

FROM THE ZAD IN NOTRE-DAME-DES-LANDES, FEBRUARY 2018:

THE “MOVEMENT” IS DEAD LONG LIVE... REFORM!

“I chose to come live here because this struggle seemed to be a good place to try things differently, to put some sticks in the gears of this shitty world where they’re not expecting it.”

“For me, it was an attempt to dodge “ecology”, too easily recuperated, because it was just an airport among hundreds, and not one of those famous nuclear power plants with environmentalists proposing wind-mills in its place. It was also an attempt to kill the “Mother Nature” myth, because the land involved was bocage and so by definition totally human-created and functional. And to hold at a distance the “return to the land” of bourgeois-bohemians, because the ZAD is facing a massive urban expansion plan with little room for dreams of gardens and fresh spring water, tiny beautiful babies and everyone-should-just-do-like-us.”

“All that while connecting to other realities around that which the city nearby concentrates and produces as relations of exploitation, control, democratic and “citizen” manipulation, scorn, uniformization, repression and segregation.”

“When you look at it now, it seems kind of ridiculous, what I’m saying...”



A CRITIQUE OF “COMPOSITION” AND ITS ELITES

AUTHOR'S INTRO

This text was written during fall 2017 on the ZAD of Notre-Dames-Landes, France. Since then, the situation drastically changed when the government announced on January 17th, 2018 that they are abandoning the airport project. It may seem obsolete to publish this after the “victory”. But, despite the importance this struggle has for me, I didn’t celebrate this victory. I am probably too suspicious and critical about what’s at stake and what’s hiding behind the decision.

In this difficult period for social struggles, the fight against the airport has become a kind of symbol against the capitalist onslaught, as the struggle to not lose in an ocean of defeats. So, trying a critical approach means often being confronted by a defensive reflex to protect an idealized vision. Oh well, here goes...

This text is addressed to those who want to question “victory”, and dig a little deeper into what is at play here.

On one hand, because the end of the struggle against the airport leaves the “movement” an orphan – or even dead – and thus facing a new situation. Yet even if it is new, it will remain the legacy of these long mixed-up years of conflicts between different political tendencies, with their different objectives and means in struggle.

On the other hand, because the recent months leading up to this “historic victory” have much to tell and to contribute to a culture of struggle in general. And because we can already imagine the glorious and eternal radiance that many will give to this victory.

In short, there are a few reasons why I am no longer part of this struggle:

The feeling of being used – my involvement, my energy, my connections, my sincerity and my knowledge – for hidden, enemy ends

The feeling of working to save a situation while others orient and take advantage of it

The feeling of being part of an advertisement in seasons and episodes for the regeneration of a revolutionary imaginary based on a story rewritten in real time and full of fantasies

The permanent and harmful contradiction between the collective ideal of Autonomy and the individual neurosis of total control over the path for getting there

The notion of Insurrection as a moment when it is possible to take the upper hand, especially if one has it already, and worry just about expanding what’s yours, when you’re already doing pretty well

I refuse to feel flattered and valued by a place in the elite

My anger at having learned to be afraid of being sincere so as not to be eaten by the Other, its lies and its strategy

The confusion of no longer knowing how to name political conflicts, given so much experience with the same people and their practices, and the recurrent doubts that I’m being manipulated when I hear “it wasn’t on purpose, don’t be paranoid either!”.

TRANSLATORS' INTRO

This text appears at a time when everything is moving faster than ever. Two weeks ago, within 24 hours, the occupation movement went from categorically refusing to consider filling out individual agricultural project request forms, to filling them out and the delegation bringing them to a meeting at the prefecture. A lot has happened since February. My hope is that this can serve as a historical document, as for now, it's the only written long-form counternarrative of the struggle on the ZAD.

My motivation is to make much needed space for other voices to emerge, voices that have been suffocated by a discourse of "unity at all costs". I think that debate and internal critique (and ability/space/desire to accept critique!) are vitally important to the strength of our movements.

I also want to share the sense of anger and betrayal that many feel about the direction this struggle has taken over the past years. This feeling is so hard to translate to people that don't live here and haven't lived the power plays in the same way, and it too often ends up sounding like petty process disputes next to the glorious myth of the ZAD or the latest glossy "commune"-erotica. So we end up falling silent, or only saying neutral things that explain technically what's happening in the anti-airport movement, not how we feel about it or the conflict between different forces internally.

To name it— what's at play here on the ZAD is more nuanced than rupture with Tiqqunists or not. For me, they can be objective allies, we're stronger together against our common enemies, diversity of tactics, all that. But I don't think it's possible to work or ally with any group where their end goals are hidden and they work to increase their power through invisibility and conscious manipulation. Nor with any group whose positions range from disdain to active sabotage to mafia tactics in relationship to anti-authoritarian organizing. I hope this text gives a glimpse into what an outcome of that theory looks like when its backed by power and money, operating in a field of relative possibility,*

where the stakes are high. For me, it's only from a starting point where the power that comes from pretending to not exist is undone, where people name who they are and what they're doing, instead of groups of "friends" who all happen to like the same book. Only through being honest about our differences and desires is it possible to build enough trust to work together. I don't think that's possible here anymore, even if we do somehow end up staying, but I hope it is in other places.

I don't pretend to be neutral in this conflict, but I made factual corrections (identified as such in footnotes) where it seemed important to clarify. The corrections are in relation to things I directly experienced, in periods where the author wasn't on the ZAD. My intention isn't to delegitimize what he has to say, but I feel invested in the narrative of this struggle moving closer to accuracy than is usual with the fantastical myth of the magical "commune". From a more accurate telling of history we can draw better conclusions to make our struggles more resilient. I also took out the term "insurrectionary" where it appeared because the author means it in almost the opposite way as it's understood in the anglo world.

So so much gratitude to all the people that worked on this text.

On the ZAD, May 4th, 2018

**Not sure if "objective ally" is a French thing or not— it means we know we don't want the same things in the end but we have common interests for a period of time, and so choose to ally together while that makes sense. It was the basis of the anti-airport movement before "composition" came into style. I know North America is allergic to the word ally but it's a useful word and i want to take it back.*

with crowbars and hammers. In front of around fifty people who are chatting and transporting pieces of the cabin while smiling, twenty people are able to put a stop to the situation by getting on top of the cabin too, shouting at those below to leave and let them live this alone. After a forty-person assembly in the cabin without a roof, and a simulacrum of negotiation, the demolition was again to be done by the residents themselves in the afternoon, with the idea of rebuilding 15 m away in the field.

Friday the 26th, the Prefect's car drives down the road accompanied by her henchmen and some movement leaders. She then drinks a glass of champagne with them and recognizes their efforts, like an inspector handing out points to schoolteachers who managed their classes well, despite the schoolboys who mooned the convoy from the bushes and the helicopter seeming to stubbornly search for something in the forest.

That week, even online means of communication seemed to be disrupted by the events. Several texts critical of the clearing of the road went unpublished on the zad.nadir website, as well as on the inter-committees email list, which changed suddenly from direct-publication to moderation to "filter out" inconvenient views. In parallel, the Facebook page, which is not administered by occupiers, went on strike...

There remains the website nantes.indymedia that continues to host a long series of texts fighting against the current and nourishing rebellion. Go check it out once in a while to read different voices.

or intervention of police would therefore only exacerbate the situation.”

Thursday the 18th, the extraordinary General Assembly on this “tomorrow that sings out of tune” was the site of a putsch, acknowledged by COPAIN and the Coord as they rarely do, imposing the decision to hand over the route des chicanes, cleared, to the state within a week, despite the condition set in the previous GA that there not be any threat of evictions. The CMDO takes the same position.

Saturday the 20th, negotiations that don’t yet speak their name occur over the phone between the Prefect and a leader of COPAIN who says that the Prefect accepts the Lama Fâché cabin staying.

Sunday the 21st, people from the “neighborhood” around the road meet to prepare for the works to begin the next day.

Monday the 22nd, around 200 people arrive happily at the call of the movement to “clean the road”, and many realize on site that there’s opposition, notably around the Sabot grocery which could not be destroyed without clashes. That day, as the flowering debris and stockpiled tires disappear, one observes the relay of state pressure descending directly upon the road via the respectable Coord, COPAIN acting, the CMDO in support, and a bunch of people mediating “so that everything goes well”, dialoguing with the people resisting... An instant, exemplary display of the “composition” of the “movement”. Meanwhile, nearby, several platoons of cops twiddle their thumbs, amidst the media clatter.

Tuesday the 23rd, the works continue and the Sabot is taken down by people from the neighborhood themselves in the hopes of thereby keeping Lama Fâché. Meanwhile, surprise! – COPAIN announces that the Prefect now also wants Lama Fâché to be destroyed. In the evening, an extraordinary meeting of residents shows that consensus is far away on its destruction.

Wednesday the 24th, the GA is on lockdown more than ever, and “the point on the D281 is not a debate”. COPAIN threatens to leave the movement if the road is not entirely cleared the next day.

Thursday the 25th, in the morning, while people are on the roof and inside the Lama Fâché, about thirty men from the CMDO and their friends from the Maison de la Grève in Rennes begin taking down the cabin

“I’M NOT LOOKING FOR STERILE CONFLICTS, BUT I DON’T WANT FALSE SOCIAL PEACE. EVEN ON A DAY OF CELEBRATION”

Hop hop hop

“EVERYTHING HAS TO MOVE FOR NOTHING TO CHANGE”

Reformist proverb

ANNEX



The conflict around the “liberation” of the road shows the extent to which unity was an illusion. At least, if we want to actually take into account the view of many of the occupiers. And the process that led to this clearing is also interesting to observe. The last few weeks of the struggle against the airport were of a particular intensity, revolving around the imminence of a thousandth governmental decision. Tension triggers haste. The practice of a sort of governance through urgency, which was already the norm within the struggle, lost its subtlety and democratic precautions. This moment of denouement has had the advantage of brutally revealing what a number of party-poopers have been denouncing for a long time.

A chronology sometimes suffices to say a lot..

Wednesday, January 17th, the movement’s press release is edited, without approval, by a couple leaders two hours after the abandonment of the project. These sentences are added: “As far as the question of the reopening of Route D281, closed by the public powers in 2013, is concerned, the movement commits to formulate its own response. The presence

NOVEMBER 2017, NOTRE-DAME-DES-LANDES

*The climate has been particularly tense on the ZAD these past months. Of course, as usual, we're always thinking about the threat of the zone being attacked by the State, but these tensions are mostly internal to the anti-airport movement. By digging through our memories, we can think of many moments of visible conflict between two very different approaches in this struggle, which we could caricature by way of two slogans: on one side the *Citoyens Vigilants* [Vigilant Citizens]¹, who are on the side of the *Coordination des opposants* [Coordination of Opponents] (the Co-ord)² with their "Decision-makers, think again!" and on the other side the occupants, autonomous groups and individuals, with their "Resistance and Sabotage." It's true that "unity" is a bit more complicated than people say, and that's normal.*

However, there exists another point of conflict, which is discussed very little outside of the ZAD, but which takes an enormous amount of space in daily life here – it is internal to the occupation movement itself. These are the conflicts of sharing space and practices, ideologies and strategies, of power and material possibilities. We can say that it is very complicated, to live with hundreds of people and manage to organize together. Daily conflicts are visible on orders material and emotional, around care for others, territory, etc., with all their complexity and also this richness in learning how to integrate personal differences as a part of life, without the intervention of law or the State.

¹ I will write in *italics* the names of different groups and assemblies, the citations and references to distinguish them from my own commentaries, and the terms *movement*, *components* and others that I don't want to employ myself.

² *The Coordination of Opponents* brings together sixty-something citizen organizations, unions, and political parties. *The Association des Citoyens Indignés par le Projet d'Aéroport* [Association of Citizens Indignant about the Project of the Airport] (ACIPA) is the principal motor of this tendency via its leaders that have been involved for decades. We also find the ADECA (association of farmers affected by the project), Attac (tax activists), the Green Party, the Left Party, the Moderate Democrats, Solidaires...

By looking even more precisely, we find political conflicts between objectives and means of reaching them – whether that’s how to conduct this struggle specifically against the airport, or more largely on how we confront “its world”. “Its world” is that which needs this airport and so many other apparatuses of development and control. A world based on inequalities of access to resources and systems of domination of some by others, and so the some and the others don’t have the same stake in the fight.

In this electric complexity, there’s a major risk of oversimplifying the situation in trying to untangle it, or to play on binary caricatures to have more chances of seduction. I want to be explicit that I’m not looking for adherents to my analysis for building any kind of force around it. I’m not worried about that. I can finally speak with both my feet outside of the ZAD, even if there are ties that bring me there often.

It’s been months since I deserted the *movement assemblies*, with their screenplays written in advance, and I have no intention of returning except maybe to contribute with others to disrupting their rigid, locked-down form. But a certain bitter rage in my gut drives me to poke the anthill, as a way of not leaving by myself, or silently, and for all the other participants in this struggle who have already gone so far away. I’m not trying to convince people who might feel targeted by my critiques. They’ve already had many occasions to realize how what they’re doing harms others, and the benefits they receive from their decisions.

I’m looking to heal the wounds inflicted by what I have put of myself, alongside others, into the slow and laborious construction of this struggle, and how it has been reoriented in the past couple years. I want to know how to say just how important what has happened here is to me. My intention is not to undermine the immense majority of the squatters, who are still faced everyday with the normalization in progress on the ZAD as they try to save what has meaning for them. Nor do I want to diminish the countless

This belated proclamation is a good definition of reformism. Decidedly, we don’t have the same goals either. The movement is dead, long live the struggle!

Nantes, February 12th, 2018
An Insignificant Little Groupuscule

P.S. I see that a picture and a little description could have guaranteed a nice political career for me too, but I’m off to a pretty bad start, so whatever, eh. I’ll find another project for my future.

February 10th was the occasion to celebrate the end of a long struggle, long and tenacious. Calls were also made for people to gather that day who wouldn't stop at this victory and the crumbs of a negotiation with the state. The non-official party on the D281 (the ex-barricade road) sensed the curiosity, the doubt and the support of numerous people who came from far away to see and hear first-hand what's happening here. A bar and a "losers' info-stand" were set up on the crossroads.

In the neighboring field stretched the encampment-construction site of *La massacrée*, future twin cabin to that which was destroyed during the "liberation" of the barricade road by the *movement*. In the afternoon over 300 people participated in a discussion proposed *in extremis* on "seizures of power in struggles." The next day was the inter-committee meeting, presided by the CMDO's same few eternal leaders. It departed from the planned framework of the radiant future because of an intense conflict amongst the committees over the risk of normalization related to the choice of negotiation with the state.

That weekend, we were able to see the CMDO's first signed publication, "ZAD will survive," a glossy color print on recycled paper distributed by tens of thousands of copies.

Decidedly, we don't have the same means.

"We're well aware that any legalization obviously carries risks of normalization. However, what we are considering takes the opposite path: to create precedents that continue to push the threshold of what institutions can accept, in the hope that these wedges driven into the rigidity of French law serve many more beyond us in the future."

(Excerpt from the CMDO's "ZAD will survive")

invisible people who make the ZAD alive. Personally, however, I never had any doubt about the outcome.

A beautiful victory in a world which remains intact is always just a new reform that solidifies it. I was prepared for some people to try to have an "alternative" and respectable appearance to stay long-term, and to personally benefit. I feared all along the final curve that comes at the end of a struggle. This genetic and systematic tendency of the Left, in its union or citizen variety, toward a return to normal and the validation of the State. I simply didn't see where the inevitable reformism was coming from this time, discreetly but surely, coming from where we speak of insurrection and autonomy by the thousands of copies. So here I am, trying to name this while thinking of people who are confronted in their struggles by the same power dynamics, often carried by the same tendencies (but not only). Let's continue to give each other the tools to face up to them.

What I have to say here is a packet of ideas, shared for years with each other by discussing nonstop what traverses us with people implicated here or elsewhere. It inspired me a lot to read the anger or wounds regularly expressed in the *zadnews* (weekly newspaper of the zad) or the zine "Oil on the Fire" (distributed on the ZAD in spring of 2017). Of course, it's always easier to invalidate the foundation of a critique that is deemed too aggressive or which doesn't follow radical social codes, everyone chooses how to lie to themselves. I know how good it felt for me to hear others managing to break the taboo of "airing your dirty laundry in public" with acid humor, cold argumentation, or rage as it comes. I will probably pass through these different states in the course of this text. By collecting all these stories end to end, we get a long list of "little scams" which seem insignificant or anecdotal, but which are so diverse and repetitive that we end up feeling surrounded. Which brings to mind the slow process of leaving a relationship under the hold of someone, strengthening oneself by connecting the dots of the multiple humiliations that form a fog that's so difficult to explain.

In this text, *I would like to talk about foundations*. I don't pretend that I'll manage not to caricature, and I also have my dose of bile to spit, but people can take from it what speaks to them. I would also like to name mechanisms and perspectives which will never be criticized enough. I want to do that on a larger scale than the internal one of *zadnews* because I find there to be a lack of contributions toward the outside, other than "Look how great we are!" or "We support you!" Basically, a bit of conflict and analysis doesn't do any harm, or maybe it does, there where it needs to. I chose to publicly give my point of view on this situation because I consider the consequences of silence to be more harmful than those of unveiling a couple weak points and "internal" conflicts that we pretend to hide from the Enemy.

Also, I speak of the ZAD because that's where I come from. I think that this struggle, like every struggle, has lessons to bring, especially from the conflicts that extend through it and the analyses that are refined in it, much more than the hazy "unity of the struggle" or "diversity of tactics". These are chanted as pillars of the struggle, but they're only battle standards for building a legend. And, likely contrary to original intention, making a model-struggle on the basis of a pacified lie, serves more than anything to hide the keys to understanding for people who want to use this struggle as inspiration.

I observe a publicity style of "the ZAD, mother of all struggles", enacted by certain occupants and their networks. I think their choice to come focus their energy here at the ZAD permits us to see more clearly than in other places their objectives and means that are never spoken of outside of their inner circles. The ZAD is used as a megaphone for practices and strategies of struggle that will be held up as examples for decades. Basically, I want to try to name what happens elsewhere too, by what can be seen really clearly here. I want people who are far from this struggle to be able to understand the stakes drawn out in this text. Also, many other contributions will continue to elaborate on the complexity of this situation.



The end of the struggle against the airport signals retirement for numerous people who won't go any further against "its world." The *movement's* organizational structures seem to still be working, but they have in fact taken a different path along with those that drive them.

Two weeks have passed of DIRO [Interdepartmental Directorate of Roads – West] machines operating and hundreds of police on the D281, some armed with machine guns to dissuade the slightest outburst that would again produce images of civil war. The famous plan of *decentralized actions by the committees in case of work beginning or evictions on the ZAD* has not been launched, everyone from afar asking what's happening on the ground, habituated to hearing the central signal, which doesn't come.

tirelessly after a clear cut, like the branches we re-position on the bare pavement, like this, *paf*, out of nowhere, a barricade...

Myself, I sometimes dream of a de-occupation demo, as a moment of collective departure from this dead struggle, a public desertion so that we no longer serve as a bogeyman or a radical front for a shit project. To leave a mark as a collective rupture rather than as invisible, individual escapes. But where are so many people to go into exile?

This text strives to contribute to a culture of struggle that is lucid about recuperations, seizures of power, and other bullshit that the “future” holds. It may seem pessimistic, but I would rather call it realism, which is my starting point in this world. I know my side, and it’s the side of losers. Not very seductive for founding a Party, that’s for sure. But it allows for recognizing one another amongst quite a number of people and in quite a few different contexts.

Some know how to “win”. Maybe it’s their starting point in this world. And from there, they know how to recognize one another when concerned. *But since you are winners*, this world is yours. Why don’t you instead go secure stability in the spaces you live, act and work in – agricultural or other – elsewhere than in struggles? There are many means to building a sustainable future, and you know them, you can access them. If you’re going to diagram *prefigurative entity* structures, why don’t you do it with *Terre de liens* [leftist real estate nonprofit] or other credit cooperatives that would be delighted to finance your *projects*. And do whatever you want, but give us a break coating it all in your big revolutionary speeches. Everyone has a hustle, even if not everyone has access to the same ones. The problem lies in making them into glorious acts of subversion, like a lie to yourself that you shout from the rooftops. Yeah, it feels good to say that! I had to say “you” there, I would have liked to be polite and distant, but I couldn’t hold it together...

I’ve wanted to write for such a long time, but I always tell myself it can wait, like for the end of the struggle or something. Regularly, then, something happens that upsets me, so I try again to say what I think, but I don’t manage. Everything happens so fast, I’m too slow, it’s never the moment, and others have already written – faster, better – but I don’t agree with their perspective, so it starts all over again... But faced with the dictatorship of Urgency and Efficiency, and also faced with the political and strategic choices which have been laid down lately, I tell myself that it will never finish, that there will never be a good time to debrief this struggle. I have the impression that the struggle is morphing into something else to be better assimilated, so I guess I won’t have to wait very long to see where it goes. Through a handful of old stories and from a text written by a group within the occupation movement, I will discuss the strategic choice of “composition”, anti-authoritarian intentions, the obviousness of considering the media as allies, revolutionary romanticism for the masses, the reformist turn at the end of the struggle, and the dominant political perspectives held by this same group.

“IN SUSPENSION OR IN FLIGHT?”

Over the past months, there have been several texts in the *zad-news* which give a sense of big internal conflicts in the occupation movement. Several individual texts criticized initiatives of a group called the CMDO and their seizure of power over the struggle. Others were declarations of unconditional support with the *components* [*composantes*, from ‘composition’] of the struggle, presenting them as being regularly attacked by squatters. For example, in April 2017 a short communiqué was signed by multiple spaces on the ZAD, almost all of them linked to the CMDO, to condemn an action that interrupted a press conference for the presidential campaign of France Insoumise at the Vache Rit farm, a symbolic place on the ZAD controlled by the Coord. Then a long text enti-

tled “In Suspension or In Flight?” [*Sursis ou sursaut?*] appeared in the *zadnews* on August 21st, 2017.

Paradoxically, the title of this text depicts pretty accurately my attitude lately in relation to the situation on the ZAD. “Wait as we are slowly crushed or react brutally right now?” So I’m going to dwell on it some. I’d like to thank the authors of the text for having given me this red thread of anger to finally pull out what I have to say, even if it probably won’t encourage them to reveal their intentions more often. On another note, I have no idea where you can find this text. But I don’t worry too much about the authors’ capacity to make themselves heard in life, so if it’s not out there, it’s on purpose. I would have added my messy double-scanned version at the end, but I won’t.

To begin with, or more precisely, to begin with the end, the *signature* is a long list of houses and individuals to whom this text was proposed in person. The signature “CMDO” isn’t there, even if almost every house and person who signed on are part of this group. I will take the risk of attributing this text to them as a group, because I haven’t spoken to anyone who understood it otherwise. The signature of “*Comité pour le Maintien Des Occupations*” appeared in the *zadnews* in August 2016, and finally gave a name to this group, after a number of critiques of their strong unacknowledged presence in the struggle, and a second time in the Spring of 2017 to present themselves in writing before a confrontational assembly concerning power grabs, where they were facing many squatters.

The CMDO is a group that brings together about 30 occupants who live in different places on the ZAD. I want to note that among these houses are the large majority of farmhouses and ‘real’ houses on the ZAD, which concentrate many of the material resources and collective structures. It brings together the people behind almost every public and strategic initiative of the last year, and who are present in the majority of influential groups and roles on the ZAD.

and I don’t deny responsibility on all sides for the impasse of a situation. But we cannot treat it as a mere folkloric symbol that has served its time playing a role in the romantic saga of *mauvaise troupe*. That would be to deny and to scorn its place at the heart of the sort of “zone in the zone” called “the East.” Its functioning is non-centralized, its residents rarely attend meetings of the ZAD. Its tangled fallow fields and forest, known as a “non-motorized zone” for the denial of entry to tractors, was torn away from communal management and from the re-cultivation of the land led by the agricultural tendency of the movement. The East is kind of the *banlieue* of the ZAD, an isolated place, fairly incomprehensible, fairly impenetrable, with its dreams and its failings, quite hostile to whoever wants to impose their rules there. In short, this zone is bothersome, and its residents are too. So the “cleanup” is somewhat two birds, one stone, whether or not it’s admitted.

Clearing the road is a bit like making those famous hiking trails – it’s like operations to “open up” areas, to “break isolation.” “For the good of all”, evidently. Many people, and not only “from the East,” will not find a place in the future envisioned here. And a large number of those who do won’t be bothered by their absence, inasmuch as the disdain and aggression are already clear. The clearing of the road was a chance to realize this fact. It will be said that they left to fight on other ZADs, or some myth of this type, to assure that all those stayed who wanted to stay. And probably too few traces will be left to hinder the ZAD’s beautiful future.

Refusal to leave alone and in silence like so many others is what pushes me to write this. Some say “Good riddance! One less obstacle.” Well, maybe leaving provides precisely the strength to speak, whereas many on the ZAD feel encircled and have too much to lose. I know that many occupants have their whole lives there, or nowhere else to go, and will wait to be kicked out, by force or by blackmail. They will stay until the very end, until disgust finally takes over, to not let others down, or try to preserve an oasis in the hurricane of “recomposition.” I’d like to help them in their efforts to be impossible to uproot, like the sprouts that grow back

As a show of good faith, let's try to imagine further: maybe it was still a choice to be made to not give the government the chance to launch an eviction operation out of bravado due to the road. I even heard people argue that it was to avoid deaths in a battle that we had to clear it.

Personally, the story of this road blocked in 2012 reminds me the most of the distress and powerlessness in the eyes of the cops whose mission was to clear the way for the circulation of their troops. They had to come back over and over to dismantle our makeshift barricades, seeing us re-close the road immediately behind their backs with whatever we found in the surrounding woods.

I believe that the issue for a certain number of occupiers, including the CMDO, who were there cleaning on those days, is above all to not get on the bad side of the state, to have their own chances to appear respectable, to keep the support of a few local committees that recently dissociated themselves publicly from the barricade road, and to find a little spot when the reorganization of the land concludes. On another note, not reacting to a police operation on the road would have tarnished the radical image that is so seductive.

“A fringe of 20 to 30 irreducible zadists, supported by the anarchists of Nantes, doesn't want to listen and refuses to leave the road. (...) It's sad that it's come to this. But if those anarchists continue to act dumb, we might have to wait for a day of tear gas. (...) The tractors sure won't go protect that crew there!” declared the ACIPA in the Ouest-France, February 8, 2018.

Where do all these games leave the other squatters? The return of traffic to the D281, with its clearing according to the DDE [Departmental Equipment Directorate]'s norms, are not the “detail” being recounted. On one hand, because it exudes a return to normal, and in the worst way. On the other hand, because this road was a living space. All these years, it crystallized many conflicts,

Politically diverse, the CMDO resembles an interest club, it's an alliance on material bases to be able to take initiatives without being bogged down by the decision-making process of the occupation movement. This committee chooses to be invisible from the outside when it's in their interest, but internally clearly dissociates from tendencies in the occupation movement that are less acceptable to the mainstream or more critical of the other components. I would add that the people of the CMDO have different roles and act differently, some are visibly in charge, others are more discreet but very influential behind closed doors, or show up as strong men for shows of force or intimidation, certain people also participate in open activities on the ZAD and can act as a social go-between or mediator to neutralize critiques and pacify conflicts. It seems fairly easy to join the committee for anyone who has a key position on the ZAD and is willing to contribute. In this text, I choose to speak about the CMDO when its influential members take initiatives because I consider that they couldn't have done it without the support of their group. And their eventual internal conflicts are invisible to the outside.

The text “In Suspension or In Flight?” appears to innovate with strength and panache by laying down a rupture with the occupation movement, yet it merely validates practices that have been observable and in place for a long time. That said, it's probably a sign of their self-assurance to finally “own” their position in the face of widespread hostility on the ZAD, or maybe it's also a somersault with their back to the wall. The keyword in this text is “composition” and reflects well the *position of the CMDO in three paragraphs*.

Composition, like an ode to the legendary peace and understanding which supposedly reign in the struggle against the airport, with as a side effect the rendering invisible of internal conflict to the advantage of the most powerful.

Decomposition, as one would scold bad children for creating internal division and not understanding that the most important thing

is to respect the “6 Points Declaration” (a kind of internal movement charter to guarantee cohesion by promising everyone that they’ll have a place in the “future without an airport”), basically, you shouldn’t annoy the grownups who are doing real things.

Recomposition, as the future has the air of “we won’t be squatters anymore”, with as a conclusion a new constitution for the *movement* and a new promise/threat of a militia to back it up.

I’ve caricatured these positions here because I felt like it, but behind these big words, well placed and carefully chosen, lies what isn’t spoken but many people here know.

SOME ASSORTED COMMENTARY:

The movement assemblies are not where initiatives start, but where they are validated, with agendas pre-determined in meetings and emails between the elites from all corners (3). Meaning between some occupants from the CMDO and some heads of liberal or agricultural organizations, unions, and political parties who meet in the Coord and of COPAIN (a collective against the airport made up of farmers who live off the ZAD and linked to the *Confédération Paysanne* union.)

This “more than ourselves which only the composition between our differences makes possible” is still often the same people, who manage to see that they’re not that different after all, and who come out stronger for it.

The famous sacred union against the common enemy smells like an age-old trap, and we should have learned by now who benefits from it.

Attacks and direct actions are condemned because they hurt the current strategy of collaboration with power. But let’s not forget

would go to negotiate alongside those of the Coord, COPAIN, and Naturalists in Struggle. After trying to impose at least one of their members, will the CMDO finally declare itself a *component* of its own to be sure to participate in this potential great moment of the struggle?

Whereas the terms of the negotiation attempt appear to be agricultural, what is at stake that we’re not seeing? The process of “the future of the land of the ZAD” being primarily related to the agricultural question, it gathers occupiers with agricultural projects under COPAIN and its legitimacy as an owners’ collective. COPAIN for its part is dependent on the *Confédération Paysanne* to negotiate with the competing right wing union FNSEA which wants its piece of the pie. With elections in the agricultural chamber taking place in January 2019, the abandonment of the airport is the ideal occasion to look like a powerful and intransigent union. No surprise, the Conf’ wants to build its house atop the struggle, recovering land and seats in the chamber. But for all that to work out, a demonstration of force was needed, in the direction of the state and the agricultural milieu. Clearing the road was this demonstration of force roundly led, where no one else could have done it without clashes. What negotiations with the state are at issue, when the state would only need to allow the agricultural institutions and the sale of *public domain* land to govern the return to normal? After all, maybe for some occupiers forming a common front is enough of a guarantee of protection from the farmers in what follows. And why not a massive crowdfunder in their vast citizen network for the ownership of a couple farms with particularly cute projects?

Okay, *let’s admit for the purposes of the exercise*: maybe it was a choice to be made to promise the state that we would clear the road ourselves so that it would take the step of abandoning the project. When all signs point to the government not being ready to evict the woods and the fields, when the cops are tired and anxious, when the project has been abandoned, why keep this promise?

ate with the state requires a serious and respectable appearance. The discussions about the negotiations leave room for no other option. Gone was the “diversity of tactics” that would force the government to play very cautiously faced with differing adversaries, as in other key moments of this struggle. Was that not where our force resided? But maybe the “*unity of the movement*”, too, disappeared behind the nice speeches? While the state shows all the signs of not wishing to send cops into the zone, probably to preserve its image of a pacified third way brought to you by Macron, the *movement* finds nothing better than to guarantee it this image, by doing the work itself, with urgency even. A good test for seeing that a mere speech, in grand pomp and relayed well by the media, is all that is needed to start the dominoes of *composition* falling.

“*Preconditions for the coming negotiations?*” You mean they haven’t already started? The clearing of the road, the phone calls to the prefecture?.. By the way, what do people expect from negotiations with the French state, and by beginning so weakly? Three conditions have been developed by the *movement*: the setting-aside of the farmland, an entity coming out of the movement to manage these lands, and the refusal of evictions. A fourth seems endlessly up for debate: amnesty for the arrested during the struggle. Ah... Yes, and if not? Well, uh, there’ll be a fight! They’ll see what they’re going to see!.. From professionals of negotiation, like the syndicalists of the Confederation Paysanne for example, it’s hard to imagine that the terms are chosen at random. They know that a real negotiation is based on a strategy of tension and involves asking for more than one thinks one can get. It’s good to remember that before the government’s announcement, the *movement* had already committed to clearing the barricade road, on three conditions: the abandonment of the project, the end of the DUP (declaration of public utility), and no threat of evictions. Once again, we surmise that the evictions demand is the decoy ready to be dropped. It’s staring us straight in the face. While awaiting hypothetical negotiations, a delegation of the movement is being formed. The occupiers now find themselves “designating”, so as not to say electing like in middle school, their two delegates who

that among those who condemn today, many were and are talented at this kind of action when it serves their own strategy.

“Taking distance from ZADism” is so much more comfortable when we’ve fed it with fantasy and revolutionary romanticism in mass paperbacks and exploited it to the bone to build legitimacy for finally being in struggle from a specific place.

When the occupants have become reticent toward the multiple initiatives of CMDO, it’s easier to no longer recognize the weekly organizational meeting of inhabitants.

A new “assembly of uses, to be developed” is proposed, but, well actually, it’s already developed – with its commissions giving report-backs at the very first assembly. This assembly of uses self-proclaims itself “embryo of this collective entity of the movement which is intended to determine the collective usage of land on the zone.”

And then finally the threat of an enforcement structure [*service d’ordre*], which feeds into one of the zone’s famous jokes, that “you’re gonna wind up in a CMDO car trunk”.

The text suggests that *the problem to resolve* lies in the conflict between some occupants and the other *components*. To me, it lies mostly within the occupation movement, and more than that, in the radical resistance movement beyond the struggle against the airport. By listing diverse actions of past months on the ZAD all together, the intention is to make it seem as if they come from the same place (a couple of bad zadists) and target the same victims (nice farmers and citizens). It’s almost funny to see the good old media/political discourse of insecurity here, and one could almost say that it’s only to better place themselves as protectors.

But let’s take a step back. An attack against journalists during the “March of the Sticks” organized by the CMDO and the Coord on October 8th, 2016, the interruption with compost of France In-

soumise's visit to the ZAD, tags on the road against the organized tourism of the CMDO and their controversial hiking trails before the Coord weekend of the 8-9th of July 2017, the disruption of a lecture by a group of "experts" linked to the high-speed rail lobby and who also present to the National Front [Fascist party], and then we have barbed wire fences cut and cows who get out in October, and we rush to attribute it to anti-speciesist squatters who are kind of loudmouths and conveniently right here, and who anyways are somewhat dissonant in this struggle of dairy farmers.

It's true that these things are happening, but they are diverse, and a little too complex to lump all together. I understand that the Coord would be upset to see one of their famous "3 pillars" targeted (politics, media, expertise). But, apart from the barbed wire, the acts which are presented as sabotage seem like the only actions possible to be heard amidst the clamor of those in charge, without being recuperated. There have always been actions like that in this struggle, and no one made that much drama about it.

Amongst the "allies" of the Coord, Nicolas Hulot, Jose Bove, Melenchon (all three prominent leftist political figures), the Green Party, and a number of journalists have been regularly targeted over the years. No one can really be surprised, and least of all the Coord; unless maybe their new occupant allies in the CMDO had promised them calm.

And here, I come to what I believe was the real target during these events: a certain dynamic of a dominant minority within the occupation movement. One that considers the media allies, that chooses to organize in priority with hierarchical, reformist organizations, that wants control and a beautiful image of the zone, imposing hiking trails and clearing the barricade road, that sells the ZAD in bookstores as the ungovernable "commune," but that works on a daily basis to allow nothing to escape its control, that is scornful towards the masses of squatters while taking advantage of the strength they produce... basically, they act like shitty politicians.

EPILOGUE - FEBRUARY 2018 - HOT OFF THE PRESS

The "movement against the airport" is dead. The prime minister sounded the end of recess, there were beautiful inter-component accolades, the champagne was ready and the cameras too. We'll have a nice bunch of historic pictures to accompany the political careers of our young winners. Beautifully staged, in short, and everything began to be put away in its right place the very next day. I'd like to elaborate here on this week following the victory, to help leave a trace of it among others. Because we don't "win" every day, right? So might as well take the time to "savor" the details, to not let them be cast into oblivion so easily.

To start with, I believe the abandonment of the project was a done deal for quite a while in the upper economic and governmental spheres. The question for the government was rather when to announce it to be able to proceed calmly to the actual problematic phase, that of the re-conquest of the "zone of non-law", the shame of any state that respects itself. Our new victors' story will prefer to recall government pressure to justify the act of the *movement* itself clearing the D281, only 5 days after the "victory". But the question for a certain segment of the elite of the *movement* had been for a while how to allow the state to show that it was retaking control of the place. In fact, this way out had already been opened months before by the *movement's* citizen elite (some spokespersons of the ACIPA and Naturalists in Struggle) by offering the gift of the barricade road as a prelude to negotiations on "the future of the zad".

The D281 and its barricades against Operation César in 2012, which became the "*Chicanes*", represent a five-year knot of multiple conflicts internal to the struggle. Numerous arguments have been made through the years for clearing the road. Neighbors in surrounding villages are scared to take it and be extorted. The obstructions had to be moved to allow farm vehicles to pass. "Roads are a common good, it's up to the state to manage them." But above all, the movement's demonstrated intention to go negoti-

CONCLUSION

Some people seem to attach themselves to “territory” as the new terrain of struggle at all costs, probably because class struggle has lost its sexy connotation in this corner of the world. It seems like a new revolutionary subject is appearing, which would be someone who “inhabits” somewhere, quite ambitious... As for me, I think that if this struggle has brought a lot to an imaginary of confrontation with the State, capitalism, and everything that makes them strong, this contribution isn’t found in place, in material power and its perennality, but in the practices and questions at play. Also in the numerous structures that have been developed and perfected around the struggle against the airport, that will be a source of inspiration far and wide, for a long time: medic team and medic trainings, anti-repression committee or legal team, radical cooking collectives, autonomous camps, pirate radio, rap workshop, ways of collectively organizing direct action or the conflict resolution group on the zone, reflections-attempts-encounters-solidarities around domination based on gender, class, race and age, large-scale not-for-profit collective food production, diverse and varied workshops and skillshares. Knots of relations have been woven between all these people that have passed through here during these years of intense fermentation, and who will continue on their paths with bits of this story of struggle, its successes and failures, its joy and its anger.

on the ZAD
November, 2017

I imagine there was tension amongst those who signed the text, maybe even it was discussed with people before they were asked to sign. Is this a version that keeps the meaning but softens the form, to not go too far? The underlying question posed in the text is still “should we break away now from the rest of the occupants we have problems with, to stay in privileged communication with the citizen *components*? Or should we cover our asses a bit to calm the day-to-day conflicts on the zone? And of course, we can feel the urgency, always the urgency, to not take the time to ask too many questions, and to convince everyone to follow us.

By the way, the unconditional support affirmed multiple times lately by the CMDO towards the “historic inhabitants” and the “components” reveals a strange way to “inhabit” somewhere, whether a struggle or a territory. Making alliances with neighbors because we have common interests doesn’t mean pretending to agree about everything, creating unreal expectations and then finding yourselves always going the extra mile to maintain this false trust. Trying to build trust doesn’t mean forgetting that we also have conflicts of interest, notably that of a “return to normal”. Unless, little by little, by pretending to be united, we become so without realizing it. But to what ends?

COMPOSITION?

Like any word that suddenly appears and gets recited everywhere as though a decisive discovery, the word “composition” evokes within me above all many things that aren’t at all new. I will try to share my point of view, via a few “old things” in order to make this as understandable as possible.

At the beginning of the occupation of the ZAD, I’m speaking here of 2010-2011-2012, an era so close yet that feels strangely so far already, we had to put in a huge amount of energy everyday to pull off existing outside of and facing the Coord. The occupants never intended to participate in it. In 2011-2012, two different observers

were sometimes sent to their monthly meetings to make the link, and also to do a little bit of espionage. It also happened that some of their leaders passed by the weekly inhabitants' meeting to say something, a piece of news, a reproach, and to listen to whatever they could.

In this text, when I'm talking about the Coord, it's in order to name the small group of bosses who lead it, and its implied hierarchical functioning. The numerous members of different orgs which compose it are very diverse, and have direct relations with the occupants. Often they would be in disagreement with their orgs during different conflicts. The people who find themselves here with the label of "leader" are people in their own right with their own sensitivities, their course in life. I myself have shared moments of trust and sincerity with some of them, and I could value them as people outside of their leadership roles. But it always seemed to me indispensable to expose, in assemblies, the conflicts that we face.

We, the occupants, weren't many, a few dozen, a majority of a libertarian and feminist tendency and with experience squatting. We were very dispersed throughout the Zone in order to better look out for and interfere with the advances of the workers. We didn't really know each other, nor the people in the area. Little by little, we met the "inhabitants who resist," who had called for the occupation, with whom we were in solidarity on the ground, facing down this project, the landlord Vinci, and also facing the Coord and its hesitancy to act concretely.

I chose to come live here because this struggle seemed to be a good place to try things differently, to put some sticks in the gears of this shitty world where they're not expecting it. For me, it was an attempt to dodge "ecology", too easily recuperated, because it was just an airport among hundreds, and not one of those famous nuclear power plants with environmentalists proposing windmills in its place. It was also an attempt to kill the "Mother Nature" myth, because the land involved was *bocage* and so by definition

political current in the 70's in Italy. The people who hold this position (on the ZAD) aren't representative of an "autonomist" current today. But these people don't need to be many to manage to have influence as long as some of them don't hesitate before any accumulation of power to arrive at their end goals. In the legalization process of the ZAD, precise places are often referenced, like the autonomous space of the Tanneries in Dijon (moved, legalized, and financed by the city government in 2016), or Longo Maï and their network of cooperative farms in different places. The functioning seems less secret and more easy to join, because it's more diffuse. The goal would be to propagate autonomy, as a sort of immediate putting into practice of communism outside of a party structure, by the constitution of a network of stable places, autonomous of power and capitalism. These places of experimentation and resources can be illegally occupied, punctually as during counter summits, or acquired by conventional means such as private property, financed by the creation of businesses or by sponsorship. Another possible way is to promote and participate in "territorial struggle", to constitute a *rapport de force* with the State, by allying with other autonomous groups for illegal occupation, direct action, and material force while allying with reformists for institutional pressure – with the goal of ending in a compromise that will give the place permanence.

✂ LITTLE INTERMISSION ✂

It was written in *Call* in 2001:
"We're on the side of those who organize"
- "Ah, and where do you want to go?"
Today, the new slogan could be:
"We're on the side of those who win"
- "Congratulations! You're well on your way,
mauvaise troupe of elites!"

On one side, we have a dynamic linked to what I would call the Imaginary Party, since they already named themselves in this way so as not to have another one. Mostly they are called “appelistes” in reference to the 2001 book “Call” (Appel in french). The mass publications of the Invisible Committee, or the more elitist ones of the magazine *Tiqqun*, seem to want to define big political and strategic lines, and most of all to seduce by a kind of romantic communist poetry, with a vocabulary that is like an Orwellian newspeak to better envelop a mashup of discourses we’ve already seen. In this world which is described as a “desert,” the insurrection would be the overthrow which would put everything in play, back to zero, with no class distinctions or other relationships of domination. It’s simpler like that, no need to dwell on it ahead of time. Paradoxically, we should prepare ourselves materially, well, obviously whoever has the resources to, to play our cards right and get what we can out of the situation. The quest for power is the ultimate motive, as much for acting within the insurrectional situation as to be able to provoke it. The way to get there is to build a stable network of places that will be material bases, by buying big pieces of land that are strategically and evenly geographically distributed, by creating businesses, by finding wealthy benefactors, by running for political office. “Inhabiting” is the word of the day, it allows for material alliances with neighbors, no matter their political alignment, and to be able to pull legitimacy from that to take local political initiatives. The “partisans” move about within the network, and are invited to participate in demonstrations or moments of riot spectacle, organized by their friends or by other people. Their alliances almost always take hidden forms, whether that be among anarchists in a riot, or among the Left in moments of organization. In all cases, they hide their belonging to an organization, even informal. Finally, after a time of “inhabiting” and accumulating material strength, we can wonder if their real interest in an insurrectional reversal of the situation still has a reason to exist.

On the other side, on the ZAD, we have the dynamic I would name “autonomist” because of their systematic reference to that

totally human-created and functional. And to hold at a distance the “return to the land” of bourgeois-bohemians, because the ZAD is facing a massive urban expansion plan with little room for dreams of gardens and fresh spring water, tiny beautiful babies and everyone-should-just-do-like-us. All that while connecting to other realities around that which the city nearby concentrates and produces as relations of exploitation, control, democratic and “citizen” manipulation, scorn, uniformization, repression and segregation.

Looking back at it now, it seems kind of ridiculous, what I’m saying. But it wasn’t that long ago that the Green Party careerists had to keep their distance because they were seen as enemies, and that the cops came to mess with us without waiting for ministerial approval. During these years, we were looking to meet and mutually support other folks who were fucked over by this world and didn’t believe in the “democratic” fairytale of the left.

Also, we started to do “speaking tours.” In these moments of going to other places to talk about what it was like to live here, we said that we’d chosen this angle of attack and that we were going to make good on our word and throw a cherry on top. And so it’d be good if folks kept an eye out for what was going on here, because we might eventually start fucking with the proper functioning of things and we would need support, but we didn’t want our callouts to interfere with or weaken other struggles, which often seemed a lot more substantial and concrete than this lousy airport in the sticks.

On site, it took a lot of attention for the occupants to learn to get to know each other, understand each other’s ways and objectives, find ourselves side-by-side acting together, and always discussing and getting muddled in identifying disagreements and finding common points.

One of these common points was that we didn’t want a leader. It’s not like it never happened that someone took on a leadership

role, but we tried a lot of things to either make these moments visible or to avoid them. In regard to the feminist occupants, or the non-French-speakers, we collectively confronted relationships of domination which made it so that certain people could take up more space in collective discussions, and thus in decision-making. It was one of the most enriching things that struggling together here gave me.

There were many *points of conflict with the Coord*: illegal practices, squatting, direct actions, “violence,” the rejection of journalists, the struggle against the state, anti-institutional and anti-capitalist. All that was clumsily contained within the “...and it’s world” [referencing the catchphrase of the ZAD “against the airport and it’s world”] but came to connect to their struggle against an airport and radicalize their citizen-friendly, non-violent image. There was also the question of territory, and the fact that we’d come to live in this place without any connection to those in the Coord, who mostly lived outside the ZAD in the surrounding villages. This gave us a position of strength from which to observe, decide and act. And we were also in connection with other groups from Nantes and the surrounding area and further away, whom the Coord could not control. All along, during this period of struggle, we experienced a number of moments together facing the cops, periods of public inquiry, demos, drillings, archeological surveys, plots on the land. Information was shared with a few people in the Coord, so as not to step on each other’s toes too much. But there were also many quarrels, misunderstandings, feelings of betrayal, bad faith on both sides, and disgusting backstabblings that can’t be forgotten, in the media or in the political sphere, on the part of a few bigmouths of the Coord, whether self-proclaimed spokespeople of the ACIPA or of Europe Écologie.

With time, given that we stayed there, gave ourselves the means, and were growing in number, I believe the Coord ended up telling themselves that they had to account for us for the time being. And everyone felt the need for moments of discussion, collective or individual, to get to know each other better, have keys to how

alternative lifestylists and other proponents of “degrowth”, two tendencies are particularly strong and organized. In this particular struggle, they are strongly allied within the CMDO group to the point that it could seem like they’re unified. They don’t define themselves, going as far as to pretend sometimes that they don’t really exist, so it’s easy not to see them, and probably more comfortable this way. While taking into account the diversity of the people who are linked to them, their internal conflicts, and the informal manner which lets them deny a certain cohesion, I have chosen here to name them anyway as tendencies.

With the years and the massive publicity that they have made, the ZAD has become a kind of unavoidable model which seduces across the protest movement in France but also much farther. For this reason, I decided to contribute at my local level to a larger understanding of the situation. I will give here elements of analysis and observation which are my own, and thus partial, but coming from countless discussions, here and elsewhere. I consider this to be already known to State intelligence services but not put in common publicly inside the protest movement. I am conscious that this choice goes against the interests of these groups that would like to be discreet about their intentions and their existence. Yet, in the euphoria of power, some have chosen to give themselves visibility as individuals and to incarnate this struggle with their faces in the media. But is their recent reformist choices that have incited me to consider them on the side of the State, and so to render them visible, as reactionary forces in struggles to come. In addition, I know of their local use of threats and intimidation, and so I prepare myself to have to deal with that. But I know also that many others are already exposed in this position of obstacles in their road, and so I will join them.

I will try here to offer ways of understanding their two political perspectives. This attempt has limits in a schema which denies individuals, and defines them against their will. But I judge that it’s one of the rare inconveniences of being in a dominant position, and also that a rough penciled map is often better than nothing for orienting oneself in the political fog of the moment.

When a dominant group takes initiatives without worrying themselves about being understood or joined, we try to remedy it to give a chance for everyone to find their place, by creating formal meeting spaces with lots of facilitation protocols, moderation, speaking lists, and report-backs. The result can take a bureaucratic form that consumes tremendous energy to give it life, and that isn't that much more accessible, while having taken on a more democratic air. For example: the assembly of uses.

In a moment of unclarity, a head of the CMDO said:
"The gamble of the assembly of uses is an attempt to hybridize two modes: that of hierarchical organizations and horizontal assemblies."
 Cool! A sort of diagonal then?
 Did you make that up?
 Thanks for daring to make this gamble for us.

What is eye-catching in this *assembly of uses* is especially the resemblance to a sort of municipal council, although more modern, with the pre-planned meeting agenda, its tribune of officials and its circle of important participants. And then there are the "dumb country people" of which I'm a part who are so off-topic when they try to participate, with their questions about what is going on here, or their yelling when they say their piece. They nonetheless serve to give a democratic appearance to the play. And for the several people who already sit elsewhere in municipal councils and other political bodies, it must be rather comfortable and even exciting to live this experiment of "participatory democracy".

DOMINANT POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

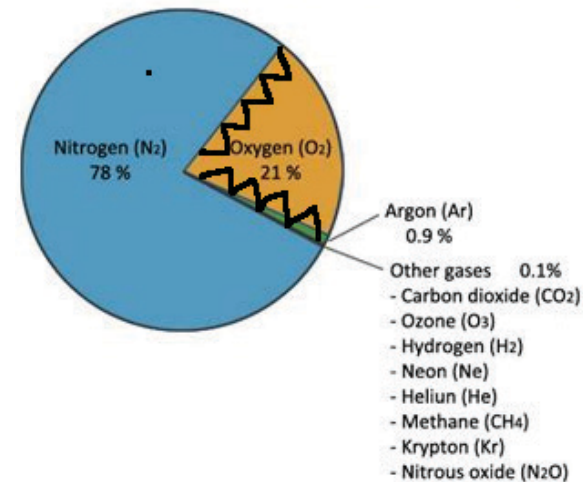
In the struggle against the airport as elsewhere, and also in the occupation movement of the ZAD, different political tendencies share space, ally, and are in conflict. At the sides of anarchists, anti-authoritarians, anti-speciesists, feminists, radical ecologists,

the "other" thinks and accept to approach it all with sincerity, to be able to better anticipate and understand reactions and to have confidence that we'd be able to speak to the problems which presented themselves.

The *movement assemblies* were launched and relaunched regularly at the initiative of the occupants for whom there was, in this struggle, the possibility for each to come and participate without belonging to an organization or group, whether on the "outside" or the "inside." For a long time, this remained a space of debate and of pooling various ideas and projects from different sides, without the pretense of a unitary decision-making body. For me, the "movement" was connected to this creative space, where different tendencies informed and responded to one another, affirmed and critiqued one another, without renouncing their autonomy of initiative.

I believe that's what certain people began to call "*composition*," in any case it's there that I heard this word for the first time. In

Composition of Air



the moment, I didn't pay too much attention when people started talking about the "movement" and its "components." Later, I told myself that the concept of composition more resembled a manner of pacifying the situation, of speaking in seductive words that make conflicts and contradictions disappear. Basically, trying to put us to sleep. To the point of impoverishing this ebullience by searching nonstop for a "middle path," such that in a "movement" we end up leaving the surprising diversity behind in favor of a mass moving "all together."

In general I prefer to speak about the relation of forces within struggles, and in particular to describe what was constructed during these years, because we really started from zero and had to gradually build our strength... to become this force worth taking into account...

For me, *the evictions in 2012* and the very large response showed that this attempt to find our own place in this struggle over the course of a few years had worked, as well as giving the struggle political meaning that went further than the question of the airport and local issues. The evictions were also the first time in the struggle when the occupation took center stage, with the initiative inviting to resist and reoccupy, reconstruct, with the active solidarity of tons of new people alongside those already implicated in the struggle. And the Coord couldn't keep up, sort of like a union surpassed by its base. And we know how difficult it is for leaders to lose control, or even an understanding of what's happening.

Anyways, everyone was lost then. That period was really violent. For the occupants who were there before, the landmarks had disappeared, houses destroyed, living collectives dispersed, the roads occupied by the cops... and 300 new people to orient in this swamp of war. How to familiarize them with the complexity when we didn't even know which direction to send them to find a dry place to sleep? Among them, there were many different realities, eco-warriors coming to save the newts, degrowth-ers coming to do organic farming, full-time barricade warriors, folks who live on

chapters in the area, notably the CGT AGO of Vinci) to participate, while two-thirds of the occupants are left behind. Even the *zadnews* seems suddenly invaded by the bureaucratic language as a sort of official journal that reports to the administered with all the good will of elites.

For anti-authoritarians, one of the risks is to concentrate on what is most visible in the forcing through of decisions, the "how a decision is made," and to ceaselessly find oneself supporting the struggle moving in a direction they don't want by doing all the work to give them a more acceptable form. A nice division of labor... The two other organized groups of occupants often take on this role of "limiting the damage."

For years, the majority of available energy has been spent on chasing the CMDO train to try to hook all the other wagons on. But in trying to get everyone on the same train, we forget to ask ourselves where it's going, and why. And while the "movement" was becoming a train, many disgusted people preferred to jump off while it was going rather than to follow this path altogether. We sometimes hear among those who climbed aboard: "The CMDO nonetheless has contributed a lot to the struggle." I would say rather that there were lots of consequences, like an avant-garde which is all-the-more efficient for its subtly reformist strategy, and so only meets with surmountable obstacles. These natural leaders will claim to have taken this direction for strategic reasons when faced with the critique of the "radicals." Meanwhile, we can ask ourselves if the true engine isn't simply the Coord and reformist logic in general. And how long will the CMDO wagon last?

In situations where a group crushes another, we see roles of mediation appear. Despite the pretension to restrain the dominant group, in practice it mainly reminds the dominated group of its weakness in the situation and its interest in submitting without making waves. A good freak-out is sometimes what feels best when we're being crushed. The most shocking example is the cleaning of the D281 which I'll speak of in the epilogue.

daily practices on the ZAD that could potentially be normalized, from bakery hygiene to housing norms. The adopted hypothesis is the creation of a unique legal structure to present to the State. “This entity would aim to encompass the swarming of the ZAD to maintain it in richness, really a coat under which the margins of invention and freedom could continue to develop”.

Perhaps the assembly will try to then simply integrate into its *conflict management commission* the rotating conflict resolution group coming from the weekly inhabitants’ meeting, called the “cycle of 12.” And its *welcoming commission* will give permits to build and cultivate land. Since then, they evoked that in the case of the airport project being abandoned, there would no longer be a *movement*, and so no longer an *assembly of the movement*. They would then become the unique collective assembly, much better policed. Creating this duplicate assembly serves to return the central power of initiative to the institutional fringe of the *movement*, and to empty the other assembly spaces of meaning. With its functioning in commissions, all the moments of assembly, including outside of the “assembly of uses,” become a string of report-backs of groups of experts who overtake the administrated masses.

How could the hundreds of other occupants feel like they have a handle on what is happening around them with these reforms that all the other *components*, led by the CMDO, have put in place? They pop out of the hat like emergency measures tied to the rhythm of mediation with the State, and of unified reaction to an internal enemy who “attacks the collective bases from which we try to construct a collective future”...

I would like to take the time to describe the bureaucratic turn in progress. But the rhythm of change is so quick and the codes so hard to understand that we can get dizzy just trying to follow it. The circle of actual participants in the new process is reduced to a small number of people trying to adapt to this mode of organization. These assemblies foretell the “cleanup of the ZAD” announced by one of the heads of the Coord. For example, they invite the “unionist collective” (several union members from

the street coming to a place where they could finally feel welcome and go head to head with the cops who made their daily lives hell.

There were a ton of problems on the zone that spring, lots of misunderstanding and aggression on everyone’s part. The new arrivals felt looked down on and misinformed. The veterans felt invaded and not respected. The Coord and the farmers of the zone were afraid of losing their hand in the struggle. The collective COPAIN came to occupy a newly-abandoned farm, as a more radical manner of embodying their agricultural point of view, being on the zone rather than staying in the good graces of the outside. This was the fruit of several nice encounters which took time and that arrived at certain practices, direct action, and with tractors to boot. But it was difficult to make their manic objective of re-cultivating the ZAD coexist with all those folks who landed there with nothing but their determination, their chaotic ways and their idea of “Zone to defend,” with all that could possibly mean. After the evictions, I had the impression that I’d spent an enormous amount of my time dealing with messes on the Zone, mediating between the locals, farmers or activists, and the new occupants, with such a cloud of misunderstanding and tension that it became difficult to hold space for initiatives and reflection.

It was at this moment that I realized that I was burning out from this joyless maintenance work. A devotion had swallowed all the other initiatives I’d been involved in these last few years, and which had made sense, because they weren’t centered on the ZAD. But also, it permitted other new occupants to arrive en masse, to have time to envision the future, and the path free to choose which strategy to adopt, which connections and which resources to favor. In short, how to insert themselves and benefit from that which had been built and shared before their arrival, to gain strength and orient everything in a precise direction, without hesitating to re-write history in real-time only with greater means. “A sexy struggle that will serve as an example to feed the imaginary of Insurrection and Autonomy.”

And what could be sexier than the image of tractors making barricades? For me, the direct involvement of these neighboring farmers in this moment of confrontation with the state was an occasion rich with encounter between very different worlds. For example, some ranchers from the area and some vegan squatters experimented with mechanizing legume cultivation. But on the other side of this intermingling, I believe certain people there sensed an opportunity for an alliance, toward an unprecedented material force. It was at this point that the choice was made to orient the struggle in an agricultural perspective nearly exclusively for the next few years. Some gained an image of strength in the radical sphere, others gained a radical image in the agricultural sphere.

In parallel, support committees had been springing up all over the place, and it was also difficult to explain to them the complexity of what was happening here, the eternal conflicts with the Coord, the new diversity within the occupation movement. At the same time, these support committees brought together very different sorts of people organizing in their cities and who had experienced smaller-scale versions of the same political conflicts as us. So, I started to see the sense in countering this pervasive idea of “Oh yeah, it’s really great that things are going well between y’all, where we live we just don’t manage,” with “Actually, we fight about all sorts of shit all the time. So by arguing all the time, we’ve learned what to expect from one another when we take an initiative that will be conflictual.”

The force of the “movement” was very tied to the struggle’s geographic breadth, which forced the state to have to make huge preparations if it wanted to intervene on the Zone. But what’s more, it had to take into account this diversity of politics and of modes of acting, present on the Zone as well as in the committees. It was difficult to build autonomy of initiative in the committees, and I find that often they were considered more as a labor force than as allies with their own stakes and positions.

these recent moments of unified mobilization speak to? A race of numbers to affirm a symbolic and pacified force. During this time, the *movement* meticulously avoids the downtown of Nantes since the demonstration of February 22, 2014, its “trauma” in the media and rioting that was publicly condemned by the Coord. It was the group *Dès-qu’on-pense* (‘As soon as we think of it’), ancestor of the CMDO, which had chosen to invite the elite of the Coord from the beginning of the organization of this demonstration, rather than to simply let them join the initiative proposed to the *movement* as a whole. The other occupiers and the committees weren’t informed of this demonstration until after in the *movement assembly*.

The effect was to give back to the Coord the central and reactionary position that they had lost during the evictions. How can anyone be surprised that they felt betrayed during the confrontations that had clearly been prepared and that they hadn’t seen coming? Then their public dissociation, and their obstruction up to now of even the slightest common event in town? Then, the price of the *unity of the struggle* was to not put pressure on Nantes, the real site of decision-making, to no longer ask too much of the Coord, and to rebuild “trust.”

This story recounts how the assembly of the movement above-all became a theatre of false horizontality, already-made decisions between elites and showing off to reassure the Coord. Ever since, we see the loss of the autonomy of initiative of other forces, and thus a major loss in the diversity of practices.

But especially, at the end of this text, a new assembly appeared, called “the assembly of uses,” which surpasses the “past separations between residents, occupiers, and farmers.” Its *judicial commission*, already existing before the invitation to the first session, proposed in its already prepared report-back, to “constitute a multifaceted delegation that makes an interlocutor of mediators (for Macron, the president) regarding the future of the ZAD.” An alarming report-back of this commission, which became the *commission of hypotheses for the future*, erected a long list of surveys of

The ZAD is a weaving together of wobbly and arduous efforts at collectivity, currently unprecedented and untranslatable into their language. And we must discuss together to imagine the future? “For a future without airport” says the fashionable slogan. Ah? Uh, “and its world”? Ah yes, well, we’re just taking the coat! We see already several of the existing structures that have registered with the institutions, like a dairy farm, a self-owned brewery, a farmer-baker, and maybe one day a nonprofit status for the *Taslu* bookstore, a wood shop, a *farm school*. All these “issued from the struggle against the airport” to differentiate yourself and not simply resemble all the other self-owned ‘eco-friendly’ dissenting businesses that already flourish everywhere else.

A large part of what is extraordinary and actually subversive in this zone is what is uncontrollable and incomprehensible, and not the capacity of certain projects to enter into the institutional codes. And this is also what scares leaders from all sides the most. And rightly, the claim of the CMDO to invent “still unprecedented hybrid forms” that allow continuing to live on the ZAD while badly concealing their contempt of that which lives outside their control, beyond their comprehension, and will disappear from their imagination once an end is put to it.

That said, there is probably still the necessity to maintain a radical image and keep daily life bearable on the zone by avoiding provoking a revolt of the occupiers of the ZAD. So a plan for internal reform that doesn’t say its name is announced in the text “In Suspension or In Flight?”.

While finally taking responsibility for their non-interest in the weekly inhabitants meeting, the CMDO reaffirms that it’s “in the movement assembly that the most audacious initiatives were taken.” They forget to say that it is their own that they are speaking of.

And what audacity in recent years to propose once a year a mass spectacle that’s always more symbolic and inoffensive. What do

ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN

To me, the basic conflict that posed the biggest problem to the Coord was their inability to find *leaders amongst the occupants* with whom to decide important things, and who would ensure they would be respected by all the “uncontrollables” of the ZAD and elsewhere. Constantly, for the last 7 years, they have attempted to find these representatives amongst the occupants. Regularly, when they realized that this was not working, we were put under pressure, threatened, and there were public acts of dissociation.

For example, their recent tantrum-theatre piece leaving the movement assembly in August 2017, under the pretext that the occupants didn’t know how to behave, was just another expression of this same frustration of leaders without privileged representatives to talk to. But what can we say about the theatrical departure from the same assembly by a few occupants of CMDO, and what this reveals of their role in this struggle? Was this gesture one of similar frustration or an act of support? In any case it was a sign of recognition. For the past few years these signs of recognition between the same people have become numerous, and they create a difference in relations between the search for horizontal functionality of the occupation and the assumed vertical/hierarchical functioning of the Coord. This difference is the space of opportunity inhabited by CMDO and COPAIN with their informal hierarchies. These two groups pull the strings whilst walking a line down the middle of all the forces present. Their principal concern seems to be with efficiency, by reassuring the Coord with their unconditional support in the assemblies, going as far as to be their potential “strong arm” in conflicts with occupants.

Amongst the occupants, there are two other groups which assemble influential people with material means of production in daily life and who have major strategic links. These groups were created, and they are defined in relation to CMDO as counter-powers, and their members could then find themselves in the same situation of having to endorse leadership roles, notably in critical

situations. But the majority try to maintain the open spaces of collective discussion as well as they can, with the rhythm imposed by those running ahead.

By targeting CMDO, I do not look to vilify this dominant group in particular, nor the individuals that make it function. They have only taken on the roles that we find in other collective contexts, the spaces that we leave for them to take out of the absence of a culture of struggle which could detect the taking of power and combat those who engage in it.

As with all dominant groups, we hear them crying persecution and conspiracy when we criticize them. As with all dominant groups, it is not necessary for them to have the intention to step on others' necks. They just do it, that's all. And when this is pointed out to them:

"Oops, we didn't see that you were there. Sorry, it was an accident"

Or: "It had to be done, and if you don't agree, it's just that you haven't understood what's good for you"

Or finally: "Well, really, you shouldn't have crossed us."

Like every dominant group, they consider that it is up to others to take more space, not to themselves to leave space for others. Like every dominant group, they speak of victimization and self-fulfilling prophecy for those who say they have no place. Like every dominant group, they don't ask the question of what allows them to have this position – the social and material conditions which permit them the time and the means to reflect, anticipate, take risks, be recognized by other dominant groups for the purpose of making alliances... Basically, to have the advantage over those who have material preoccupations, are in difficult situations, and others who worry about everyone being able to find their place or who try to patch things up, particularly after the dominants have forced others' hands.

For my part, I recognize that it is *difficult to organize in a horizontal manner* and be able to be effective. The search to be free of hier-

What is called reformism is to consider that the structure of the State can be improved and that it is desirable to do so. People also speak of "citizenism" to depict the belief that from the position of the citizen we can be an actor of this permanent reform. But the search for a reform can also be an occasional strategy to cope with an asymmetric relation of force. For example, prisoners in struggle choose different forms of action (from petition to rebellion through diverse refusals in the daily functioning of incarceration) that counteract the functioning of the prison to put pressure on and negotiate their demands for improvements to prison life. When we are locked up and isolated in this sadistic perfection that is prison, the destruction of prisons is an objective that seems very far off, and the smallest advances can feel like a victory.

Without denying that we are in a struggle with an asymmetric relation of force with the State, it is also true that everyone admits that situations of struggle with as much of a force as we have here are rare. How then to explain this paradox that it is precisely the position of force that leads to the choice of reformism? How to explain that it is precisely these groups with revolutionary claims who propose to negotiate their integration as if they were defendants in a stalemate, at the same time that they chant about their power?

The CMDO proposes to invent "still unprecedented hybrid forms" for the judicial plan to be tolerated by the State. With big words, we learn that these forms will be just a "coat" that covers the "body," in other words a sort of administrative mockery that allows the ZAD to keep its subversive side. Installing a legal structure, declaring an activity, registering with one's identity, centralizing decisions in a permanent commission with hierarchical structures, using the word "project" to promote ourselves as the managers of our own lives, normalizing housing, redoing the barricade road to be able to drive 90km/h like the good old days to make a good faith gesture and prove we can manage things ourselves... These are just several small details to be satisfied, for people who learned the language of administrators at the most elite schools and who have "projects" that are all compatible with these constraints.

REFORMISM

Each discourse about a struggle is also a key of understanding delivered to the enemy. The capitalist state in its democratic form would like nothing better than to understand its critics, to better assimilate and adapt to them, as “innovation” has long been its primary axis of development. For example, in the long struggle of the anti-nuclear movement, what remains of the strong anti-militarist, anti-industrial and anti-State critiques? In contrast, we note that the ecological aspect was retained and valorized, because it offered new economic opportunities, notably in the commercial development of the wind turbine industry or solar panel technology, useful to many other military-industrial purposes. But yet more largely, ecology serves as the base for an entire new market of the study-management-damage control of capitalism, by calling for technological progress that itself generated these damages. And we come full circle.

It makes me dizzy to imagine what will remain of the struggle against the airport after the famous “victory,” with the legalization of some and the disappearance of others.

From my perspective, to imagine placing myself in one of these “components of the movement against the airport,” I must first understand myself to be equal with organizations such as political parties, unions, NGOs, and citizen assemblies in this struggle against the State and the capitalist interests that it defends. Yet who knows better than the State the difference between that which wants to destroy it or improve it, and will always know to apply it at the proper time?

It's this precise gamble that the members of the CMDO make: to position themselves as detached components of the occupation movement, in solidarity with and equal to other reformist forces, to appear alongside them as acceptable by the State and to participate in negotiations to persist at all costs.

archy complexifies decision-making, and therefore the efficacy of rapid and centralized decision making. But by asking the question of the means by which to obtain an end, we allow the “now” to be political, rather than just another strategic moment towards a brilliant “future”. This mirage which always comes out on top, and which evokes for me the urgency and seduction of the “strategy-which-doesn't-say-where-it's-headed.”

I have also often had trouble with the tension between efficiency and horizontality, and the temptation to react to situations with urgency being the driving force, rather than sharing information so that everyone can position themselves. I have been criticized sometimes for the space I've taken up, individually or with other occupants that I chose to organize with. We chose to form a small group based on political affinity and lasting engagement, because the blurred politics and transiency on the ZAD were tiring.

Our seniority on the zone and our links with those around us provided some understanding of the whole and allowed for initiative and space to maneuver. I remember one weekly inhabitants' meeting in which we counted the number of times people spoke, it showed that I had taken too much space because of the important information that I had in my possession and my ease expressing myself. In some moments it was difficult to find ways in which to share information and proposals without taking a central and essential role.

What appeared essential to me was accepting to question this position and to take the time to put the keys of understanding in common, even if it meant slowing down.

To look for ways to share and spread confidential information while keeping the flexibility of affinity-based organizing for direct actions.

Also to acknowledge when a proposal comes from a group, rather than to pretend that it just appeared in the head of someone, by

chance, and that several people in the assembly find it fantastic and have ideas to make it better.

Or to invite new people to meet other groups in the struggle to avoid the fixation of roles as intermediaries.

And to have the time and curiosity for what happens on the ZAD that is not ‘productive’, meeting people who are passing through or who need a place to be during a time of difficulty.

I also think that there will always be problems of power which will arise again and again. No rule can ever replace collective vigilance, humility and listening to critique. We have to feel strong, to be able to identify these problems and formulate these criticisms, so that the large assemblies function and everyone finds their place. A culture of autonomous struggle should know to be based on spaces of discussion and organization in which people recognize each other and choose who is welcome according to their position in the subject that is to be discussed. This practice also called *non-mixity* or *chosen mixity* and is notably used in struggles against institutionalized oppressions (sexism or racism for example). Often these practices are attacked by people who know how to find their place in general and in particular in the assemblies qualifying as ‘separatist’ anything that happens out of their sight.

I think that only political sincerity allows for a real discussion about strategy. *The bludgeon-argument* ‘it’s strategic’ allows decisions to be forced through without tackling the political aspect of the chosen direction, nor how it was chosen. By listening continuously to talk about strategy, we end up believing a “pure strategy” exists which would be the best in itself. All strategies, even survival strategies, are preceded by political and ethical choices which are important to discuss if we want to build confidence. To say where everyone wants to go in order to see how to advance together means identifying conflicts and naming them. And this is what created the situation on the ZAD for which everyone congratulates themselves.

concepts of a Left program: the value of work and productivity, the preservation of the environment and energy transition, direct democracy and the division of tasks, local management and the rational development of a territory, the sacred union and social peace, the interior enemy and the state of emergency, and finally the radiant “future” and its new constitution of the “6 points”.

We can imagine several benefits to this communications strategy aimed at seducing the Left. Speaking to them in a language they understand is a way of giving them access to the struggle. They feel invited to it, and probably reassured by this new radical legitimacy that they so lacked for continuing to “be on the Left”. In exchange, this allows for anticipating repression by merging with this influential mass respected by the State, to be less vulnerable. We already could see this in 2008 during the ‘Tarnac affair’. And the call for support to the Left by a group of insurrectionalists who disguised themselves for the occasion as friendly and inoffensive “alternative” folks, attacked by a State that had made a mistake in the target of its repression.

I want to talk here of another consequence of inviting the Left into our struggles. The Left has this capacity to understand the idea of the destruction of the State by those who escape its control. It then has its historic role of transforming it into an offer of pacification via reform. It knows how to bridge two irreconcilable poles, so that one crushes the other and that the opposition is channeled into the neutralizing path that has been prepared for it. The examples are numerous in the history of revolutionary attempts, and mistrust remains strong towards these structures of dialogue with power that are unions, parties, and citizenist groups. They must then find a precise link that opens the door to “composing oneself” with them. In this struggle, they found the “*Comité pour le Maintien Des Occupations*” (Committee for the Maintenance of the Occupations). But with this “maintenance” as an end in itself, one wants to ask: for what purpose? What political project follows this maintenance at all costs? What is ultimately maintained in these occupations when they are legalized?

them. From the poet-prophets of the *Invisible Committee* to the *mauvaise troupe* of historian-storytellers, the style is the romanticization of subversion, and it smacks of grand editorial methods for mass-market seduction. In the process, the diffusion of ideas and of struggle is newly integrated into the market system. Indeed, when we look for efficiency, we know where to find it... These people are intelligent and constantly draw on their capacity to anticipate situations to orient them in their direction. I consider their choices as politically thought out, and they reveal this same pretension to play equal to equal, this time with the world of marketing. Their books are sold in all the chain bookstores and supermarkets, with the promotion and support of the Left media like *Nouvel obs*, *Libération*, *Télérama*. We then logically find their books in the living rooms of the middle-class Left, beside books by Attac (leftist eco tax activists) on energy transition or copies of *Indignez-vous*.

I will speak a bit of this *middle-class Left* because it seems to me to be at a crucial point of affecting the balance of power in France and because I believe that our “subversive” authors understand this well. And it’s not very complicated to understand when one comes from it. I know what I’m talking about, because I come from it too, and I see how even in trying to betray my class, I remain for it a point of entry into the worlds it doesn’t know. Even if only by my way of writing here. They are of the heritage of the “Lights that illuminate the world” and the typically French pride that accompanies it. They derive from it the double luxury of living in material comfort with a progressive good conscience as a bonus. Today, it is painful for them to not acknowledge that their Socialist Party wasn’t actually socialist. Even their own children struggle in the world that they largely contributed to building and to pacifying, and in which they are relatively pretty well off. It must be comforting to see that there are still “rebels,” especially environmentalist ones, who invite them to their sides, like a symbol of reconciliation between generations. Maybe not all is lost.

Behind the famous *imaginary of the ZAD* that we can find in nearly all the public texts and events of recent years are hidden the key

I think that it is here that I am the most hurt, seeing a powerful group chant that “composition” is “one of the most precious things” the ZAD “allowed them to learn”, while they ceaselessly dissimulate their real objectives so as to ally themselves in all directions, and especially towards the top. I’m left with anger at having learned to be afraid of being sincere so as not to be eaten by the Other, their lies and their strategy.

I would like to talk about something I learnt in this struggle. There is an *aspect of the role of leader* that is obvious in the relations of a group towards the exterior. The real leaders are those that know how to recognize each other by talking as equal to equal, to make alliances or pacts between rival groups. Their power within the group is validated by the power of their interlocutors outside the group. In this way when a leader distills strategic information to someone in particular, they give them a place of power, including if it’s in another group. In the same way when someone takes on the role of spokesperson of a group, they become the potential interlocutor of other leaders and so end up carrying their words in return. We have often seen assemblies blocked, awaiting the decisive “news” which is received and given always by the same person. Or, all the recent general assemblies of the movement, so well prepared amongst the leaders of all sides that all the proposals have already been discussed and pre-negotiated, their protests anticipated in a programmed timing. The main issue being to have the “movement speak” in a manner that appears unified, in order to establish permanent dialogue with the government.

PRESS GROUP

In autumn of 2015, a sort of *strategic expertise* group appeared. It rapidly became the unavoidable, go-to place to understand and face down the solely media-driven threat of evictions kicked off by Valls, Socialist Party prime minister. This expertise was incarnated in the “press group”, formed out of urgency by a couple

of squatters and with the idea that it would be temporary. Its intention was to analyze the media discourse around the threat, to anticipate the strategy of the government. Quickly, the objective evolved. It became a strategic spokesgroup through press releases, with the job of spotting and recruiting hungry journalists to partner with in the large national media, Libération, Figaro, Ouest-France, etc. Basically, an incredible list of collaborators of power...

It is precisely here that we see an example of the shift from a strategic approach toward political choices. Studying the discourse of the enemy through the media, then counting on their “forced” transmission of our positions by direct actions that they can’t deny, to end up enlisting them as allies.

Because the seemingly strategic choice to constitute this press group has had enormous political consequences on the last two years of the struggle, I would like to tell another old story about the relationship with the media in this struggle.

In my memory, the first appearance of the idea of a “press group” goes back to the organizing of the *Sabot demo-occupation*, May 7th 2011. The goal was to publicly and massively occupy a piece of land on the ZAD to set up a collective of squatter-farmers. In this period, the local media spoke regularly of “ultras”, “foreign eco-warriors”, or other “violent anarchists” on the ZAD. The argument was to channel the attention of the journalists present to avoid them collecting “everything and whatever” among the people present. They would only have access to a minimalist kind of common position defined in advance in the form of a communique that would be read to them. I don’t remember well the debates in the inhabitants’ meeting about what the contents of this text would be, and I remember that there were several debates about the pertinence and necessity of saying something to the press. At this point in time, I believe that it was pretty common among the squatters to see journalists as enemies. But a group of squatters and the *Reclaim the Fields* network had organized this

going on. From sociology to architecture, the majority are probably sincerely curious and passionate in their research. And their volunteer work, even activist work, is compiled in institutional archives which serve to train the innovating elites and managers of tomorrow. They contribute to the understanding of the world below, to the creation of criminological theories, like those of Alain Bauer and thus, to a more efficient management by the powerful. Who would neither have the time or the eyes or the social codes to come themselves and dive into our hostility.

Despite their convictions, these students are all snitches who don’t know it, not to mention how they imagine participating in the renovation of capitalism in their future professional careers. Few accept to realize their role and to abandon their studies and the place that the system “offers” them.

So, we have this self-evident position of agreeing to speak with journalists. “And there are some good ones” and “we have to talk to people.” So, we imagine ourselves through the virtual eyes of the hypothetical “public opinion.” We unconsciously normalize our own discourse in anticipation of that which “the most people” will be ready to hear. And we make abstract the hierarchical chain of interests that the media serves, the potential censorship, the sensationalist choices which orient (non-)publication. And among what other articles that make you want to vomit? And finally, what central role of “independent counter-power” do we help give them in this shitty world by delegating to them the broadcasting of our resistance. Finally, this legitimacy is all the harder to counter in the moments when the wheel is turning.

SEDUCTION AND ROMANTICISM

The great promotional writings that rush to make History boast the emblems “diversity of tactics” and “movement unity,” but without detailing the complexity and internal conflict that accompany

to the point that each event seemed to have, as its principal goal, newspaper coverage and that the demos made me feel like I was an extra in a propaganda photo. I stood amongst this crowd of people “armed” with sticks as though for making a terrible big budget film, with my stomach twisting faced with this simulation of resistance. And the next event is already planned so as to keep the back-and-forth rhythm vis-à-vis the state thanks to the journalists to whom we guarantee their next scoop.

I think that behind the strategic choice to work with the media is hidden the desire to be heard and understood by the “outside world.” We open the doors to journalists and recognize their social role, which would be to inform the masses of what they don’t see. All while putting on display what is sellable, according to the criteria of the market and the moment, their removed viewpoints of non-participants offer plenty of new information to the repressive apparatus.

In periods of tension within a struggle, we easily have the reflex of mistrusting the work of information-gathering and file-building that the police put into place to anticipate and repress. But the struggle against the state is not just punctual, it plays out on very long timeframes. And this enormous machine deploys maniacal efforts and lots of money to understand and map that which threatens it. Faced with this surveillance, sometimes it even becomes difficult in our daily lives to discern between our paranoia and our complacency, to protect ourselves.

But the system has other gears more subtle and diffuse to analyze and adapt faced with that which puts it into question. The question that we can ask if we think of ourselves as enemies of the system is: *do we want to be comprehensible* to that which is crushing us? And therefore, take the time to define that which is crushing us.

For example, these past years on the ZAD, we’ve seen a tide of young students show up to observe the new or subversive things

event and that day five or six people took on the role of speaking with journalists.

To avoid personalization, two androgynous pseudonyms were chosen: Dominique and Camille. The next day, in the local press, we could read that all the “ZADistes” that the journalists had met were strangely called Camille. Hence the famous “ZADist identity” that all of Facebook began to claim support for, little by little, like something that escapes and subsists on virtual buzz. In the moment, seeing everyone taking up our daily attempts at false identities faced with the investigative work of cops in the struggle, it seemed funny to me. But I quickly had the feeling of seeing a spectacle rise up around it, and this common practice, which was widespread and systematic, disappeared bit by bit to have become almost forgotten today. It passed from concrete resistance to policing and against the personalization of the struggle to a cool online style as one would make an activist head nod with the click of a mouse.

I think it’s important to say that six years of struggle later, many of these same people continue to very often play the role of press contacts – in the *press group* writing press releases or showing their faces in press conferences. Why not add that by a strange happenstance, it’s a good number of the same people who publish under the name “mauvaise troupe” their shiny, sanitized vision of the struggle.

The questions it all made me ask at that time feel even more present today. I saw then the risk of throwing ourselves into a conquest of “public opinion,” like one falls into a trap that I imagine to be at least as old as “democracy.” At that time, it was so clear that journalists were our enemies that I had trouble conceiving how we could seek out working with them. But I didn’t have the motivation to block people who wanted to try that. I just chose to do other things far from the media at that moment, or against them in other moments. Yet, the fact that we would talk to the media as self-evident became normalized very quickly, and it seems to

me that it's never been seriously put into question since, at least for public events. Even if hostility towards the media has been expressed in a continuous way in cities or against their presence on the Zone.

Of course, from time to time, we ask the following questions when the mandate of such a group is up for discussion: "what do we want to say to them?" or "how do we decide what we want to say to them?" or "how do we organize so that the roles rotate?" It resembles so much the good old method of democratic consultation, this manner of not leaving a place for the conflictual question which precedes all the others: "do we really want to talk to them?" "In a centralized way?"

And if yes, through the media...:

Who are we talking to? The enemy? The "masses"?

Why? Playing chess? Seduction?

At what price? Legitimizing vultures? Making things up?

I think that this unusual impression of being able to play move-for-move with journalists from the bourgeois mass media logically lead to the grotesque pretension to go toe-to-toe with Valls in 2015, for example, which might have looked like a game of ping-pong via interposed media. Or like a crown on the activist career for some occupier egos that are a match for those of their great enemy. And the adversaries' blows are anticipated to be able to respond according to the situation, with press releases prepared in advance in the urgent setting of a small, limited group and validated by a small elite group of the "*composantes of the movement.*"

✿ SHORT INTERLUDE ✿

*"The phase of
decomposition
recomposition
of the Socialist Party
is not finished"*

Manuel Valls
November 5th 2017

I don't contest the *strategic value* of the media face-off these past couple of years with all of its virtual guerrilla screenplay by instantaneous press releases in the Figaro. I have a problem with the obviousness of the strategic priority and the absence of political questions around the place that we give to the media, the pretension of mastering the game, the power that comes from it, and the idea of dialogue with the government.

My impression is that the media jumped on the images of war from Operation Cesar and so there was no need for a *press group* to retransmit their spectacle. When something kicks off, they are obliged to transmit it, to be recognized in their role of information-givers. But, they needed to be convinced and fed to broadcast the image of the good zadist who works well, speaks well, is productive and imaginative, funny, pertinent, critical, and intelligible. The political significance of this portrait is a disaster. It feeds the hope of a productivist and reformist alternative of the middle-class Left, which has lost its bearings and is in a crisis of guilt. In the background, the self-organized fantasy of "another world is possible" as long as it stays inside of this one.

The "ZAD Partout" campaign which followed had the goal of weakening the state by multiplying land-based struggles against its projects more so than support committees for the ZAD. In the medias, it was relayed simultaneously by a sort of superficial robot portrait of the zadist softly illuminated posted up in the four corners of France to protect nature. I think we can say that this stereotype also has its strategic value, that of inoffensive sympathy. But its political significance is the abyss of the modern eco-citizen hero, saving the little baby animals threatened by the bad developers, as the only new way to struggle.

Anyway, the autumn of 2015 and 2016 and their eviction threats were the occasion to measure the place that media games were taking in the course of the struggle against the airport. We saw a succession of declarations, announcements, and press conferences from both sides "We're going to evict!" "Let them come!"