingent influence on our experience of the world; Husserl defends the more radical idea that the body has a transcendental status, that is to say that it is a condition of possibility of experience (1989; 1997), that our experience of the world depends on our body. In order to defend this idea, we must first rely on the observation that all perception is always operated according to a point of view (Husserl, 1989; 1997). However, as this position or this point of view is always determined by the position of our body in space, the body necessarily represents the point zero of any orientation (Husserl, 1989; 1997), thus generating the lived space. This demonstrates how the body is constitutive or conditional to any perspective or experience of the world. Second, the mobility, capacity and ability of the body modulate the way in which we are able to move, to be in motion in space; they are also constitutive of the way in which we perceive the world. As our orientation in space depends on what is possible according to our bodily capacities, the experience of the world is always made according to our body: it occupies a transcendental status. Considering this transcendental role of the body within the Husserlian perspective, we can understand the impossibility of a disembodied experience: all conscious experience is embodied. This is important to consider in this research project, as the interview materials I work with come from lived experiences that cannot be dissociated from bodily experience, and vice versa.

Although Husserl first raised the importance of the body as structuring experience (1989; 1997), critical approaches to phenomenology have mainly mobilized Merleau-Ponty's radicalized rethinking of embodiment. Indeed, Husserl's conception of the body as "in the service of consciousness or the Ego" (Doyon & Wehrle, 2020, p. 128) constitutes the dividing line between his work and that of Merleau-Ponty, who suggests a complete reversal of this approach. For Merleau-Ponty (2012), it is the imbrication between the body and the world that is fundamental, which primordially locates the body as the subject. According to Merleau-Ponty (2012), subjectivity lies within this imbrication between the body and its surroundings, which allows the author to depart from Husserl's contribution. Merleau-Ponty's (2012) statement that

the original relationship to the world is that of the body represents an existentialist answer to the Husserlian perspective that lends itself easily to a reappropriation of phenomenology by critical currents. These currents, interested in the social and cultural structuration of experience, have led to the development of new theories in phenomenology, such as Ahmed's queer phenomenology (2006).

The formation of these critical readings of phenomenology, stemming from the premises of the Husserlian analysis and Merleau-Ponty's contribution, provide a social reading of the inequalities that relate to our bodies, their assigned gender, their racialization (cf. *A Phenomenology of Whiteness* (Ahmed, 2007)), and their capacities. In the present research, the university environment is revealed to students according to their bodies, and even more according to their bodily capacities or possibilities of action. In turn, we experience our bodies through the experience of the world, through the relationship with what surrounds us (in this case, the university). As such, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's work are overall crucial to grasp the embodied implications of perception, as perception is argued by the author to presuppose our movement through space (Zahavi, 2003, p. 103). It is also unavoidable as it has strongly informed, along with Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964; 1968; 2013, *in* Ahmed, 2006), the work of Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). Recalling the work of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, Ahmed states:

> What makes bodies different is how they inhabit space: space is not a container for the body; it does not contain the body as if the body were "in it." Rather bodies are submerged, such that they become the space they inhabit; in taking up space, bodies move through space and are affected by the "here" of the movement. It is through this movement that the surface of spaces as well as bodies takes shape (2006, p. 53).

Ahmed, therefore, points toward the contacts surrounding and shaping bodies, and the body's spatial, moving dimension to reveal the relationship between spaces and the bodies that inhabit them. Indeed, within this thesis, queer students' bodies are theoretically approached according to the spatial and social context of universities, therefore taking into account the specific composition of these academic spaces to further discuss the way we move within them, are submerged by them, inhabit them. Ngo's (2017) research is an excellent example of how phenomenology can be mobilized to bring to light how the body's movements, orientations and everyday embodied practices result from hegemonic racism. This approach places the phenomenological perspective at the fore with the purpose of enhancing the ways in which the social and spatial dynamics affect or restrain the taking shape bodies, which can further be transposed to the relationship between academic institutions and that of our queer bodies.

In the context of this research, queer phenomenology is highly relevant, specifically in the way that it mobilizes the body, gender and queer identities in a non-essentialist manner, centralizing desire, orientation and embodiment as vectors of movement, action and experience in space (Ahmed, 2006; Chanady, 2021). Extending Merleau-Ponty's importance given to the body as the central perspective to encounter spatial forms and distance between elements of our environment (2012), Ahmed's queer phenomenology (2006), for example, deeply relies on the connection between the mind and the body. This approach stipulates that if we experience space, movement, and thus orientation through embodiment, we need to also consider components of our bodies and identities within our understanding of embodiment. Consequently, our bodies and their specificities (as will we see later, notably in terms of gender, sexuality, race, abilities, etc.), determine how we navigate through space, what is reachable, what constitutes our bodily horizon. In the course of this back-and-forth relationship, our bodies are "shaped" by what is in our reach, what is near us, and through contact with objects that are reachable to our bodies: "what gets near is both shaped by what bodies do, which in turn affects what bodies can do" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 54). Additionally, Gibson's notion of affordances (1977) refers to the perceived possibility for action offered to certain people or bodies within specific contexts, notably through the perception of objects we orient ourselves towards. The notion of affordances thus strongly contributes to the discussion of the bodily horizon, of what is 'in reach', or concerning which affordances are available to whom (and why). Bain (2022) mobilizes the notion of affordances to further speak to queer affordances of care, which are portrayed in her work as elements present in public libraries in the form of inclusive stickers, posters, and LGBTQ+ books displayed. Although these elements could be challenged as not necessarily opening a possibility for *action* for queer people, they might have the impact of creating spaces that are more welcoming to queer communities, which can, as a consequence, expand the possibilities of action for them.

Leaning on Husserl's work, Ahmed (2006) further argues that what we see and perceive is defined by the direction we can take and decide to take; which then reveals what is available to us in terms of sight and reach (2006). The way we move through space shapes what is behind us, what is in and out-of-reach, and what we understand as being in the "background" of our perception. A queer approach to phenomenology, as proposed by Ahmed, suggests that our relation to the social norm affects the familiarity of the spaces we find ourselves in, influencing the extension of our bodies into the space. Just like an echo, the relationship between our bodies and the objects of our surroundings confirms or infirms a fit in that space. In this sense, Ahmed

speaks to the familiarity or comfort of certain spaces, for certain people, as follows: "if orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that extension fails. Or we could say that some spaces extend certain bodies and simply do not leave room for others." (Ahmed 2006, p. 11). The notion of our bodies extending in space refers back to the horizon of possibility, the graspability of our surroundings. Because some actions are possible for some and not for others, the possibilities that emerge from our bodies determine the shape of our surroundings, and vice-versa.

This bodily horizon can then of course be transposed, as it is in Ahmed's work (2006), to the impacts of heterocisnormativity, a set of social references that creates disorientation in regards to queer bodies, bodies that do not correspond to the norm in terms of gender or sexuality, bodies that then are unable to extend to, or reach, the bearings set by heterocisnormativity. According to Ahmed, this discord represents *heteronormative disorientation*, during which one might feel out of place (cf. Cresswell, 1992). Concerning gender and the gendered body, Ahmed explains:

> Spaces are not only inhabited by bodies that "do things," but what bodies "do" leads them to inhabit some spaces more than others. If spaces extend bodies, then we could say that spaces also extend the shape of the bodies that "tend" to inhabit them. So, for instance, if the action of writing is associated with the masculine body, then it is this body that tends to inhabit the space for writing. The space for writing - say, the study - then tends to extend such bodies and may even take their shape. Gender becomes naturalized as a property of bodies, objects, and spaces partly through the "loop" of this repetition, which leads bodies in some directions more than others as if that direction came from within the body and explains which way it turns (Ahmed, 2006, p. 58).

With this statement, Ahmed confirms that bodies – and therefore people – occupy space(s) according to the properties of their bodies, including but not limited to gender and race. By doing so, Ahmed alludes to the socialized component of our identities, from which flow gendered occupations, of masculine and white spaces, of exclusion, and finally, possibility of the transgressing these same norms, which is consistent with Garland-Thomsons' definition of fitting and misfitting:

> Fitting and misfitting denote an encounter in which two things come together in either harmony or disjunction. When the shape and substance of these two things correspond in their union, they fit. A misfit, conversely, describes an incongruent relationship between two things: a square peg in a round hole. The problem with a misfit, then, inheres not in either of the two things but rather in their juxtaposition, the awkward attempt to fit them together. When the spatial and temporal context shifts, so does the fit, and with it meanings and consequences. Misfit emphasizes context over essence, relation over isolation (2011, p. 592-593).

Both concepts illustrate how spaces can take the shape of social norms, or how "spatial practice reinforces the meanings of space through the repetition of norms" (Kinkaid, 2019, p. 182), which will further impact our bodies (their shape, their orientation), when in these spaces. By demonstrating what actions and orientations are familiar to certain bodies, and thus, repeated by them, the work of Ahmed reveals not only the embodied implications of orientation, but of gender norms. Indeed, the author navigates through both Merleau-Ponty's and Gilman's work to demonstrate that gender, just like a muscle that we perpetually flex, becomes with time "a bodily orientation, a way in which bodies get directed by their actions over time" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 60). By leaning towards certain objects, accomplishing certain actions and engaging with certain horizons, we practice a gendered muscle that further impacts what our body does, and what our body can do. Through the recurring encounter with an object that is dedicated to a gendered occupation, such as a writing-table in Ahmed's work, one can experience the loop of repetition as a process that reproduces social norms (Ahmed, 2006).

This approach is further supported by Young's reading of gendered embodiment in phenomenology, which explores reasons for differences within the male/female comprehension(s) of space, movement, and bodily existence. Analyzing the specificities of feminine bodily components, Young proposes to reflect on the "particular *situation* of women as conditioned by their sexist oppression in contemporary society" (Young, 1980, p. 152) instead of contenting ourselves with mere justifications based on anatomical, biological or physiological differences. This approach is achieved by crossing Merleau-Ponty's (2012) system of intentionality and bodily possibilities with the process of feminine socialization in a sexist society, which requires that women are fragile, immobile, and avoid getting hurt or dirty (Young, 1980). This convergence further enables Young to speak to the three modalities of the feminine bodily existence: ambiguous transcendence, inhibited intentionality and discontinuous unity with itself and its surroundings (Young, 1980), the latter of which resonates quite strongly with the notions of heteronormative disorientation (Ahmed, 2006) or misfitting (Garland-Thomsons, 2011). Overall, Young observes that women's bodily comportment can be described as enclosed, as they do not move their bodies to their full capacities, due to being "inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified" (Young, 1980, p. 152) by patriarchal and sexist norms. This perspective further emphasizes the object of the patriarchal gaze that is often directed towards feminine bodies as one of many elements that produces a shift in the positionality of the body from subject to object in space (Young, 1980). Although Young focuses on the male/female binary, this analysis is crucial for its contestation of a sexist or sex-

based approach to differences, and for its demonstration of a gendered and socialized reading of our bodily capacities to engage with our surroundings. *Throwing Like a Girl* (Young, 1980) therefore builds a spatial understanding of embodied gender dynamics that establishes the foundations of the gendered socialization's impact on the use of our bodies, including our motor skills.

Critical phenomenology is furthermore helpful for understanding the harm that emerges from moments of rupture between bodies and the space of their surroundings. This is the point of departure of Jennifer Lane's work (2021), which develops through a phenomenological approach the institutionalized stigma concerning queer gender identities and sexualities:

> Navigating intersecting systems of oppression that inadvertently further legacies of stigma via heteronormativity cause a need to manage one's stigmatized identity, which could have many negative consequences [...]. It would follow then that heteronormative worldliness is amplified in spaces where stigma has been institutionalized (Lane 2021, p. 2175).

While Lane's reading of queer phenomenology is engaging with health-care institutional spaces, it is applicable to other institutional spaces, such as universities. Indeed, by stipulating that institutionalized stigma contributes to hegemonic heterocisnormativity – and vice-versa, that heterocisnormativity depends on stigma to perpetuate heterosexuality – , the author sheds light on the stakes of navigating spaces or institutions that reinforce internalized homophobia, stigma-related stress, hypervigilance, and fear of discrimination or rejection (Lane, 2021). Careful not to contribute to false dichotomies or binaries regarding being or not in the closet, or between hetero- and homo- sexuality, Lane describes the body as "the site of action for social stress" (2021, p. 2173) that must be understood in its specific social context, where social norms are internalized. Such harmful impacts of institutional legacies of discrimination, for example, pressure 2SLGBTQIA+ people to 'align' themselves within heterocisnormativity (Lane, 2021). Overall, institutional structures of power can cause accumulated harm over time, and further be internalized in this site that is the queer body (Lane, 2021). The proximity between phenomenology's terminology and critical geography is clear. Ahmed's use of 'spatial orientations' to speak to 'sexual orientations' (Ahmed, 2006; Lane 2021), for example, demonstrates the geographicity of her work. This also resonates with Massey's three fundamental concepts of space, which converge towards the possibility to impact our environments through our presence, actions and embodiment (Massey 2009 *in* Kjaran 2016).

2.4 Bridging Phenomenology and Queer Geographies through Embodiment

The notion of the body as a scale of study in geography has taken shape from the analysis of its movement through –and interactions with– space (Simonsen, 2005). Specifically in the subdiscipline of political geography, the body is generally depicted as a point of departure for approaching identity through the lens of "social location" (Mountz, 2018, p. 761). Moreover, the quantity of contributions on the body and embodiment from a feminist geography perspective has grown significantly in the last decades, addressing as much the embodied performance of gender than the body as a geographical point of reference for inquiring about our cities or public spaces (Longhurst & Johnston, 2014). Fluri (2017) brings forward the idea of the body as a surface on which can be inscribed cultural, social and political meanings of many forms to further drawn links between corporeal markers such as gender, race, class, sexuality and (dis)ability and their geographical, social and political implications. This reading of the body as a geographical surface is informed by the interaction between geography and gender studies: drawing from the work of Butler (2002; 2011), Longhurst (2008), and McKittrick and Peake (2005), Fluri demonstrates the spatiality of bodily markers "to [further] examine how corporeally based inequalities are organized geographically" (Fluri, 2017, p. 31). In addition to its political and geographical contribution, as it refers back to Butler's work, this piece reiterates the importance of weaving links existing between bodily geographies and queer studies. Within queer and trans geographies, the scale of the body is all the more important as it is a site that implies as much broad dynamics of power (such as heterocisnormativity and socially gendered assignation) as intimate emotions, sentiments and personal desire (Knopp, 2007; Nash, 2010).

Within feminist and postcolonial theories, the body has been described as both global and intimate, "a site of transformation or self-determination" (Pratt & Rosner, 2012, p. 10) that often faces the injuries of colonialism and racism (Gopinath, 2005). In a similar sense, the body is depicted as a testimony of historical violence: "injured imaginatively and actually, [the body is] also a site for resistance to coercive and deforming forces and a place for self-actualization or, at the least, a place from which to negotiate with social norms" (Pratt & Rosner, 2012, p. 10). While this portrait of the body can be useful to read many social power dynamics – such as within Gopinath's (2005) work on queer diasporas and colonial violence – it also sheds light, in the context of the present research, on the possibility for queer bodily negotiations of space and the contestation of heterocisnormativity. In other words, by taking into account the violent system that allows systematic gendered assignment of our bodies, Pratt and Rosner's definition

is crucial as it allows us to theorize our queer bodies as places of disruption, contestation and resistance within the frame of academic spaces.

Emotions are an important indicator of the implications of our embodied experiences as members of the academic community, as documented by Catungal's own experience and process as a researcher in the University of Toronto's Geography PhD programme (2017). By highlighting "how the social embeddedness of the geographer […] in social, political and institutional worlds of power, difference and regulation is felt and negotiated as part of the knowledge production process" (2017, p. 291), Catungal sheds light on the dynamics of power that are present within the academia and that strongly influence the sphere of research, which resonates strongly with the portrait of academic spaces above. The author opens an important yet still infrequent discussion about the emotional, relational entanglement that researchers often feel during fieldwork, which furthermore creates a specific ever-changing social context for research production (Laliberté & Schurr, 2015, p. 3 *as cited in* Catungal, 2017, p. 292). While this piece offers an overview of knowledge producing spaces and their need for a feminist and queer transformation, it also offers compelling arguments concerning concrete ways of doing queer research, notably in geography; of being queer at the university.

Emotions and their embodiment are also central within Bourcier, Prieur and Borghi's work *Performing academy: feedback and diffusion strategies for queer researchers* (2016), which sheds light on the bidirectional influence between academia and elements of queer research. Following Prieur's questioning of emotional, embodied and social implications of queer methodologies, Borghi continues by addressing the concrete impacts of the relationship between academia, research production, and researchers' bodies. Using auto-ethnography and the tool of their own body to study post-porno performance in public spaces, Borghi examines academia's political and social control of bodies, whether inside or outside of academic spaces. Through an overview of the reception of their research-performance within these spaces, Borghi illustrates the ways in which the university shapes academic discourse – and bodies – through the reinforcement of social norms. This observation sheds light on the binaries and boundaries that persist between academia and activism, or lectures and performances, further speaking to the devaluation of research that transgresses academic traditions. In sum, their work draws important links between the university and the reproduction of a multi-faceted normativity, which constitutes the theme of the following section.

2.5 At the Crossroads of Modernity, Heterocisnormativity and (Re)productivity: the University

Studying university spaces while also being directly invested within them can be difficult to navigate. To approach this subject, Ahmed's blog *Feminist Killjoys* (n.d.) and book *Complaint!* (2021) offer an intimate overview of the (now independent) scholar's journey within academia and the reasons they left it in 2016, highlighting the power relations that are embedded in academic spaces, and the resulting discrimination or abuse they enable. Universities are presented as institutions whose mechanisms reproduce a culture of harassment, silence and ableist violence, notably through tactics of intimidation, non-disclosure agreements, institutional pressure, minimization and dismissal of violence (Ahmed, 2021). Ahmed's depiction of the university invites us to pay attention to the precarious, isolating and vulnerable status of members of the university community in the face of these issues, especially when they find themselves at the intersection of several systems of violence. Within and beyond queer studies, academia is portrayed as elitist, in some sectors conservative (Pinar, 2012), normative and overall blatantly "straight" (Borghi et al., 2016, p. 1). Built on exclusionary practices that reinforce power dynamics and social inequalities through the production and reproduction of norms (Borghi et al., 2016; McNeil et al., 2018; Pinar, 2012), academia is itself reliant on this process of reproduction: "the culture of academia, ultimately, is impervious to change because its power structure is designed to reproduce itself" (y Muhs et al., 2012, p. 7). In other words, academia depends on the reproduction of norms to regenerate itself as an institution that is impermeable to change and absorbent of critical social movements.

Embedded within academic exclusionary practices and social reproduction is the matter of social class, which intersects with other dynamics of power, such as gender inequality. Indeed, the higher educational system has often been described as exclusive and reproductive of socioeconomic disparities. In *Degrees of inequality: Culture, class, and gender in American higher education* (Mullen, 2011), Mullen sheds light on the economic disparities that feed into the American higher educational system, which allows inequalities in terms of gender and socio-economic background to reaffirm themselves through the system. This comes in direct dialogue with Brim's book *Poor Queer Studies: confronting elitism in the University* (2020), from which the academic sphere is depicted as one of hierarchy that is based on class, gender and race. In fact, Brim (2020) speaks to class stratification within the university as well as on a broader scale, between institutions. This perspective allows a greater understanding of the social position of the institution and its role in reinforcing and reproducing social inequalities,

therefore adding depth to our comprehension of the entanglement of the universities' roots within a broader system. The author's words illustrate the multi-faceted dimension of elitism, which is entangled both in our role as (queer) scholars and in institutional practices. Academic elitism and its ramifications may be understood as one of many unfoldings of Bourdieu's "symbolic violence", which signifies an invisible yet highly embodied relationship of domination rooted in social order (Bourdieu, 1997 *in* Landry, 2006). This violence, which "permanently inscribes itself in the bodies of the dominated, in the form of perceptual schemes and dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 245 *in* Landry, 2006, p. 86), has the lasting effect of naturalizing the social class order, in particular through the use of social codes. According to Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence, social domination resides in all social codes and interactions, through and enabled by the reproduction of social habits inculcated from one generation to the next.

The elitism of academia is concretely demonstrated in the collection *Presumed incompetent: The intersections of race and class for women in academia* (y Muhs et al., 2012), where more than 40 scholars bring to our attention the reality of women of color in academia. The collection reminds us of the educational system's capacity to adapt itself in an aim of reproducing the norm, notably by remaining "not only remarkably blind to its own flaws, but deeply invested in a thoroughgoing denial" (y Muhs et al., 2012, p. 7). The authors denounce the exhausting cycle of racist incidents that prompt the creation of committees "appointed to investigate diversity concerns" (y Muhs et al., 2012, p. 7) before said committees accumulate dust until the next racist event. They further state: "the culture of academia, ultimately, is impervious to change because its power structure is designed to reproduce itself. Here we return to our first theme: the links among race, gender, sexuality, and class" (y Muhs et al., 2012, p. 7). Their reading of the power structure declines into concrete branches of the elitism and conservatism discussed above, i.e. according to racist, classist, sexist, heterocisnormative systems. Concluding on the mutual uplifting of dynamics of power within and outside of academia, they argue that the University is dependent on power systems such as racism, hence its incapacity to truly work to move beyond. This unfolds in ways aforementioned, such as committees that take the shape of dark holes for complaints of different sorts, and, as synthesized by Ahmed, "strategic inefficiency" (2006, p. 91). The expression is suggested by the author to argue that slow and/or inefficient mechanisms often benefit the institution's dismissal of problems (e.g. harassment or racist incidents); that there is an important correlation to note between an inefficient institution and its efficiency at reproducing the norm (Ahmed, 2006).

Places where the ramifications of symbolic violence often unfold, classrooms are not unimportant in the spatiality of universities, nor is it in terms of queering academia. Small academic ecosystem in itself, the classroom represents a privileged space for exchange and communication between students or with professors, a space where theories are constructed and deconstructed, where the social expectation to voice opinions is more often than not present, and, for many members of the university community, one of the most frequented academic spaces. Like a condensed form of the social dynamics taking place at the university, these spaces are highly conducive of racism and racial prejudice, where many BIPOC students feel the need to both self-censure and correct misinformation and stereotypes (Park & Bahia, 2022). Often documented from professors' experiences, classrooms are spaces where syllabi and theories are shaped, where bodies are observed and scrutinized (if present), and where a possibility lies in terms of opening the university's doors to academic bodies of knowledge from the margins (DasGupta et al., 2021). Waite (2018) mobilizes the notion of "body of knowledge" and their teaching experience to further demonstrate how a traditional reproduction of classroom spaces leads to the reproduction of the binary between mind and body as bodies, especially queer bodies, should be (and are, traditionally) excluded from the space. Speaking to the contested nature of the body and classroom relationship, Waite argues that "there is no bodiless pedagogy" (Waite, 2018, p. 226) to further question what would happen if we stopped pretending there was. Tackling the hegemonic disembodiment of education and thus acknowledging their body's presence, influence and importance within classrooms may be understood as one of many possibilities in terms of "queering the classroom" (DasGupta et al., 2021, p. 492), which invites us to disturb power dynamics that structure learning environments and question the impact of normativity within classrooms.

Furthermore, the modern design of academic institutions is not insignificant. Indeed, the values of Modernism and its key design features, which are prevalent in many universities, have a role to play in the aforementioned reproduction of social norms. Inspired by Sparke (1994) and Gronberg's (1992) words, Modernism can be defined as a myriad of ideas and practices which transpose in design and architecture as a promotion of technology, efficiency and masculinity. Moreover, modern design is devoted to a demonstration of morality, health, superiority and productivity (Gronberg, 1992; Sparke, 1994). Erasing identities and divergences in the name of logical neutrality, modernism adapts itself through time to orient our renewed experiences of the interior. By pushing forward a single understanding of rationality and order (Sparke, 1994), modern design is committed to productivity and cleanliness; this often takes the form

of unornamented, whitewashed walls. On the question of ornaments, Adolf Loos's influential opinion was clear: ornaments were signs of degeneracy, criminality and all things outgrown by the "modern man" (1913, p. 24). According to the modernist architect, Modernism and its white walls evoke a sense of freedom, productivity, and health (Loos, 1913). In contrast, decorations and alterations of the modern spaces – such as graffitis, posters, banderoles, murales, and other haptic interventions (Potvin 2017) – can be understood as gestures of contestation in regards to the exclusionary values expressed by an institution's design (Potvin 2017). The tensions that arise from the modern interiors and its contesting interventions are one of many examples of what will be explored in the following section, that is, queer resistance in face of hegemonic modern or institutional values.

2.6 Queer Resistance within Academic Institutions

When focusing specifically on queer presence, the critiques regarding academia abound in the same direction. In 1993, Bryson and de Castell demonstrated how speaking or doing research about queer matters in academic spaces can be responded to with acts of hetero-sexism, social exclusion, marginalization, and threats concerning tenure and other negative impacts on one's career. The authors speak to pressure and value-based judgment concerning the knowledge they produced, and "the need to do "work" (i.e., getting published in academic journals) that is "relevant" (i.e., to white, middle-class heterosexuals)" (Bryson & de Castell, 1993, p. 287). Subsequently, queering pedagogy as a practice, queering syllabi, queer methods and methodologies (Browne & Nash, 2010), and queer presence within university spaces can be understood as resistance or contestation in a context of power relations and normativity (Bryson & de Castell, 1993; Luhmann, 1998), in a similar sense to the resistance expressed by queer bodies.

In fact, what is generally demonstrated by the scholars working on queer presence in the educational system, as much regarding universities as elementary and high schools (Pinar, 2012), is that power relations embedded in academic spaces mobilize educational practices in order to tint, inform or modulate the production of knowledge and reproduction of social norms (McNeil et al., 2018), while isolating individuals that would take actions or risks against this. This environment created by academia is the context within which the present research takes place, where queer students (and our bodies) navigate in order to exist, take part in research, learn, uphold student activism and build solidarity.

To further establish this interpretation of queer presence as resistance, it is essential to begin by defining the broad lines of what 'queer' essentially means, and take a careful look at the origins of queer theories. Queer is not a term that can be described with a rigid, unalterable definition. For instance, its fluidity was quite central to the group Queer Nation, who presented 'queer' as more than a simple synonym of marginal, strange or twisted: queer is about transcending social settings and practices to build a strong movement of transformation, notably in regards to gender and sexuality (Cervulle et Quemener, 2016). Following this, the expression 'queer' inspired scholar Teresa de Lauretis to name a conference 'Queer theories' in protest of exclusionary lesbian and gay studies (Éribon, 2003). Thus, the very creation of Queer theory was built on the strongly political and radical essence of the notion. By focusing on the formation of normative sexual and gender identities, queer theories "problematize and politicize not only the body but also [...] knowledge and the production of truth, in short, knowledge-power relations" (Bourcier, 2000, p. 175). In its simplest form, queer theory can be defined as "a variety of methods of interrogating desire and its relationship to identity" (Watson, 2005, p. 67). Both queer social struggles and queer theories were hence produced by the same need to dismantle the "knowledge-power relations" (Bourcier, 2012, p. 175) present both in society and academia. These constantly evolving theories reveal that gender and sexual identities are fragile social constructs that rely on their reproduction through performance (Watson, 2005).

This is further brought forward by the Queer Nation Manifesto (2012 [1990]), which denounces the inaction of the heteronormative political elite in regards to the AIDS crisis. Their statement regarding government homophobia, on the blatant privileges of the social and economic elite and on police violence (Queer Nation, 2012 [1990]), powerfully embody the theme of resistance in and against dominant structures of power. Along the lines of the international ACT UP movement, Queer Nation and other queer movements strongly condemned the economic disparities that constituted the discriminatory urban settings of the 1990s (Rofes et al., 2002). Today, the notion of queer is still strongly in relation with anti-capitalist thinking, as demonstrated by Gieseking, who wrote about "[q]ueer, feminist, antiracist, and anticapitalist practices of urban survival [offering] profound insights into organizing against social injustice" (2020, p. 944). If we understand the university as a structure that contributes to the broader reproduction of socioeconomic disparities, the collision between the institution and its queer population's presence is clear.

Queer practices within academia further inscribe themselves in the movement towards a reappropriation of university spaces by queer students and workers. Inspired by many critical authors who have worked either on academia (Borghi et al., 2016; Moten & Harney, 2004; McNeil et al., 2018) or on the concept of inclusivity (Bain & Podmore, 2021; Hartal, 2018; Oswin, 2008; Prieur, 2015; Willis, 2009), the goal of this research is not to promote a fictional understanding of "safe space" or forms of inclusion that have been co-opted by institutional power. Rather, I am rooting my work in critiques of the institution, and am inspired by community-led tools that help build solidarity, hold space for queer communities, reappropriate spaces on campuses, fight for unconditional access to education and participate in a transformation at a much larger scale. These tools, however, might take many forms, including perhaps "micro-practices of inclusion" (Willis, 2009, p. 642), subtle manners that can still make the difference for some people in terms of feeling accepted and appreciated (Willis, 2009).

Within university campuses can sometimes be found 'safe(r) spaces' or at least attempts at creating queer spaces that promote inclusion, – physical, psychological, emotional and social – security, acceptance of diversity and generally speaking anti-oppressive practices (Hartal, 2018). The shaping of such spaces for LBGTQ+ folks within university communities has been present since the 1990s, notably in response to violence on campus, dropout rates and mental health crisis amongst queer students (Fox & Ore, 2010). The creation of this geographical phenomenon has often been carried by the will to resist heterocisnormativity and forge tangible space for gay, lesbian and queer communities (Hartal, 2018; Prieur, 2015; Oswin, 2008). This being said, the work of many scholars, such as Oswin's *Critical geographies and the uses of sexuality: deconstructing queer space* (2008), demonstrate the limits of safe spaces by highlighting the "unequal access to safety" (Hartal, 2018, p. 1056). Indeed, safe(r) spaces can be understood as fragile sites of resistance that can still be influenced, transgressed or carried by surrounding oppressive dynamics (Hartal, 2018; Oswin, 2008), or even be complicit with heterocisnormativity (Schroeder 2012 *as cited in* ; Freitag, 2013). Some scholars bring this idea further, as it is the case for Leonardo and Porter, who state that "there is no safe space" (Leonardo & Porter, 2010, p. 149), and that the discourse implying safety holds space for violence in the shape of silencing, or avoiding emotions in the face of oppression such as anger, hostility, and frustration (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). To approach the idea with flexibility and intersectionality, the habit of adding an 'r' to safe*r* spaces reveals the multiple layers of oppressions, and denotes an ever-changing possibility of safety/unsafety, underlying that it is never really attained (Fox & Ore, 2010). For the purpose of this research, safe(r) spaces are

spatial attempts of resistance and community building, sometimes ephemeral and sometimes stable through time (this can be, for example, the premises of a strongly anti-oppressive student association), though very easily carried by the institution's power, normativity, and control.

As our reading of queer resistance within university spaces takes shape, it corresponds more and more to the notion of 'counterpublic' (Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2002). Adopted by many to elucidate dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within public spheres, Fraser's counterpublic emerges from the observation that there is in society and its public sphere more than one social group, that inequalities and dynamics of power exist between these different groups, and that such relations of dominance are reproduced by the institutional structures of society (Fraser, 1990). This reading of the publics and their discursive practices, which relies on Habermas's work concerning the public sphere (Habermas, 1991), argues that equal access to participation in the public sphere is impossible in such societies that allow a reproduction of social inequalities, dominance and subordination, notably towards "women, workers, people of color, and gays and lesbians" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). Fraser therefore proposes the term *subaltern counterpublics* (Fraser, 1990), to theorize the contestation of the bourgeois public status quo, and moreover the efforts and strategies constructed by the "alternative publics" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67) to face and fight inequalities (Asen, 2000). This concept is the point of departure of Kjaran's reading of queer space-making in highschool classrooms and corridors, which mobilizes Massey's theorizing of the spatiality of social power dynamics and the possibilities for claiming space in order to shed light on student practices in a heteronormative school environment (Kjaran, 2016). In schools of all levels (from elementary to university), the contestations and overthrowing of norms can resemble space-making practices such as discussing queer theories in classrooms (Kjaran, 2016).

2.7 Conclusion

Ultimately, the combination of queer phenomenology and queer geography allows us to mobilize a panoply of concepts in order to better grasp the embodied experience of queer students within the educational landscape. These concepts include, without being limited to, queerness and its ramification in terms of gender, sexuality and desire, orientation (bodily-, sexual-, institutional-), the experiences of fitting and misfitting, institutional power relations, heterocisnormativity, and spatial dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. The phenomenological contributions allow for an understanding of embodied experiences through the imbrication of our bodies in their surroundings, which are vectors of gender norms and heterocisnormativity. Educational studies further shed light on institutional heteronormativity, which can reinforce

hypervigilance and fear of repercussions. These impacts further create a need for strategies and tactics developed by queer students – and professors – to navigate through these spaces. This theoretical framework informs the methodology and methods of research explored in this study, which constitutes the following chapter. Indeed, whether by stipulating essential concepts or by suggesting important perspectives to consider while developing this research project, all disciplines aforementioned have contributed to the shaping of the data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3. A Queer Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The methods of research for this project are imbricated in both feminist and queer geographies, which makes it necessary to ponder the relationship between these two currents in order to propel the ideas towards inclusive research practices. Addressing the connections between queer and feminist geographies, Oswin's assertion that queer theories are about "transgression, contestation, challenging the norm instead of extending it" (Oswin, 2008, p. 92) expresses an element central to the present methodology: I bring into dialogue queer and feminist geographies to ensure that my work is not simply about extending dominant methods of geography to include diverse identities, but rather, tackling the core of the structure that reproduces oppression. Indeed, overarching to the methodology of this research – and at the core of the research in its entirety – is the following principal: " 'queer' research can be any form of research positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations" (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 4).

To this end, the present chapter begins by outlining research practices in both feminist and queer geographies, forming the structure for the chosen methods of this research. This methodology framework is further supported by a passage on the role of positionality and emotions, both in queer geographies and in the context of this research. Based on these considerations, the data collection methods are then presented, which includes sampling, ethics certification, recruitment, interview methods, mapping and methods of data analysis. Finally, a few words are included concerning the process of researcher reflexivity, which has been explored to some extent during fieldwork.

3.2 A queer, Feminist Ear

Feminist geographies provide substantial critique of spatially reproduced inequalities and patriarchal power dynamics (Mackenzie, 1986; Fenster, 2005; Valentine, 2007; Massey, 2013; Vacchelli and Kofman, 2017). Their approach allows a very tangible understanding of gendered spaces, of a performed reproduction of gendered dynamics in space and time. More precisely, feminist geographies focus on the way gendered social relations are inscribed in space, particularly along the lines of male/female opposition, in ways that challenge a neutral or universal understanding of space (Rey, 2002). This approach further encourages geographers to understand spaces as performative (Gregson & Rose, 2000). Feminist geographies thus provide a conceptual crossing of gender performativity (cf. Butler, 1993) with both

inclusion/exclusion dynamics and intersectional perspectives to bring to light the spatial foundations of systems of oppressions that complement and support each other, such as racism, classism, heterocisnormativity and patriarchy (Pratt, 1998). To illustrate this specific spatialization, Pratt invites us to consider the territorialization of identities and their formations, along with the production of difference, through the consolidation of social boundaries. These boundaries, although dynamic in space and time, can be understood as spatialized into "grids of differences" of all scales (Pratt, 1998, p. 26), which can either stabilize identities or enable the crossing of these same boundaries. Relying on the process, performance and unstable character of identities, a dynamic understanding of their spatialization brings to light the complexity and variability of the relation between space and identity. *Grids of differences* (Pratt, 1998) contributes to feminist geographies by demonstrating possibilities for some to be bounded by identity, while others may cross social boundaries, although sometimes performing different aspects of their identity; a reading that can easily be applied to the scale of universities. In terms of methodology, this understanding of the dynamic between identity and spaces of all scales reconfirms the attention that must be kept on the interlocking character of both elements of the participants' identities and of the systems of oppressions they speak to.

As a whole, "the key aim of feminist scholarship in general is to demonstrate the construction and significance of sexual differentiation as a key organizing principle and axis of social power" (McDowell, 1999, p. 8), the axis that contributes to Pratt's grids of differences (1998). When observing university spaces, feminist geographies are useful to ground my work in this very clear reading of the patriarchal system shaping our spaces within academic institutions, shaping the very structure of academia. This point of departure allows me to better grasp the way systems of oppression all contribute to one another and maintain each other, absorb and institutionalize grassroots movements in our institutions, assuring the reproduction within universities of sexism, heteronormativity, racism, and ableism, to name a few. Feminist geographies concretely bring to light these co-constructed, co-dependent systems, in our universities' skeleton or frame.

Also intervening at this level are queer theories, which operate "beyond powers and controls that enforce normativity" (Browne, 2006, p. 889). While both feminist and queer geographies are addressing the same or very similar power dynamics, queer theories push feminist geographies to aim further than anything that is not an absolute transformation of our spaces. Across all disciplines, queer methods confront "taken-for-granted" (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 4) ideas to disrupt any and all knowledge-production that allows the reproduction of

normativity, including of course heteronormativity, but also homonormativity and cisnormativity. In this project, I aim for a constant renewal, auto-critique and accountability, to ensure that there is a rupture in the reproduction of all oppressing norms. Feminist and queer methodologies enable collaborations and mutual support between researchers and activists whose work tackles injustices without being limited to the patriarchal system, as they aim "to rework configurations of power between the constituencies of Global North/Global South, researcher/researched, academic/activist" (Browne et al., 2017, p. 1377).

In the context of the present research, this objective means looking at universities as institutions that reproduce the patriarchal system and heterocisnormativity, and how these systems work hand-in-hand with other systems of power, such as racism, ableism, classism, etc. During the interviews with participants, feminist and queer methods imply being aware of a multitude of factors that impact their presence and participation within university spaces in order to completely rethink our learning and working environments. These factors include, without being limited to, mobility needs, financial needs, overwork, fear of homophobia, mishandling of sexual harassment, sexist or homophobic behaviors, access to healthy food on campus, access to inclusive bathrooms and healthcare. As such, relying on feminist and queer methods allowed me to hear and consider a broad range of experiences within university spaces, as student's stories further imbricated different oppressions that they face.

The attention paid to fully understanding the participants' stories, which emerge at the crossroads of several dynamics of oppression, can be attributed to Ahmed's (2017; 2021) concept of the "feminist ear". Indeed, my presentation at the interviews was strongly inspired by her book *Complaint!* (2021), which begins by acknowledging the habitual lack of adequate reception of complaints within academia. In this context, she responds by offering a "feminist ear" (2017; 2021) as a vow to truly hear, listen and see the people who approach her about their experiences of complaints. Within my research, this process implies understanding the participants' experiences both in the context of institutional spaces that render invisible queer bodies through heterocisnormativity, and as embedded within many social dynamics. The interviews were always open for the participants to draw links between their queer identities and other components of their academic experiences. In sum, rooting my methods of research in the need for hearing, reception and visibility allows me to lend a queer, feminist ear to the participants and to the vast variety of stories offered in the context of this study.

3.3 Oriented Research Activities

This motivation for compassionate, respectful and attentive research practices sets the table for a methodology that strongly considers the notion of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Rose, 1997) or positionality. Haraway's proposition of situated knowledge considers the location, partial perspective and embodiment of all knowledge production (1988). The process of situating both the researcher and the participant is one of embodiment, a "view from the body" in contrast to a deceptive neutrality, simplicity, a view "from nowhere" (Haraway, 1988, p. 589). In a similar sense, the notion of 'positionality' (Maher & Tetreault, 1993; Alcoff, 1988) is used to acknowledge different components of our identities that act as "markers of relational positions" (Maher & Tetreault, 1993, p. 118), such as gender, class or race. In fact, critical geographers across many fields – notably amongst specialists of critical race theory, feminist geographies and queer studies (amongst many others, see Rose, 1997; Delgado & Sefancic, 2000; Maher & Tetreault, 2001; Waite, 2018) – have been addressing the particularities of the researcher's positionality and the tensions produced by it. Emphasizing the power dynamics that arise from academic practices, this critical perspective has disrupted the dominant (non)representations of researchers and, moreover, confronted the hegemonic silence and disregard generally attributed to their positionality.

In contrast, Kobayashi (2010) brings to our attention a few considerable slippery slopes in regards to self-reflexivity and positionality. These concerns include the distance often created by indulging in reflexivity and the position of our privileges (as researchers), the context created by these practices that then allow for critiques to become personal attacks, and the power-dynamics that push the responsibility for questioning positions of reflexivity onto the shoulders of only some people (read here most people except white, cisgender, able-bodied, full-time professor men) (Kobayashi, 2010). Inspired by scholars who have stated "the limits of detachment and impartiality as tenets of 'objective' research" (2017, p. 289), Catungal further brings to our attention the social embeddedness and emotional entanglement experienced by geographers, especially those confronting masculinities or conducting research related to sexualities. By speaking to "the emotional aspects of becoming a geographer of sexualities" (2017, p. 293), Catungal emphasizes the significant role of emotions in research processes, including the "commitments [researchers] have to certain forms of community and politics" (2017, p. 293). As such, Catungal's proposition to consider emotions as a crucial process within knowledge production allows us to highlight the social, political and institutional implications of research. Along with the notions of situatedness and positionality,

emotional considerations strategically situate research practices and their results as part of dynamic social processes that cannot be dissociated from each other.

As a white settler scholar in Tiohtià:ke, the unceded land of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation (Native Land, 2021; Concordia University's Indigenous Directions Leadership Group, 2017), I occupy a privileged positionality that has often been used to, in the context of research and beyond, notably in the form of abuse of power, build reputation, and pretend objectivity[2]. To be coherent with the values of queer studies and critical geography, it is of utmost importance that I actively, through my research and academic practices, disengage and confront this history of domination within research spheres. Anti-racist and decolonial authors and activists such as bell hooks (cf. 1981), Tuck and Yang (cf. 2012), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (especially their work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (2003)) and Angela Davis (cf. 1983), to name only a few, have inspired me regarding how to work on the main themes of this research because they pay close attention to deeply rooted inequalities and prejudices that influence research practices, notably racism.[3]

Participants in this research were therefore also invited to situate themselves. This took different forms for different participants, depending on their reality. Opening a discussion about our bodies and embodied experiences in public spaces might mean for some speaking about their ethnicity and origins, or about access to certain services, certain spaces, and the general context of ableism, which can be defined as "a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human" (Campbell, 2001, p. 44 *in* Bogart & Dunn, 2019, p. 651).

Conducting research at the crossroads of geography and phenomenology brings into light the analogous nature of positionality and the phenomenology concepts of orientation and bodily horizon. Indeed, considering a Husserlian perspective (see section 2.3), my experience of the world depends on my body (1989; 1997). Therefore, my experience of universities, which here constitute the premises of the research, also depends on my body. As my body is constituent of the 'point zero' of all my experiences, it is also the point zero of the fieldwork I conduct. Hence,

[2] On whiteness, geography and the "normative white gaze", see Kobayashi & Peake (2000).

[3] Naming these sources of inspiration comes from Gay's (2021) discussion of the "politics of citation" from Ahmed's *Feminist Killjoy* blog (2013), which describes citation practices as yet another form of reproducing power in the academy. Through this political reading of citation processes are revealed authors at the margins of the cannon, often absent from references lists (Ahmed, 2013, *as cited in* Gay 2021). The choices that are made regarding citations thus offer a portrait of knowledge reproduction, which further highlights according to Gay (2021) the importance of citing people - activists, artists, journalists and academics - who are at the origins of our ideas or of reflections we are developing.

my navigation of the university premises in fulfilling fieldwork depends on my body – my queer, feminine, student body, that is. Furthermore, the fieldwork unfolds according to my own bodily horizon, which is determined, in parts, by my body and identity, as is my positionality. This process exemplifies similarities between positionality and orientation, which reveal themselves during fieldwork as both reliant on embodied identity components of the researcher. As I navigate through universities via my queer body and identity, the fieldwork becomes tinted, oriented, by my own identity and navigation. Just like one's bodily horizon is unique, all researcher's fieldwork horizons are also unique: this logic demonstrates the impact of the researcher's identity on the research, which is at the core of situatedness and positionality.

As I wished to include a range of different experiences, I decided to do my fieldwork in two universities that correspond to different languages and cultures but that are both located in downtown Montreal; Concordia University and the *Université du Québec à Montréal*. Considering my present and previous attendance to both institutions, this decision was made in light of my own student trajectory, which facilitated my contact with their student populations and increased my chances of reaching queer communities of Montreal that speak both French and English. Concretely, when posting the recruitment posters in both universities, I generally went to spaces I frequented as a queer student, where I knew I had more chances of finding queer people that would be interested in participating in my research. I was thus myself guided and oriented by the experiential knowledge I had of these institutional spaces; knowing for example the importance of the Greenhouse at Concordia for my friends and I, or of the Café Aquin at UQAM from my years there. In sum, because I generally went towards spaces I knew (especially the social sciences buildings, but not only) to display recruitment posters, my positionality has oriented my research towards participants who, in majority, also studied social sciences and humanities.

Having established this methodological framework, the present research mobilizes a combination of qualitative approaches that value the ideas and words coming directly from marginalized communities in the pursuit of queerer academic spaces. The methods of this research are built to triangulate three data sources, namely open interviews, cognitive/sensitive mapping, and self-reflexivity in the form of field notes (borrowing this idea from Emerson et al., 2011). All three methods are detailed in the following sections.

3.4 Methods of research

3.4.1 Sampling, recruitment, ethics

Recruitment was done by study advertising (Robinson, 2014) via posters dispersed in both universities, followed by online advertising by one publication of the same poster on a Facebook group related to queer communities in Montreal, in order to find more participants. A few respondents also expressed their desire to participate after hearing about my research by word-of-mouth through friends groups, thus adding to the sample source methods a few cases of snow-ball sampling (Robinson, 2014). For a sample size of 14 participants, six people reached out after seeing my poster, two participants indicated their interest after seeing the publication online, and six heard about my research through our discussions or friends in common. While there were no exclusion criteria concerning the target population, the two main inclusion criteria were simply being a student in one of the two universities, and self-identifying as queer (in all possible ways).

To keep the recruitment poster dynamic, light and accessible, I also prepared an informational message to send to people who responded to my call for participation. This follow-up exchange allowed me to offer as much information as possible with potential participants to assure they were truly interested in participating and to confirm their correspondence to the criteria of participation. While this exchange was an opportunity to circulate the consent form and Ethics certificate, also attached was a short document containing examples of sensitive/cognitive mapping. All of the fieldwork materials can be found in appendixes.

A few elements about sampling must be taken into account when considering the content of the interviews. All of the interviews with students from Concordia University were completed in English, while the one's from UQAM took place in French. To reach queer students from both English and French communities represented one of the reasons the fieldwork was done within two different institutions. These two universities are also quite similar in the visions they promote and in their way of being embedded within the urban fabric. While this "sample universe" (Robinson, 2014) allowed a small heterogeneity in terms of language, I must note here that the posting of my recruitment materials was made mainly in the buildings I knew and frequented as a student, which resulted in most of the participants also being students in social sciences and humanities. The process thus resembled convenience sampling, where a source of potential participants is demographically and geographically located (Robinson, 2014) – in this research, that would be near student associations and student-led cafés, though I did post in

other places too. This decision is partly justifiable by the fact that as I knew, from being a part of queer communities at the university, that these spaces were important to many potential participants, but it might also have created unwanted filters to the recruitment. Indeed, the demographic or geographic homogeneity resulting from the fact that recruitment was done in only a few specific, strategic spaces might have impacted the results of this study by having many participants studying similar humanities approaches or sharing similar political views (often brought forward in student associations). This should be considered when interpreting the results of this study, as the sample is not representative of the entire community of queer students.

Information concerning the participants is useful to further understand their positionality and the imbrication of their queer identity within other components of their identity. Within the sample, all of the participants had been university students for more than a year. On one occasion, one participant had recently dropped out of their program and was not currently a student. As they were still frequenting the spaces to see their friends and had been a university student for many years, I deemed their experience relevant to the study and accepted a small bend to the criteria. While some students had begun their undergrad studies during the pandemic, and therefore online, others had been enrolled many years before. I did not directly ask them about their ethnicity, nationality and cultural identity, but left it up to them whether or not to tell me about theirs, and the impact it has on their reality as students. Some mentioned belonging to Arabic, African-American and Haitian communities. Students that spoke to their belonging to racialized communities often did so to speak about racist events, overpolicing of Black people, academic racism, and other cultural specificities, including in regards to their queer identity. A few students mentioned being white, sometimes to speak to the privileges this brings them within the academic sphere. Three students had arrived in Montreal in recent years from the international scene. At last, as queerness, to many, represents no limits in terms of identification, the participants often used many words to describe their identity. Amongst fourteen students, the following terms were combined and used a number of times each by the participants to detail their queerness: queer (14 times), lesbian (four times), nonbinary (three times), woman (three times), trans (two times), genderfluid (one time), man (one time), pansexual (one time), bisexual (one time), gay (one time), in questioning (one time). These terms were often combined by the participants in a way that makes it nearly impossible, or simply irrelevant, to divide the sampling into distinguished categories.

The participants were asked to take part in an individual, one-hour long interview, during which they would be offered to create a map of their experience. While there were no explicit benefits of participation, participants could appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the discussion about queer experiences within universities, and the potentiality of transformation that emerge from them. Participation in this research was completely anonymous: I, as the primary researcher, am the only one that knows the real identity of the participants, and have removed all identifying information from the reported data (field of study, year of graduation, belonging to certain groups, such as student or workers unions, jobs and laboratories). Apart from the signed consent form (for which one copy is filed in order to protect their confidentiality and another sent to the participants), all documents related to the thesis are identified by the participants chosen pseudonym. At the beginning of each interview, participants were informed of this information, and of their right to withdraw at any moment. The research was deemed minimal risk by the University Human Research Ethics Committee, who received a copy of the consent form and of the interview guideline draft (see appendixes). The certification of ethical acceptability (see appendixes) for the present research was issued in September 2022, and valid until September 2023.

3.4.2 Open Interviews

All 14 interviews took place between October 21st and December 12th, 2022. About an hour long, these interviews were an opportunity for me to ask questions to queer students in regards to their relationship to their body and to university spaces. More precisely, I asked questions related to their relationship to university, the way they felt within a variety of academic spaces, and the impact that their academic experiences have on their relationship to their body. These questions allowed us to build a common understanding of their trajectories on campus. All interviews began with a few open-ended questions to slowly approach the topics, regarding their program of study, their number of years of attendance, and the spaces we found ourselves in for the interview. All participants chose their pseudonym and felt comfortable being recorded to facilitate transcription. Before diving into the interview, I also asked each participant to describe to me what the university generally meant to them.

When starting fieldwork, the questions were organized to begin with the scale of the body, to then extend the emotions and felt experience expressed to the scale of university spaces. After the first interview, I realized how difficult it was to begin with the very intimate topic that is our relationship to our body, even after breaking the ice. The two scales were thus exchanged;

we began by discussing university spaces, slowly carrying our thoughts on these spaces to their impact on our bodies, to the ways in which our bodies played a role in navigating these spaces. This allowed us to discuss with more fluidity the relationship between university spaces and our bodies, and explore the notion of academic embodiment. Together, in an academic space they most often chose, we explored the ways in which we can understand the body as a geographical entity.

3.4.3 Queering Cartography – Mapping our University Experiences

Each interview but one was accompanied with the practice of cognitive mapping, notably inspired by Gieseking's work *Mapping lesbian and queer lines of desire: Constellation of queer urban space* (2020) and Rose's *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (2016). Cognitive mapping, also known as mind mapping, represents a way of visually expressing a geographical phenomenon by centralizing personal or collective representations of space and encouraging creativity and spontaneity (Fournand, 2003). Cognitive maps further reveal what is central to the perspective of the creator concerning any given subject (Fournand, 2003), which can contribute to the discussion and demonstration of situatedness and situated knowledge. The elements vary according to research themes, but may include places that are significant to the author of the map, landmarks, streets and buildings, representation of interiors, reference to specific moments, significant areas or neighborhoods, etc. (Gieseking 2013; Lynch, 1960). In its early days, notably Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1960), this method involved producing sketch maps during interviews. The maps resulted in detailed visual ensembles within which were found significant landmarks and symbols, further illustrating a popular understanding of the cities studied. During the interviews, Lynch would spark discussion and reflexion concerning a city by asking questions such as "what first comes to your mind, what symbolizes the word "Boston" for you?" and "Do you have any particular emotional feelings about various parts of you trip?" (Lynch, 1960, p. 141). As observed by Lynch (1960), the maps that give a visual form to geographical entities or phenomena often feature fragments, with huge parts left blank, revealing an incomplete comprehension of space. The details of this method, accompanied with interview questions that inform as much the emotions participants felt towards certain spaces as spatial details found in participants' maps, shaped the way I would prepare my interviews.

During the execution of this method of data collection, I have also encountered the concept of sensitive mapping (Olmedo, 2015), and body mapping (Jager et al., 2016; Skop, 2016), which both have strongly contributed to the construction of the ways in which I explored mapping in

this research. On one hand, Olmedo (2015) defines sensitive mapping as a socially, temporarily and spatially situated practice that reveals lived interpretation of space through artistic means. Sensitive mapping marks the shift, in cartography, from the representation of space to "the construction of a lived relationship with space" (Olmedo, 2015, p. 143, author's translation). Exploring cartography through textiles, sketchbooks and fieldnotes, Olmedo furthermore describes the method as the production of geographical knowledge that is generated through sensibility (*le sensible*) (Olmedo, 2015). Pushing back the boundaries of conventional cartography, sensitive cartography aims firstly to "represent unusual dimensions of space", and secondly to "integrate new techniques for processing this geographical data" (Olmedo, 2015, p. 65, author's translation). The absence of limits implicit in this creative process, as well as the emphasis placed on the *lived relationship with space* rather than aiming for a representation, are two elements that have fundamentally structured my approach to cartography in the course of this research.

On the other hand, body mapping emerges from the desire to render visible marginalized perspectives concerning specifically the body and embodiment (Jager et al., 2016). This alternative cartography contributes to postcolonial and feminist approaches and methods by encouraging the participant's reappropriation of the narrative concerning their body and by centering bodies and embodiment within knowledge production (Jager et al., 2016). Skop's work on body mapping further informs us of a methodology that overcomes the duality of the mind and the body "by helping the participants reflect upon the connection of their minds, bodies, feelings, thoughts, experiences and social interactions" (2016, p. 31). Concretely, body mapping invites the research participants to visually represent their body, which unfolds in an active role in the construction and representation of their own embodied experiences. This art-based method of knowledge production relies less on language (thus reducing risks of language barriers) and more on creative representation, hence having the possibility of reducing the power dynamic between researcher and participants, who are in control of the representation of their bodies (Jager et al. 2016). This accessible method of mapping is often mobilized for its equal interest in terms of data collection, content analysis and wide dissemination of the results, as their result may be easier to grasp for communities outside of the academic sphere (Jager et al., 2016). Centering embodiment at every step of the process, this research thus borrows elements from a variety of mapping alternatives in hopes of representing the emotional, embodied and social implications of navigating through the educational landscape as queer students.

Both myself and the participants created maps during our interviews using several types of mapping to express ourselves. To this end, the materials brought to the interviews included papers, crayons and crafting tools. Towards the end of the interview, I asked each participant to describe their map and add some information on the elements visually presented to allow further reflection and make sure I analyzed correctly the connections between the spaces mentioned and illustrated. It is worth noting that we did not aim to map universities specifically, but more so the interviews in all of their content. In other words, we produced maps of their felt, lived, embodied experiences in a broad sense, from which emerged important themes of the interviews. I began the interviews by discussing this process with the participants, offering them a multitude of possible outcomes for these maps, such as maps of some spaces we would talk about, or the drawings of specific elements of our conversation that were most important to them. The maps could contain representations of emotions, specific events, spaces, even words that offer a precise understanding of the participants' experiences. The maps became visual representations of our discussion, a creative, even *queer* way of expressing our thoughts during the research process. As it was my first time facilitating this and, for the vast majority of the participants, their first time participating in a similar exercise, I adopted an open approach with a few suggestions (such as using colors, drawing important elements of our discussion, or mapping their trajectories across campus if relevant) that were repeated at the beginning of each interview in order to create a common thread amongst all the maps.

As all types of creative mapping seems to be a "collaborative process between researchers and participants" (Skop, 2016, p. 37), it seemed fitting that I would be producing my own map alongside the participant. This method was first useful to break the ice, as participants often began to draw only after I started. Both creating maps signified creating together, sharing the vulnerability, and participating in the co-creation of ideas (Skop, 2016). Interpreting my map in parallel with the one from each interview allows me to see connections between what was expressed and what I registered. Resemblance between maps, either from the same interview or between interviews, confirms the shared importance attributed to certain elements. This is visible in many ways when observing my map of the interview with Walker (Figure 1). First, both Walker and I have illustrated the homophobic comments heard in the elevator (see p.64 for Walker's map, which includes a similar representation of the elevator), which confirms the importance that this element took during our conversation. Second, the plants and representation of the greenhouse that appears in this map also appeared in many others,

confirming the importance given to both green spaces and the Concordia Greenhouse by participants.

Figure 1: My map from the interview with Walker

Furthermore, the resemblance and co-creation emerging from the maps produced during a same interview offers a tangible demonstration of the possibilities in terms of influence between both the participant and myself. Indeed, the way I respond, ask questions, or map may impact what information emerges from the interviews and the participants' maps – hence the importance of positionality. I became aware of this dynamic during Walker's interview itself, and took note of it in the bottom of my map, where one can notice the resemblance with the stairs in Walker's pictured map, laid in front of him. Overall, the maps I produced myself play a role both in the data collection process and in the analysis, where connections and interpretations can be observed.

During some interviews, the participants felt comfortable with the idea of me representing them on my map, tweaking a few or many elements for anonymity. I asked if they felt comfortable that I draw them when it felt fitting; during other interviews I did not find the time, or felt like it was less fitting. Mapping the interviews thus implied representing the people that sat in front of me, coming from varied socio-economic and ethnocultural backgrounds and realities that I do not share with them. How I would represent them would be telling of the biases that might modulate the research. Just like it is impossible to speak about our queer bodies without talking about the processes of racialization and racism, of fatphobia and of ableism (cf. Ejiogu & Ware,

2018), it is impossible to map interviews without considering how to map the implications of these same social dynamics, that I do not always fully understand. For example, too often, whiteness has been chosen to reflect neutrality and deemed invisible, both in visual representations and in the context of research (cf., Ahmed, 2007; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Leonardo, 2009). It was hence mandatory that I have a variety of accurate skin colors for the maps, to be sure to represent all skin tones, and not leave blank space as white skin. To do so would have been the same as removing whiteness from research, presenting it as neutral, deeming it unnecessary to the representation. These reflections were prompted by the mapping exercise, remaining in my thoughts through the entirety of the research. Underlying the analysis, these thoughts are a non-negligeable product of the mapping method that tints the production of this research. This reflection first emerged from my fieldnotes, where I noted that I needed to buy an actual beige pencil (Figure 2). More on fieldnotes, that also mainly took the shape of creative mapping, can be found in section 4.6.

As such, this participatory and exploratory methodology is of equal interest in terms of data collection, content analysis and dissemination of the results. While these images reveal and "carry different kinds of information from the written word" (Rose, 2016, p. 330), they were most useful for building a space between myself and the participants where vulnerability and creativity were shared between both of us. Concretely, creating the maps allowed for comfortable silences, time to think, and material to discuss during the process of each interview. In that sense, they facilitated comfortable moments of sharing and intimacy, where the discomfort of drawing 'poorly' was discussed at the beginning in hopes of leaving it aside.

Figure 2: Fieldnotes of a no-show

Strongly inspired by Gieseking's work with cognitive mapping (2020; 2013), the first aim was to analyze the maps according to their "mechanics of method" (2013), that is, analytic techniques that categorize each element of the map (i.e. use of color, presence of text, space between elements, shape, orientation, time limit, etc.) (Gieseking, 2013). This aim changed after the interviews, as I felt a gap between the precision of such an analysis, and the maps produced. Although many represented buildings, floors and elements of the university premises that they described during the interview, some were also

very abstract, and some elements were doodled without much focus while the participants spoke. While some of the elements from the participants' maps were significant and others were doodles, their importance seemed to vary immensely, which made a precise analysis feel like deviations. The variety of types of maps and elements present also indicated that my guidelines for the participants were probably unclear. Indeed, as the topic of discussion was not only the university spaces (which were easier to represent), but also their embodied experience (often difficult to illustrate), I wanted to avoid guiding the participants to a certain kind of map, containing certain elements.

Although representing some challenges in terms of analysis, as I was able to pair the maps with the recorded interviews that were very generous in information, the maps potentially played a different role within this research, one of creativity and shared vulnerability that complemented the interview. Still, I was in position to see, from the maps created, some important contrasts between the spaces represented by the participants. This is present in both Cody's (Figure 3) and Cory's (Figure 4) maps[4]: while Cody used heat and cold to represent the warm/welcoming spaces and their opposites in the university, Cory drew happy and sad faces to represent the feeling associated with certain spaces.

Figure 3: Excerpt of Cody's map

Figure 4: Excerpt of Cory's map

[4] Throughout the thesis, participants' maps are presented in excerpts in order to target certain characteristics or elements within them. The maps in their entirety can be found in the appendix, starting on page 96.

On the left side, an excerpt of Cory's (CU) map illustrates a positive feeling in the library and Hall 7, in contrast to how she feels in her bedroom, notably as time passes. On the right side, Cody's (UQAM) excerpt contains snowflakes in a specific room, and warm, felted colors in another[5]. This comparison shows not only contrasts between the spaces represented by both participants, but also a contrast between the two maps. Indeed, Cody's potentially reflects the overall atmosphere of the spaces, while Cory's mainly illustrates the feelings experienced within the spaces. Comparing the maps of all interviews between them, I was also able to find similarity between elements of different interviews, such as the metaphor of body as a vessel, that I represented twice during fieldwork (figure 9 and 10, page 62). They also offer a very creative support to the analysis of the interview content, confirming and illustrating important elements regarding the students' experiences. In sum, maps have contributed to several levels of the project. They were useful for breaking the ice with participants, for creating spaces of sharing, and sometimes for provoking reflection on certain subjects, such as the representation of participants from a researcher's standpoint. The maps also contributed to the analysis by sometimes supporting, provoking and reminding the significance of certain concepts or academic spaces. Combined with listening to the interviews, I was able to go back to the maps to make sure I targeted all the important elements, and also see what had been drawn without mentioning it in the interviews. As explored in chapter five, the maps further played a crucial role as an interpretative tool to see and feel the emotions that colored the participants' words.

3.4 Methods of analysis

Transcription of the interviews was done by hand, sometimes with the help of the software Trint for interviews in English. The transcriptions were then read several times to begin highlighting important sections and recurring themes amongst the interviews. Grouping and identifying key excerpts, themes and concepts as such, the analysis adopted an inductive coding approach (Chandra & Shang, 2019; Thomas, 2006). This approach made it possible to trace links between interviews, observe repetition, contrast, and difference, and allow shared experiences amongst queer students to emerge.

After transcribing all of the interviews, I began to build a concept map (Figure 5) starting with the main concepts organized into three large categories, that related to the thesis and each relied on the previous one. The first category serves as a mapping for participants' definitions of the main themes of the research. The second section groups together recurring concepts from the

[5] Cody described the warm, welcoming space as "*un espace feutré"*, which seems to lose its significance through translation.

students' individual experiences. The third is constituted by statements concerning community or collective aspects of queer experience in academia, particularly in tension with the Administration. To be able to grasp a collective experience of academic spaces (Theme three), one needs first to understand specific events and unique trajectories that forge the student's individual experiences (Theme two), and to this end, it was first important to define a common understanding of what the university meant, and what a queer identity implied (Theme one). This map was organized vertically for the three main sections in the order I would write them; and horizontally to organize concepts, indicators of concepts that came from interviews, links with literature, and links with the participants' maps. Overall, mapping was, for me, the most efficient method to organize the enormous quantity of data that resulted from the fourteen interviews in order to build a multiscalar structured analysis. This inductive and exploratory technique allowed me to visually discover, as the analysis took shape, which cluster became bigger, from where did the lines came the most, and what links could further be drawn.

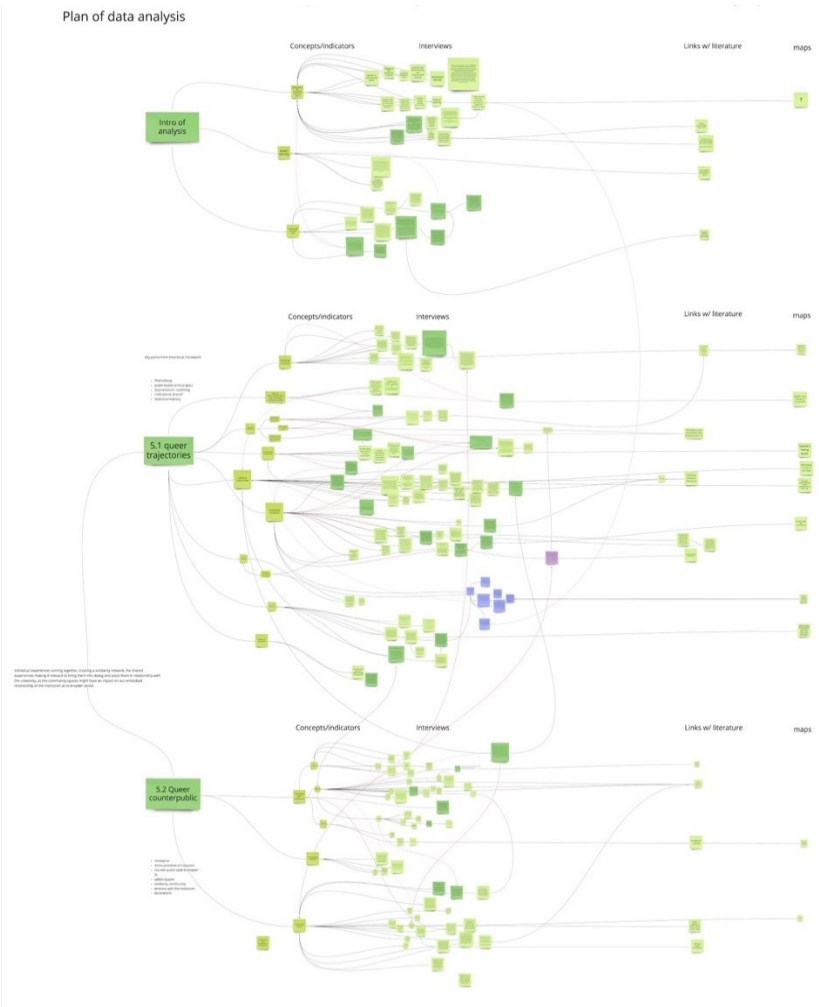

Figure 5: Map of Analysis

Being both an advantage and a downside, the space on this web map is infinite: on the one hand, no spatial limits constrained my analytical process, but on the other, such a dense map quickly becomes unreadable when shared.

Still, a few captures may be useful to better grasp the methods of analysis. Important clusters formed around the concepts of embodied moment and queer trajectories, as demonstrated in the following excerpt of the map (Figure 6):

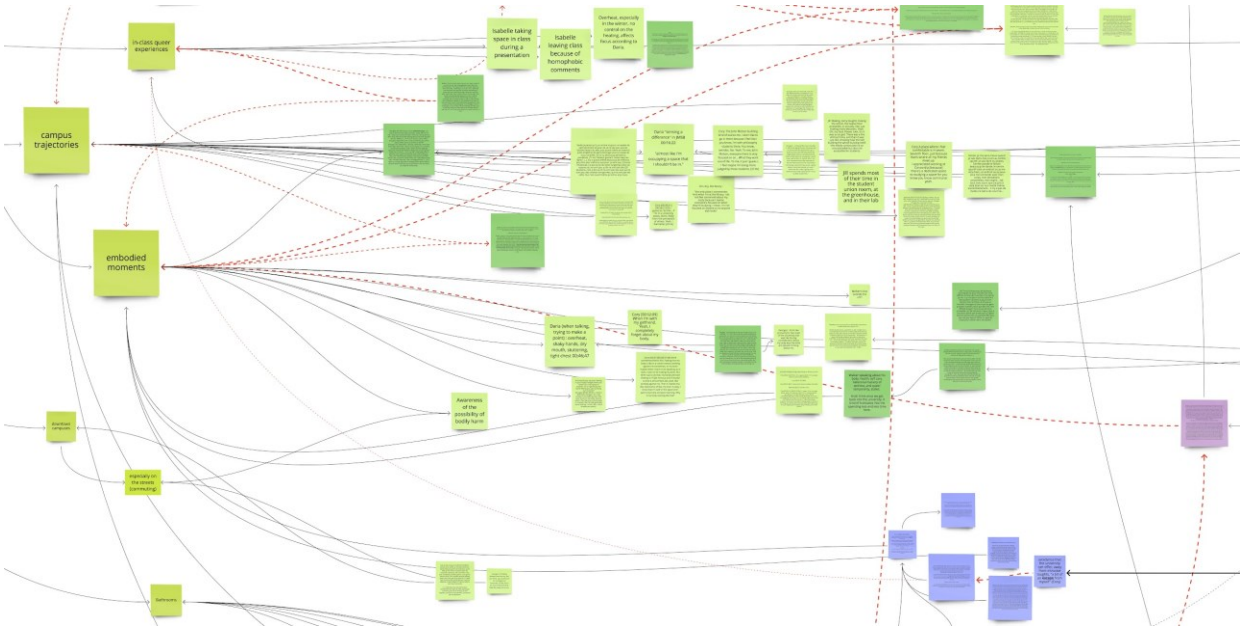

Figure 6: Clusters of Concepts with Analysis Map

This excerpt is also useful to illustrate the different colors that were used in the process. Tones of green distinguish concepts (on the left side of the map) from interview excerpts (in the middle). A purple color was also used to easily find a small cluster that was of great importance concerning the theme of avoidance and disconnection. When key elements from the interviews needed to be linked to more than one concept, I used dotted red lines to go across the map to be sure not to lose sight of them. Once ready to transpose the elements of the map into a written analysis, a copy of the map was used to remove the color of the elements written as I went (Figure 7).

This progress allowed for the remaining elements to stick out. From the clusters eventually emerged observations for the results of the analysis that I first organized into a series of lettered arguments:

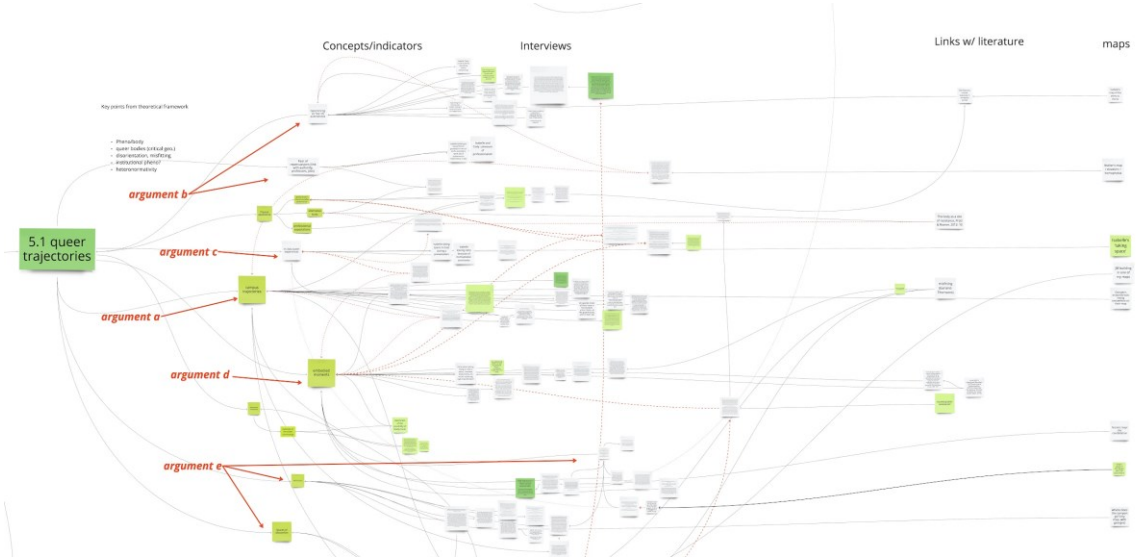

Figure 7: Arguments within Map of Analysis

The themes organized thus built an analysis that unfolds from individual stories to shared emotions, further allowing us to reimagine, collectively, our learning and working environments. The same structure is underlying in the analysis, which thus begins with the aim of defining queerness, the university and the body through the perspective of the participants. The second section's purpose is to detail the students' unique queer trajectories within the university, which includes the themes of spaces of comfort and discomfort, campus trajectories, navigating different academic contexts, expression of identity through style, etc. The third section is reserved to regroup concepts and findings that begin drafting a collective experience of academic spaces, which includes the themes of solidarity, community, resistance and friendship.

3.5 Mapping fieldnotes

Self-reflexivity in the form of fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 2011) was involved during the first stages of fieldwork, allowing me to take note of some events or particularities of this project as they occur. Often used in the field of ethnography and auto-ethnography, self-reflexivity is considered to be "a foundation for engaged activist scholarship" (Kobayashi, 2010, p. 346) that is sometimes in need of a critical reconfiguration. As a method, a reflective approach emphasizes "the role of subjectivity as a way of conducting more rich and meaningful research"

(Fook, 1999, p. 14). Concretely, this motivation to consider subjectivity as an important variable of research (Haraway, 1988) processes unfolds in centering positionality, engaging in a process where both the research topic and the construction of it are studied, notably in relation and contribution to each other, and considering the role of the researcher as a research instrument that obtains, selects, and interprets the data collected (Fook, 1999).

While I demonstrated previously the way phenomenological tools (i.e. orientation and bodily horizon) help define positionality in fieldwork (see section 3.3), Finlay (2005) further makes the case for a phenomenological approach of the method of researcher-reflexivity. To propose the idea of "reflexive embodied empathy" (Finlay, 2005, p. 271), Finlay relies on Merleau-Ponty's contributions to demonstrate how self-reflection is founded on an embodied consciousness. The central focus of this proposition is to invite researchers to be attentive to the intersubjectivity relationship between them and research participants, and "to learn to read and interrogate their body's response to, and relationship with, the body of the research participant" (Finlay, 2005, p. 272). These considerations are all the more important in the context of the present study, within which not only is the notion of positionality central to its methodology, but where embodiment is a key theme of the research topic. Although the fieldnotes for this project were limited, they did permit reflection on the process and the greater consideration of the relationship between embodiment, phenomenology. Researcher-reflexivity hence contributes to concretizing the notions of situatedness and positionality addressed previously.

Taking the form of fieldnotes, my process of researcher- (or self-) reflexivity has consisted of both writing and mapping in a notebook my thoughts, reflections and experiences as the research advanced. I kept track of my reactions, interactions and challenges, notably to highlight the "inseparability of 'methods' and 'findings'" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 11). They also permitted me to consider how I hold space for the interviews and the way that I interpret the results. As the project is strongly carried out by the methods of cognitive and sensitive

mapping, these fieldnotes incorporate drawings, maps of the interviews and of my emotions throughout fieldwork.

When showing up to the interviews early, I drew myself waiting for the participants. While discussing the experience of our bodies in specific places, I felt myself sitting, crouching, leaning in to listen, and worrying. I mapped these brief notes of my body, of this researcher body, to remember its presence, its role, and its impact during the interviews (see Figure 8). I often mapped fragments of the interviews afterwards, of the feelings I had during them, to better remember how it unfolded, how it felt. This process is a way of considering my situatedness (Haraway, 1988), to disengage with the myth of objectivity and to attest, to feel, the role I play in this research. Indeed, drawing glimpses of the interviews has confronted me with my positionality, to the strange and uncomfortable feeling of my body slipping into the body of the emotionally-solid, somewhat distant researcher. Pushing myself to create a concrete, visual representation of the emotions felt during the process is a way to acknowledge them that furthermore brings to light the ways in which they could influence the study.

Figure 8: Interview fieldnotes

When mobilizing sensitive mapping, the difficult emotions that emerge during the research process are impossible to avoid. How does one map a constant lack of confidence? Losing my words, realizing my knowledge of English might not suffice, or losing sight of my research questions? Feeling shy while knowing the responsibility for making everyone comfortable lies on my shoulders? How do I navigate through my anger about feeling stuck in a system that does not support me while I carry this project? How do I conduct a good interview when I feel ashamed, discouraged, or both? These are some of the questions that gave shape to my fieldnotes, that bring to light the emotions I felt that might tint the research.

While sensitive mapping seems to me as opening the door for vulnerability in cartography, the exercise of drawing instinctively in a notebook also helped me put words to what I was thinking before theorizing it for an academic audience. Furthermore, this exercise of drawing my body pushed me to be mindful of it while I do my work. As I study embodiment in the present research, this constant reminder has been quite beneficial. Focusing on the sensations of my

body and exploring the ways in which I could visually represent them, such as pink hands for feeling sweaty and warm for example, potentially bridged a gap between my embodied experiences and the participant's, and gave us a language for sharing our own perspectives. This observation is strongly informed by Finlay's (2005) proposition that understanding our embodied sensations and responses, as researchers, further enables us to better understand what the participants experience.

3.6 Conclusion

In sum, the convergence of queer methodology with sensitive mapping allows for a geographical research process that prioritizes emotions and situatedness. To this end, a phenomenological reading of the methods of research enables an interpretation of the analysis that takes into account the impact of each decision of the research process on the results, including choices made during sampling, recruitment, interview guidelines, and inductive methods of analysis. In the form of sensitive and body mapping, the fieldnotes taken during the elaboration of the data collection abound in this sense, while also offering a creative insight on the challenges and thought processes that emerged from the fieldwork. Altogether, this exploratory methodology provides an informed insight into the key findings of the study, presented in the following section.

Chapter 4. Queer Trajectories, Vectors of Resistance Across Heterocisnormativity

4.1 Introduction

This chapter's purpose is to mobilize and interpret the experience of queer students to shed light on the dynamics of power spatially inscribed within the two universities. To do so, I begin by defining the participant's relationship to the university, to their queer identity, and to their body (section 4.2). With these three elements clearly outlined, I then commence drafting the parameters of participants' embodied experiences of academic spaces (section 4.3), which is at the core of the research question. Precisely, the present analysis organizes the content of the interviews and the maps by the following themes: the student's personal trajectories, identity negotiation in university spaces, academic participation, queer embodiment, discomfort, and queer resistance. The analysis begins with a smaller scale, that of the university, and slowly moves towards a larger scale, that of the body, emotions and felt experiences. Through a recollection of key moments, anecdotes, campus trajectories and distinct feelings associated with certain spaces, the interviews shed light on the particularities of queer embodiment and socio-spatial dynamics inscribed in academia. The analysis aims to highlight common themes concerning the personal experiences of the interviewees, across scales, which allow us to probe queer embodied experiences of academia. This process provides a departure from the individual perspectives and convergence towards a shared experiences and queer community building at university, which is in direct relation with resistance and the transformation of the institution.

4.2 Queer Bodies at the University

What the university meant to the participants was one of the first questions of the interview, to set the table, so to speak, for discussing their experiences of institutional spaces that would be addressed in the course of the exchange. Focusing first on what the university meant to them in their daily life, and second on the university as an institution (the 'capital U University', as was often proposed during the interviews), this opening topic presented an opportunity to set the context within which we would continue the discussion, while also drafting a common understanding of the space we found ourselves in. Concerning the role of the university in the students' personal lives, the answers varied between a place of learning, an opportunity to meet friends and socialize, and an obligation for the future, whether that is in terms of careers, work or a response to family expectations. While some answers were quite neutral or positive

regarding the university (notably in regards to making friends and learning), others were tinted with words of negative connotation, such as “hostile” (Nicole, UQAM)* and “elitist” (Jamie, UQAM)*. Students also spoke to the “pressure of productivity” (Lenny, UQAM)* and to the importance of “academic validation” (Daria, CU). For Nicole, who returned to university after a few years of absence, the university is a strategic tool to open some doors and have easier access to letters of recommendation, job banks, and professional relationships. For her, the choice of coming back was very pragmatic, and came with the following understanding of the institution:

> It’s a sort of big machine, with lots and lots of codes that you have to master to be able to get out on the other side. Yeah, it's also an extremely elitist place where you have to flirt with, learn the dominant language, a bit like playing a game. And so it's a place that reproduces social inequalities (Nicole, UQAM)*[6].

Nicole’s depiction of the institution resonates powerfully with both the work of Mullen (2011) and Brim (2020) regarding academia’s role in upholding elitism. By speaking to the reproduction of inequalities (cf. Borghi et al., 2016; McNeil et al., 2018) and specific social codes and the importance of being able to engage with academic forms of language, Nicole pinpoints tangible ways in which elitism unfolds. Indeed, the need to master the “codes”, understand the “machine” and play with academic social manners demonstrates that a failure to engage with these codes results in the exclusion of some people from academic spaces. The process of exclusion described by Nicole can be referred to as Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence (1997). In the context of academia, one could think of social codes such as ways of expressing ideas and asking questions, the use of sustained academic language, an ease at interacting with peers and professors, arguing in a way that leaves little room for less experienced participants, or putting forward a strong ability to participate in intellectual debates. As such, many of the thoughts shared by the students concerning their experience of university spaces represent different dimensions of symbolic violence and the reproduction of social order through the spaces of knowledge production.

Other participants also mentioned academia’s reproduction of social inequalities in the beginning of the interviews. While the University represents to Lenny a space of struggle, conflict and performance characterized by “a feeling of constant illegitimacy” (Lenny, UQAM)*, Jill's description of the university used few words to spark many thoughts: “progressive ideas in a really conservative Administration” (Jill, CU) – which resonates

[6] All interview citations marked with a * are interviews that took place in French, for which the translations were made by the author of this thesis.

strongly with Pinar's depiction of conservatism within the university (2012). Stipulating that this tension is inherent to society as a whole, Jill touched on a phenomena that was brought up by multiple students, namely that the university represented a microcosm of the broader society. This idea of scale was referred to by interviewees either to depict the university as "practice for the real world" (Georges, CU) in terms of working and developing (organization, communication) skills, or to speak to dynamics of power that students notice within the university walls – such as the use of authority, hierarchy, pressure of performance, conformity and productivity, etc. – but outside of them too. As some of these comments concern the university as a place of study, while others engage with the university as a workplace – in fact, this was the first word used by Alana (CU) to describe the university –, we can note that labor, to the students, is an integral part of their embodied experience of academia.

Along the same lines of the tension revealed by Jill, the vocabulary of contradictions was used by several students to highlight a dichotomy that is constantly embedded in their understanding of the university as an institution, or in their own relationship to the university. To summarize his thoughts on the university, Georges stated that it is "kind of both exhilarating and exhausting" (Georges, CU). Others have raised the point that the university can represent valuable access to knowledge and information, but in a way that remains unequal, expensive, and out of reach to many. For Jamie, there's a significant tension between the university as a political institution, with whom she is in strong confrontation, and the university in her daily life, where she goes to see her friends and have fun. The opposition expressed demonstrates the complexity and multifaceted nature of the institution, and the challenges of reconciling the political and the social facets of the university:

> I think I've lost any illusions I had about admiring or respecting UQAM as an institution, but that's really on a political level. Because in reality, I love coming here because when I do, it's to hang out with my friends. I'm not face-to-face with [the Administration], who keeps hammering [the university's values] away at me. (Jamie, UQAM)*

In contrast to the different perspectives present in this research in regards to academia, is the institution's way of presenting itself, from which tensions may also arise. Both the *Université du Québec à Montréal* and Concordia University generally present themselves as innovative institutions that support cutting-edge research. On one hand, a brief glance at Concordia's website gives a great indication of the value it wishes to perform, as the institution describes itself as an innovative "next-generation university" that "pursues technology without losing sight of [their] humanity" (Concordia University, n.d.). Key-words speak to "performance",

"novel approaches", and "advanced technology" (Concordia, n.d.). Along similar lines, the first few words to catch our eyes on the *Université du Québec à Montréal*'s website concern technology and information programs. Again, innovation and its derivatives are quite present in the university's description, in addition to their "international outreach" ("*rayonnement à l'international*") (UQAM, n.d.). Both universities are imbricated in the urban fabric of downtown Montreal, and are currently undergoing many renovations within the Universities' walls (on this topic, Concordia University presents the renovations of Hall 6, the 6th floor of the Hall Building, as a model for all future development). These different components of the Universities, in their essence and materiality, are engaged with by the interviewees in the following section.

One last thing to note regarding the participants' experience of the university is that the experience of temporality can vary immensely from one participant to another. For instance, while the term "transitional" was used both by Walker and Cory to describe their passage at the university and its spaces, Cody wishes to become a professor one day, and therefore projects the duration of her presence at the university onto a very different timeline.

Similarly to the participants' relationships with academia, their perspectives on their queer identity include several points of convergence, while still being unique to each. To identify themselves, the participants used the words queer, lesbian, non-binary, genderfluid, gay, bisexual, trans, and pansexual, but their description or understanding of their queer identity rarely ended there: for many, there was a need to express the political, social and personal dimensions implied within these markers of identity. Their identities expanded towards an important sense of community and solidarity building across oppressions that are complementary. Some participants, including but not limited to Walker, Georges, Léon and Nadia, underlined that their queer identity is imbricated in other socio-political matters, such as class and race. Others evoked the complexities of gender and of romantic or intimate relationships to be taken into account when defining their identity. In other words, while all identified to the umbrella term that can be the word 'queer' (at least enough to respond to the call to participation), they each had their own personal stratifications to unfold in order to express what that meant in their everyday lives. The importance of the political aspect of the queer identity was shared by Georges, who suggested lifting the attention off his intimate life, and redirecting it to the way these aspects of life are perceived, spoken to, and reacted to in his daily life and in our societies. Thus, Georges reminds us of society's role in upholding norms.

This relationship to one's queer identity resonates strongly with the political dimension of queerness and queer theories present in the literature (cf. Cervulle & Quemener, 2016), which denounce the reproduction of queer marginalization in all spheres of society.

To a majority of participants, being queer plays a major role in their relationship to their body; being queer is in large part experienced through the body, to a point where the body and the queer can sometimes be difficult to dissociate. Moreover, many of the students mentioned that their relationship to their body relied heavily on others' perception of them. The desire (or pressure) to look a certain way and be perceived in a certain manner – androgynous, queer, lesbian, etc., depending on each of the participants' reality – was at the forefront of many discussions, often unfolding into a special attention given to the types of clothes that are worn, and to the way that their voice sounds. Nadia spoke to this pressure of looking queer and performing queerness through certain kinds of looks, to further draw a parallel with other spheres of their life where fighting this pressure was unavoidable:

> There's so much pressure [...] that I put on myself as a racialized person to fit into standards that don't take into account the fact that I'm not a white person and [I realized] that I've put so much pressure on myself in my life… I did things that I know... it's like [fitting] a square peg in a round hole. Impossible, it doesn't work. And somehow it took me [so many] years to figure that out. And now that I understand it, it's really liberating. (Nadia, UQAM)*

For many, their relationship to their body is strongly defined by their journey of the last few years, discovering themselves as queer, finding their belonging amongst QTBIPOC (Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities within and outside of the university's walls, and learning to accept and love their body in its full potential, without the need to label it in any ways. This was one of many interviews during which the participants shed light on bodily relationships that were abundant with care, that demonstrated a long and thoughtful process of reconciliation, reconnection with their queer body.

> [This relationship] certainly changed a lot over time. I used to really, really hate my body, like not be able to like… I couldn't, like, I couldn't walk past like a reflective surface, like that kind of thing. And then over time, I mean, definitely a big part of it was transitioning, and just like becoming more comfortable with myself as a person. I feel really good about my body. I feel like it's… It's my companion, you know? Like we're… We're in this together, so we make it work. (Georges, CU)

Although for some, queerness can imply a certain pressure to 'look queer', it can also alleviate stress, for others, in terms of gender performance and diversity acceptance. This was the case

for Sol, Cory and Cody, the latter for whom queer and lesbian communities represent a refuge away from the embodied burden of performing femininity.

> Cody: It was a slow transformation I think… I was in a "straight" relationship, [and] I was like, OK Cody... you watch a lot of queer content, you... your inner speech is like, 'wow I'd like to be that person', you [see] lesbians and you're like 'um, I wish I had a girlfriend', but you're in a relationship with a dude... [Cody snaps fingers] Wake up baby! [Laughs.] The more I walked towards affirming my queerness, the more I felt like there was this calmness like... I'm an anxious person... and the more I walked [towards my queer identity], the more my body relaxed... So I thought... if you're this anxious in straight relationships, there's something there. I just... Really, I felt my body really... *reactive*, the more I walked towards affirming my queerness. [...] When I look back, I was already frequenting queer spaces that made me feel... *soft*. I saw these spaces as places where I didn't have to perform anything, I just had to be… It was so chill...Whereas in a straight bar [...] you're like 'OK I've got to perform this, I've got to look desirable' like...There's a kind of *breathlessness*, like... why do I have to do everything like this...
>
> Mathilde: But there's a kind of expectation too, which is perhaps more determined by the fact that we know the straight scripts, we know what it looks like?
>
> Cody: Oh yes, yes, ah, oh my god the straight script. Yes. Yes, of course.
>
> Mathilde: So then, on the other hand let's say… What do queer spaces offer you?
>
> Cody: Ah! Creativity. Space to be. And to appropriate the way I want to be. And not, precisely, respond to that male gaze there, to that script we know. [...]
>
> Mathilde: What does this queer flexibility bring to your body, how does it translate into everyday life?
>
> Cody: [...] Softness, more fluidity... Less... you know, for the longest time, I was really pulling in my belly.
>
> Mathilde: Mhm, pulling in your belly! Mhm..
>
> Cody: I'm *breathing* now! Literally, I'm breathing! Like… yes.. I'm breathing. And I'm conscious when I'm not breathing. Like for a long time I had so much… my body was so numb. That I didn't know when… I didn't know anything about my body. And then, when I understood [about my queer identity], it was really a slow transformation towards... walking towards myself. How I see it, the more I go towards it, the more embodied I am. And it's not like... it's not hyper vigilance of my own body, it's like...I'm *in it*.
> (Cody, UQAM, emphasis by the author)*

This excerpt weaves together important links between Cody's queer identity, hegemonic heterocisnormativity, and her body. Through her words is revealed a strong dichotomy between, on one hand, embodying heteronormativity in all its tightness, numb rigidity, social expectations and "breathlessness" and, on the other hand, embodying queerness. Within the

latter, Cody found herself soothed, releasing tension, and feeling creative, detaching herself from the male gaze and the pressure of holding in her stomach.

This process, taking part in the register of the affect, represents a moment of transition for Cody. As such, this excerpt contributes to the drafting of an underlying theme present in many of the students' contributions, that of transition. Indeed, from Cody's to Georges' experiences of different kinds of transitions, and all the other interviewees' transitional experiences in between, this terminology was used many times to speak to the process of embracing or living fully their queer identity. Perhaps this shows an observation that emerges from this communality, that is the university provides a social space that is conducive, or at least suitable, to journeys of self-discovery or identity affirmation. Along the same line as Cody's journey discovering her queer identity, Sol and Cory both expressed feeling a relief when beginning to feel part of queer communities, where unrealistic expectations concerning their body weren't as present. For Sol, feeling desired by people who weren't cismen resembled a "180 degree flip" (Sol, UQAM)* in how they perceived their body, naming that they finally felt seen for who they were. For Cory, not only does having a girlfriend give them confidence, but also does it allow her to distance herself from men's "unrealistic expectations for how women look" (Cory, CU), stating that she found lesbian communities considerably more accepting of women and bodily diversity.

It is also through queer communities that Jill's relationship to their body changed drastically. Indeed, while they had been uncomfortable with their chest "their whole life" (Jill, CU), meeting a romantic partner who introduced them to safe binders was truly transformative: "[binders] really like appeased, this kind of, like, hatred" regarding their chest and their body-image (Jill, CU). Access to safe binders further impacted Jill's experience of being in public spaces, notably the university. When asked about how they felt in their body when at the university, Jill spoke to the need to express their non-binary identity and to be perceived in a gender-neutral way, which has become much easier to them with safe binders.

On one hand, Jill's experience of embodied gender-expression at the university comes to show that our relationship to our body can have an impact on the way we experience public spaces, such as the university. On the other hand, Cody's interview demonstrated that the correlation works both ways, that is, that academia can have an impact on our relationship to our body too. After recalling a moment of intense writing that left her body hurting, Cody also spoke to the way being overworked impacts her relationship with food, and therefore with her body:

> With my fourteen thousand contracts, there's a real lack of time around making myself something to eat, taking the time to eat, loving what I eat... Like today I really want to eat a Pho, I'll probably go sit down and have soup and love life, because right now I have the time, [...] I have less deadlines... But I know that food during more difficult moments or like, when you forget about yourself, it becomes very uh, very mechanical. It's like fuel. The language I use around food changes, it's not fun anymore. It's like, *I have to feed myself to give to the university*. And there's a kind of... I find it really interesting because I'm trying to get away from the mind-body dichotomy [...]. But when I feel pressure, I become very much like, body-machine. I have to fuel myself, I have to sleep well, all to meet expectations. [It becomes] something rigid. And when there's less pressure, [...] the food can be for when I'm truly hungry, not just for when I have to feed myself to write for 12 hours. (Cody, UQAM, emphasis by the author)*

The importance given to our relationship with food is something that emerged in many interviews. As Cody explains, it can strongly be affected by academic pressure, in the context of which Cody perceives her body quite differently, as a machine that needs fuel to perform. Along similar lines, two other participants have spoken to their body as "vessels" (Jamie, UQAM; Isabelle, CU) they could customize through style (clothes, piercings, tattoos, hair color, etc.), change the appearance of easily, or vessels that allowed them to move through space, creating a distance between them and their body. Although phenomenology relies heavily on the connection between the mind and the body, it is important to note that this distance is often present within queer communities, especially for folks whose body is gendered by society in a way that does not resonate with their identity. We could understand the vocabulary of 'machine' and 'vessel' used by the participants as a way to express a distance that is felt between themselves and their bodies, whether that is constantly felt, or only in specific contexts. To bring together both Isabelle and Jamie's thoughts, I have drawn them both on maps as vessels of similar shapes (Figure 9 and 10). The aspect of being customizable was important in Jamie's explanation, which translated into many colors and tattoos on the map:

Figure 9: My map of interview with Isabelle

Figure 10: My map of interview with Jamie

In sum, the participants' various ways of describing their relationship to their body illustrates the multiple imbrications of embodiment. While for some, gender-expression and social perception were fundamental to their relationship to their body, others have spoken about food, sports, health, style, ability and disability, time with friends, romantic partners and inclusive spaces as central elements of their embodied experience. In this regard, Daria and Lenny both represented their bodies within their maps as interconnected to many other elements of their lives (Figure 11 and 12).

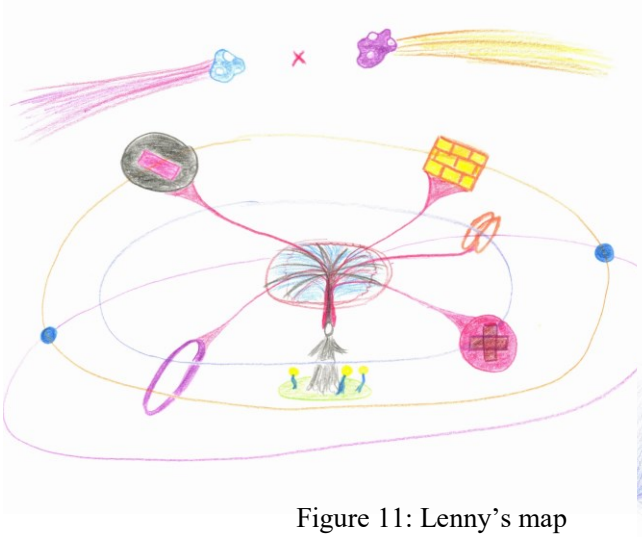

Figure 11: Lenny's map

Figure 12: Daria's map

In the context of the present research, these elements are mobilized to illustrate the participant's embodied experience of university spaces, which, in turn, inform us of the spaces themselves. With considerations to these varied and collective perspectives on the themes of academia, embodiment and queerness, the following section presents students' queer trajectories across both campuses in order to begin mapping their (queer) academic embodiment, and illustrate some socio-spatial dynamics that are specific to university context.

4.3 Queer trajectories: testimonies of queer embodiment

During each interview, students discussed the trajectories they adopt when they are on campus, the spaces they occupy most, the ones they avoid, and the ways in which their embodied experience of the university might change from one space to another. The way we approached their relationship with university spaces is largely based on the phenomenological contributions discussed in chapter 2, particularly in regards to the notions of orientation and disorientation, of bodily horizon, and of the shaping of our bodies and spaces through an embodied

relationship. In turn, the present section mobilizes feelings, experiences and key elements shared by the students to illustrate their presences on campus in order to shed light on the queer embodiment of academic spaces: by drawing on the participants' experiences of uncertainty, academic decor, fear of homo/lesbophobia or transphobia, friendship connections and moments of comfort or discomfort, we can furthermore make visible the broader social dynamics, notably in regards to exclusion/inclusions practices, inscribed within the university. Considering the significant amount of detailed stories that the students shared, and in order to provide a clear line of thought, the analysis unfolds in six key observations, from which stem multiple experiences and ramifications.

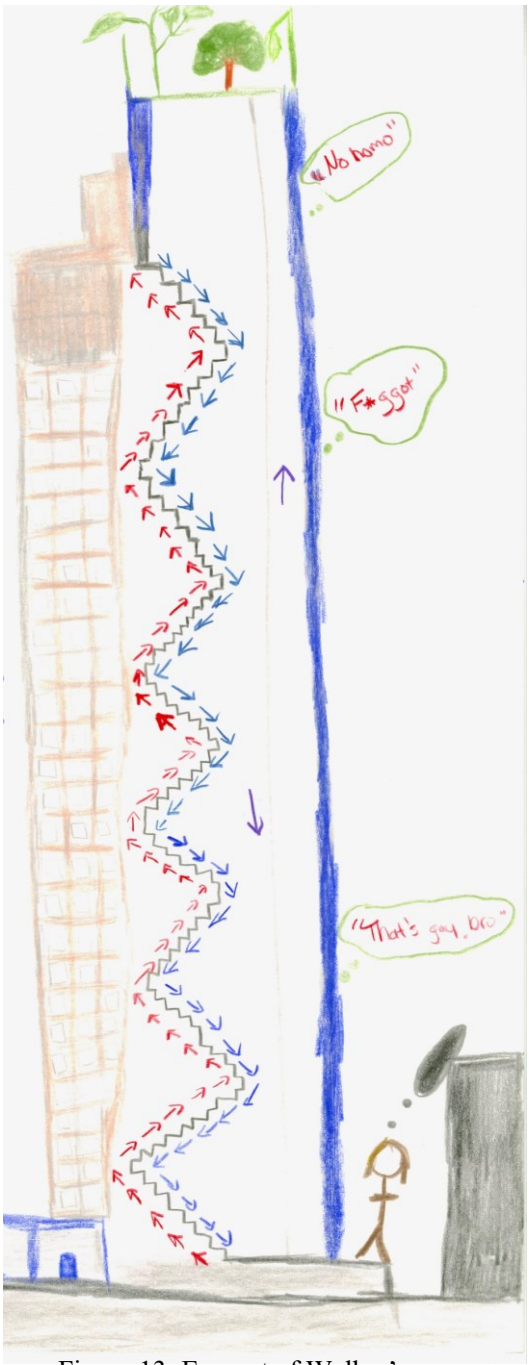

Figure 13: Excerpt of Walker's map

4.3.1 A myriad of unique trajectories

Each of the student's campus trajectories are forged by personal recollections of moments and feelings that crafted, through their years at the university, singular pathways. For example, Walker prefers taking the escalators all the way up the Hall Building of Concordia instead of the elevators, as he has more than once overheard homophobic comments and slurs in the elevators, small spaces where long minutes can go by before you reach the floor you may exit the elevator. Often overcrowded, the elevators are confined, enclosed spaces from which it can be difficult to leave. In contrast, the escalators allow Walker to continually be in movement, to react to events that he may encounter, to "have the option of passing by that" (Walker, CU).

Walker illustrated the Hall Building on his map (Figure 13) and wrote the slurs next to the blue elevator. The escalators, in contrast, were illustrated with blue and red arrows indicating (the possibility of) movement. This first example of how one's queer identity can play an important role in one's navigation in space resonates quite

strongly with Ahmed's explanation of the bodily horizon, as the trajectories we adopt unfold in front of us as horizons that are (un)reachable (2006). His decision to opt for the escalators rather than the elevators relies on his experience and queer identity, creating a specific bodily horizon within the Hall building. Following Ahmed's approach, the objects and spaces in and out of reach for Walker are determined by previously taken orientations, such as his way up the Hall building. According to the phenomenologist, Walker's body surfaces are further shaped by what becomes reachable in his trajectories: "some objects don't even become objects of perception as the body does not move toward them: they are "beyond the horizon" of the body, and thus out of reach. The surfaces of bodies are shaped by what is reachable" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 55). As Walker makes his way up repeatedly over time, some levels also become recognizable by differences in the design, creating markers of the gradual ascension to higher floors, slowly changing his perception of the building's deployment, as well as his bodily horizon.

It is important to note that the way Walker drew his map is what first allowed me to understand his queer trajectory across campus. Beginning at the bottom of the map, where he drew himself walking out of the metro station, Walker took the time to work his way up, one arrow at the time. In doing so, Walker was taking me up the Hall Building with him, building together a common understanding of the choices and events that forged his trajectory. This process and the time allowed for the map to unfold was crucial, especially as we were talking about the physical and temporal implications of choosing the escalators instead of the elevators. Moreover, the common understanding that emerged from our discussion is visible on both of our maps, as detailed in section 3.4.3. As such, the mapping component of the interview strongly contributed to both the questions I asked, and the detailed answers that Walker offered, in a process of co-creation.

All of the students interviewed had personal spatial patterns and habitual ways of getting around the university. Léon, who has been a UQAM student for many years, has a great knowledge of discreet passages, underground crossings and unused staircases, which are their preferred way of moving around campus. For Nicole, the sports center is one of the spaces on campus she feels the most at ease. Describing her pilates and dance classes as a place where she can feel connected to her body and her sensations, she specified that all of the classes she took were, without being intentional, without cis-men. Cory, who feels better "away from the perception of others" (Cory, CU), said the library is the only place where she can truly concentrate. The library is thus represented on her map (Figure 14), where the blue sofas

surrounded by smiley faces are accompanied by the words "Study mind, no body"[7]. This is in part because everyone is focused on their own thing, which feels to her like a place where there is an absence of the pressure to look a certain way: "and when I'm at the library, I do not feel concerned about my body because I realize everyone's focused on what they're studying. I mean, I'm not focused on anyone or how anyone else looks" (Cory, CU). This citation from Cory's interview is quite important, as it refers to a sometimes very heavy pressure, shared by many students, regarding the expectation to conform to society's beauty standards. Here again, sensitive mapping played an primordial role: as the topic we were discussing was quite delicate and personal, the maps became a way to communicate information that was difficult to say out loud. In a moment of shared vulnerability, the maps became spaces where we could collect our thoughts. The amplitude of the challenges that Cory faces seemed difficult to put into words but is unequivocally present in her map, as we can feel the harshness of the strokes that crosses out parts of her body. The emotions that the map contains are undeniable: they were present during the entirety of the interview, and remained with me through the analysis and the redaction. This moment of vulnerability, during which words are hard to find, is held by Cory's map and persists through time, inscribed on the paper. It is impossible to rephrase, and impossible to be interpreted otherwise. Not only did this moment impact the interview with Cory, it shaped every interview that followed, where I kept compassion, (my own) vulnerability, and care at the forefront.

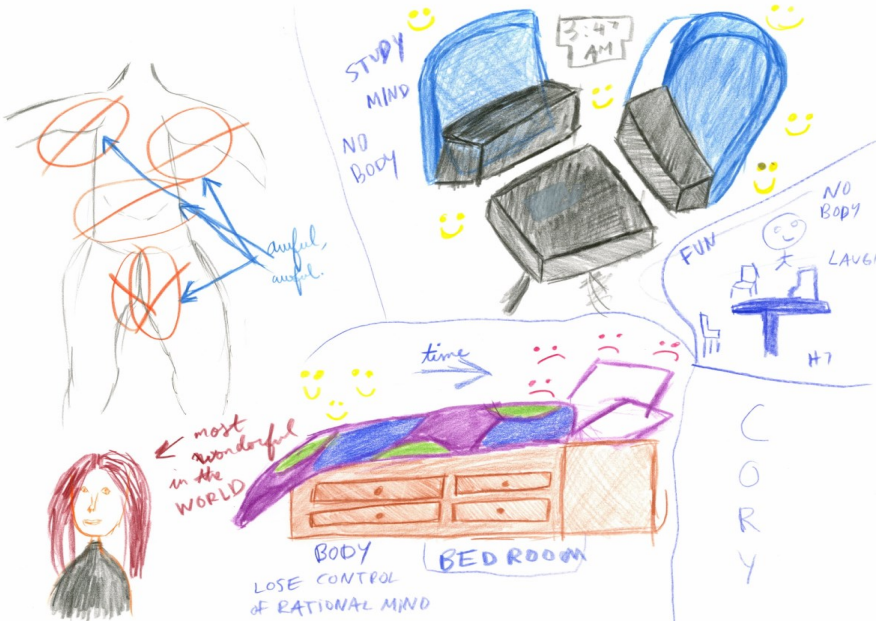

Figure 14: Cory's map

[7] The division implied here between mind and body, especially in the context of academic work, is addressed near the end of section 4.3.5.

One of the only time Cory felt relieved from this hypervigilance and pressure was when she was laughing with her friends, a moment she associated with being on the 7th floor of the Hall Building at Concordia, which houses the student union and student services – a place where students can hang out in ease. From Cory's and others' interviews, it seemed clear that the way they felt in their bodies and the way they dealt with their physical complexes truly impacted the shape of their campus trajectories. While opinions were quite divergent concerning the library spaces and the sports centers (see section 4.3.5 for spaces of discomfort) of both universities, many of the students still shared similar trajectories, which included spaces to eat, their department of study, workers' or students' union rooms, spaces where to hang out with friends, and spaces that are adapted to study or work. Community spaces, such as student cafés, were mentioned by a strong majority of students; these will be addressed further in the analysis.

4.3.2 Navigating academic spaces: a queer negotiation

The student's trajectories, influenced by their queer identity, also include unique ways of being in academic spaces that vary according to certain spaces or contexts. For example, experiences of – or fear of – queerphobia was present in many of the student's experiences of academic spaces, which often implied strategies to avoid moments of tension, discomfort or aggression. Isabelle, Cody, Cory and Nicole spoke about hiding their queer identity at the university in general, or in specific context (such as in front of a class, in lab, in conversations with professors, or within their own department of study). For Isabelle, this choice stems, among other things, from the hypersexualization of lesbian relationships by student peers, and from overhearing homophobic comments in the classroom. Hearing a professor dismiss and mock the importance of pronouns, for example, indicated that her identity might not be respected in some academic contexts. To Cody, the "mechanisms of violence" (Cody, UQAM)* are perceivable everywhere: moments like hearing a colleague being misgendered taught her to modulate what is perceptible of her queer identity depending on the context, in hopes of avoiding comments and microaggressions. To compose one's perceptible identity to echo the context one finds themselves in resonates quite strongly with Gill Valentine's work on concealing lesbian identities (1993). Indeed, what the author describes as specific dress codes and behaviors in response to stigma in the context of patriarchal norms, both in public and semi-private spheres but especially in workplaces, corresponds almost perfectly to what the participants described. Similarly to Valentine's conceptualization of the multiple identities of lesbian women, notably in terms of sexual identity (1993), Isabelle and Cody share the experience of probably being perceived in their laboratories and research groups as single,

heterosexual women. As historically, lesbians risk “violent responses” (Valentine, 1993, p. 407) when revealing their identity, the legacies of this risk seem to remain in the form of fear.

Nicole also spoke to this consciousness of what we allow to be perceptible, as a constant negotiation : “[it’s] a game where I feel the norms and the way I want to present myself, [it’s] always a negotiation” (Nicole, UQAM)*. Alongside Cody and Isabelle, Nicole’s words are equally indicative of Valentine’s (1993) theorization of the continuous need to negotiate one’s lesbian identity in relation to the heterocisnormative context. In the same breath, she added that people must think “there’s something off” (Nicole, UQAM)* about her when she dresses completely in lime green, and that she often has to remind herself that she does not dress for the male gaze.

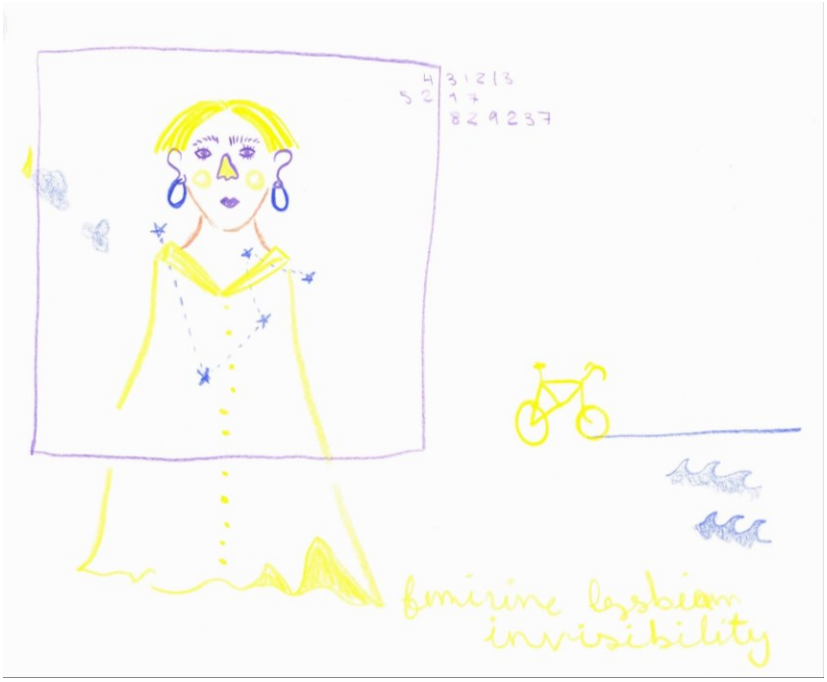

Figure 15: My map of interview with Nicole

To map Nicole’s navigation of the university’s social and heterocisnormative norms, which have a tendency to invisibilize her identity, I have drawn a version of Nicole that is very pale, almost invisible, with a dress and the words ‘feminine lesbian invisibility’ (figure 15). The box and numbers around her portrait illustrate a machine of social and heteronormative codes, which is her understanding of the University, as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. Nicole is confined in this machine, but her dress, representing her lesbian femininity, exceeds the confines of it and the codes that are imposed on her, which can be interpreted both as Nicole not completely fitting in, but also resisting the suppression of her identity. The maps I produced during the interviews have, as such, contributed to the co-creation of knowledge emerging from the moment I spent with the interviewees. The stars forming a constellation near Nicole’s shoulders, representing a “constellation of knots" (Nicole, UQAM)* (explained in section 4.3.5), are another demonstration of this knowledge co-creating, as we built during the interviews a common understanding, in words and images, of the participants’ experiences

The way of shaping and reshaping what is perceivable of their identity is something that was repeatedly described by the participants. Walker describes it as a sort of skill for protecting himself and "evading uncomfortable situations" (Walker, CU), stating that it is something "straight people [don't] have to think about when they enter spaces because they're just like accepted for who they are off the bat" (Walker, CU). Often wondering if he is perceived by others as queer, he also spoke to his way of being changing from space to space, depending on his level of comfort. To illustrate this, Walker recounted an event of receiving an unwelcomed, out-of-place comment concerning his hair, in a context where he felt at ease to reply:

> Walker: Someone told me, 'Oh, I love your hair, it looks so modern.' And I'm like, What does modern hair look like? I mean, like if... (laughs).
>
> Mathilde : Because it was bleached?
>
> Walker : I guess so. But it was like, it was very much like a compliment. But it's just like little things... Like that happens very often. [...] And I was like, wait, that's such a... [...] like in that moment... Here's the thing. [...] *I felt so centered in the environment*, and being around us, and being in a greenhouse, I literally said, the second [they] said that, I'm like, 'Oh, what does modern hair look like?' And he just said something I don't really remember. But it's like... *There are definitely spaces where I feel okay just to push back and make comments. And then there's spaces in the university where I do not, at all.* I'm just like, You know what? It's better I leave it alone, especially when I feel like I'm a guest (Walker, CU, emphasis by the author).

Walker's story illustrates the shifts in his ease depending on the spaces he occupies, but also the way some events, comments, and social interactions can impact the way we feel within a space. Furthermore, this also relates back to Valentine's observation (1993) on how navigating different (heterocisnormative) spaces and their social contexts both have an impact on how we interact with others, and what part of ourselves we allow to be visible. While marginalized markers of identity often push people to the margins, some remarks or comments can also have the impact of bringing undesired attention, of centering them in shared spaces. This kind of moment or comment that influences our perception of a space is also something that Sol recounted. Recalling the moment when someone asked them an inappropriate and rude question regarding their gender in front of other classmates, Sol made important connections between the event, the way they felt, and the spatial context of it: "in this place the walls are very prone to echo, and everything was very echoing, so I just felt very exposed to the harshness of it all... everything was in concrete, the place was perfect for that scene" (Sol, UQAM)*. Unlike Walker, Sol didn't feel at that moment in a secure place to push-back. As they told me

about the brutality of the concrete walls and the words that were voiced, which almost felt like they were complicit, I could understand Sol's feelings of vulnerability.

Interviews have additionally shown another facet of vulnerability: that of the fear of academic or professional repercussions regarding one's queer identity. Along with a certain pressure to present themselves 'professionally', they shared fears that their forms of embodiment were revealing their identities. For Daria, this takes the shape of managing their 'alternative' appearance by hiding their nose piercing before speaking with certain professors, for example. Cory, for her part, prefers to keep her romantic relationship to herself and does not want to make it public, out of fear that other people's judgment will ruin it. Isabelle mentioned sometimes hesitating before kissing her girlfriend goodbye and avoiding demonstrating queer love in front of her teachers, to avoid the possibility of discrimination, even if unintentional or unconscious. Fears of repercussion, which extends to the way Isabelle dresses, are indicated on her map, where she also represented indecision about wearing a dress or a tie, wondering how to express her queerness while being perceived as professional (Figure 16).

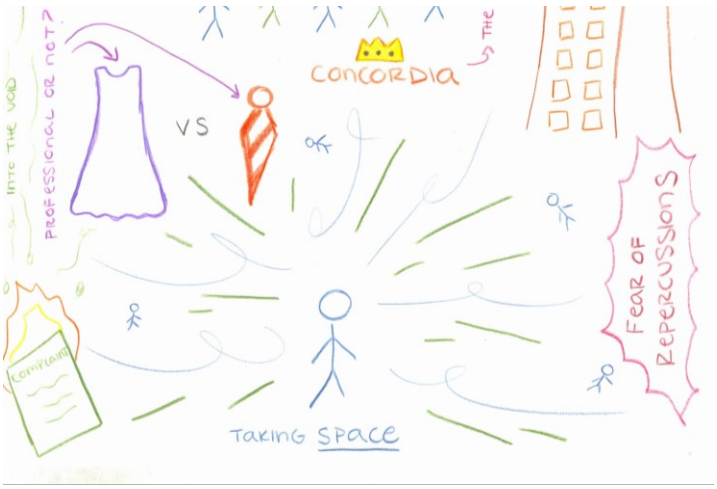

Figure 16: Excerpt of Isabelle's map

Along the same line as Daria who hides their piercing depending on social contexts, some participants also described how they modulate their physical appearance and style depending on the context within which they find themselves. While one might think just about everyone dresses for the day they anticipate, what is discussed here is about gender affirmation and expression of identity, rather than simply wearing suitable clothes for planned activities. Nadia, for example, stated that the way they present their body will impact the university settings they will frequent. Recalling a moment when Isabelle got a comment from a prof because she dressed "differently" that day, she named the fact that she felt people had a preconceived idea of how she is supposed to look, and that deviating from this expectation felt risky in an academic or professional setting, which results in her dressing more femininely when in a professional context, such as in her laboratory. While for Daria and Nadia, understanding

themselves as queer allowed them to explore their personal style with more intention and purpose in terms of gender affirmation, what they wear will still depend on where they go, what they do, and even the class they have that day. This comes back to the pressure to fit in and navigate within the specific context of heterocispatriarchy (Valentine, 1993), a pressure that is at the core of this second observation as an important variable in students' academic trajectories.

4.3.3 Queer *classroom* embodiment & academic participation

Not only do students' queer identities shape how they navigate social or professional relationships, and the university's hallways; their embodiment also impacts their presence in class, and academic participation. This was demonstrated by many participants. Isabelle, for example, recalled moments when she left class because of homophobic comments that were left unaddressed by a professor, or when she physically took more place with her body during an oral presentation to be able to speak without the interruption from her teammate. For Georges, who lives with endometriosis, class presence and participation is also strongly shaped by his queer identity in the context of heterocisnormativity. Distracted by endometriosis pain, sometimes unable to prepare for class because of it, and most importantly, feeling that it is impossible to speak freely about it because of the difficulties of talking about uterus health or pain as a transmasculine person, it is clear that Georges's full participation in class is diminished by this situation. This situation also trickles down to an inadequate access to accommodations students usually benefit from when juggling with health matters, as queer students sometimes feel unable to ask for accommodations due to the risk of a stigma-related response. To illustrate the omnipresence of his endometriosis pain when inhabiting university spaces, Georges has drawn small red patches hiding in corners everywhere (Figure 17).

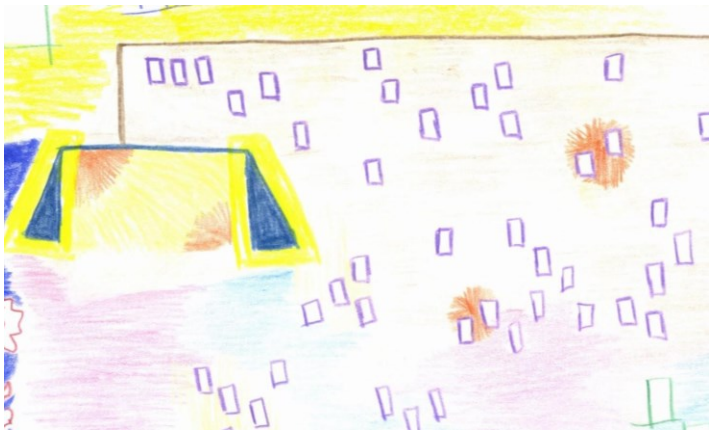

Figure 17 : excerpt of Georges' map

It is through his placement of the widespread, insidious, hidden but ever-present endometriosis that we begin to see how this method represents a queer method, a queering of cartography. Indeed, the precision that emerges demonstrates

both the importance of mapping by the people directly concerned by a given subject, and the need to approach certain realities through emotions, experiences and feelings.

Nicole's way of navigating the heterocisnormative context of the classroom was quite different than others, as expressed in the following excerpt:

> I think that during the first two years I was at university, I found it really difficult that people, on the one hand, assumed that I was straight, because being lesbian is a big part of my identity, of my social sphere, of how I connect [with people], it's a community to which I belong. By presenting myself as feminine and cis, and by dressing how I do, I perform a hyper-femininity that's queer, it's not normative... but it can be perceived as such... that's what I find hard, and for a majority of my first years here, I was looking for ways to come-out to my colleagues in a way that wasn't completely weird, not to necessarily tell them, but just so that it's visible. ... which means a whole sort of hypervigilance in conversations, interactions... to make sure I could plug in 'my girlfriend and I', 'I did such and such with my girlfriend'... Something that's subtle in the conversations, but that makes you visible, that's been my strategy this year.
>
> [...] I like subverting through demonstration, it's something I'm really comfortable with, you know, *changer la honte de camp*[8] [...].
>
> I think it's evolved a lot because I spent my first year not being out much, and then I was finding it really hard not to be out. [...] I've practiced just dropping it quickly with the people I work with as a team. [...]
>
> The look of surprise in people's eyes when I out myself spontaneously, [...] it often confirms to me that people didn't think it was a possibility that the person next to them [was lesbian]. [...] You know when you meet someone you kind of put them in boxes to understand them. I know [that learning I'm lesbian] is distorting a conception by their expression of surprise, it's destabilizing but afterwards I really feel more myself, it's like a way of reappropriating class. (Nicole, UQAM)*

Sol shared Nicole's fear of not being understood as queer by their peers and classmates. Sol described it as a hope to be understood in their entirety, to be seen for who they are, notably in regards to their gender. Considering these different experiences of classrooms and academic spaces, the following section centers their impact on the embodied experiences of the participants.

[8] "*Changer la peur de camp*", or "*changer la honte de camp*" is a common expression in francophone communities to illustrate that marginalized people (used in queer contexts, but also regarding sexual harassment and gendered violence) should not feel afraid or ashamed, but that these feelings belong to ones that perpetuate homophobia and other kinds of discrimination. As I had difficulties translating the essence of the expression, I decided to keep it in French.

4.3.4 Queer academic embodiment

The moments recalled by the students to map their academic trajectories contain a significant embodied dimension that further allows us to contribute to the embodied component of these trajectories, which contributes to drawing a portrait of queer academic *embodiment*. This is made clear not only by a phenomenological approach, but also by the participants themselves, who really detailed the effects of such events on their bodies and bodily experiences. For Daria, thinking about their body at university brings them back directly to speaking in class and trying to make a point. Moments like these give Daria the feeling that their body is working against themself; stuttering, shaky hands, a tight chest, dry mouth and a feeling of overheating are elements that characterize Daria's embodied experience of speaking in class. In reference to the work of Jennifer Lane on a phenomenological approach to heteronormative stigma, this illustrates well the body as "a site of action for social stress" (2021, p. 2173). Nicole described how she felt in her body when at the university as a little tense, cold, with shallow breathing, "shoulders forward, legs bent, [and her] hands a little more together" (Nicole, UQAM)*. Her description of embodiment when in an academic setting directly engages with Young's observations of the women's enclosed bodily comportment (1980). Georges also spoke about anxiety inhabiting his body when at the university: when in spaces that are "less comfortable", Georges feels tense and does not breathe as evenly. As the primarily concern about his body is what others think about him, a concern he's carried with him since high school:

> I transitioned at the end of high school. Um, and like, I don't like to be the center of attention generally. Um, and so transitioning kind of like, forces you to be very visible in a way that I never wanted. And so especially like at that point in time, that was like the time that I was able to make the choice of like, okay, I get to decide who does and who doesn't know about me. And like, this is finally something that I have agency over and not something that like other people get to decide for me. So I never, I didn't tell anyone. Um, it's the first year and it made me really, really *hyper aware of my body*, like, all the time. Like, are people noticing? What are people seeing? Are my hips too wide or my feet too small? Whatever, whatever, whatever. And so I spent most of that first year just being like, first of all, like expressing kind of much more masculinity than I generally would, and also just being constantly trying to understand, trying to think about how people were perceiving me (Georges, CU, emphasis by the author).

This citation comes to show the imbrication of one's queer identity with their experience of their body and how we navigate social spaces through our queer bodies, which are often in transformation themselves. Aware of gendered standards to which we do not or no longer correspond, this may create a feeling of hypervigilance, of disorientation, and uncertainty about our peers' perceptions of ourselves. Hypervigilance is something that was shared by many of

the participants, in all kinds of academic spaces, especially regarding other student's judgements, or due to the worry of being perceived or not as queer by others. Indeed, while some students worry that they will not be perceived as queer by their peers, rendering them invisible or misunderstood, others expressed being confused about what they present in terms of gender expression, and frequently worry about being misgendered. This confusion is illustrated in Alana's map by 'M', 'F', and question mark symbols that surround their face in a mirror (Figure 18), which echoes Georges' sense of constantly questioning and not knowing how they are perceived. The distance between how I perceived Alana during the interview and how they represented on their map, unrecognizable and without detail, helped me understand the extent of the confusion that was being expressed.

For Sol, who lives with chronic pain, their experience of the university is also strongly guided by their experience of their body, and directly linked to the accessibility of the spaces. When the university's escalators are broken (which, they reminded me, happens often), moving around can become difficult. Conversely, Sol added: "anything that's more accessible makes me feel better, more at ease, because I know there are plenty of other people who can be [here] too, that you don't have to be a certain body type to exist in this space" (Sol, UQAM)*. Sol's depiction of the university's escalators (Figure 19) provides a powerful illustration of what Garland-Thomson defines as misfitting (2011). A lack of accessibility measures reinforces Sol's experience of 'misfitting', a narrowing of their bodily horizon in the academic context.

Figure 18: Excerpt of Alana's map

Figure 19: Excerpt of Sol's map

As mobility, movement and transitions through spaces emerge once more, Sol's own academic trajectory takes shape. Moreover, the representation of these concepts on the maps of participants, in shapes of staircases, elevators, escalators and corridors, allow for a collective creation of queer trajectories. Accessibility measures were mentioned by a few other students, including Jill, who drew direct links between accessibility and sustainability concerning the university's design.

These embodied moments – notably shaped by the academic social context or the design of academic spaces – affect the way students carry themselves around the university, and the way they perceive different spaces. The student's trajectories are influenced by their queer and embodied experiences of different academic spaces; their experiences often gave specific intonation[9] to certain spaces. While the library was described as a place of refuge for Cory, and the gym a place of comfort for Nicole, these places did not have the same connotation for Georges and others. Indeed, the intonations and connotations associated with some spaces are often personal, resulting from past experiences, although some were resurgent and common to many participants. Common spaces of discomfort and the habits that emerge from navigating these spaces are explored in the following section.

4.3.5 Spaces of discomfort, avoidance and disconnection

A portrait of queer academic embodiment must take into account spaces of discomfort, habits of avoidance and disconnection, and the impact that academia has on our bodies. Operating at different scales (rooms, department, floors or buildings), students avoid, selectively use and feel out-of-place in these uncomfortable spaces. When discussing spaces of discomfort with Concordia University students, the John Molson School of Business (JMSB) building came up many times. Daria explains this phenomenon as JMSB being a place where we can "sense a difference": it's "almost like I'm occupying a space that I shouldn't be in" (Daria, CU). Along the same lines, Cory mentioned the same building as being a place where she feels judged as a student from another program. The equivalent for Nadia would be UQAM's administrative buildings, where they described feeling "out of place" (Nadia, UQAM), an expression and feeling that was shared by Nicole and Walker, in similar contexts. Nadia described this space as very modern and compared its elevators to those in another building that always break:

[9] This observation can be supported by Heiddeger's phenomenological notion of "thrownness", which stipulates that the subjective experience is not a coloration we add or patch onto the world given to us objectively, but a necessary condition for experiencing our environment (intonation). We can only experience our environment through the mediation of this subjective affect. An "objective" perspective is only one specific coloration or intonation, according to the author: "[One] confronts every concrete situation in which it finds itself (into which it has been thrown) as a range of possibilities for acting (onto which it may project itself)" (Wheeler, 2020, n.p.).

> Nadia: In building AB, for example, [...] you know, I don't like it there, but I still have no choice but to go sometimes. [...] It's the building at the corner of St-Denis and Sainte-Cath, which is like a very modern building, like you go up to the eighth floor to see the student life services and yeah, I don't like it there, but it's fine when I go.
>
> Mathilde: How do you feel in these spaces?
>
> Nadia: Out of place. [...] You know, there's no graffiti, there's no... You know you take an elevator to get there, like an elevator with mirrors inside, and even with chrome doors and so on. It's not the N [building] elevators that stop working mid-way. [....] So [I feel] a little shiver, maybe not a little shiver, I don't think so… but I don't feel like staying. I'm in a hurry to leave, to stay as briefly as possible. (Nadia, UQAM)*

This excerpt speaks to Nadia's discomfort in more unfamiliar, corporatized, newly renovated buildings, but also to the importance decor has in catering different embodied experiences, which further has an impact on student's campus trajectories (i.e., Nadia increasing their pace as they move through such disorienting spaces). Comparing a building with modern decor to one covered in graffiti highlights tensions in interior design and surveillance, which is discussed in the following observation. For Georges, spaces of discomfort included the gym and the library, both described as always full of people. Walker also feels uncomfortable in the library, notably because of the "pervasiveness of security" (Walker, CU). Underlining the constant patrolling of security guards, Walker emphasized the fact that queer and BIPOC people are overpoliced, resulting in an atmosphere that is unsettling or disturbing. A similar feeling was shared by other participants regarding the security cameras, described as "jarring" by Georges.

Of course, bathrooms are included in the category of spaces of discomfort for a few participants. Without reducing queerness to a conversation concerning bathrooms, as Georges expressed in his interview, it is still relevant to address this space in all its particularities. On one hand, Georges did not know where the inclusive washrooms were located, but reminded me that gendered bathrooms should also be part of the discussion on inclusivity. Indeed, being a trans man includes the experience of menstruation, a situation that is not taken into account in the men's bathroom as there are no garbage cans in the stalls for menstruation products. Walking out of the stall with used tampons (figure 20) can be an uncomfortable situation that can force one to 'out' themselves to peers and classmates. Georges described the feeling of

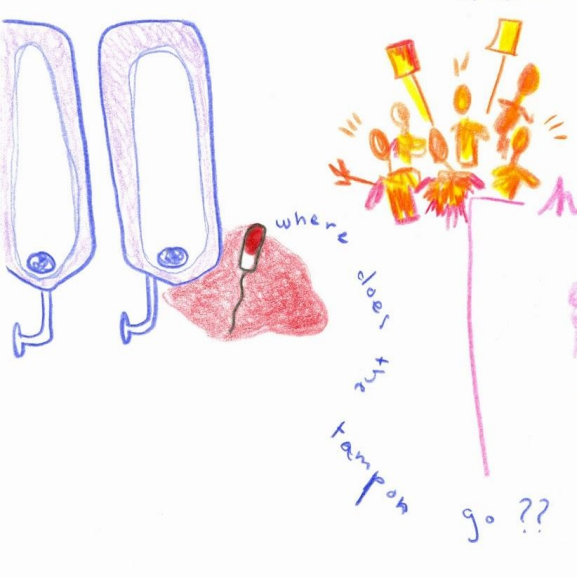

Figure 20: Excerpt of my map of interview with Georges

going to bathrooms without the adequate infrastructures to meet his needs as the following: “every time, it’s like a reminder [that] this is not for me. Like, nobody, nobody was thinking about me in this setting” (Georges, CU). As Georges’ poignant statement reveals a strong feeling of marginalization, of being out-of-place, there is a common thread that is revealed between the experiences of the students at the university, a consistency in terms of misfitting. Georges’ experiences of the gendered bathrooms reveals cisnormativity in design, declaring that the space was not built or adapted for queer people.

In this case, my own map that took shape during the interview with Georges embodies an important aspect of the methods of this research: drawing a tampon that leaks near the urinals, I was demonstrating my own understanding of the issue. During each interview, doing so allowed the participants to witness the attention I was giving to their stories, the focus I offered and needed to be able to draw their narrated embodied experience. My own maps probably also revealed gaps in my understanding of certain elements, further giving cues to the participants on how to navigate the interview. As such, it is important to interpret the maps of this research as both a tool and a result from our exchanges, where our desire to understand each other and build a common comprehension of the participants' experiences is embodied through the co-creation of the maps. In this sense, the maps are a method that centers listening, which brings us back to a queer, feminist ear (see section 3.2).

On the other hand, Nadia, Daria, Sol, Jill and others expressed favorable thoughts about gender-inclusive bathrooms. While they are slowly being installed in both Universities, one non-gendered bathroom in particular has been established by the francophone university’s students in a non-official manner, as Nadia reminded me. For many years, the student population has periodically removed the male/female signs on some bathroom doors across campus to protest against this binary division. While the Administration often puts new stickers back in place,

there is one bathroom in the corner of the building A, level 2 that was eventually abandoned by the Administration (Figure 21). Nadia explained that the Administration eventually stopped hanging gendered signs on these doors specifically, which unofficially established a non-gendered status-quo in a small corner of the building. They described this back-and-forth as "a kind of battle going on for a long time" (Nadia, UQAM)*, noting that many visibly queer students seem to appreciate the bathroom as it is now.

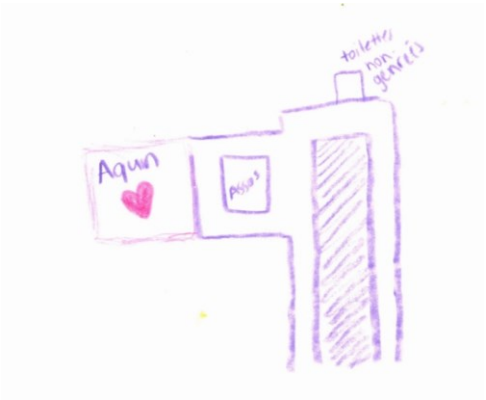

Figure 21: Excerpt of Nadia's map

This story of UQAM's queer presence reveals not only the long-standing desire of the students to have inclusive bathrooms, but also a tension that is present between them and the Administration, who kept putting back the gendered signs. Nadia told the story of a continuous spatial contestation by the queer student communities and their allies. These are the same bathrooms mentioned by Sol, who will sometimes change buildings for an inclusive bathroom, depending on how far away they are. If they are out of reach, Sol wait in line for the bathroom, a moment they find particularly uncomfortable:

> If I'm close to here I'll always go to the gender-neutral bathroom. Even if it's more walking, I'll do it because it'll make me more comfortable and I'll feel better. Otherwise I'll go to the women's bathroom, I'll wait [in line], and often I'll look at my phone because that *puts me out of the space*. And I'm like, less conscious. Then I try to think less about it. I'll also often try to tell myself that there are people in worse situations than me, which isn't necessarily healthy, because I gaslight myself a bit, but I tell myself that I'm not in *danger*. But I know there are people, like [my friend], he's a trans masculine non-binary person, and I know there have been *dangerous situations* when he's gone into the men's room. And then, I know that I'm not in danger in the women's bathroom, so I always try to put things in perspective, that one day we'll reach… that we'll understand... (Sol, UQAM, emphasis by the author)*.

When asked about their bathroom trajectories, Sol added that changing buildings for an inclusive bathroom depends on where they are within the university. Stating that it is not normal for a student to do a thousand steps in order to meet this basic need, Sol's calculation relies primarily on how much energy it would take them to change buildings, versus the energy that it takes to go in a gendered bathroom: "I know that if I exhaust myself by just going to the bathroom, it's going to take more energy than dissociating while I'm in line. So I always [calculate] the energy ratio between what might make me feel good and what I'm willing to sacrifice" (Sol, UQAM)*.

Sol's words are substantial on many levels, notably in 2023, as the public and political conversation about gender-neutral bathrooms in schools has gone viral (right-winged powered) in Quebec and elsewhere. By taking us through their strategies and patterns of going to the bathroom, Sol's words can be linked to what has been explored above in terms of university trajectories (see section 4.3.1). In the course of Sol's explanation, we have a brief insight into the calculations that are required in order to meet their needs in the most energy-efficient way possible. Their queer identity impacts their trajectory on campus, as they sometimes decide to make long detours and even changes of buildings for a gender-neutral bathroom. It is also impossible to ignore the reflex to evaluate the risk of violence and danger, which relates back to the fear of homo/transphobia (and its repercussions) that is shared amongst many participants. To get through this situation, Sol uses a distraction or dissociation tactic with their cell phone (Figure 22), describing this as a way for them to subtract themselves from the space. This statement is of utmost importance for the present research, as it reveals a particular relationship with gendered spaces where the discomfort is strong enough to create a reflex to withdraw, where one extracts themselves completely. Alana's experience of the bathrooms strongly relates to Sol's, as illustrated in the following excerpt, where they speak to their experience of going to gendered bathrooms:

Figure 22: Excerpt of my map from interview with Sol

> Alana: It's just like a tension you know. Or like, I'm being monitored. Like I'm being watched by other people? But more so than normal. [...] It's much easier to take a break at Myriade[10], specifically for the bathroom you know.
>
> Mathilde: Can I ask you how it feels, if it feels different in the gendered bathrooms, like in your body?
>
> Alana: Hum, like an absence... It doesn't really bother me, it's more like the absence. (Alana, CU).

The distance thus solicited by Sol, and the absence that Alana feels when going to the bathroom, both demonstrate that gendered spaces resulting from heterocisnormativity impact the students' embodied experiences of academic spaces. Furthermore, the discomfort felt by students on campus can become so ambient, generalized to their presence at the University that they develop a total detachment. Indeed, the vocabulary of disconnection, avoidance and absence

[10] Myriade is a coffee shop near Concordia University, where the bathrooms are non-gendered.

was one used by many. This took the shape of different expressions or metaphors from one participant to the other: what Alana calls an absence or "a negation" (Alana, CU), Cory describes as "an escape from herself" (Cory, CU), Cody labels as an "absence of sensation", and Walker names "turning himself off", or "a vacuum" (Walker, CU). The latter metaphor came up when describing a moment in the context of an elective course from a different department of study:

> The partner that I had for our final project was a non-binary person and they were like, they were actually [from that department of study]. [...] They had a very hard time, just like dealing with [lack of representation and heterocissexism in the department]. And I can definitely see that in the class, [...] a lot of the things that we read were from older white men and it was like the world through their perspective. So when we had to frame our questions and like, answer things, that was through their perspective. And like it was a very, like, *out-of-body experience* to put myself in those shoes because like, I am not a white man, [...] I'm black, I'm half Haitian and African-American. So it was just a very weird experience on both of those fronts, being a queer person and a black person putting myself in those shoes. But we had to do it basically every single class. *And I just like it's almost like a vacuum. It's like, All right, [Walker], turn yourself off.* You know, [...] I would convince myself that it didn't mean anything, even though it obviously does, where [...] there are people who this is, like the person that was my [class] partner, this is what their life is going to be for, the rest of their career (Walker, CU, emphasis by the author).

Through Sol's, Walker's and Alana's recollection of these moments, one can observe the similarity in the need to extract themselves from the spaces and contexts which, ultimately, undermine their identities, whether that is by pushing them into a gender binary they do not relate to, through white narratives that do not respect the students' roots and identity, or through perspectives that invisibilizes theirs. Overall, the students' stories indicate that they live with a reality of invisibilization, whether through academic and social discourses that occlude them, or through protective reflexes developed over the course of their lives. This results in an embodied experience shared amongst the participants as a response to institutional spaces that stigmatize them, leading them to lose touch of their feelings, emotions or sensations in the process.

Nicole used similar language when describing a sense of feeling invisible, while also insisting on the fact that the university is favorable, even conducive to, such a detachment. Reminding us of the quantity of time and energy that can be gobbled-up by the university, Nicole stated that "it's like you have to put yourself at a distance from a lot of parts of yourself" (Nicole, UQAM)* in order to satisfy the criteria and meet academic expectations. As she forgets

everything that is outside of the university to be able to focus on her work, Nicole remains invisible to others, yes, but becomes invisible to herself too.

Figure 23: Nicole's map

Nicole's expression of academic embodiment is represented on her map, as her body, sitting in front of her computer, gradually reshaping itself into a spool of thread (figure 23). The thread continues to connect the escalators, which lead to a map of the university in all its corners and various hallways. Next to the escalators can be found a constellation, which is the metaphor Nicole used to describe the tension and pain she feels in her back; a constellation of knots. Similar to Walker and Cody, Nicole's embodied experience of university spaces cannot be considered without taking into account the impact that the university has on her body. On this matter, Nicole expressed feeling unsupported by the university in her desire to listen to her body. Recalling episodes of persistent back pain, Nicole enumerated the volume of work, the amount of time required at school, the lack of sunlight, as well as the lack of sleep as the causes of her duality between university work and taking care of her body.

To Cody, the impact the university has on our bodies is just as clear:

> It definitely has a physical impact to be [writing your thesis and working at the same time]. [...] And so for three, five, or nine years, you're just going to put your heart and soul into it, because I think there's a kind of self-forgetfulness at the university. I feel like... not a forgetting of the self, but *a forgetting of your body*. There really is a forgetfulness... to be working 14 hours a day, you forget yourself, you have no choice. And *you're in the cerebral*. [...] Honestly, the higher you go in graduate

> school, the more you forget yourself! I have this feeling, it's just my gut feeling but you know, it's something I observe with my friends, that the more you immerse yourself in a subject, the more you're deep into something specific, the more you're asked to subtract yourself (Cody, UQAM, emphasis by the author)*.

Cody's acknowledgment of the impact that the university has on our bodies quickly relates back to the absence, detachment or dissociation explored previously. However, her input also brings into light the role academia has to play in this dynamic, as she stipulates that graduate studies, field specialization and knowledge production still often require us to remove ourselves from the knowledge produced, as it has been the academic norm for decades. This disembodiment coincides directly with Borghi's research work, which denounces "the invisibility of the researcher's body, which is supposed to be represented by his head" (2016, p. 14). It also resonates quite strongly with Cory's campus trajectory, where she finds relief in spaces that allow a division between the mind and the body (see Figure 14, page 58). Acknowledging the fundamental critiques of this norm regarding the erasure of researchers and their positionality within the research to support a supposedly disembodied objectivity (Haraway 1988), Cody additionally speaks to physical damages that can result from overwork and from being forgetful of our bodies, which comes to play an important role within Cody's embodied experience of academic spaces. From Cody's perspective, there is a correlation between the erasure of the researcher from knowledge production and the negligence of our bodies through overwork and norms of intense productivity.

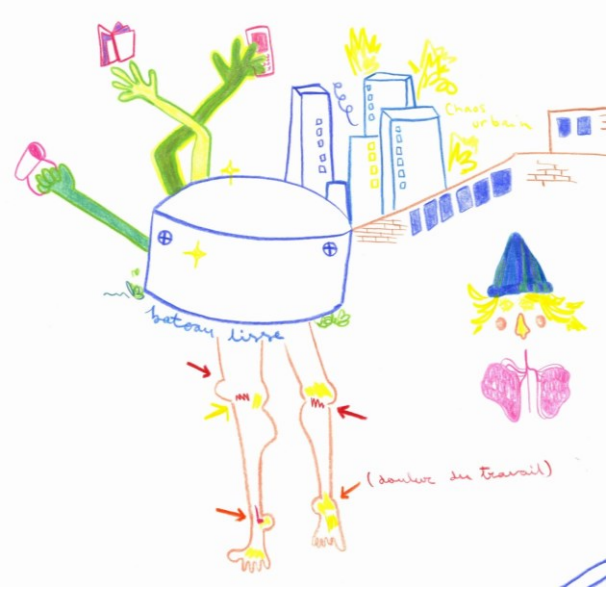

Figure 24: Excerpt of my map from the interview with Cody

The physicality of overwork is illustrated in my map from the interview with Cody (see Figure 24) in the form of yellow and red sections on the legs that stem from UQAM's Président-Kennedy Building, referred to as a "smooth boat" ("*bateau lisse*" in the map). Analyzing Cody's understanding of academia – as not only impactful on our bodies, but also encouraging a division between our mind and our bodies, between our concentration and embodied signs of discomfort, between the researcher and their positionality – demonstrates why cognitive mapping and sensitive mapping are so crucial to this research project. Indeed, the exercise of

mapping our bodies brought them to the forefront of the discussions, as well as our bodily sensations. As we tried to represent them on the maps, we were bound to become aware of them, their implications regarding our positionality, and the latter's impact on our work. Through both Cody's comment about forgetting oneself in order to be in the cerebral and the exercise of drawing the thought-process emerging from this research onto the maps, we challenge the mythical separation between the mind and the body, between the researcher and knowledge.

The pressure and productivity intertwined within academic spaces also have an impact on Walker's bodily experience. He quickly established, after talking about self-care and wellness in the heterocisnormative context, that "once we get back into the university, it kind of translates into [him] spending less and less time here" (Walker, CU). Although the participants' statements hold the pressure of productivity stemming from neoliberal university practices as primarily responsible, one can also draw links with their queer identity. Indeed, Lane's theorization of heterocisnormativity's stigma and its impact on LGTBQ+ people includes hypervigilance, stress and preoccupations that are embedded in their mind-body relations (Lane, 2021), which resonates quite strongly with the students' shared tactics of avoidance and disconnection. Overall, their statements thus align with certain critical perspectives of higher education institutions, while mainly when engaging with everyday university spaces and dynamics. In contrast, students also create, through their involvement within academic life, spaces that allow them to resist academic norms of all genres; these spaces, where avoidance tactics are potentially less needed, as well as their importance for queer students, are presented in the following section.

4.3.6 Student Spaces for Solidarity and Resistance

Emerging from this recollection of queer moments at the university is the importance given to community spaces, and their role in the overall queer experience of universities. Indeed, practically all the participants spoke about student-led cafes as places of comfort and solidarity within university spaces. Student-led cafes, such as the Hive at Concordia University, the Café Aquin and the Café des Arts at the *Université du Québec à Montréal*, were portrayed as epicenters for friendships, community building, and important spaces for queer gathering and meeting. They are strongly appreciated by the students for the way they communicate student solidarity in tangible ways, of having strong inclusive policies, of offering food and beverages that are accessible within a student budget, and space where the students can decompress. Interviewees described their cafes as welcoming, warm, friendly and sustainable, from an

ecological point of view. Generally speaking, students expressed the importance of being able to hang out with their friends, sit comfortably, have dinner, or participate in informal gatherings. On the latter, Georges expressed that we lack informal spaces and times where people can gather, exchange ideas, and have conversations that are not meetings. While Nadia (UQAM) explained that the cafés are "the complete opposite from all the rest", Jamie (UQAM) said they especially appreciate the fact that they are self-managed ("*autogéré*"). This value, amongst many others, is also part of the reasons Nicole appreciates the Café Aquin so much:

> I'm still more likely to come across people with whom I have more affinity in [the café], [...] I feel like I'm in a safe space, it's potentially the most suitable place to meet people. First of all, it's a self-managed place by and for students that also has more radical political values, whether decolonial, feminist, disability-inclusive… so it's already a place that asserts its identity at school, which attracts more left-wing people necessarily, especially in the humanities. Then, it's a space that keeps porcelain cups, that has tables where you can sit, couches, you can legit take naps there. If I want to rest comfortably anyway... it's there (Nicole, UQAM)*.

This excerpt illustrates how students converge towards this space in search of comfort, a place to meet friends or to rest, while also encouraging somewhere aligned with their political values. This was also present in Sol's interview, who added that the cafe is close to the non-gendered bathrooms that were established by the students. The porcelain cups lent to the students by the cafe, later placed in designated boxes around campus for students to bring them back on the second floor, represent a tangible way in which their ecological values unfold. On that note, Daria (CU) explained that the values are important, yes, but it is mainly about "seeing those values played out", meaning to be able to testify to their concrete implementation, something that was often desired by the students regarding their university, a desire that was rarely met.

For Georges, it is equally important that non-commercial accessible spaces like the cafes exist in the academic sphere. The Concordia Greenhouse, which was mentioned by most of the Concordian participants and described by Alana as "not such a sterile place" in contrast to the rest, corresponded to such criteria. To Daria, the relationship between the Hive Cafe and the Greenhouse is rooted in shared values and cooperation, as the cafe sometimes sells products grown in the Greenhouse, for example. To Walker, these student spaces can be categorized as "spaces that have a mission", and stand out in comparison to spaces that are managed top-down. He explained their connection to his identity as the importance of using and creating spaces that allow us to "interweave [...] our queer identities into the future of sustainability" (Walker, CU). For many others interviewed, this relates back to a political queer identity: not only are their identities intertwined with the other political aspects of their identity, but they

also see the space's political stance on the environment, inclusivity and anti-racism as a commitment to treat everyone with respect. For queer people, to see a place that displays and promotes inclusive values is reassuring, as they know they are welcome.

Amongst other spaces mentioned by the students were the student union rooms and, in the *Université du Québec à Montréal*, the second floor tables of the A building. For Jamie and Sol, the student unions' rooms are spaces where friends can easily be found, and where welcoming activities take place. Jamie described the union rooms as spaces she felt safe in. After participation at an activity that invited the students to come paint the walls of their union's room together, Sol felt a feeling of belonging to the space. Finally, for similar reasons as the cafes and the Greenhouse, Concordia's People's Potato (student food bank) was also mentioned as an important community space by Walker (CU).

Figure 25: Excerpt of Léon's map

During Leon's interview, we also spoke about community use of university spaces that extends beyond the actual student spaces. Indeed, they told me about a performance art event organized by a queer collective to reclaim the Judith-Jasmin Agora at UQAM, located at the subway entrance to the university (which makes it a very busy space). This artistic event came about after a student had been inadvertently intercepted and discriminated against by a security guard. The event recounted by Léon is one of collective resistance and reappropriation of university spaces, which is represented in the middle of their map by an immense spiral that fills the Agora (Figure 25).

Additionally, Jill (CU) mentioned that the university often removes posters put up by students from its walls, further illustrating the tension between the Administrative definition of spaces and student uses and ideals. A persistent tension between the student body and the Administration, that goes beyond the simple demarcation of student-led reappropriated spaces, was thus revealed through the interviews. This negotiation of the spaces, taking here the form of the ephemeral presence of student posters, further resonates quite strongly with the negotiation for inclusive bathrooms at the *Université du Québec à Montréal* detailed

previously. Students from the latter university, additionally, noted that murals and graffiti in the student unions hallway were constantly being removed by the Administration, contributing to revealing the tensions that shape university spaces.

Like Léon, some moments recalled by Jamie demonstrate the importance of having access to spaces for community building, especially for students who embody a queer presence in academic spaces :

> Jamie: There are many, many moments when I meet my friends, we meet in that room. Then we tell ourselves 'after school, we're going to go to the bar'. Then [...], it's got a nice symbolic feel to it, this moment that could be described as getting ready [...]. Wine-off after class blah blah. [...] And I always bring my backpack for those moments. Nail polish. I have glitter, I have all kinds of stuff. [...] Everybody, whatever their style you know, you'd find really punk people, or like someone who's in slacks and joggings, then someone else who's really always *chixed* to the max… everyone participates, everyone would get *glitterized*... [...] Then while we're drying our nails, there's like a contact too like, you wouldn't necessarily want this at any other time, but like taking the person's hand and doing their nails, and afterwards we go and sit on the couch. There's a little moment, resting your head on the other person and thinking, 'oh my god, it's been a long day, but we've done everything we can'. [...] Really as a moment of, of deep friendship [...]. In that moment there, *that's very corporeal, of allowing yourself to be tired after a long day, to share that tiredness with other people*, but also to reconnect. [...] And not just be in performance, and in stress. And we go and spend a few hours at the bar, and tell each other all sorts of silly stories.
>
> [...] Everyone took part, because that's how we created, by creating a new fashion, *we created something alternative to the performance that, the performance of our bodies that was imposed on us* (Jamie, UQAM, emphasis by the author)*.

This recurring event narrated by Jamie is one of community, friendship, and solidarity through the pressure of performance. It is a story of queer bodies not only taking space at the university, but taking it to liberate themselves from the sense of embodied exclusion many queer students experience. They created a place for themselves to support each other and alleviate the pressure to perform an embodied identity that is not theirs. The event described by Jamie, and the meanings attributed to it, resonate greatly with the body as described by Pratt and Rosner (2012), that is, a site of resistance. Indeed, it is possible to see the collective care detailed by Jamie as a resistance to both the hegemonic norms of productivity within university spaces, and the heterocisnormative norms that dictate social codes at university. As students share glitter and nail polish, regardless of their style and gender, we can attest to a solidarity that weaves itself in the face of academic and social fatigue.

4.4 Conclusion

The theme of our bodies as places and vectors of resistance is relevant to conclude this analysis, as it is an unequivocal meeting point for all the testimonies gathered during the interviews. Whether through their involvement in student groups, their efforts to take care of their bodies in a context that does not encourage it, their uncompromising clothing style, or their academic participation that continues despite the obstacles, every student I met is resisting the hegemonic heterocisnormativity of academia. While their experiences vary immensely, they have in common the contestation of academic (heteronormative) exclusivity. This resistance unfolds in an embodied experience that includes hypervigilance, fatigue, dissociation or tension, but also the warmth of solidarity, courage, creativity and collective growth.

Overall, this chapter offers a multi-scalar analysis of themes and experiences that were common to interviewees in order to outline the perimeters of academic queer embodiment. To this end, the content of the interviews and maps were reviewed to identify similarities and differences between the participants, particularly in terms of the areas of the university used and avoided, feelings of solidarity or fear, and needs that are sometimes met, sometimes not. The deployment of the analysis was first made possible by an overview and definition of the concepts of the queer, the body, and the university. While the relationship between the participants and these elements remains unique to each, certain similarities were significant, such as the political dimension to their queer identity.

During fieldwork and beyond, the co-creation of knowledge through the doubling of the map production by myself and the participants has emerged as a major contribution of this research. This practice became central both as a tangible way of concretizing research done 'by & for' marginalized communities and as a way of pushing boundaries in cartography, notably by the use of sensitive mapping as a tool of communication between the participants and the researcher. More than simply translating the student's spatial experiences into imagery, the production of sensitive maps also enabled us to go beyond the use of words to emphasize emotions as a crucial element of the research process.

In sum, the participants' testimonies of resistance bring to light the structuring pressure of heterocisnormativity within academia, which impacts the pressure of performance felt by students, interior design features, services offered by the university (or lack of), and the persistence of exclusive or marginalizing social dynamics. This observation, alongside others, contributes to concluding the present research on a note of community resistance, while also outlining the limits and other contributions of this research.

Chapter 5. Conclusion: (a plea for) Student-led Universities

This research proposes to work with both queer geographies and queer phenomenology to observe the relationship between queer students and the university, the latter of which is structured by neoliberal and heterocisnormative currents. Such a reading of the fundamental role that student communities play in shaping and reshaping academic spaces is enabled by a theoretical framework that supports emotions, inductive research practices, and creative methods.

Key observations from the thesis can be summarized into the following points. Students' university trajectories are strongly shaped by personal experiences and identity, which includes, without being limited to, their queerness. This particular identity component, that all participants shared in common, results in an embodied experience of academic spaces that cannot be understood without a queer reading of these spaces, that is, without taking into account heterocisnormativity. The latter can result, within universities, in a feeling of anxiety, fatigue, hypervigilance, tension, and even avoidance patterns. The university environment also impacts the way people present themselves, such as whether or not they disclose, through their appearance, words and manner of being, their queer identity. Academia further influences how students feel in and about their bodies, notably depending on whether they are in spaces where they choose to disclose their queer identity, or not. All the particularities of queer academic embodiment thus illustrate the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that modulate the students' trajectories, which includes the pivotal role of community spaces within educational landscapes. Indeed, through the contributions of the participants, it is possible to grasp the importance of community spaces by & for students as a place of exchange and encounter, of solidarity and of resistance in the face of the many facets of academic exclusivity felt by students.

These observations were made possible by developing a creative and innovative research framework and methodology. University spaces are vectors of power dynamics, places that reproduce societal heterocisnormativity in misunderstood and often imperceptible ways. Satisfying the complexity of portraying these spaces, the queer phenomenology and sensitive mapping approach of this project also show that students subvert and rework these socio-spatial norms, as does sensitive and cognitive mapping with cartography norms. Overall, the present thesis brings into light the ways in which the diverse experiences of queer students illustrate

certain socio-spatial dynamics that are inscribed within university spaces. This objective is made possible through the reading of a bidirectional relationship between the university and the students by a crossing of phenomenology and geography perspectives : academic spaces influence the bodily experiences of students, while students, through their experiences, also influence academic spaces. While the power dynamics that operate within academic spaces can be damaging for students, whether in terms of their sense of belonging, their fulfillment within – and participation in – student life, the pressure to perform (heteronormativity, or other parts of the university system), and the need (fundamental, for many) to express their queer identity, universities represent an important site for the continuity of queer communities among students, as indicated through the way they meet, share and depict dedicated spaces.

Limitations of this research may include some shortcomings regarding the exploration of sensitive and cognitive mapping. While on one hand, this method was a first for both myself and most of the participants and implied some practical difficulties, it has, on the other hand, evolved in an innovative way of approaching sensitive and cognitive mapping. The maps provided were sometimes difficult to analyze, thus some being difficult to include within the analysis as more than simply a visual support to the interviews. The scope of this research is also worth noting, largely defined by the terms of the master's program, but also by the absence of funding, which impacted material, access to research software, and time. Not having to do a lot of recruitment to achieve the desired number of interviews, the small scope played a role in the diversity (or lack of) amongst participants, who were all social sciences students. They all seemed to have a certain ease in terms of analyzing heterocisnormativity and social power-structures, which played an evident role in the shaping of their participation. If I were to do this research again, exploring different buildings of the same university (such as natural sciences or engineering buildings) would be interesting. Indeed, as the disciplines are often organized by buildings, changing buildings instead of exploring similar spaces found in two different universities, could reveal research results of a broader diversity.

Three contributions to the sphere of critical and queer geographies may be noted from the present research. First, although work has been done concerning universities in various perspectives, the voice of university students seems rarely present within these studies. In centering queer students' perspectives, I hope to contribute to broaden our horizons regarding our teaching and learning environments and invite us to focus on the felt experiences of all members of academia when pondering the evolution of our universities. Second, I have discovered in the process of this research the unequivocal relevance of converging two queer

and critical approaches of two different disciplines, that is, geography and phenomenology. The phenomenological and multi-scalar approach brought an accuracy to the geographicity of this study that should not be overlooked, as it supports our bodies as the point zero and legitimate scale for the observation of any geographical experience. Third, exploring sensitive mapping alongside the participants felt to me as a *queering of cartography*, notably through the mobilization of subjectivity, creativity and emotions to map geographical phenomena. While this method had some limits in the context of this research, it also represents a key part of it and a major contribution to the ongoing exploration of possibilities emerging from a redesigning of the rules of cartography. By exploring sensitive mapping from both the researcher and the participants' point of view, this method became a crucial tool for co-creating knowledge, from which further derived an important interpretive power. It is also worth noting that this methodology was valuable for fostering a space of vulnerability and creativity between myself and the participants. As such, the colorful, eclectic results emerging from this queer practice offer representations of academia that inherently resist its own way of presenting itself. Through the colors, the personal stories and the emotions portrayed, we depart from the ivory tower and reappropriate the narrative concerning educational spaces.

One last contribution to note is to an ongoing and urgent conversation about the transformation of universities *by and for* its community members, including of course students. Indeed, one of the most important findings of this research resides within the importance given to a sense of community by the participants, represented hereby in one of my maps (figure 26). Whether that be through the relief felt by Cory when surrounded by her friends, political action groups for Jill, queer art performances for Léon, Isabelle's sports club, union solidarity for Lenny and Alana, the glitter shared by Jamie or the memories of painting murals with their student unions for Sol and Nicole, all of the students emphasized the importance of a sense of shared community to their embodied experience of the University. Leaning towards such a student-centered transformation allows for a departure from a neoliberal administration of our learning

Figure 26: Excerpt of my map from the interview with Walker

and working environments, which goes hand-in-hand with the idea of creating academic spaces that are truly welcoming and inclusive, that are for everyone.

When speaking about the institution, many of the participants expressed disappointment and pessimism which, aligned with their longing for a feeling of community, illustrates a clear distinction between the University as a structure, and the university in its quotidian, lived and embodied experience. Although the structure plays a top-down structural role in shaping its academic spaces, the people that use these spaces demonstrated a multitude of ways of transforming them, of reappropriating and reorienting them through their embodied practices within the University. By creating spaces that resemble their values, by leaving classes when homophobic comments are left unaddressed, or through the forging of their unique trajectories, students refuse to engage with blatant heterocisnormativity and an unquestioned reproduction of social norms. Moreover, they demonstrate a strong motivation to take seats at the table and be part of the decision process regarding the institution's constitution, role and actions within our city, especially regarding current social polemics such as the university's handling of complaints, the reproduction of academic exclusivity, and its lack of concrete engagement in social struggles.

This key thread, the call for spaces of acceptance, spaces to breathe and places that alleviate the pressure of performance brings us back to both the context within which these community spaces emerge, the neoliberal University, and the possibility of queering our academic practices. As a whole, the ideas offered within this research demonstrate a desire for, and the materialization of, a community that goes beyond, transcends and transforms the institution. By highlighting the divide between the institution and its members, the vision that emerges from this research becomes an exceptional parallel to Moten and Harney's Undercommons (2004). Relying on the theoretical contributions of Abolitionist movements, the latter proposes to dwell on the utilitarian, quasi parasitic relationship that persists between the university and the people who sustain it, notably in terms of knowledge production, material reproduction, academic legitimacy and emerging currents of thought to be absorbed (Moten & Harney, 2004). As such, the two authors praise the formation of a community counter-current, little pockets of revolutionary care and resurgence. Moten and Harney's work also takes place within the North American neoliberal context, where the university aims towards professionalization, and where students are consumers.

What distinguishes the present research from the Undercommons (2004), however, is a shift regarding the students' role and perspective. Indeed, Moten and Harney (2004) focus on the subversion of intellectual work mainly from the perspective of academics. In contrast, the results presented propose a reappropriation, a *reorientation* of the institution by & for the students, notably by a sense of community building that influences, constructs and deconstructs academic spaces, a community that claims multiple seats at decisional tables. This proposition is strongly influenced Ahmed's "reorienting devices" (2006, p. 61), a status she attributes to a kitchen table that is used for writing, an action which provokes a shift regarding its gendered occupation. Transposing this reorientation to University decisional tables, a shift may appear, where student-led revolutionary currents and community resurgence could contribute to an academic counter-current. The idea that emerges from crossing the participants' contributions with the Undercommons (Moten & Harney, 2004) is not necessarily one of a reinvestment in the University. Rather, we are invited to transform the university in a way that simultaneously transforms the role that the latter plays in our lives. We are invited to reconsider ourselves, its community members, as central, to use the spaces without being dependent of them, to change the spaces so that they correspond to our needs and desires. Without fully relying on the institution, we allow our ideas to grow from and out of academia, we allow for our communities to meet within its walls perhaps, but develop towards spaces of all kinds; spaces of connection, of vulnerability, of creativity.

These ideas are a few of many possible avenues of – and perspectives on – transforming our communities' relationship to the university, leaving us with a fundamental question that goes beyond the scope of this thesis: how do we redefine the dividing line between the institution and its members? While we attest the misfitting that is occurring between a top-down organization of space and inclusive, bottom-up experiences of students, our aims in rethinking this line may vary immensely. Do we approach this transformation as a reappropriation of spaces that allows an alinement between the institution and the needs and desires of its communities, perhaps reinvesting in this relationship, or are we skeptical of the feasibility of such a transformation, notably due to the imbrication of academia within the reproduction of power structures, regardless of the values brought forward by the administration?

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Appendices

Ethics certification

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant:	Mathilde LaRoche
Department:	N/A
Agency:	Faculty of Arts and Science\Geography, Planning & Environment
Title of Project:	Queer Students, Our Bodies and University Spaces: Remapping Academic Embodiment
Certification Number:	30016844

Valid From: September 09, 2022 To: September 08, 2023

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Dr. David Waddington, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

Recruitment poster

Call for Participants

"QUEER STUDENTS
OUR BODIES
AND UNIVERSITY SPACES:
REMAPPING ACADEMIC EMBODIMENT"

In part of my MSc. research, I am looking for *queer university students* to participate in individual, 1 hour long interviews.

We will be discussing *our embodied experiences in academic spaces, our relationship to our queer bodies and to university spaces*.

Participants will also be invited to *participate in the creation/exhibition of cognitive maps*.

If this research interests you and *you are a queer university student in Montreal*, please get in contact!

Mathilde LaRoche (they/them)
Candidate, MSc. in Geography, Planning & Environment
Concordia University
ma_aroch@live.concordia.ca

Interview guideline

[Before beginning: look over consent form, speak about cognitive mapping, ask permission to record, talk together about name coding and the possibility for an exhibition of the maps.]

1. Introduction
    a. What University are you from? What program?
    b. For how long have you been a University Student?
    c. Where have you taken us for the interview today? What does this space mean to you?

2. University spaces
    a. Where would you position university spaces on a scale of comfortable vs. uncomfortable?
    b. Are these feelings applied to most university spaces? Where do you feel different, why?
    c. What elements do you find yourself going towards in academic spaces?
    d. What do you look for in spaces in order to feel good?

3. The Body
    a. How would you describe your relationship to your body? What elements or parts of your identity are central to this relationship?
    b. What comes to your mind when we speak about the body as a geographical site?
    c. How would you describe your body or relationship to it, according to this (geographical perspective)?

    (In other words, if I say our bodies are like places we inhabit, live in, construct, take care of… how to you feel about this place?)

    d. Does these feelings or elements change depending on your surroundings? Where do you feel best? Where do you feel less comfortable?
    e. Would you say your feelings concerning your body, as described earlier, change within university spaces? How so?

4. Closing on Inclusive Universities
    a. Based on what we said in our discussion so far, do you think your University could improve some elements in regards to inclusivity?
    b. What could change for you to feel (even) better in academic spaces?

Maps of the interviews

Alana's map (top) and mine (bottom) from the interview with Alana at Concordia University.

Cody's map (top) and mine (bottom) from the interview with Cody at UQAM.

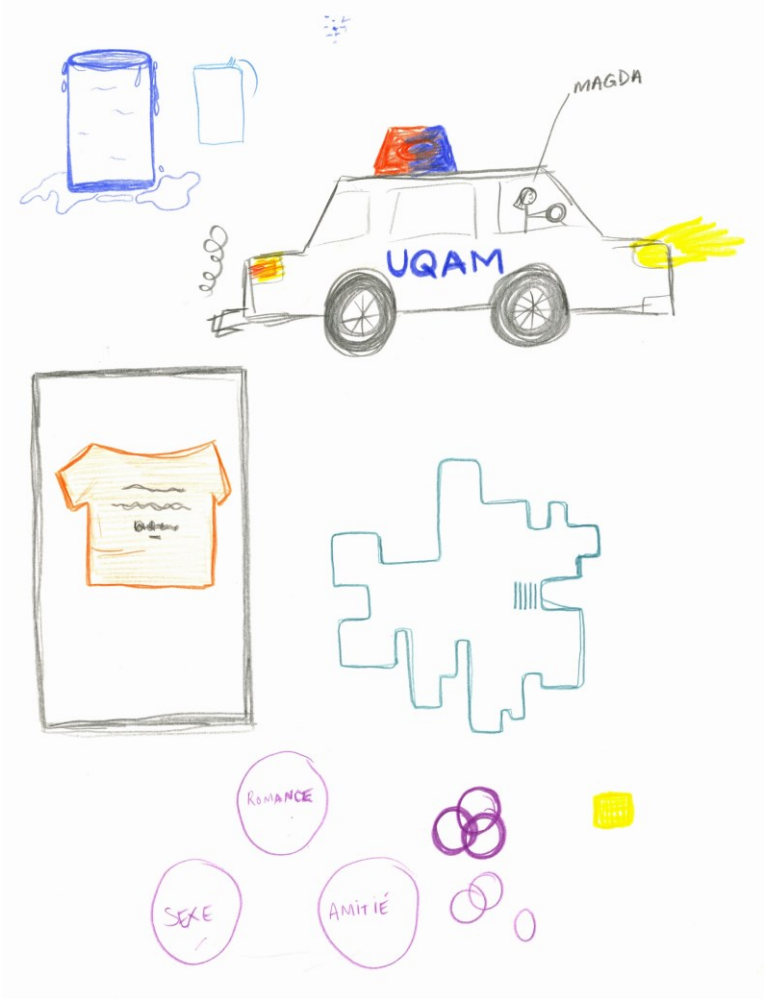
Daria's map (top) and mine (bottom), from our interview at Concordia University.

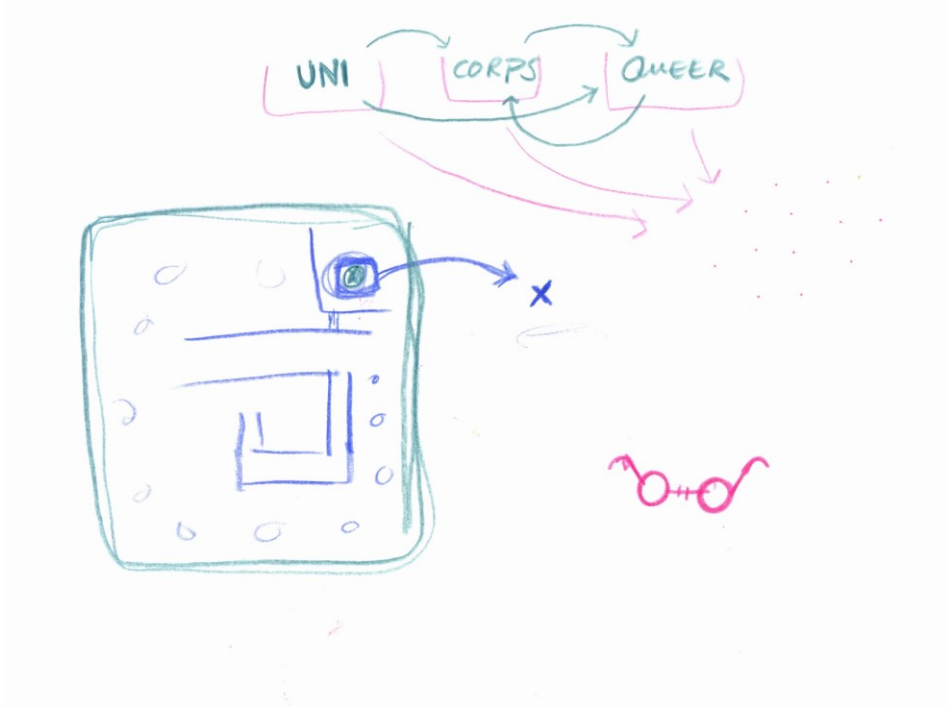
Georges' map (top) and mine (bottom) from our interview at Concordia University.

Isabelle's maps (right) and mine (left) from our interview at Concordia University.

Walker's map (left) and mine (right) from our interview at Concordia University.

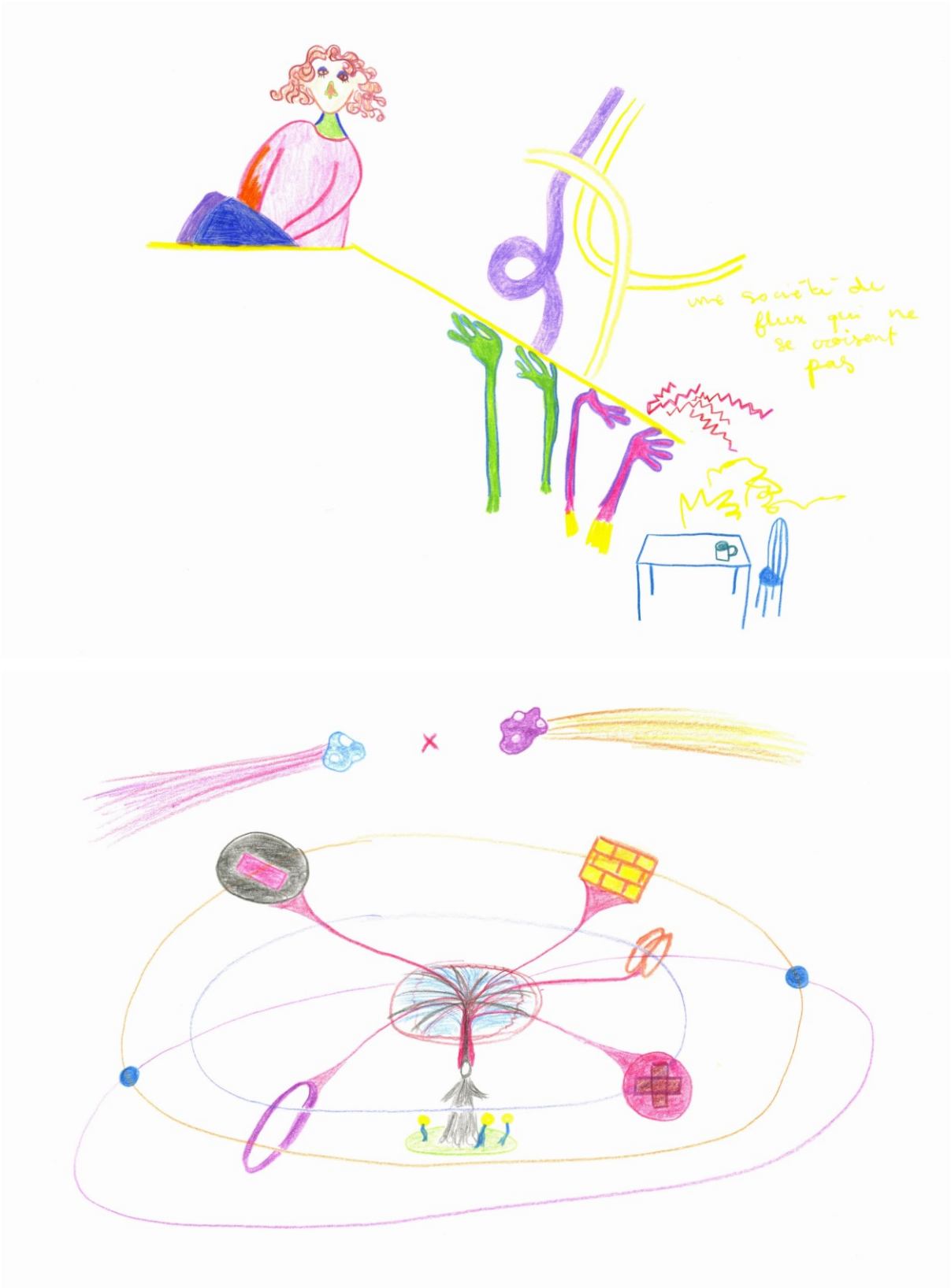
Cory's map (right) and mine (left) from the interview with Cory at Concordia University.



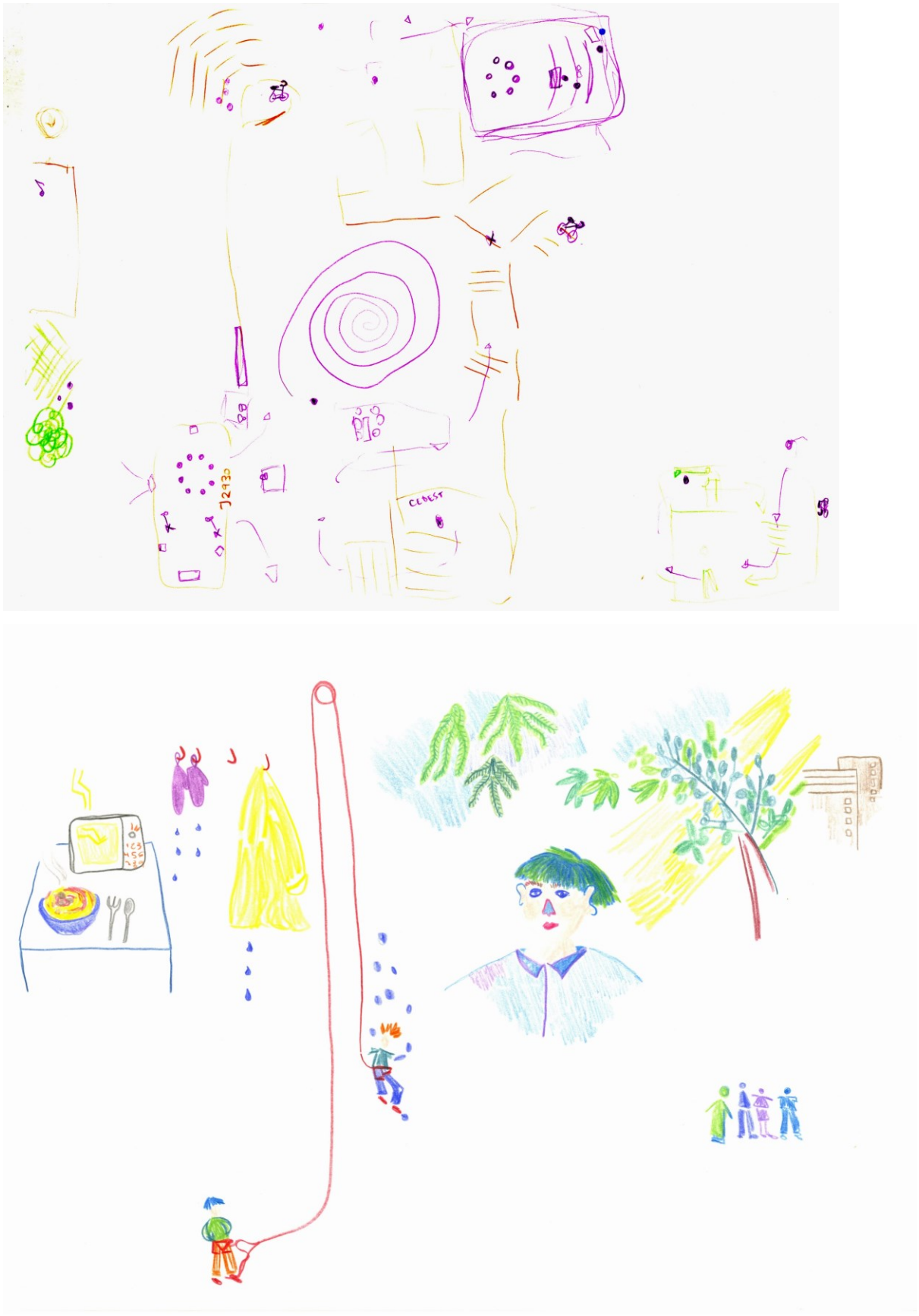


Jamie’s maps (double-sided) from our interview at UQAM.

My map from the interview with Jamie, UQAM.



Lenny's map (bottom) and mine (top) from our interview at UQAM.



Léon’s map (top) and mine (bottom) from our interview at UQAM.

Nadia's map (top) and mine (bottom) from our interview at UQAM.

Nicole's map (top) and mine (bottom) from our interview at UQAM.

Sol’s map (top) and mine (bottom) from our interview at UQAM.