Reflections on the ZAD: Another History

Looking Back a Year after the Evictions

CrimethInc.

March 23, 2019

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Starting in the 1960s, people set out to block the construction of an unwanted airport at Notre-Dame-des-Landes in western France. This became the world-famous land occupation known as la ZAD—the Zone à Défendre (Zone to Defend). In January 2018, the French government announced that the airport would not be built; in April and May 2018, French police carried out a brutal military operation to re-introduce state control. Today, the ZAD is a shadow of what it was.

Why was it possible for the government to crush this powerful example of autonomy? In the following retrospective, a longtime resident of the ZAD explores how internal dynamics helped set the stage for state repression. This is one of the many stories that could be told about the ZAD, but we consider it an important historical document that poses crucial questions about how to balance autonomy and accountability and how to deal with authoritarian dynamics that arise from within. We hope it will inform the struggles that people around the world are participating in today.

The appendices include a glossary explaining all the different groups that participated in the movement around the ZAD, translations of other important documents from the ZAD, and a list of further reading.

Background

The ZAD was born out of local opposition to an imposed airport project in Brittany, the traditional region in northwestern France. Since its inception over 50 years ago, the struggle has grown and become more complex, with the arrival of radical squatters in 2007 and a strategy of land occupation since 2009. The ZAD covered more than 4000 acres, but the movement around the ZAD is much larger than the land itself.

In the fall of 2012, the French state carried out “Operation Caesar”: six months of destruction, resistance, and military occupation intended at regaining control of the area. This brought a lot of attention from the national media, outside support and solidarity, and new possibilities. As a consequence of the failure of this operation, the ZAD was free of uniformed police from April 2013 on. Participants had already established many different kinds of collective infrastructure including bakeries, a pirate radio station, and a legal team; after 2012, these thrived alongside an autonomous healthcare system, large-scale agriculture, and weekly distribution of locally-produced food.

In January of 2018, the French government officially abandoned the airport project and announced an injunction to clear off the famous “barricade road” while threatening evictions for the end of March. On April 9, 2018, military police arrived to carry out that threat. In the year since then, everything has changed.

ZAD 2010

I showed up on the ZAD in early 2010 looking for a place to do drugs in the woods. I was in my early twenties, interested in radical politics but mostly involved with the environmental non-profit world. At that time, there were ten or fifteen people living there scattered between a few houses. We spent a lot of time having meetings and tea with the neighbors, everyone speaking in French (which I didn’t understand). I had expected anarchist struggle to be more exciting.

About a week in, I had a long conversation with a new friend that showed me a way beyond the mainstream politics I'd been engaged in. I had been complaining about how frustrating it was to endlessly cold-call people and ask them to contact their legislators, knowing they probably wouldn't, and even if they did, said legislators only care about money and power, which our small non-profit didn't have. He responded that all of those letters were going in the trash; the government didn't need to take them into account. He said that what people were doing on the ZAD was putting their lives and their bodies in the way, against the airport and the concept of zoning and for community self-determination, so they couldn't be swept aside or ignored. By living there, by gardening there, by biking around to see friends and drinking tea with them, the occupiers kept abreast of construction work and could disrupt it immediately whenever it began. Any advances on the project had to take the people there into account. Living there forced the government to engage.

I'd never heard of "direct action," but I was sold. That night, I decided I would stay until the end.

In 2010, the goals were to slow down the airport project using a combination of mobilization, locals' legal strategy, and sabotage, and to make the project as expensive and embarrassing as possible. Instead of writing letters, we would shut down offices and conferences. Squatting and learning to fix up old houses, making treetop villages and pirate radio, living together and handling problems collectively—all this was a lot more engaging than working in an office. In a day, you might weed potatoes alongside locals in a squatted collective garden, do legal support to get someone out of jail, and weld bike trailers for communal use. Almost half the people living there were internationals; they brought experience from other struggles, like forest occupations. I remember a conversation on top of a van about our hopes for the struggle and the ZAD. A friend from the UK said, "I hope that the state doesn't cancel the airport just because they lose in court—I hope one day it's politically impossible for them to build, because there are so many nice people here that they just can't, even if they send the military." We laughed—the scenario was almost too ambitious to imagine. Constantly amazed by the ingenuity, confidence, and resourcefulness of the people around me, I had the feeling that the possibilities for creation and resistance were nearly endless.

What Happened at the ZAD?

There is a lot of confusion in the Anglophone world about what happened last spring, especially why some people chose to negotiate with the state and sign contracts. My intention is not to justify the decisions that were made, but to talk about what factors shaped the decision-making. The vulnerabilities of anarchists and anti-authoritarians were used against them by those who became increasingly reformist in their collaboration with liberal groups. The ZAD offers a useful study of how authoritarian tendencies emerge, develop, and undermine situations with revolutionary potential. Because this took place on such a large scale, it is possible to identify patterns that can be disregarded as mere "interpersonal conflict" in other cases.

This text weaves together personal reflections about what happened on the ZAD with analysis of the dynamics within the occupation and anti-airport movement. My intention is to draw lessons from the changes that happened over the course of the 8+ years I lived there and came to a head during the evictions of spring 2018. If we are to be more cunning and effective in the future, that will require honest storytelling—not just myth-making or propaganda. I hope that these reflections can open the way for more thoughtful critique. It's tempting to reverse-engineer political justifications for past decisions; but I don't think we should glorify the path of legalization as a victorious model others should follow.

The state played a significant role in reinforcing pre-existing divisions; state repression was often targeted at specific political groups in order to pit people against each other. These kinds of counterinsurgency tactics are very simple: focus on the most isolated group and convince the rest of the movement that everyone else will be spared if they disassociate themselves from it. The consequence is that the most isolated group experiences the brunt of repression just as the other groups are abandoning it: a process that fuels bitterness and resentment on one side, guilt and self-justification on the other. When the state moves on to the next target, there is less support for the remaining groups because of their prior disassociation.

Repression and psychological warfare also affected decision-making at the ZAD. The added pressure aggravated pre-existing political tensions. Many of the decisions people made in 2018 were based in fear: fear of losing the ZAD as a base, fear that someone would be killed by the intense police violence, fear that the homes and land we depended on would be destroyed.

For example, the prefect publicly reiterated that only the houses close to the road in the eastern part of the ZAD would be evicted and she labeled their occupants dangerous radicals. This happened in the context of the movement dismantling the houses on the barricade road (D281) as a "good faith" gesture to open negotiations with the state, and at least three figures of the opposition making public statements that they would not support or defend the people near the D281 or their homes.

Tensions within the Movement

Over time, participants' goals and priorities changed and the common objective became less clear. The goal of the anti-airport movement was to stop the airport and get some level of legal protection for the ZAD, but among those occupying the land, there was too much political division to arrive at a cohesive goal. The slogan "against the airport and its world" served as a useful shorthand at the beginning of the occupation, making it possible to fit a systemic critique into a few words. The "and its world" was also a baseline of the occupation, though it meant different things to different people.

The evictions in October of 2012 didn't just change the physical landscape by destroying houses and infrastructure. The intensity of those moments combined with massive support and media coverage fundamentally changed the struggle. New friendships and alliances emerged; new occupants moved there, from well-organized political groups to people who had come simply to fight the cops and have somewhere to stay. The population of the ZAD doubled or tripled in a matter of months, with a division between those labeled "bourgeois intellectuals" and those labeled "schlags." There were other new arrivals, better organized and with more resources, but they mostly kept to themselves in the western side of the land, making links with the farmers. Once the military occupation ended and the common enemy was gone, there was a lot of internal conflict, mostly along class lines. This contributed to many ZAD inhabitants focusing inward, resulting in fewer actions and attacks. At the same time, the focus of the struggle was shifting to agriculture. The change in demographics, as well as some ZAD occupants' desire for increased power and legitimacy, set the stage for a focus on dismantling existing groups and forging a united front as the main political objective.

One of the most amazing things about the ZAD after the evictions of 2012 was how all the lines of identity shifted: there were squatters farming and professional farmers cracking open squats. Even the Green Party opened a squat. During this golden era, people took positions based on the issues rather than according to group allegiance.

Later, people started to settle back into positions; groups like the "Collective of Professional Agricultural Organizations Indignant about the Airport Project" (COPAIN), the "Committee for the Maintenance and Defense of Occupations" (CMDO), local support committees, and the like. Some of the key players in the movement are described in "Terms and Definitions" in the Appendix, below.

In 2014, a precursor to the CMDO sought out leaders in different local and citizen groups to plan a large demonstration in Nantes together before presenting it to the General Assembly. One ex-member argues that this was the first time the citizen groups found representatives who could offer them leverage within the occupation; until then, the occupation had prioritized horizontal organizing, eschewing representation and rotating people in and out of the roles of relating to locals and citizen groups. This is what the leaders of the citizen groups had been looking for all along: other leaders to communicate with in order to organize "more efficiently." Without that, they had no more leverage than anyone else in the assembly. Opening back channels of communication between group leaders short-circuited the openness of the general assemblies, paving the way for exclusive alliances to emerge. These "strategic friendships" created the context in which some squatters decided to side with farmer and liberal groups against the squatters around the road and their supporters in January 2018.

There are already plenty of texts devoted to critiquing the CMDO and their "Appeliste" comrades; some are available below in the "Further Reading" section. The goal is not to focus on one group, which can change name or shape, but to learn to identify and confront authoritarian tendencies wherever they occur. I'll name them when it's necessary for clarity because it would be incomplete to leave them out of the story, but I won't focus on any particular political tendency here.

"Composition" has often been translated as "coalition." This contributes to confusion around terms. The word "coalition" also exists in French, defined by the Larousse dictionary as "a military or political alliance drawn up between different groups against a common adversary." There is a difference between "coalition" and "composition": a *coalition* involves groups with clearly different methods and end goals making a temporary alliance to combat a shared enemy, whereas *composition* describes groups with different methods and goals trying to create unity based on what everyone involved can agree on.

In practice, "what everyone can agree on" often means the least threatening possibility—for example, holding demonstrations on the ZAD instead of in Nantes where they could pose a threat to places of power. Every *composant*—COPAIN, the Intercommunal Citizen Association of Populations Concerned by the Airport Project (ACIPA), the occupation, etc.—thus fits into this larger composition, but as a subset of the unity, effectively subordinate to it. You can read a more detailed critique of the logic of composition at the ZAD in "When Lama Fâché, Llama Spit!".

There had always been a healthy push and pull between squatters and liberals within the movement. In 2011, there was a successful confrontational action almost once a month; in 2012, the ACIPA organized several large and successful mobilizations. As usually happens when different people come together to fight a common enemy, there was disagreement about tactics, with groups condemning each other's actions in the media and disagreements about how to organize and make decisions. In early 2014, there was a split after a 60,000-strong demonstration in Nantes co-organized by squatters from the ZAD and various groups within the movement turned into a riot. The Co-ord (the "Coordination of Opponents" of the Notre-Dame-des-Landes Airport Project, a coalition dating to 2003) and the ACIPA refused to co-organize demonstrations in Nantes after that, and there was a lot of mistrust and reluctance to organize events together that might become confrontational and thus lose liberal support. This increased the frequency of demonstrations on the ZAD, such as the "March of the Sticks" in October 2016. Over time, the squatters were pulled further towards the liberal mainstream, with the help of reformists within the occupation movement who presented themselves as legitimate representatives to other *composants* and to the state.

As the logic of composition gained influence, a dichotomy between ideals and pragmatism developed. In the summer of 2017, a disagreement around the creation of walking paths on the ZAD illustrated this tension clearly. The proponents of this proposal, the CMDO, felt the paths would be useful to bring people from other *composants* to the ZAD to use the land more regularly. Those opposed felt the paths were imposed despite opposition and without much discussion, and created a spectator/spectacle relationship between those living on the land and those outside of it. When people voiced their opposition in a General Assembly, someone responded, "We've heard your concerns, and we will take them into account as much as possible while moving forward."

In response, some opponents of the walking paths painted graffiti along the route. The tags that appeared on the day of the grand opening of the walking paths said (in an alteration of the slogan "the courts on fire, the judges in the middle"), "The paths on fire, the strategizers in the middle." It was later altered to read "Principles on fire, the purists in the middle." This was one of the first times that a clear division between "purism" and "practicality" was named in that way.

These tensions—within the movement and more particularly between squatters—came to a head in 2018 during the discussions around negotiations and in the lead-up to the evictions of April 2018. So-called "idealists/purists/anarchists/radicals/uncontrollable elements" were pitted against "pragmatists/the reasonable/reformists/objective strategists/sellouts."

Obviously, there's no such thing as an objectively strategic choice. Choices are only "strategic" in relation to a strategy aimed at particular goals. The underlying assumption on the side of the "practical" ones was that the most important thing was to maintain control over the land and the structures on the ZAD, no matter what the cost and by whatever means would serve. As that goal was hardly unanimously shared, any purportedly collective strategy stemming from that was flawed from the start. Over and over during the meetings before the evictions, we heard the mantra "If we don't negotiate and sign the contracts, we're going to lose everything." The risk of "losing everything" was contrasted with political coherency—as in, would you rather be homeless or right? This only makes sense if your "everything" is limited to physical or material infrastructure.

The ones labeled as radical purists in this dichotomy were people who held political ideals. That label was used against people who had opposed any cooperation with the state from the start, but it was also used against people who were deeply involved in the negotiations and even members of the delegation that was interfacing with the state. As there was no agreement on goals or strategy, there was also dissension on tactics and strategic action. It's easy to make the "purism" argument when others reach their ethical limits before you reach yours. This is especially true when you're appealing for liberal sympathy. Liberals love to hear that those who refuse to live in contradiction with their ethics are "impractical"—it gives them an alibi for their own hypocrisy.

The accusations "purist" and "radical" were often used to discredit a person's position; sometimes, even holding a political or ethical position rather than a "practical" one was described as illegitimate. For example, in the occupants' assembly to discuss whether the delegation would return to negotiating with the state a week after evictions began, the facilitator asked the people who were opposed to resuming negotiations to justify their opposition in practical terms, not based on their political positions or how they felt about talking with representatives of the state after the raids. This occurred mere days after we had sustained massive losses and while we were still under military occupation. Those who were in favor of returning to negotiations were not asked to defend their position on "practical" grounds.

In most situations, most people will regard the option that is easiest and that conforms to existing norms as the "practical" one. As the emphasis on prioritizing *composition* with liberal groups grew, so did the value placed on societal norms and perceived legitimacy as tools to help build the movement. As squatters moved towards affirming societal norms, they raised expectations that they would be ready to compromise, that they would be capable of maintaining internal order, that their interests were those of young productivist farmers. These unrealistic expectations repeatedly led to resentment and disillusionment.

During a press conference in March 2017, when a politician was making a campaign speech in the traditional organizational space of the movement, la Vacherit, manure was thrown at journalists' cars and at the building. This provoked liberal outrage, with the ACIPA going on strike and moving the General Assemblies from the Vacherit; months of heated debate followed. Yet it was hardly the first time that politicians were targeted in this way on the ZAD. People had thrown manure at the Green Party publicity stand at the 2009 Climate Camp, and dumped a bucket of compost over presidential candidate Nicolas Hulot while he was doing a TV interview at the ACIPA summer gathering. La Co-ord, the ACIPA, and other *composants* were shocked because they had been led to believe that some squatters were capable of policing the others, and the squatters as a whole had somehow become less hostile to politicians using the ZAD to boost their campaigns—despite everything that had happened before. Partially as a consequence of these events, out of 450 "vigilant tractors," there were only two making barricades to oppose the 2018 evictions, and a handful that came days later to symbolically protect Les Fosses Noires, a farmhouse that faced only a very slight chance of being evicted.

There is a constant tension between ideas and practice, between what we see as being possible and how far can we push the limits, the norms, to spread new possibilities. This challenge is inherent in living in a world that is hostile to the ways we want to live our politics and sometimes to our very existence. It's not possible or desirable to stay "pure" if we want to engage with the world. But it is extremely dangerous to discount a political position precisely on the grounds that it is *political* and therefore "purist" and invalid. If we exchange our ideals for pure practicality, what exactly are we fighting for?

We got here by dreaming, by being absurdly overconfident, by trying to put radical ideas into practice. One of the many little deaths of the ZAD occurred when the terms "anti-authoritarian" and "radical" were used by a dominant group as insults and ways to delegitimize others within the occupation. This was deeply unsettling in a place where some of the few shared baselines were opposition to the state and to authority. Under pressure from more reformist elements, people stopped believing that we could do things differently. While the ZAD had once offered endless possibility, the compromises, restrictions, and resentments grew over the years until people were more focused on fighting each other than fighting the state. The party line of total unity could only be stretched so far.

The reformist tendency towards forced internal standardization was also seen in the press group disassociating itself from certain actions. In late 2010, when ACIPA publicly disassociated themselves from an action during a public inquiry meeting in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, this was addressed in months of organized discussion in a local hall. People finally arrived at an agreement that neither the squatters nor ACIPA would disassociate themselves from the other group. The agreed-upon statement was "We don't wear masks or use violence, but we don't condemn their actions," and that worked really well for a long time. For much of the history of the ZAD occupation, participants were skeptical and reluctant to engage with journalists. Journalists who didn't respect the conditions that ZADists proposed to them sometimes had their tires slashed, as referenced in this tongue-in-cheek statement from a judge's visit in fall 2015. The fact that the (CMDO-dominated) ZAD press group disassociated themselves and the movement from acts of road sabotage and actions against journalists contradicted historical agreements and showed how far some in the occupation movement had gone towards accepting the idea that we could "win" by behaving ourselves and being respectable, even if that meant violating a clear mandate to represent the different political currents existing on the ZAD. Their romanticized and incomplete version of events supports a political agenda of power grabs to the detriment of useful narratives for learning and improving.

When people talk about the ZAD, we often hear a sort of propaganda that implies that everything about it was exceptional; in fact, we were just normal people in a crazy situation doing what we could. Although they are meant to be inspiring, I think the myths that were spread about the unity or exceptionality of the ZAD or the fearless warriors who defended it can create unrealistic perceptions for others who want to replicate our "victories." For example, it's inaccurate to say that "The ZADistes defended every single building and every inch of land by all means necessary," as in this CrimethInc. article. It's patently untrue: different groups defended their own interests and the houses of their friends and allies, several groups and individuals wrote press releases or articles dissociating themselves from the others, and when people realized that entering into negotiations made them accessories or pawns in that process, many people left or stopped taking risks. It's vitally important to understand the role this mythology played in why things turned out as they did. Pretending that the movement won a unilateral victory does a disservice to everyone.

A large part of the movement had decided to negotiate and accept legalization before the airport was even abandoned. When this was first proposed, it was controversial, but people (most of whom were involved in the CMDO) kept pushing the issue in the General Assemblies until the question became no longer if but how. Legalization became the only strategy, so people continued pursuing it even when the circumstances turned out to be completely different from the scenario they had imagined, in which they would have been making demands from a place of power.

Many participants in the movement had convinced themselves they could meet with the state and talk as equals. Negotiations were the chief justification given for evicting the barricade road: the hope was that if we made a good-faith gesture and did something that the state had asked for, the state would offer to open negotiations in return. Unfortunately, albeit predictably, clearing the road without securing any concessions in return not only heightened tensions within the ZAD and opened up space for the police to do surveillance and prepare to carry out evictions—it also made the movement look weak. The original agreement had been to leave the cabins on the road and install concrete speed bumps, but the prefect made more demands every few days until the road was restored to its pre-2012 condition, exactly as it was before. ZADists and a local farmer moved one house with a tractor, only to be told later that it hadn't been moved far enough and should be moved again. Although they complied with both demands, that house was one of the first destroyed by police during the evictions.

This should have reminded everyone at the ZAD not to trust their enemies.

There were diverse motivations for negotiating, but for many, it came down to the fear that other *composants* or occupants would go with or without us, so we might as well participate collectively in hopes of mitigating the outcome. Others considered it an important step in maintaining links with other *composants.* Among the occupants of the ZAD, the decision to enter negotiations was made with many stipulations. For example, it was seen as a way to avoid evictions, so if a military operation happened, that would be grounds for breaking off negotiations. Another stipulation was that if houses were destroyed, the movement would rebuild them—all together.

By that point, however, the façade of unity was already crumbling. In retrospect, it was a mistake to believe that the movement as a whole could still make promises regarding the future.

The Evictions of April 2018

Under the military occupation we experienced for several months during the evictions of spring 2018, sometimes success simply meant avoiding being blocked by the cops in order to make it to a meeting on time. Like, it's 7:30 am, the tanks are pulling up now, so we have a two-minute window to get out before they exit their vehicles and we're blocked in for the day. It fucks with your head. The week after evictions began, the garden collective held a well-attended workday to mobilize, assess the damage, and catch up on the work that had been missed. It was nice to see so many people and have the feeling of getting back to everyday activities.

The next day, when I was talking with a newly arrived doctor, she shared her experience of being deeply shocked. She said she saw similarities to the Nazi occupation of France: a field full of people working, tanks parked at the entrance, drones overhead, and military police with weapons in hand standing like overseers. Part of her discomfort with the scene was how normal it seemed to all involved. Like heading out to a confrontation on the road and passing a friend watering the garden in her gas mask, or trying to write a collective text and being interrupted by the necessity of chasing cops out of the front yard. "Normal" was trying to live everyday life under these circumstances, working to ensure that there would be some kind of future while knowing that it might be interrupted at any time by confrontation.

Another thing that affected decision-making was that the occupation was losing ground. One third of the homes on the ZAD were destroyed in the first few days, all of them in the "East." The state made sure to drive home that it was in charge everywhere. For example, the cops were complaining in the newspaper about how dangerous the strategy they were ordered to employ was for them, that it made no military sense to give up the ground they'd taken every evening only to come back the next morning at 6 am to clear the barricades and take it back. But this was part of a plan of psychological warfare to show that they could and would come and take the road every morning for weeks on end.

The police were excessively violent, even compared to other demonstrations or confrontations in France, and especially compared to the evictions of 2012. On April 11, a march of several hundred families and retired people from the "White Hairs Camp" led by a samba group tried to cross the D281 (formerly the barricade road) into the East; the police fired upon them and charged them deploying concussion grenades nonstop. The medic team recorded treating almost 300 people in the first 10 days, a conservative estimate. The medics and healthcare workers collective published a statement asserting that the violence was so intense that it was surprising that no one had yet died. Journalists were banned from entering, though the gendarmerie kindly offered to give them police footage instead. Journalists who came anyway were targeted with police grenades.

During the weeks leading up to the evictions and even after they had begun, some leaders of citizen groups and other figures who had been part of the movement for over a decade publicly disassociated themselves. For instance, Françoise Verchère, on the evening of April 8, said in the regional newspaper, "I would have called for demonstrations against the destruction of the countryside. But I will not defend the houses near the road." Julian Durand, the self-proclaimed spokesperson of ACIPA, was quoted in the same article encouraging squatters on the ZAD to sign forms seeking contracts with the state on an individual basis in order to diminish the violence and size of the police operation.

It was infuriating and disheartening to have people from the movement explicitly not calling for eviction defense, while implying the evictions were the fault of the ZADistes because they hadn't complied with the demands of the state, on the very day that the attack began. Statements like these increased the feeling of abandonment and betrayal; they contradicted past commitments and discourse, as well as the "6 points" agreement, which declared among other things that everyone could stay afterwards if the airport was cancelled.

This betrayal was a classic example of the cooptation of one part of the movement combined with the intensification of repression against the remainder. The prefect repeated many times during the buildup to the first wave of evictions that she would only evict the houses near the road. During the second wave, May 17–18, each morning the general in charge of operations published a map of the houses that would be targeted for destruction, for "reassurance." Especially as there was already a good deal of tension around the barricade road and with those who didn't sign the forms, the state's strategy seemed to count on a strategy of division to increase the apathy of those who weren't directly attacked.

A division between "the East" and "the West" had begun developing around 2013, largely along class lines and relationship to the environment, but also around goals and methods of organization. The conceptions of "East" and "West" had their origins in geography, but it would be more accurate to say that it was a question of different ways of approaching the world; for instance, some houses that were in the western half were obviously part of "the east." The western side of the ZAD was primarily occupied by people who fit the model of the hardworking organic farmer or the concerned middle-class activist, while many on the eastern side identified as primitivists or had previously been living on the street. At least at the beginning, the east was opposed to agriculture and centralized or formal methods of organization.

As soon as the cabins were destroyed in the east, it began to be erased. The center (formerly the land between the D81 and the D281, around the Fosses Noires), became the new eastern border, and the new "center ZAD" was west of the D81, places like the Rohanne forest and the Wardine. As part of the disappearance of the east, throughout the evictions the general assemblies took place at Bellevue, an hour's walk from the front lines, with the newly redrawn geographical borders as justification. A region of the ZAD with less power was scapegoated and their houses sacrificed, as they were accused of being dogmatic and insular "purists" compared to others' participation in liberal-dominated general assemblies and events aimed at courting the mainstream.

One narrative that surfaced was that "people deserve the repression they are subjected to." This arose in different ways, from conflict in assemblies to physical attacks. As tensions increased under pressure, fractures opened or deepened along political lines. One disturbing example was when someone who had allegedly sabotaged the road construction was forcibly taken from bed, viciously beaten, and left in front of a psychiatric hospital, as described in this statement from the movement legal team and this article in the regional media. When he arrived at the General Assembly in a wheelchair that evening, people were more or less indifferent.

This act of intimidation happened two weeks before the eviction, and had numerous consequences. It contributed to an atmosphere of mistrust and resentment, and had a concrete effect on whether people were willing to engage in sabotage during the evictions. More generally, it showed how far some people were willing to go to impose a strategy that relied on becoming a unified and disciplined movement that was able to keep internal order in negotiations with the State.

People became sick of the constant police presence; hoping that if others stopped fighting the police, the cops would go away, they convinced themselves that this was true. Consequently, they chastized, mocked, or tried to block others from engaging with the cops or digging up the road, and blamed them for the police presence. It was scary to see where people directed the blame when they were afraid. Instead of supporting multiple lines of attack, understanding sabotage and resistance as useful in general and increasing the political leverage that ZADists would have in negotiations, some people developed a logic according to which people who resisted in ways beyond those broadly accepted by the whole movement deserved to experience repression or at least to be denied solidarity.

For example, building barricades or damaging the road outside of a few approved places repeatedly came under fire in the general assemblies. For some roads, it made sense to keep them passable, such as maintaining an evacuation route for wounded people out of each neighborhood. More often, however, the criticism was directed at actions on the two main North-South axes (D81 and D821), in hopes of avoiding upsetting people of certain *composants* who were tired of constant military presence and roadblocks and blamed those things on people who engaged in confrontation or sabotage. Much of the criticism was rooted in the idea that if the movement could keep its word by maintaining internal order, it would show the state that it could offer credible partners for negotiation. Some of the pushback was also based on the argument that sabotage would undermine public support; by this point, many decisions were being made based on whether they would gain or lose support. It seemed to me that many people used this argument to bolster their points, taking for granted that hypothetical "supporters" would necessarily agree with them.

There was a growing uncertainty about the basis of divisions between "the movement," "occupants," and "supporters" as evictions went on. People who lived elsewhere found themselves unable to take the floor in assemblies, shouted down after risking their lives all day. A new category, the "supporters," was born, as in—this move will gain us *supporters,* this meeting is closed to *supporters* but they can observe in silence, "we thank you for your support, but…" One of the main arguments for signing the forms to seek individual contracts with the state was that it would garner support against the state's continued attacks, and that "no one had a better idea." These forms were individualized declarations of intention to seek a temporary agricultural contract with the state under one's legal name, although the projects were intrinsically linked. This was done in the hope that liberals would see that the squatters were co-operating and would be angered if the evictions continued nevertheless; it was also hoped that, if the contracts were granted, the would provide some sort of collective stability.

Many "supporters" expressed that they found it insulting to be *othered* in that way, their differences flattened and transformed into a unified category. The assembly of the movement that followed the form signing, which was slated to plan the mass actions that had been one of the stipulations of signing, had its agenda tabled after half an hour because most of the hundreds of people present had come to talk about how upset and betrayed they felt. Many people spoke about why they thought that signing the forms was a terrible idea and asserted that it went against many things that had been said before.

In the end, we gave up the support of comrades for a failed attempt to seduce the Left. But once we made the state responsible for our future on that land, the liberals trusted the state to take care of it. Thus, we lost significant amounts of support, including some of the most crucial "supporters." We exchanged the support of actual comrades for that of theoretical masses, assuming that our comrades would support us no matter what—even if they disagreed, even if they weren't kept informed, even if they were explicitly excluded from the decision-making.

We can see some of their perspectives on this in a letter read by "outside supporters" at the "assembly of uses" (the assembly that the CMDO had organized after they quit the assembly of inhabitants) and a text written by comrades in Nantes about their reasons for striking.

> "We know that the meeting was only to set terms for re-initiating a dialogue, but we found it inappropriate to go to the prefecture while the military occupation continues on the ZAD, a good part of the houses have been destroyed, and comrades are sleeping in prison.
>
> "Our feeling is that the negotiations that have happened up until now have only weakened the movement, and have contributed, among other things, to 'the movement' demolishing the cabins of those who lived on the road, without obtaining anything in exchange. So we are going on strike starting at 2:30."
>
> -"Strike against Negotiations," a text by comrades in Nantes

Since the Evictions of April-May 2018

When the decision was finally made to sign the individual forms, the agreement was—everything is connected, so there will be names on the forms, but they'll all be linked and turned in together; it's "all or nothing." This phrase was repeated ad nauseam—people wouldn't sign individually, everyone would sign together, and "we were going to fight for it." The trap was identified—the idea was not to give the state any more opportunities to create division, to sort through the "good" and the "bad" squatters and choose which ones to legitimize. Nevertheless, shortly after the individual forms were handed in on April 20, the projects were divided into three groups: those who would be offered contracts immediately, those who would probably be offered contracts in the fall if they changed their projects, and a third group to be discussed… at some point in the future. The projects in the first group signed contracts six weeks later, the first week of June, without much assurance beyond "the state says they'll get to everyone eventually." These contracts were temporary, covering agricultural projects and not houses, and could be cancelled on 48 hours notice.

The strategy of negotiation failed for several reasons. One was that the various groups on the ZAD and in the movement didn't share the same goals. Once the common enemy was gone—the airport—the project became building a future together. But people had always had vastly different visions of that future. Conflict began intensifying the day after the airport was abandoned, with the question of how to respond to the government injunction to clear off the barricade road. Without the common goal that had held the movement together for so long, it became increasingly difficult to elaborate a common strategy.

Another reason for the failure of negotiations was that a part of the ZAD tried to push through a non-consensual legal strategy and others refused to engage. One of the agreed stipulations for initiating negotiations was that ZADists should put equal effort into organizing action and mobilization, but discussing legal strategy took up an inordinate amount of time in assemblies, occupying space that could have been used to organize a mobilization. Once negotiations began, they were the main factor determining what the future would be. At that point, extra-legal means could only increase or decrease the *rapport de force.* Intensifying the *rapport de force* could have increased the likelihood of establishing better terms for the legalization of the ZAD, but as it became clear that many people were fundamentally opposed to doing this, other people stopped engaging in the organizing process. As one "supporter" elaborated:

> "[We weren't here] to save a couple acres for a sustainable eco-friendly agriculture project, nor to add some weight to the balance of a process of negotiations with the state. We were here, we are here, to try to defend the possibility of creating our own spaces, geographic and temporal, outside of the framework imposed by capital and the state. "
>
> -"A Funny Kind of Feeling," translated in full in the appendix, below

For some, "defending the ZAD" meant defending a unified and coherent political project to be built among the productive occupiers and parts of the wider movement, who, sharing a willingness to integrate into a legal structure, were able to work together and find common goals. Others wanted to maintain a ZAD closer to the diverse and disorganized place that had served as a home for people from different social backgrounds and with different politics, who worked together at multiple levels but mainly were held together by virtue of being neighbors, through need and affinity. Some people clearly had no interest in the latter approach; it was duly sacrificed during the process of negotiations.

One position generally saw the ZAD as a playground for living and experimenting with social organization, brought together by common enemies—the airport project, the state, and Vinci, the construction multinational. The most important thing for them was the diversity of ways of organizing and people with different life experiences and values. How can we live together and take care of each other with all our baggage, create networks of sharing and support that are broad and open, that are not limited to people who already have resources and all agree?

That's what made it such a unique community. It's also part of why the ZAD was able to exist for so long: with so many different elements all acting differently but in solidarity, it would be complicated for the state to intervene. The social legitimacy of the farmers who could organize tractor blockades, the practical knowledge and experience with squatting and direct action that anarchists brought, combined with the delays brought about by the legal proceedings initiated by citizens' groups and the unpredictability of the street punks—all this combined to produce an ever-changing offensive that the authorities could not easily defeat, pacify, or coopt. As the movement moved towards the false unity of *composition,* it became more one-dimensional and thus easier to attack.

Others were motivated by a model struggle, a symbol of resistance, something that linked small farmers, intellectuals, syndicalists, and liberals; a physical territory with material infrastructure that attested to the strength and power of their movement. From this perspective, those who were labeled "schlags," or who lived around the road, were not only inconsequential, but detrimental, because they were difficult to control and tarnished the legitimate image of the ZADists as hardworking young farmers.

In retrospect, in view of the consequences of the argument that "If we don't sign, we'll lose everything"—I would argue that we lost more by signing. I loved my home, my gardens, and the projects I was involved in. But I loved them more because of the context they existed within. Their context gave them meaning; the projects were woven into a larger structure of interdependent groups within a struggle—from a radical alternative healthcare system to people growing grains to mill and bake into bread. So many people left angry or disillusioned that much of the collective infrastructure stopped functioning; when you pass through the ZAD now, the paths and roads are deserted. There's no more weekly inhabitants' assembly, so the groups it mandated like the conflict resolution group have ceased to exist, while the non-market (weekly food re-distribution) limps along… All this has drained the life out of a thriving community, leaving behind some state-sanctioned agricultural projects.

One of the hardest parts of last summer was when people came to visit for the first time and found it amazing. So much land! Such beautiful structures! Those small farms, even a (for-profit) brewery! I was baffled as to why anyone would be excited about a project in the midst of its death throes, aggravated by vicious infighting. Several experiences helped me realize that many of the people who came after the evictions didn't understand what had existed before—the cabins that defied logic and gravity, large-scale collective solidarity, the burned cars on the barricade road with flowers planted in them, the fabric of community woven by everyday interactions, the migrant house and language school, a pirate radio… For those who don't have a comparison, it was like enjoying the best cake ever, not realizing that it was only the crumbs. Because in the world they were coming from, the world we all live in now, we have so little control over our lives that it seems amazing when people manage to achieve some modicum of autonomy and organize to take care of each other, putting radical theory into daily practice.

The most recent chapter in the follow-up were the two days of police operations in March 2019—with lockdown, helicopter, etc.—to evict all of the cabins that had been rebuilt over the previous eight months. The first day, the official ZAD website published one sentence about the evictions, after the cops had been there all day: "Today the cabins rebuilt at Youpi and Lama Fâché were destroyed by about 30 vans of riot cops with bulldozers." There was no call for support or mobilization, and the police returned the following day in near media silence to destroy the remaining cabins. The day after that, the zad.nadir website and email were "hijacked" and redirected to a call for reconstruction.

Strengths and Weaknesses

It is possible to turn the tenets of anarchist organizing against those who are committed to them. I don't think all of these tenets are bad; I don't want to change to a way of organizing that doesn't take oppression into account, for example. But I do think it's important to be aware of these traps to stop people from weaponizing them against us.

One pitfall was not having created structures for discussion and decision-making that were formalized, accessible, and effective enough to fill the power vacuum that followed the 2012 evictions. At that point, many people were opposed to meetings in general or lacked social or political experience conducting meetings (like following an agenda or speaking in turn); the weekly inhabitants' meetings were often chaotic and could be frustrating. People experimented with many structures, but none of them worked well for all involved. A more formalized structure emerged over time, involving roles like facilitation, note-taking, and "dictionary" (sitting with recent arrivals to answer their questions so that they wouldn't need to interrupt the meeting). However, it took many years to implement this model because it was uncomfortable to enforce it—as enforcing structure and roles seemed authoritarian. Not having a strong, clear, decision-making space meant that others who didn't have qualms about taking power could show up and take it.

Another pitfall was open, inclusive process. To write a text coming from the ZAD, for example, the common process was to find a place and time, publish the meeting point in the weekly newspaper, compose the text with others, and seek to have it approved at the inhabitants' assembly. Sometimes this would take two to three weeks. The process was the same to propose a demonstration or a new project, or to deal with conflict: it began with announcing it publicly in a collective way, and then discussing together what forms it could take. This is more complete and inclusive than deciding everything about a proposal within a closed group. The idea was that this sort of process was open to the largest number of people, so it would offer the widest collective intelligence and create a better chance of presenting the full diversity of the ZAD. But it was also a very slow process; often, by the time people reached a larger consensus around a more inclusive conclusion or story, others had written it first.

There's a legitimate discomfort with using the logic of capitalism or other things we oppose, such as social norms based on race, class, or gender oppression, to gain power or legitimacy by using access to privilege, even when it's the easiest or most "practical" way to make connections. For example, not wanting to uncritically use male camaraderie to make links between male farmers, rendering those relationships more difficult to access for others.

Finally, one strength of anarchist organizing that can be a used as a vulnerability is how we value support roles and putting lots of effort into conflict resolution and caring for the general collective. In some cases, this meant that we ended up doing the social and emotional labor while others made the decisions. In trying to facilitate people getting along and avoid rupture, people in "neutral" positions delegitimized the anger of those who were being marginalized.

There will always be people who aim to take power, who try to take advantage of what they perceive as the weak points of collectively organized groups or movements. What do we do about it? How do we avoid taking on our adversaries' methods in order to combat them? How do we organize to keep our practice related to our theory, in order that our practices will be our strengths?

Authoritarian Tactics

When one tendency acts without taking the others into account, imposes their decisions in the name of urgency, and speaks in the name of the whole, this creates a mechanism that won't just stop by itself. Here are some examples of authoritarian activity seen on the ZAD that might offer helpful reference points for people organizing elsewhere.

Various tactics were employed to bypass collective structures, leading to the development of a dominant political force. By concentrating on taking roles that hold power, such as communication, and recruiting others based on their positions of power and access to resources rather than affinity, the CMDO built a separate base for discussion between people from different parts of the occupation. This created the feeling that they had legitimacy to act outside of collective organizational spaces—for example, deciding with other *composants* to hold a demonstration on the ZAD before proposing it at the inhabitants' meeting. At the same time, there was a cultivated pretension that they didn't exist as a political group but as a nebulous group of "friends" that would introduce fully-developed proposals: "A few of us were talking and we agree it's a great idea that…"

People were discouraged from publicly naming these dynamics through systematic personal attacks—for example, delegitimizing anyone who presented a critique, or calling them paranoid, or playing the victim while dodging engagement with criticism.

Once their position in the anti-airport movement was consolidated, there was less need to engage with the rest of the occupation. The CMDO officially withdrew from the inhabitants' meeting in a text, citing inefficiency and disinterest in discussion around the problems of everyday life together. It became possible to push through proposals or decide to go ahead with them despite vehement opposition. Lines shifted again and as one group gained power, they moved towards strategies that protected their interests at the expense of others. For instance, two days before the second wave of evictions was scheduled to begin, a group with arguably the most access to resources out of anyone evicted squatted a house that they knew was intended for people who lost their homes in the second wave of evictions; they did not even communicate beforehand with the squatters who live directly across the street. During the second wave of evictions, I saw people who had been evicted sent away from the only house still standing in that neighborhood that was not entirely kettled. No longer needing validation from the inhabitant's assembly meant that one person with access to the collective ZAD emails could refuse to share the access codes, even after it had been decided in an inhabitants' assembly that that person should give the codes to at least one other person.

I also saw people take a position as a bloc to protect members from criticism even when the others in the group did not agree with what they had done. That's part of why this is not just a critique of individual actions or discourse: because that approach depends on constituting a strong group, it is the group that holds responsibility.

Looking Back

Compared to 2010, things are very different now. The airport is a thing of the past, as is "the struggle against the airport." In the past year, half or even two thirds of the people who lived on the ZAD and made it through alive have departed. I haven't heard many people say they "wanted to return to nomadism," or "just felt like living somewhere else," as some have suggested. I imagine it's clear at this point why they left.

The division isn't between who leaves and who stays, however. People choose to leave or stay based on what options are available to them. Right now, I can't bear to imagine working towards a future on that land when it no longer has a political meaning for me anymore, and knowing that whatever happens, it will never be as good as it was before. After the evictions of 2012, people talked about being traumatized by the violence of the police. Although the 2018 evictions were markedly more violent, the lasting damage is less a result of the repression and more a consequence of how things played out between us. The aim of the evictions wasn't so much to destroy the houses as to destroy the will to resist. There was the constant promise (for those not automatically classed as undesirables) that if we would just conform to their norms, legalize and legitimize ourselves, we would be permitted to stay. But trying to squeeze the complexity of the ZAD into boxes and forms is a full time job that continues to this day, with the practical questions of continued negotiation, conforming to hygiene regulations, paying for electricity, water, and taxes, and figuring out how to define projects that were created in opposition to the state in terms that the authorities will understand and accept.

As one person wrote, "The system accommodates rebels—as long as they don't attack it."

I was always skeptical of labeling the ZAD a "social experiment," because it wasn't a summer camp or a think tank to practice or play for some later date; we were living and creating it in the present. In the aftermath, however, I feel like that is much of its value for the future: sharing what we tried and the problems that cropped up, exploring its successes and failures for other struggles to use and learn from. I hope that wider discussion of these dynamics will provide different perspectives for post-ZAD discourse and open the way for more diverse narratives.

"Was it worth it?" a friend in the US asked me recently. Yes, it was. I don't think I would have said that a year ago, but I'm glad that the ZAD existed.

I don't know if all our struggles will inevitably be recuperated by liberals and authoritarians. I'd like to think they won't, if only to preserve my sanity. I do know that in the meantime, we achieved a lot of amazing things—exchanging ideas, finding out what was possible, and concretely making people's lives better. There was an autonomous, police-free zone for many years, a place where people with wildly different life experiences lived together and supported each other within a fairly well-functioning collective infrastructure and a daily life that resembled an anarchist utopia more than anywhere else I've been. That feels worth it.

Appendix I: Terms and Definitions

ACIPA: "Intercommunal Association of Citizen Populations concerned by the Airport." A local group opposed to the airport that was formed in 2000 and disbanded in June 2018. They were influential in the struggle against the airport and led most of the legal challenges. There was a lot of friction inside ACIPA around differences between goals and values. ACIPA included a board that made decisions and card-holding members from all over France. They held a large annual festive gathering with concerts, panel discussions, and presentation stands from anti-infrastructure projects, leftist organizations, and political parties.

COPAIN: The "Collective of Professional Agricultural Organizations Indignant about the Airport Project" is a group of leftist farmers formed in 2011; they were part of the movement and also involved in many collective agricultural projects on the ZAD, sharing tools and skills. Their stated goal was always to have more small farmers cultivating the zone. The acronym means "friend" in French.

La Co-Ord: The "Coordination of Opponents" of the Notre-Dame-des-Landes Airport Project was created in 2003 and met monthly to discuss the issues and organize joint actions. The Coordination was made up of over 60 groups including associations, unions, political movements, and collectives. The ZAD wasn't part of the Co-Ord, and ACIPA held a lot of influence there.

The Movement against the Airport: The movement against the airport included non-profits, trade unions, political parties, political groups, the occupants of the ZAD, and a network of support committees. While initially there was little formal coordination between the other groups and the occupants, from 2012 onwards, some occupants made increasing efforts to build a unified strategy.

Inhabitants Meeting: A weekly assembly of people living on the ZAD, known after 2012 as "the Thursday meeting." The central place for sharing information and taking decisions on the level of the occupation, it also mandated several sub-groups like the press group and the "cycle of 12" conflict resolution structure.

The Occupation Movement: All the squatters who occupied the territory of the ZAD.

The Assembly of Uses: An assembly started in late 2017 to discuss land use, which became the central decision-making assembly during evictions—not without controversy.

General Assembly of the Movement: Started in 2010, over time this grew to become the main body of inter-*composant* communication and decision-making for the anti-airport movement. After the airport was abandoned, the Assembly of Uses took a more and more central place.

The delegation: Comprised of six people from different *composants* and three representing the inhabitants' assembly of the people occupying the ZAD, this delegation had a mandate from the assembly of uses to meet with the prefecture and negotiate agreements for the future. The "Letter to the Local Committees and to Everyone Who Would Like to Understand Where We're at on the ZAD" of May 2018 describes the delegation in detail.

CMDO: The self-named "Committee for Maintenance and Defense of Occupations" is a group of people—not based in affinity—opposed to what they saw as the inefficiency of horizontal organization and with anarchists' distrust of institutions and political parties. Often referring to an ideal of "the Commune," this group comprised of "Appelistes" and anti-state leftists organized among influential people from the ZAD and from the wider movement to build a clear strategy to fight the airport. They operated in secret for a long time, often using tactics that others considered manipulative or dishonest to serve what they considered important ends. These methods combined with little capacity to engage with critique eventually created mistrust and division.

Appendix II: Letter to the Local Committees and to Everyone Who Would Like to Understand Where We're at on the ZAD

A translation of a text that appeared in May 2018.

It seems like it's really hard for people in other places to follow what's going on, so we wanted to tell what's been going on these past couple months on the ZAD of Notre-Dame-des-Landes. We'll present in this text what we understand of what's happening. It's not just our analyses or feelings about the situation: we'll try to present a diversity of opinions even if we don't agree with them—we don't even agree between the few of us writing this! The authors, by the way, are a couple of people who live on the zone and are used to organizing together in the same political group.

Victory and Fears

The announcement of the abandonment of the airport project, January 17, 2018, was—for a large part of the movement—a triumph in a long battle that gave strength and motivation to other struggles. For once, a struggle was won against a state-sponsored project backed by corporations. Yet for others, the next phase seemed difficult and full of worry. At the same time as the abandonment of the project, the government announced the "return to the rule of law," when everything that happens on the zone is decided by us—who live here or are involved here. How will we be able to continue with everything that is built—human or material—on this zone? Many of us weren't here just to oppose an airport. How will we continue to struggle against "its world," in particular in the current context of Macron's politics and the globalized development of neoliberalism?

It All Happened So Quickly: D281, etc.

From there, the pace, partly dictated by the government and taken up by many among us, was very fast and there often wasn't enough time to discuss things together before making difficult or complex political decisions that often meant compromising our ideals.

One of these very controversial decisions was evicting the "barricade road," the D281, which had been open for slow traffic since 2013. From the day after the announcement, there was discussion about giving up the road, in very long general assemblies. The positions were very different: for some, it was necessary to give it up to avoid taking the risk that the cops would come right away and clear themselves, and take advantage of their presence to start evicting houses; for many, it was necessary as a sign to our neighbors that it's easier to pass here now that there's no more airport. But for many others, this act represented abandoning one of the strongest places on the ZAD by making a present to the state and preparing the terrain for evictions that were also clearly anticipated from March 31st on in the announcement of the airport project's abandonment. Among those who would have accepted the clearing of the road, some thought it wasn't the right moment, that we should have kept it as leverage in negotiations, or waited to get guarantees about evictions. After lots of pressure and a *rapport de force* from one part of the movement, the D281 was forcibly cleared during very tense moments, and the cabins that were on the road were taken down or moved into the hedge. The most central one, Lama Fâché, was rebuilt on a neighboring field and lasted another two months, rebaptised "The Massacred" or "Sacred Lama." This moment contributed to deepening the mistrust between us.

Road construction followed; some people tried to slow or block it. Then the construction was accompanied by a heavy military police presence, when we hadn't seen cops on the zone since April 2013. For some, it was the acts of resistance that brought the police, while for others, the state had planned to send them from the beginning and were just waiting for a pretext. In the end, these weeks of police presence on the ZAD passed mostly in silence and mobilized very few people from other *components*—for whom it was normal to reopen the road, or who were upset by the attempts to block the road construction, for example.

The fears related to clearing the road and the road construction were largely confirmed afterward: they served to prepare for the evictions, seeing as the cops never left the zone after that and took advantage of their presence to do reconnaissance and habituate people to their presence; the police used the road to cut off a part of the zone during evictions, thus isolating the eastern part.

A gathering on the ZAD to celebrate the abandonment of the airport project, "grow roots for the future," and support other struggles occurred on February 10. Two blocs gathered a few tens of thousands of people to converge on the farm of Bellevue, where effigies were burned representing contentious projects where there are struggles. There were also discussions at Lama Fâché and a party at Bellevue.

Negotiations

Before the airport was abandoned, the anti-airport movement and notably the "assembly of uses" had already decided to form an "inter-component delegation" to negotiate with the state about what would happen to the ZAD without an airport by upholding the decisions of the assembly of uses (see a previous letter to the committees in January). After long and difficult debates, the assembly of inhabitants decided that the squatters would participate in this delegation. We didn't expect much out of it, but some among us considered it important to participate in this delegation with the other *components* to continue on our path together and take a step towards them; some didn't want to let the other components negotiate for us without us, while others were totally opposed to discussion with the State.

Once the decision was made, we discussed how to choose people to participate in the delegation. After some discussions about what was at stake, a group proposed a delegation process, in which small mixed groups would propose a list of people that they considered complementary enough to represent our diversity and who they would trust. Making this sort of "election" was a huge effort for many among us, and it wasn't easy or simple. But most people tried to play by the rules, although two affinity groups cheated by proposing lists with only members of their group or by influencing the facilitation. In the end, the people whose names showed up the most and who didn't have vetoes became the "group of 11" who would follow the delegation process and designate delegates and subs for different meetings. The result is that the people who go have a collective mandate—first from the assembly of uses and then from the assembly of inhabitants, but not all of them are very convinced by the method: they didn't sign up to be delegates, but they try to do their best to respect their mandate.

This decision to participate in the delegation and to meet the prefect was pretty widely shared at first, but some of the squatters were opposed from the beginning. The space taken up by discussions about the delegation, what we decided in the inhabitants' assemblies, and the rapidity with which the decisions were advancing contributed to growing doubts about the pertinence of this choice.

The inter-component delegation was initially charged with presenting three big demands: the refusal of evictions and the legalization of all housing; freezing the redistribution of land to give the movement time to build an entity that would handle it long-term, and amnesty for everyone who experienced repression during these years of struggle. The assembly of uses behaved as if the movement could enter into a real negotiation with the state. The delegation was received two times, February 28 and March 20 at the prefecture, but contrary to what we asked for, there was only an exchange of positions. The prefecture blocked on every point (except for the freeze on land redistribution) and particularly regarding collective land management.

Internal Conflict

With the airport project abandoned, the most obvious thing that linked the diverse groups in the struggle as well as the people within each group had ceased to exist. Disagreements came to light and internal conflicts flourished. For example, on the ZAD, some were ready to accept legalization to stay long-term; others were willing to make certain compromises if they were compatible with the collective interest, while the priority of others was to remain coherent and not submit to the demands of a system we oppose, even if that meant risking eviction with dignity by staying outside the law.

In the associations, some wanted to fight for the future of the ZAD so that everyone could stay—for example, we had the text "6 points for the future of the ZAD" that we had worked on together; while others dreamed that now that there was no airport, everything would go back to the way it was, with a couple more farm projects. Even the future for some of the associations is uncertain, as they were created to struggle against the airport project.

Some yelled at each other in private, while others argued with their comrades by giving interviews in the media disassociating themselves from the rest of the movement or by calling other groups out on Indymedia.

Among those who want to build a common future on the ZAD, there were also conflicts, such as the relationship to barricading roads. The level of tension made it difficult to move forward together—the general assemblies seemed blocked and people blamed each other.

The First Wave of Evictions

The first wave of the 2018 evictions began April 9, and on the evening of the 12th the prefecture announced the end of the operation carried out by the military police. Between the two, more than 270 people were injured by the forces of order, about 60 people were arrested, and a third of the ZAD was razed to the ground.

On the morning of the 9th, there was already outside support in place, especially at the welcome places of The White Hairs Camp (across from les Fosses Noires), Lama Fâché, la Wardine, and Bellevue. Almost all the cabins to the east of what had been the barricade road (D281) and to the south of the Fosses Noires road were destroyed during this first week. There weren't many people east of the D281, which was taken by the cops at 3 am, making passage between east and west very difficult. In the center of the zone, there was a lot of confrontation and physical resistance.

The eviction and destruction of the Cent Noms attracted lots of attention and motivated more people to speak out against the evictions and to come to physically support them. For some people, it was more shocking to see the Cent Noms destroyed because it was unexpected and because they had a sheep-raising project. For others, it was hurtful to see to what point there was more reaction for the Cent Noms, as if the other homes and gardens were less important.

During this week there were gatherings and solidarity actions all over France and Belgium and gatherings in front of the French embassies in Lisbon, Tunis, Vienna, and London, as well as actions in Chiapas, Palestine, India, Quebec, Greece, the US, and elsewhere.

Military Occupation, Repression, and Resistance

The military occupation had begun as soon as the road was "opened," but after the first wave of evictions and the declaration of the "truce" by the prefect on the evening of Thursday, April 12, it escalated to another level of pressure. They continued destroying cabins—notably at La Mandragore, L'isolette, La Noue non Plus, and Pimki. The intention seemed to be to wage a psychological war that would produce less violent images, by a daily occupation that showed the force of the state—a constant stream of tanks and transport trucks, plus the helicopter and ever-present drones. The reasons given were to "assure freedom of movement on the roads," the "clearing of debris," which took weeks, and even to protect those with agricultural projects from the others. All the while, they conducted surveillance, continued to arrest and injure people, and blocked the main axes and crossroads as well as the smaller roads, which made our daily lives and agricultural activity difficult. There were countless ridiculous scenes in which tractors with large wagons of manure behind them had to turn around four times because all of the roads were blocked, or gendarmes cut the barbed wire fences of local farmers.

However, there were acts of resistance to this occupation. Barricades comprised of whatever could be found and trenches dug in the road, every day, as soon as the police left. Games, like the challenge of trying to touch a tank with one's bare hand, or to take a selfie in front of one. People continued to live in the east of the D281 for weeks before they were discovered and evicted. There was a samba band that went to play beside the police lines every day. There were also little groups of people who went to make trouble for them in the forest or on the road, and there were regular confrontations.

To not leave the people isolated who were arrested or convicted during the evictions, there were several evening visits to the prison at Carquefou, notably one called out largely on the level of the movement. Even if it wasn't very diverse in terms of components or even of people from the ZAD, there were about a hundred people there to make a nice ambiance, including music, an improvised rap concert, exchanging messages with prisoners, and fireworks. There were no arrests or injuries and it was a joyous and motivating moment.

Forms

The famous forms that everyone is talking about are declarations of intention regarding an agricultural project, which could enable those submitting them to obtain a Precarious Occupation Convention (COP). The COP is a free contract that gives very few rights and which the state can end within a couple days. There was no guarantee from the state that these declarations of intention would result in the granting of a COP.

Just before the first phase of evictions, the assembly of uses sent a request for a collective COP that would have covered all the land and living spaces on the ZAD in the name of the "association for a common future in the bocage" which was created to implement the decisions of the assembly. After the first wave of evictions, the delegation attended a meeting at the prefecture on April 18, at which the prefect refused all collective contracts.

The next day, the general assembly of the occupiers decided to fill in the forms, trying to cover the whole ZAD. The condition to fill out the forms was to sign them all together or not at all, so that all the projects would be linked together and the bureaucracy would be approached in parallel to resistance on the ground and the mobilizing of support. The forms included "agricultural, cultural, and artisanal projects" and houses, but the prefecture only considered the agricultural projects.

The forms were filled out in a hurry, and those who weren't present at the assembly were called individually and offered a very short period of time in which to decide. About ten living places or collectives chose not to fill out the forms, for the reasons they explain in their text "Sans Fiches."

In the end, the administrative efforts took lots of time and energy, while we didn't really manage to organize collectively for actions.

Actions on the Ground

At the end of the first week of evictions, we organized a reoccupation demo for Sunday, April 15. There were 5–10,000 people who managed to pass through or avoid the police controls to get in. The plan was to rebuild the Gourbi, but it seemed impossible to even get there because of a large police presence: people were arrested and wounded around the Rohanne Forest.

In the afternoon there was a more organized effort to pass with a part of the timber frame through the fields. We didn't make it all the way to the Gourbi, but the fact of pushing together created a feeling of success and collective force. In the evening, many people brought the assembled timber frame to the Gourbi on foot. It was an incredible moment, even though we knew it would probably be destroyed the next day.

Some people were upset by the spectacle of this day of reoccupation. There were many other reconstruction initiatives: at the Chèvrerie, for example, where people rebuilt and tried to save their home. They wrote a text about it here.

There were other moments of reclaiming space together, like the two Sundays of outdoor games, "Pass to the East" and "Wild Harvest the East." "Pass to the East" was a day of attempting to return to the east and reoccupy the space, though the military police were occupying the length of the road and mobile throughout the neighborhood. The goal of "Wild Harvest the East," a couple weeks later, was to introduce people to this part of the zone while they collected medicinal and edible plants for the collective apothecary of the ZAD.

The "garden-again" days, every Sunday, reestablished gardens that had been destroyed around the ex-barricade road and in the east in order to continue to make these places live so as not to abandon this part of the ZAD, even if the cabins were destroyed. There was re-cultivation at Planchettes, Plan Chouette, and le Sabot. There was even a garden bed in the form of a middle finger, a special dedication to the low-flying helicopter bothering the gardeners.

The Second Wave of Evictions

After the first wave of evictions, the government set an ultimatum with their “piloting committee” for May 14 for those who weren’t “integrated into the framework that the state proposed.” Early in the morning of May 17, hundreds of military police passed the barricades on foot and kettled the Rohanne Forest. They evicted and destroyed four living spaces close to the forest: la Châteigne, Puiplu, la Vosgerie, and la Datcha. The next day, they simultaneously attacked les Domaines and le Phoenix in the center, Ker Terre and la Gare in the far east, and la Freuzière and la Tarte in the far west. The Pré Failly, obviously forgotten on the maps of the daily objectives that the general in charge of the operation published each morning, was set on fire, almost certainly by the cops who had kettled the neighborhood. Between a lightning attack by 2000 military police who rapidly surrounded their targets and a weak mobilization on our side, the summary of these two days of police operation was bitter: all the living spaces that weren’t covered by the forms for “declaring intention of projects” were evicted. The stone houses were walled up by the gendarmes and then unwalled and resquatted, then re-evicted. They even promised to come back and destroy them, pretending that we were forcing them to do that by re-squatting!

The following Sunday, several hundred people came to the ZAD for different workdays, from gathering materials in the rubble for reconstruction to sowing buckwheat, the construction of mini-domes at the Gourbi, and other spontaneous activities.

And Now?

We don’t really know where we’re at now. There is a lot of exhaustion and conflict, after weeks of evictions and police presence. But there are still many people who were already living on the ZAD or who came this spring and are determined to stay, to keep fighting and to build something here. There are still some desires to keep a kind of togetherness that can remain through all this.

For many among us, we want to continue to defend a zone where there is space for a diversity of social positions, situations, and opinions, a place where we are tied to other struggles. Recently, we often have the impression of having to choose between the plague or cholera, but we still have some options to try, with everyone who wants to.

-Some squatters on the ZAD
May 2018

Appendix III: Postcards from Outside

This zine, *Postcards from Outside,* was distributed with the ZADnews in May 2018.

We’ll Know How to Find Each Other

We will have fought for a bit of wetland, some ordinary country roads and a tiny forest. It’s true. We needed a pretext, an occasion, a bonfire to meet each other, warm our hands, dare to look each other in the eyes and to finally feel less alone when we go out in the night. This place lent us its warmth. It let us take its embers in our pockets when it was time to go. We didn’t betray our promises to come back and defend it. We were all there. When the evictions began, we rushed there, a bit dazed but determined to confront whatever would come to take away this bit of territory so strongly tied to our hearts. Everyone in their own way, we are fighting our last battle for the ZAD. Despite our different paths, we share a fierce desire to thank it for everything it gave us these past years—everything beautiful, sincere, joyous, and in flames. But a metamorphosis has begun, which we need to look at head on if we don't want the ghost of our past failures to haunt our future adventures. It's raining and every day our ember goes out a little bit more. The wood is wet and the fire won't start again. We should say goodbye with dignity, be up to the level of what it brought up in us. On the ashes, some projects will surely continue and that's for the best.

That some relationships, a couple cabins and fields manage to stay in this corner of the bocage could reassure us. Like flowers that we plant close to the grave of someone we love, they keep them company but don't replace them. It's nevertheless a point of reference, a place to gather ourselves together, to remember good moments and bad, a place to look for advice. The ZAD is dying. Not the topographical place but the wandering spark that brought us together. It was inoculated with a virus the day of the evil called victory. Since then, the divisions exhaust us and we spread our unease in texts and positions.

The poison spreads rapidly inside the zone and out, our relationships are more venomous. We forget our common enemy, we're blinded by our fear. The decisions are taken quickly, too quickly to be legitimate. We had a geography. Today we need a calendar as a compass to escape the general confusion. The government has won the battle of time, we run to the whim of their demands, no matter the direction. We need now to reappropriate the *echeances* [deadlines/ schedule]. We can't give in to urgency in the vain hope of buying some time. The ultimatums that come one after the other prevent us from finding each other, speaking, thinking together. If death is a taboo, it's because it holds within it our wildest fears. It's a leap into the unknown. Yet we can make the choice to look it head on and overcome the sober fatality it's wrapped in. We can choose the moment and even celebrate it. The fire is going out and it's time to leap into a world we don't know yet. We could celebrate the end of the ZAD at a moment we choose, to share a common temporality. The fact that our paths separate afterwards for some time is without importance. This place that fed us all, made us all grow up—let's make sure it doesn't tear us apart. The revolt, the insurrection, the subversion are elsewhere now.

We'll know how to find each other there.

Let's know how to die.

Appendix IV: Further Reading

- Against the Boot-Lickers and their World—An analysis of the media portrayal of the ZAD during evictions.
- Letter from Supporters to the Assembly of Uses—Poignant, bullet-pointed arguments regarding what some supporters were fighting for and the changes they opposed.
- Call to find a Political Meaning to the Struggle on the ZAD—Written by "farmers against the norms," it tends to lump all "the negotiators" together, but offers a pretty thorough and interesting analysis about "norms" and normalization.

- The “Movement” Is Dead; Long Live… Reforms!—A critique of “composition” and its elites.
- La trahison qui vient

CrimethInc.
Reflections on the ZAD: Another History
Looking Back a Year after the Evictions
March 23, 2019

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