

# **One but Many Movements**

**Two Translations from the ZAD on Isolation, Division, and Pacification**

CrimethInc.

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Two weeks ago, thousands of French police attacked the ZAD—the *Zone à Défendre* (Zone To Defend)—an occupied area in which the French government tried for decades to build a widely unpopular airport. Yet every conflict conceals other conflicts within it. Inside the movement, there have been bitter differences about how to deal with power dynamics, whether to negotiate with the authorities, and how to resist the divide-and-conquer tactics of the state.

In the US, we have watched the struggle around the ZAD without presuming to understand all the factors at play. Yet the debates taking place there have spilled over to our side of the Atlantic as well. In hopes of helping other rebels who may confront similar challenges to think through the nuances in advance, we've translated two texts from different sides of these debates, "ZAD: Second Round" and "When Lama Fâché, Llama Spit!" Both appear below with annotations.

Although we can only speak hypothetically from this distance, the fact that the disputants frame their arguments as matters of strategy and principle compels us to weigh in on these questions ourselves. We don't pretend to offer a comprehensive analysis of the events; we can only evaluate the narratives put forward in the texts that are currently available.

While we want all the perspectives in these debates to be heard, we have reservations about both sides. It's precisely because we identify with both parties in any conflict between anti-authoritarians that we always aim to be critical. Our chief goal must be to come out of each conflict stronger and more capable of evaluating our effectiveness rather than simply getting drawn into ideological gang warfare complete with jingoism, loyalty pledges, and smear campaigns.

## A Little Background

On January 17, in the same statement in which he announced the abandonment of the airport project, French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe declared that the French government was determined to regain control of the ZAD:

This is the second decision that I announce today: we will end the area of lawlessness that has flourished for almost 10 years in this area...

The three roads that cross the site of Notre-Dame-Des-Landes must now be returned to free circulation for all. Squats overflowing onto the road will be evicted, obstacles removed, traffic restored. Otherwise, the police will carry out the necessary operations...

The illegal occupants of these lands will have to leave by the spring or will be expelled.

The same day, an "official" press release signed by five of the many organizations involved in the struggle at the ZAD asserted that they would oppose all evictions, but also that they would grant at least one of the Prime Minister's demands themselves:

Regarding the question of the reopening of the road D281, a road closed by the state in 2013, the movement will take the matter in its own hands.

A few days later, on January 22, against the wishes of an outraged minority, a group from the ZAD destroyed the barricades and habitations along road D281. This did not stop the state from raiding the ZAD on April 9 with the intention of evicting and destroying dozens of habitations.

### **Comments on “ZAD: Second Round”**

In “ZAD: Second Round,” below, and another widely circulated text, “The ZAD Will Survive,” the authors justify negotiating with the state and destroying the inhabited fortifications along the road D281 on the grounds that it was necessary to maintain the unity of the movement. By this standard, however, the strategy failed on its own terms. We wouldn’t be debating this in the US if their wager had succeeded.

The blame for the dispute is laid at the doorstep of people who are described as “ultra-radicals,” whom the authors accuse of willfully snatching defeat from the jaws of victory in order to be beautiful losers—all this, for not wanting to open up the route that the police then used to carry out the eviction. If this debate were taking place here in the US, we would almost certainly hear these people called “outside agitators,” and the ones calling them that would be either Democrats or authoritarian leftists.

The authors’ charge is that those who wished to keep the road fortified had not made themselves comprehensible to the rest of the movement. But it seems to us that there was already a problem if the movement could divide along these lines. It’s all well and good for those who won the ensuing power struggle to congratulate themselves on not “withdrawing into their own private domains,” to speak about seeking “a path in common” while carping about those who have spread “a binary and depressive account of the situation.” Rather than blaming those who lost the power struggle, however, we should concern ourselves with the processes by which “radicals” end up “outside.”

There are always conflicts within social movements. We agree with the authors of “ZAD: Second Round” and “The ZAD Will Survive” that the more we can hold together in the face of state pressure, the stronger we will be. But if a rupture is inevitable and we are forced to choose, we should not justify siding with those who seek to coexist with the state over those who seek to confront it on the grounds that this decision is necessary *in order to confront it*. Those who make a habit of this may indeed be able to “build power,” but only on the terms set by the state.

The same goes for making decisions in order to be “intelligible” in the media. That should never outweigh the necessity of showing others who choose to confront the authorities that we can be reliable comrades.

Obviously, it is always better not to have to make this choice, to resist the pressure to divide a movement into tractable and intractable. But the authors of “The ZAD Will Survive” and “Second Round” themselves acknowledge that this division has taken place, in accusing those who have not taken their particular approach of marginalizing themselves.

It seems to us that this marginalization cannot have been a unilateral process. The goal of not letting “radical” ideas or goals be marginalized cannot justify *marginalizing those who espouse them*.

There are larger questions at play here. Is unity necessarily the best way for a movement to build strength? Or is it better to foster an irreducible diversity of approaches, so that negotiation will be, if not impossible, at least—useless? By asserting the necessity of pursuing a “common” strategy and speaking of “the” movement as a unitary thing—a singular noun—the authors come down firmly on the side of the former approach. Yet the only way that those who wish to negotiate with the state can speak from a position of strength is if they are flanked by an “intractable” alternative that the authorities fear will gain momentum if negotiations fail.

In the US, this phenomenon is famously illustrated by the leverage that the *negotiator* Martin Luther King, Jr. gained from the “intractable” Malcolm X. The disciples of MLK ended up occupying public office, ultimately perpetuating the status quo, while many who followed the example of Malcolm X spent decades in prison. We should try to avoid being forced to choose between this binary, but that always begins by refusing to sell out the “intractables,” from whom all leverage originates.

This is not to say that, if everyone at the ZAD *had* agreed on it, it would necessarily have been a mistake to dismantle the barricades on the D281. There are limits to what any group of people can do—the number of risks they can run, the number of barricades they can defend at once. The problem, rather, is that some participants forced their strategy on others and then sought to justify this in the name of unity and efficacy.

If negotiating with the state and evicting the D281 was intended to diminish the likelihood of an attack from the state, then, once again, it failed on its own terms. It’s axiomatic—and countless decades of struggle confirm this—that you can’t make the state stop demanding compromises by compromising with it.

We have heard various arguments in the name of pragmatism in favor of negotiation—to the effect that if it could secure the ZAD as a space to foster future rebellions, that would ultimately justify it. It seems to us that it was naïve to imagine that the state could be placated. Siding with those who wished to negotiate against the “intractables” does not strike us as a bold refusal to fall into a trap set by the state, but rather as a choice to step directly into it. To avoid falling into the trap set by the state, the proponents of the ZAD would have had to refuse any kind of division whatsoever. As usual, the internal fault lines that run through our movements are our greatest vulnerability.

There’s a bigger question here, once again, about what counts as success. What is the essence of the battle being fought here? According to one account, it is a contest for control of a piece of land, pitting two different social bodies against each other; in that case, it is strategic to use any means to expand the *composition* of one’s preferred side. According to another account, it is a battle between two different *ethics*—an ethic of governing, and an ethic of resisting governance, refusing to govern. If the latter is the battle that we are really invested in, then courses of action that are otherwise quixotic start to make sense.

To quote Durruti, “It’s not the barricade but the rifle you have to hold on to.” If you lose the barricade (e.g., the ZAD, a squat, a particular engagement with the state) but retain

the rifle (the collective ability to fight, immunity to narratives that legitimize state violence, a commitment to solidarity over opportunism), you can still move from one engagement to the next, building capacity. If you lose the rifle, but retain the barricade, it may appear that you have won, but thirty years later you will look around and find that you are where the once-formidable Dutch squatting movement is today.

This illustrates how the charge of being “ideological” rather than practical or flexible can conceal genuinely different goals, different standards of what counts as *effective*. Various parties have hurled the charge of being “ideological” rather than strategic at anarchists since at least the 1870s. None of them have proven to be *more* strategic when it comes to the question of how to undermine the state without simply replacing it.

A few of the arguments implicit in “Second Round” would be less surprising coming from authoritarian socialist parties—above all, the stuff about the “ultra-radicals” giving the police an excuse to “justify” their presence. If we let the police determine for us what counts as “good optics,” what “the general public” will be able to understand and what they won’t, we’ll never be able to build the capacity to take on the state. In the final analysis, we can gauge our success by how difficult we have made it for the police to justify themselves at all.

From across the Atlantic, we presume honest intentions on the part of the authors of “The ZAD Will Survive” and “Second Round.” Under tremendous pressure from all sides, determined not to fracture, they made a wager that they could hold the movement together and dissuade the state from attacking if only they... carried out a little internal policing. When the smoke cleared, their wager had not succeeded, and they had acted against their own anti-authoritarian values. Most any organization could have made the same mistake; there are anarcho-syndicalist and platformist groups that might have made this mistake more readily. What we’d like to hear from the authors, ideally, is a critical evaluation of their wager and some reflection on whether it is actually consistent with their ethics and goals.

### **Comments on “When Lama Fâché, Llama Spit!”**

Now we turn to the opposing perspective, the one expressed in “When Lama Fâché, Llama Spit!” as well as a variety of other Indymedia articles. For want of better terminology, we’ll call this the position of the “intractables.” If “ZAD: Second Round” and “The ZAD Will Survive” pass briskly over the controversy in a soothing voice, the Indymedia articles present strident cries of betrayal.

The authors of all of these texts—“Second Round,” “The ZAD Will Survive,” “Lama Fâché,” and the other Indymedia articles—agree that it is a problem that the less radical wing of the movement around the ZAD might be inclined to collaborate with the government towards the “normalization” of the area. The authors of “Second Round” have a solution for this, however problematic: by breaking solidarity with the “ultra-radicals,” they hope to maintain ties with those who might otherwise simply place their faith in the state. While the authors of “Lama Fâché” do not make this error, they don’t propose an alternative, either. Passing judgment on those guilty of betrayal is a poor compensation for giving them cause not to betray.

In this light, their critique of the logic of “composition” is useful as a diagnosis but offers no solutions. It is not enough to decry the logic of coalition building. Any effective resistance will need to involve many people of many perspectives. The question is how to legitimize autonomous action and open defiance, so the state and reformist elements cannot arrange for it to be isolated and defeated.

We would prefer to hear from the “intractables” an analysis of how it was that they permitted themselves be sidelined. What were the strategic points along the way at which they could have made their case more convincing? Surely they too could have built a consensus with a wider range of ZADists. If not a consensus strong enough not to fracture in the face of state pressure, then at least a consensus strong enough that—when the fracture came—the other insurrectionists would stand with them.

If their perspective is the one that we would prefer to see legitimized, it’s shameful for them to limit themselves to standing at the back of the room, shouting insults as the meeting goes on without them. It is not enough to be in the right. We have to find effective strategies that give force to our ethics. We depend on the “intractables” to find ways to surmount the impasses, to overcome binaries, to transform would-be betrayers into trustworthy comrades.

The narrative can’t simply be a story of betrayal. If the only thing we can learn from this conflict is that even those who also claim to be against the state will also betray us, that won’t help us to prepare for future struggles. It won’t help us to be more strategic. It won’t help us to put the pieces in place so we won’t have to worry that when we refuse to back down, our actions will “justify” the actions of the police in the eyes of the media and the general public—even *after* 40,000 people have come together to defy the police.

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## ZAD – ROUND TWO

*Published on April 9 at Lundimatin.*

We have been preparing for this for five years, while at the same time having so far ensured it could never happen. But we are now at the beginning of a new, great police operation whose breadth and duration we still don’t know. The State was supposed to take its revenge, there was always supposed to be a second round. Everywhere in this country, the people who have come to the ZAD ask themselves how far Macron will go to put an end to one of the most beautiful collective political adventures of the past decade, to put an end to the possibility of a space where other forms of life are sought. While barricades are again formed on the roads of the ZAD’s wooded grove, everyone here embraces each other and asks themselves what will still exist tomorrow of all that has formed the vibrant heart of our existences day after day. What tonight’s embraces say, above all, is that five years after Operation Caesar,<sup>1</sup> we must face this new invasion, hold on at all costs and again make sure the future stays open.

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<sup>1</sup> Operation Caesar was a failed police operation on behalf of the French State to evict the ZAD in 2012.

In the wake of the airport project's abandonment, we have lived through a turbulent time of numerous tensions and temptations—temptations to withdraw into our own private domains, or to simply give up altogether. Yet for many of us, this time has also been marked by a continuous investigation into what could still sketch out a path in common. Over these last weeks, it has at times been quite upsetting to see how far a binary and depressive account of the situation has been able to spread. For our part, in this hour of truth, we prefer to return to what seems to still allow us the capacity to conceive of a path in common. Before the storm blows in again here, these lines we write provide a way to transmit why it remains vital for us to continue to defend the ZAD, both here on the terrain and wherever you are in the following days. In the following months as well, because Caesar 2 will not overcome what we continue to uphold here.

## **WHAT NEGOTIATION DOESN'T MEAN**

After the abandonment of the airport project, the movement decided to enter into dialogue with the government in an attempt to negotiate its vision for the future of the ZAD. This sequence forced us to confront ourselves with new challenges. We felt guided by objectives that were at once clear and extremely complex:

- neutralize in the best way possible the near absolute need for the State to take revenge on the ZAD by an operation of eviction, and by doing so allow the inhabitants of this territory to remain in all their diversity;
- maintain as much as possible the margins of autonomy that have given a proper meaning to this experience, while also finding the means for a stability desired by a number of people here;
- maintain and amplify, finally, collective control over the lands of the ZAD and its connections with other ongoing forms of resistance.

In this period, for us, there was never a choice between negotiating OR fighting. We never bet that we would at once obtain, in the offices of the State's institutions, what we wanted. Negotiation is only one of the levers of which the movement availed itself after the government's abandonment of the airport project, supported by a relation of forces maintained through years of resistance. According to this perspective, the same forces that plan an offensive negotiation also organize in parallel an assembly before the prefecture when the State's response is unsatisfying. The same forces that, over the course of the past weeks, have led a juridical and political combat against all the evictions and organized a protest in Nantes with refugees and those living with inadequate housing, are also those that plan to engage in physical resistance when they come to try to evict the places of the ZAD.

Throwing themselves in to the gamble of negotiation with the fear of losing the ZAD's cutting edge in the process wasn't something that was obvious for the occupiers. It wasn't any more obvious for others who are part of the ZAD to pursue struggle and to include the fate

of the post-abandonment period, together with the other urgent decisions that this period would require, in the hands of large and heterogeneous assemblies. These are the risks and mutual overcomings that, as always, have permitted us to continue to move forward together rather than to desert or wither in isolation. In this case, we firmly believe it was then necessary to make an attempt there at that moment so that, each time the negotiation revealed its limits, we could continue to go beyond it.

The capacity of the airport movement's composition has been a lasting nightmare for the government, for whom it was extremely unpleasant to imagine the movement could last beyond the project's abandonment. At the start of these negotiations, clearly one of the government's primary objectives was to explode our decision to organize a common delegation. The government also had to curb its desire to address future stakes in a divided manner: from the refusal of evictions to the movement's collective control of lands, from a firm opposition to the return of classical agricultural management to the wider question of amnesty. The prefecture tried to separate representatives from among us and convene them one by one to a steering committee strictly dedicated to agricultural management. One cannot forget the force of this bait and the energy the prefecture put into avoiding rejection. The framework we had slowly developed almost exploded—but the maneuver finally failed. The ACIPA<sup>2</sup> declined the prefect's invitation, while the peasant Confederation called an organized assembly before the steering committee, which decided to hear and respect the message of the movement. The common delegation survived. The prefecture had to immediately go back on its positions and accept to speak again with the steering committee. The maintenance of only agricultural activities turned into "agriculture that is wholistic in every sense." It has almost already been won that several hundred hectares of lands saved and maintained collectively, beyond the historical lands, must be dedicated to projects connected to the movement. It is a considerable first step, but still doesn't resolve the fate of the combat connected to the ZAD's habitats and the need for collective control over the property after this transitional phase to ensure it is viable for whatever comes next.

## RESISTING DIVIDE-AND-RULE

In this first phase of negotiations, the prefecture announced its desire to sort out unacceptable criteria and called on those who wanted to have a chance to remain to apply for a personal agreement and to register as soon as possible with the MSA.<sup>3</sup> Some were unable to scrutinize the horizon with anything other than preconceived schemas and the passion for defeat; immediately they portended betrayal by those who would surely benefit themselves at the expense of others. Indeed, it would have been easy to cut a deal and run at any time over the last few weeks with some simple short letters and paperwork. The prefecture was waiting for that. But the reality is that, despite the pressures, no one fell into this trap.

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<sup>2</sup> ACIPA is an acronym for the *Association citoyenne intercommunale des populations concernées par le projet d'aéroport*, or Intercommunal Citizen Association of Populations Concerned by the Airport Project, a group created in the year 2000 with the goal of fighting the airport project at Notre-Dame-des-Landes.

<sup>3</sup> The MSA, or *Mutualité Sociale Agricole*, is a social insurance agency that provides health care, pensions, and other social protections for agricultural workers.

Nobody filed to go individually through the selective examination: we did not agree to let ourselves be separated out. On the contrary, there was a political and concrete refusal of these injunctions. What was maintained was the claim to the land and the search for a protective and collective framework for all, including a global agreement regarding the lands of the movement. It is this real solidarity that impedes the prefecture today on at least two levels: to continue the negotiation in the way that it initially sought and to legitimize its operation of selective eviction.

In this context, however, there is still much talk of “radicals” or “intractables” on the one hand and cowards eager to negotiate or peasants quick to normalize conditions on the other. It is remarkable to see how much this fiction pleases both the dominant media, the prefecture and the preachers of the good morals of a fantasized radicalism. But for most of those who have defended the ZAD, cultivated and lived in this grove in recent years, this division is only a fiction. Among those who hold to a common line in the movement through negotiation AND the fight, among those who want to stay here and really maintain the ZAD as a shared space, there are also people and crews from each category: peasants, younger and older squatters, the “historical ones,” adherents of the ACIPA, neighbors, naturalists, syndicalist comrades, nature enthusiasts, activists of the Coordination...<sup>4</sup> In the optics that the ZAD continues to spread, the idea that everything should be legal or remain illegal forms two sides of the same (bad) coin. These positions come from ideological fetishes, one as sterile as the other when applied to pursuing struggles on the terrain. Those who really participated in the unfolding of the movement in recent years, who were not content to merely comment on the internet, are well aware that these oversimplified “legalistic” or “illegal,” “violent” or “non-violent” visions never corresponded to what made our force effective and allowed us to bend the will of the State. They are not more adapted today to meet the horizons and objectives of the “6 points.”

It was never a question for us of entering a process of normalization with a bowed head, but rather to determine what would allow us to hold onto all the places of life and activity through this reconfiguration of the situation. To do this, it is necessary to determine, step-by-step, what will be best at preserving margins of autonomy and support so that we do not end up submitting in isolation to all the constraints imposed by forms of market and industrial production. This entails very real practices in a concrete power struggle with a powerful enemy and not fancies of an ideal world. To know this, it is enough to trust the attachment we have to the meaning that has been found for years in the free re-invention of the relation to what we produce.

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<sup>4</sup> The *coordination des opposants*. The “Coordination of Opponents” of the Notre-Dame-des-Landes Airport Project was created by 14 organizations opposed to the airport project in September 2003 in order to prepare a joint letter to Prime Minister Raffarin and Minister of Transport de Robien during the project’s early research stage. Since then, these organizations meet monthly to discuss the issue and organize joint actions. Today, more than 60 organizations comprise the Coordination, including associations, unions, political movements, and collectives.

## ENOUGH WITH THE ROAD MYTHOLOGY

From weeks of physical resistance to Operation Caesar in 2012, we know that the effectiveness of the ZAD's defense has never rested solely on a road barricaded by an isolated group, much less on the nostalgic obsession for this device outside of times of attack. But, it has always been a possibility for us, when the time comes, to block the different strategic access points and to hold the ground in very different ways, with a varied set of supports both in and outside of the zone. Unfortunately, the tension of recent weeks surrounding the road has, among other risks, the potential to undermine this possibility of broad resistance.

We have tried for months to leave no political opening for the State to evict anyone. Having won this bet many times in recent years, in our opinion it was still absolutely tenable to remain after the abandonment of the D281 road barricades, despite the threats of the Prime Minister. The prefecture needed a suitable story to make these threats concrete. He needed people who could embody the caricature of the famous "ultra-radicals." Some brilliantly took the role expected of them, especially on the issue of the road D281, reducing the stakes of the struggle to a story that became more and more incomprehensible for the vast majority of those with whom they had fought, for their neighbors and in general for most people near and far who heard about it. By blocking the work the first time, a few people—not to be confused with people living near the road—justified the police presence we had for weeks, allowing them to get boots back on the ground. The destruction of some asphalt at the end of the job, while the police could still withdraw, while the situation was clear and we could still hope to find a common strength, brought despair (for a time at least) to many of those who have continued to provide unwavering support for the threat of evictions. When the General Council<sup>5</sup> refused to open the road under these conditions, the evictions in question found a major justification and became almost inevitable.

## FACING WHATEVER COMES

The force of this struggle has been to constantly go against the current of certainties maintained by both the identitarian "radical" ghetto as well as the classic "citizen" militancy. In this respect, the movement has always collided with those that enclosed themselves within one of these polarizations and forced disruptions upon those that have wanted to accompany it. It has found its own path and laid a foundation for a unique front at once anchored, offensive, and popular. This simple fact has been for many of us an astounding political event and the motor of a historical defeat of the State. It is not surprising, however, that the advent of another phase brings new concerns and new hopes along with ideological scleroses. The sequence following victory is a moment of truth where the real consequences of the groups involved are unveiled. In this tense phase, there have typically been two responses that sabotage our common engagements and the movement: block the work on the road OR publicly dissociate from an assembly organized by the movement

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<sup>5</sup> *Conseil regional*, the "General Council" or departmental assembly, departments being regional administrative entities in France. The specific general council referenced here is the one that oversees the *Loire Atlantique* department of France.

in the face of the steering committee in order to support the mixed delegation. The sad truth is that, on one side some have preferred to weaken the common structure by wasting away over obsessions that are indefensible to the rest of the movement, while on the other side some have been quick to forget about holding a common line in the face of governmental pressure. Some brilliantly applied themselves to justifying a partial eviction and putting those who would be targeted in the most isolated position possible. Others kept virtually silent as the eviction operation approached. We could hold onto and rehash such bitter observations endlessly. But another much brighter truth is that, all told, most people who over the years formed the basic community of this struggle also braved its dangers and trials together and remained faithful to the promises they made to one another. It is this truth that we must continue to cling to if we do not wish to perish in self-fulfilling prophecies of the inevitable downfall of spaces of autonomy and collective adventures.

Despite the disputes that have undoubtedly weakened the movement and its legibility in recent weeks, it goes without saying that the State's plans to evict will be met with a fight. Whatever pitfalls we fell into at times, the actual foundation of the ZAD and the hopes it continues to raise did not fall apart over a few weeks of sadness. We can feel this in the forces that remobilized on the eve of the operation, in those who had their doubts but then heard the call and immediately got on the road, in the last minute assemblies, in the barricades of all kinds of things that stand up against the armed forces of the State and the story that the government is getting ready to tell...

We are going to have to go through a violent ordeal that could reshuffle all the cards. But we have no doubt that the ZAD will survive Caesar 2. What we continue to bring to the movement will be neither a docile display of alternativeness nor a radical ghetto. Rather, we will continue to make of struggle a breadbasket and of resistance a common good, a place where people who live and meet are as diverse as they are surprising, a territory that makes you want to organize seriously, to live fully, a permanent building site for wonderful constructions and waking dreams. We still need places where not relying on the economy and institutional management is visibly desirable and possible. And we need these places to last, even if they have their share of impurities and messiness. Because the spaces that excite us most compel us to assemble and put our ready-made politics into question. We believe that, essentially, it is through the ZAD that we will continue to galvanize tens of thousands of people across the country.

**And now we must stand up!**

*Voices in common*

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## **When Lama Fâché, Llama Spit!**

*Published on April 10 on Indymedia Nantes, after initially appearing in print, as described below.*

This text has been handed out a first time during the demonstration of March 31 against all evictions at Caen. We gave it out again this Monday night [April 9, 2018, the day the evictions at the ZAD of Notre-Dame-des-Landes started] while about 200 people walked the streets with a beautiful energy before reaching an empty train station with no departing trains.<sup>6</sup> During this action, the cops were discreet.

By handing out this text, we wanted to show our solidarity with the people facing the current evictions [at the ZAD] of which *Lama Fâché* ["Angry Llama"] was the first cabin raided. At the same time, we wanted to express where this solidarity was coming from and convey that it was not duped by the games of power in the zone, and by the appetites of composition that are making their way at the ZAD as well as in many other cities...

Finally this text, written at the end of March, does not mention the aggression that took place at the ZAD these last days.

"All parties, all trade unions, and their bureaucracies, are oppressing the proletariat, as much as the bourgeoisie. (...)"

-*Comité pour le maintien des occupations* ("Committee for Maintaining the Occupations," CMDO) [the original one, not the copy (sic)] *La Commune n'est pas morte* ("The Commune's Not Dead"), June 1968.

On January 17, the Macron government decided to drop the airport project at Notre-Dame-des-Landes. Just this once, opponents succeeded in stopping a major project. Needless to say, Manu [Emmanuel Macron] is not captivated by the virtues of a grove free from those concrete masses. His friendships and interests are completely different. Except that, in this situation, there is a strategic occasion to seize: an opportunity to disarm a solidarity movement that inhabits more than just a grove, but also some lives and imaginaries. And to do this by normalizing a space where, for many of its protagonists, a deeply rooted struggle was questioning much more than just an airport.

Unfortunately, as is frequently the case in such circumstances, some fringes of the movement decided to respond positively to this normalization. In the hours following the announcement from the government, the Assembly of the movement decided in an authoritarian manner to defer to the recommendations of the prefecture by paving the way for a military occupation of the site, by agreeing to clear the [road] D281 of obstacles and barricades. And this by evicting, against some inhabitants, two cabins occupied occasionally or more permanently. Quickly, troops of gendarmes took possession of the place. Drones, video devices, and directional microphones invaded the landscape.

If this same Assembly, in a text of 6 points, affirmed wanting to maintain unity among the various components of the struggle, being opposed to all evictions, and taking charge of the future of the movement, its first actions have been on one hand to "liberate" a part of the ZAD and to offer it to its new partner, the State; and on the other hand to negotiate with the institutions in power. On March 19, the Assembly made a call for a gathering to support

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<sup>6</sup> For several weeks now, railroad workers have carried out numerous strikes to defend their status and oppose the opening of the railway market to competitors.

“a delegation including all of its components—inhabitants, farmers, elected representatives, naturalists, neighbors” that seemed to represent the whole movement. Here, the old adage that says that in politics it is necessary to judge actions rather than words applies again...

When the State ordered the launch of Operation Caesar against the ZAD in 2012, it did not expect to hit a snag. Within a few days, the eviction got bogged down in this wetland before some 50,000 people decided to reoccupy the land and build cabins. That day, when political activists, non-profit volunteers, and trade unionists were invited to put their respective flags away, marked the prelude to a massive and determined resistance, the famous “cyst” described by Manuel Valls [Minister of the Interior and then Prime Minister under Holland’s presidency].

In the past, this geographical area has known numerous struggles, such as the protests against the nuclear plants of Carnet and Pellerin, in which some connections appeared between farmers and the workers of 1968. These fragile but rich complicities continued to develop while rooting themselves in past struggles, as well as in a strong sense of resistance sharpened within occupations that had begun several years earlier.

However, over the years and due to the success of this struggle, the legitimate complicities formed in this resistance have finally given way to a strategic and instrumental way of understanding the struggle: *composition*.

Contrary to the image that certain people have never ceased to convey, there have always been conflicts at the ZAD and within the movement against the airport. From daily conflicts regarding the different ways of living the occupation that played out between livestock farmers and anti-speciesists, between anti-feminists and feminists, etc., to the ways of living the struggle between partisans of direct action and partisans of disobedience, between institutional activists and autonomists, between supporters of assemblies and supporters of affinity groups, between the pro-media and the anti-media, between “against the airport” and “against this world.”

What took place here was built on a juxtaposition of logics. From its origin, the slogan against the big useless infrastructural projects encompassed intentions and operational modes that were completely opposed. The far left saw economic mismanagement; EELV [*Europe Ecologie Les Verts*, the French Green Party] saw a project that was not compatible with their vision of green capitalism; farmers saw the theft of their lands; primitivists saw an attack on a sanctified nature; and for some radicals, they saw one of the many ways that capital and the State control the conditions of our lives. The first three are hoping for a development dictated by capital and the State that will be more likely to correspond to their desires; the last two want to put an end to the development of the land itself, for reasons that are sometimes not very compatible. Moreover, some activists are managers and administrators, while others promote horizontality and self-organization.

What held everyone together was that everyone had always needed each other to keep the struggle going. The ACIPA needed the help of the ZADists to occupy the lands that were about to be destroyed; the ZADists needed the help of the farmers and organizations to serve as a shield and to legitimate their struggle. The relationships between these groups were based on reciprocal dependency, which bound them in an instrumental way. Although, obviously, the struggle contained much more fun moments.

Behind the public image of unity, deep antagonisms waited to resurface at any opportunity—for example, when activists threw stones at cops. There will always be a Julien Durand from the ACIPA to denounce, in the lineage of Bové or Mélenchon [respectively, the political figures of EELV and *La France Insoumise*], the dangerous irresponsible persons inhabiting the grove dedicated to destruction, or a team of the *Verts* (members of the Green Party) to ape the opening of a house while wearing new boots bought the same morning at Montparnasse [the Parisian train station that link the French capital to the West region of France]. This occurred on many occasions—for example, during the demonstration in Nantes in February 2014 when we saw Julien Durand, spokesperson of the ACIPA, playing the contortionist by disassociating his organization from the property destruction that took place that day while avoiding openly condemning the “casseurs” [thugs]. In other words, marking his disapproval with some strategies and actions while seeking to maintain unity with a part of the inhabitants of the ZAD whose help he still needed at the time. In the following months, pacification involved refusing any new demonstration to take place at Nantes. Part of the “ZADists” did not fail to respect this injunction.

This composition is organized around components that pile up acronyms. L'ACIPA is one of the historical anti-airport groups. It is a coordination of opponents that gather smaller organizations. The COPAIN brings together the farmers who, for the most part, are linked to the *Confédération Paysanne* [Farmers Confederation]. Then, there is the movement Assembly, initiated by occupiers.

“For a long time, [the movement Assembly] was a place of debate and pooling of ideas and projects from the different groups that took part in the struggle, without the pretention of making decisions in a unitary way. For me, the ‘movement’ was linked to this creative space where different tendencies could obtain information and respond to each other, assert themselves and criticize each other, without denying their autonomy in taking initiatives. I think that this is what some people started to call ‘composition’—anyway, that is where I heard the word for the first time. In the heat of the moment, I didn’t really pay attention to it; people were talking of the ‘movement’ and its ‘components.’ Later, I concluded that the concept of composition seemed more like a way of pacifying the situation, to talk about it with more appealing words that didn’t reveal the conflicts and contradictions. In short, to send us to sleep, in order to undercut this boiling energy by constantly looking for a ‘middle path’ [a path of compromise and concessions], and that when we hear the word ‘movement’ we end up forgetting the diversity that can give us the element of surprise in our hurry to make a mass that moves ‘all together.’”

-Testimony, *Le mouvement est mort vive... la réforme!, Une critique de la composition et de ses élites* [“The Movement Is Dead, Long Live... Reform! A Critique of Composition and Its Elites”], February 2018, by an insignificant groupuscule.

There is never a shortage of self-proclaimed revolutionary or reformist strategists to impose in the name of unity, pragmatism, urgency, a specific direction and the uniqueness

of a movement. Some leaders emerged among the occupiers themselves, mobilizing their material force, their networks, their power... not only for the benefit of the community as a whole, but also to structure an ideological hegemony in the zone and within the struggle. Alongside the “institutional” activists, they condemned some actions, like the attack on a journalists’ car, or the action in which some manure was thrown during a conference for an electoral campaign of *France Insoumise* at the Vacherie, an occupied dwelling at the ZAD. Their vision of “composition” is to muzzle divergences and impose their discipline on the movement.

In charge, the Comité pour le maintien des occupations (CMDO) and some accomplices, pompously baptized as a reference to its Situationist ancestor of '68. An ancestor that, back then, maintained a clear distance from all the trade unionists and leftist bureaucracies. In this committee, some old celebrities from the autonomous movement do not hesitate to play the role of spokespersons for the media, to arrange complicities with all kinds of bureaucracies, to accept the game of negotiating with the State. In other words, to become managers of the struggle.

These same celebrities, thanks to their class backgrounds, can monopolize resources and discourses, systematically discredit their opponents, insult them, threaten them. The last of the uncontrollable activists who had not left the movement Assemblies yet ended up leaving them, disgusted by this behavior.

Composition ends up showing its limits once the objective has been achieved or the struggle defeated. If a text in 6 points officially claims the management of the ZAD by an authority arising from the movement, the components of the movement are essentially seeking negotiation. However, for the moment, the State does not give up anything.

For several months, a specific assembly focused on thinking about the future of the ZAD after the airport. On this issue, certain groups like ACIPA or COPAIN took the lead. The proximity of many of their protagonists with some old Larzac activists enables them to present some old recipes. The proposal is a “normalized” zone, under a STCL lease with the State, co-managed by the farmer confederation and the State environmentalists. This is this option defended by José Bové, an old Larzac and EELV activist, friend of Hulot (the current Minister of Ecological and Solidarity Transition) and Julien Durant from ACIPA.

The normalization of the [road] D281 bears the influence of this strategy. For this occasion, accustomed to its hegemony, the CMDO did not even take care to abide by the rules, nor rely on an Assembly vote. In the days that followed, about 200 people dismantled the barricades—not without jostling some reluctant activists who refused the decision, getting ahead of the work of law enforcement on this occasion. Lama Fâché, a cabin installed on the road, was dismantled. Some activists rebuilt it a little further. Since then, the Assembly that represents only one side of the ZAD, admittedly the side involving the majority of occupants and those taking part in the struggle, attempts to negotiate.

To maintain unity, the ideologues of the composition have broken off unity with those for whom this struggle meant something more than just obtaining a farm or field through negotiation with the State. This struggle has reminded us that the “Friends” are not necessary friends, that COPAIN [“friend” in French] are not necessarily friends.

All this reminds us that one format alone cannot ensure horizontality. Some activists who always hated assemblies have invested themselves in them. Not for the potential of freedom and self-organization that they could offer, but on the contrary, for the logic of government, control, and submission that they promised. If on our side we are still attached to assemblies, it is for completely different reasons: to coordinate, to be able to expose the power games of some groups, to avoid feeding the narcissistic postures of groups. In short, for their anti-authoritarian potential.

Composition is to self-organization what chains are to freedom. For our part, during assemblies, we have always defended the collectives and organizations of individuals that were against strategic composition between organizations or groups. We are of those who have always refused to cosign texts with organizations, and not only “political” ones.

The piling of acronyms is not an identity, nor an autonomous force, but on the contrary expresses submission to a general staff. It is as if there were some kind of concern at seeing the decomposition of the Left—the Left that has never been anything other than a facet of submission—and that we should help it to get back on its feet, or even become part of it. To compose is to play a role, to play a role in creating a broad front. It means carrying out your activities via an essentially strategic approach rather than an ethical one. Above all, all this only produces dispossession, and spaces where everyone is urged to follow the path already drawn for them, rather than seeking to build complicities and create something common without suppressing differences and different personal realities. To compose essentially means to renew the old political tradition in its most sordid aspects.

Today this ideological apparatus of the milieu seems to have caught on like a fever. Assemblies for asylum seekers can now welcome a senator of EELV previously allied with Valls to visit their squats; anti-repression collectives are thinking of informing the local CGT union of their actions, although this union condemned the actions of “casseurs” in 2016; the *Maison de la grève* (“House of the Strike”) welcomed Houria Bouteldja [an author criticized for open anti-Semitism and homophobia]; members of the Parisian *cortège de tête* protected the premises of Emmaus, an organization that is an accomplice of the machinery of eviction... It is necessary to say that for others, it has been some time now that as “elected representatives of ‘the territories they inhabit,’ it can be riots on Thursday, and Municipal Council on Monday.”

What the ideology of composition spreads is a discipline of the milieu that favors connections with the syndicalist, political, and associative Left [i.e., unions, politicians, and non-profits] over any effective radical alternative. The ritualized spectacle of controlled direct action serves to satisfy activist impulses and warlike affects while maintaining a false insurrectionary image. The spectacle of contestation rather than the contestation of the spectacle.

The Comité El Condor, in passing.  
Caen, March 2018.

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