

QUITE BRIEFLY, THE ZAD IS A struggle concerning the building of a dam in Southern France, near Toulouse. Its construction would flood the valley to irrigate industrial farmers' land, growing large amounts of corn for animal agriculture. This also implies the destruction of 13 acres of wetlands supposedly protected by law and would affect the ecological system of the valley. The dam was over-evaluated.

The contestation starts to build in 2011 with the creation of the Collectif pour la sauvegarde de la zone humide du Testet (Collective to save the wetlands of the Testet) that will end up playing an important role on the legal field. In 2012, a few legal institutions give an unfavorable opinion about the project, and as they're only consultative, no one cares. Surprisingly, the minister of Ecology cares, and refuses to sign the ministerial amendments. Unsurprisingly, the minister is dismissed, and the project revives. In October 2013, an informal group named "Tant qu'il y aura des bouilles" (literally, 'Til there'll be faces) joins the Collective. The occupation starts in the valley in different forms of squatting. In February, the place is evicted. End of August 2014, the valley is reoccupied, as deforestation starts. Machines cut, uproot, smash everything, and annihilate life on the surface and below.

I arrive on the 22nd of October, three days before the big manifestation that was called on site:

AGAINST THE SIVENS DAM: Lets enroot the resistance! BIG MEETING Saturday 25th October 2014 at midday. Lets bring back life to the Testet : constructions, workshops, plantations, debates, concerts... For more information: tantquilyauradesbouilles.wordpress.com

It is the first time I come. Many friends have arrived here before I and would share their stories and frustrations once we would reunite. I'm familiar with the atmosphere and the life at camp as I've spent most of the

last 2 years at Notre Dame des Landes (NDDL).*

So all I know on the struggle at this point is what I've been reading and what I've been told.

On Site

There was a strong divergence on site about what methods should be employed to counter the works: strong enough to discourage a few to come here again or to set actions. There was a rich diversity of people composing the struggle, going from the young barricade holder to the mother of a 5-year-old and all you could imagine. This diversity, which was part of our force, was also a weakness. It brought a lot of debates, fights, and frustrations. We had to face the cultural, ideological, generational gaps between everyone. Not everybody was familiar with ecological resistance, political struggles, whatever we call the situation we were in, but many were full of certitudes and would try to convince others the way they think was more appropriate and should be followed by everybody. Pacifism and citizenism had a strong influence all along the struggle. Friends that preferred different methods got pointed out by others as “turbulents” and “dangerous.” During actions, some people even denounced them to the cops as potential trouble. Insane situations that prevented me from coming, because friends couldn't be discreet in this situation, and cops could easily target them.

So once again come the questions: How do we compose together? How do we coordinate our differences? I believe we must find unity in diversity for it is one of our best weapons. With determination, then nothing would stop us.

So as some would reject violence or more radical actions, as it would “only bring more violence,” some others would reject “pacifists” and spit on their methods too. Only a few would only consider that who cares what you are, pacifist or violent, ‘cause we're all on the same fucking side. Amazing how this divides us and how everybody jumps into the trap it sets. Why don't we rather focus on how effective our actions are?

If indeed certain situations require certain more appropriate methods, it seemed that the way the struggle went until now was quite ineffective. The occupation of THFS, the actions, and all that has been done brought

* *Editor's Note: The NDDL is just one resistance-camp of what seems to be many throughout the ZAD.*

positivity and brought a lot to individuals and the collective, but still the situation was not in our favor at all. Machines continued to work and the trees continued to be cut.

There were about 30 to 50 people for the last two months. A lot of people started to arrive before the days of manifestation. Frustration grew into those who'd like to actually do something about the machines working less than two kilometers away. In camp you could hear the machines, and see the dust flying as they would move. But so many trees had already been cut, that probably a lot of those on site were exhausted. Cops illegally evicted camps, tents and squats, burning personal and collective belongings, IDs, instruments, tools, all kind of resources, even piercing the water bottles and containers. CS gas, beatings, observing the destruction and being powerless about it. This is all that the life in these places involves. It takes a lot of resources. It is more intense than anything I've lived through before.

So the atmosphere wasn't very exciting. Those working on the event were very busy and positive. Lots of good things going on, from writing signs to building toilets with bamboo, from delimiting the humid zone and raising awareness on what plants and what protected species lived there to cooking, welcoming newcomers, playing music, and all the activities it suggests.

The "Préfet," meaning the chief of the police in the department, representing the state, announced that no police would be on site during the manifestation.

There a kind of fort had been built, digging 10 to 15 feet deep with 100 feet long moats, with a fence and a portal to prevent an easy access to the machines. And so Friday afternoon, all the machines were brought somewhere outside the site. All that was left was only a generator and a construction site cabin, all guarded by three security guards.

During the night, a group of thirty people came to the fort, and set the cabin and the generator on fire without harming any of the guards.

This event played a great role into what happened next. As lots of us felt that something had to happen with the construction site and the machines, that night something did. There were no machines, and the construction was not compromised in any way. But we were not powerless anymore. We were determined. We were together and we were a force.

So it's now Saturday and more people arrive on site. The weather is sunny and the mood is high. A lot of the newcomers don't know much about the situation on site aside from what they've been reading on the website or the newspapers. So it is kind of strange to see this mass of supporters to the cause, mostly only here for 48 hours.

The riot cops, probably because of the night's event, are back on the construction site, close to the Fort, and now their presence raises a few questions. There was strictly nothing to protect, nor any risk to prevent. Nothing. Also the Prêfet had announced that no police would be here. So what were they doing on site? I guess he didnt like the message that was sent.

And so there was hundreds of riot cops, dozens of trucks. The police commander will later say that 2000 people were protesting passively when "100 to 150 anarchists masked and dressed in black threw incendiary devices" at the police.

The situation was extraordinary. On one part of the site, where the camp was, there was the "big meeting" happening. Hundreds of people bringing food, construction material, tools, tents, any kind of resources. People smiling, people chanting, reuniting, chatting, dancing, welcoming others and whatnot. But, resonating into the whole valley, we could hear the detonation of the grenades being thrown two kilometers away. A really deep roar. A noise that you're not familiar with. Something strong and terrifying. And so from where I was, meaning the camp, I was wondering what the fuck was happening to the other side of the site, wondering if friends were OK. And so I got some stuff and walked all the way to the "combat zone." Along the way I was crossing people that would go there, a beer in their hand like tourists, and others that would come back, some a bit shocked, some a bit amused.

As I had lived through similarly extremely-tense situations before in Notre Dame des Landes, something was happening in my inner-self. As I was walking all these half-forgotten feelings were merging back to the surface. Fucking war. Grenades, spray gas, rubber bullets, charges, helicopter flying over, recording everything. Anarchy in the valley. There were people, carefully standing away from the cops and the situation, just looking at it, while others were trying to... I dont know what they were trying to do. The police weren't supposed to be there. Now they were there, as hundreds of people were gathering against this fucking dam and the world that comes

with. The police come with this world, so let's fight it! Something like that. I don't know, I wasn't there when the fight started. There's loads of recordings of this moment on the internet. Type "Affrontements Testet" for riot-porn. There's people talking to the cops, people throwing random shit, people clowning, people being ineffective, people trying to be effective but wondering how to, people standing and watching..

I'll see only a single molotov cocktail, the one that was necessary for the media to justify the violence of the police, only "replying to the extreme violence of the protesters." 700 grenades of all kinds will be thrown all along the afternoon and during the night. 42 offensive grenades, OF. The OF grenade is the kind of grenade that killed Rémi. I had experienced them before at NDDL, but I don't recall the cops using the grenade launcher to throw them. Now I still doubt about it, but what I had learned at NDDL is that it was forbidden to launch them, so they were compelled to throw them manually, shouting "F4" before. So you could expect them and you'd better run if you didn't want to get harmed. This time at Le Testet, cops would just launch them as they would launch spray gas. That was new to me and set a whole different atmosphere in the fight. You could only hear the grenade launcher "pop" as it would for any kind of grenade, but if the grenade didn't explode in the air and spill its five-spray pucks (like hockey pucks) whatever, it meant it could just fall between your legs and explode. These grenades, while exploding, spread dozens of little pieces of plastic or metal, that get stuck into your legs, genitals, wherever it can get. It's painful, hard to take out, and can seriously harm your tendons.

It was during the night that it was the most impressive. They would explode and provoke a mini nuclear-shroom-like explosion. Again the sound was terrible. Resonating into the whole valley. What did the birds think? According to the official report, during the night of the 25th to the 26th, in three hours, 298 grenades and 41 rubber bullets were shot. One is enough to lose your eye. A friend got shot in the genitals during fights in the summer. He'll never be a father. During the day, with the media and all, the rules are different than the night. The situation always differs, but those who carry the "flashball" like to aim for the head, the genitals, the knees and plexus, right where it hurts the most. However violent and impressive it was, it is far from the repression other countries are submitted to. I reckon that. I guess you just get accustomed to it.

During the night, the police will never move from their positions. Little groups would try to worry the cops, but they were quite ineffective. Why

were they so ineffective? I'd say because the majority of the people present would do nothing. They would just assist the situation. Safely shouting back from the front, where only others protesters would hear, but not even the cops, to which the message is addressed. People far from being serious, returning to the camp once they got bored and continuing "the party."

No one thought about collecting rocks, bringing food and water, finding walkie-talkies, bringing up gasoline, motivating those in front of the sound-systems, not minding that grenades explode a kilometer away from the base. I think one reason to this is that a lot of "protesters" were not familiar with such a situation, they kept on being passive. I get that you don't want to risk yourself too close to the cops, because you could get arrested or get hurt by a grenade. But there were a shitload of things to do outside of that perimeter. And because no one was doing shit but only a few determined, these few determined were ineffective. And so the cops never got really worried, even though they must have been scared at some point. It must be strange to be in a valley full of people hating you, throwing rocks at you, shouting as wolves, lighting fires all over the valley, insulting you constantly, but it was more of a spectacle, otherwise we would have made them leave the site. I'm being very critical now because I'm frustrated to see how powerless we generally are in these situations. I might develop that when I'll talk about my experience at NDDL in a future writing.

I wasn't on the same side where Rémi died, maybe I wasn't even there anymore, maybe I had left the combat zone. My memory's pretty confused. I can't remember the events chronologically very well. I can picture the grenade that killed him, but maybe I just dreamt it. Anyway, it's Sunday morning, I'm at the camp site, it's about 11AM. Someone shares a rumor, someone might have died yesterday night. No way. No fucking way. I try not to keep it in my head before being sure. There's no reason to give it importance while it is not confirmed. An hour passes and we get the confirmation. Someone died. He was 21 years old. It could have been me. It could have been any one us. It is one of us. It is us they killed. We decide to spread the word all over and meet at 1PM under the biggest tent. Before this I had to go into the woods. The intensity of the last 48 hours was a lot to process. Emotionnally a mess, I walked among the trees, sat and got some time for myself. Then got back to the valley. Everything has changed. Nothing will be the same anymore. They killed a man.

Right after the grenade exploded and took Rémi down, cops equipped with nightvision order to stop the use of OF grenades. They spray gas

all over, turn the spotlight where Rémi is, and for the first time in the night, get out of their perimeter and bring the body back to their trucks. A cop says “the guy is dead... this is way serious....” and adds “they must not know.” Ten minutes after, a blue light appears, the ambulance. Total blackout, the cops turn all lights off. This lasts for 20 seconds. They turn the lights back on. The ambulance is gone.

Since Rémi died, all further construction work has been stopped. An inquiry was made to examine all the details leading to his death. The police remained vague about how he died, even suggesting that he was carrying some bomb device in his bag that suddenly exploded. So they didn't admit they had killed him. They said “A protester died yesterday night at Sivens.” To us there was no doubt.

So the media repeated the cops' statement, that someone died, so suddenly everybody heard about the dam construction and started considering it, but the cops had managed to lighten their responsibility in his death.

And so we were only a few hundred in the streets of Toulouse, one of France's biggest cities, to claim our rage. I got sad facing how few we were. How few we were actually realizing how important this was. The last protester that died in France was Malik Oussekiné, in 1986.

He was killed by a group of cops named les voltigeurs (the acrobats), they ride motorcycles. One's got a bat, the other's driving, and they chase and beat up protesters after the demo. They beat him so hard he died. This no longer exists in the police, well it actually does but under a different form. They don't ride motorcycles.

So the project is off the record for some weeks. An E.U. commission opens an infraction procedure against France for neglecting the ecological consequences of the dam on the wetlands. The Ecology Minister claims that the project is a mistake, and that it should differ from the initial project to satisfy both parties involved. The most recent update we got is: there'll never be a dam where Rémi died. That they will not build what they first expected to. They're currently working on the procedure to evict the site. There's still pressure from those in favor of the dam.



Timeline of the ZAD

1970 - Inhabitants of Notre Dame des Landes (NDDL) and surrounding villages learn in the newspaper that there is an airport project planned for their area.

1972 - ADECA created, a local farmers association against the airport, project put on hold.

2000 - Project re-started.

2001 - ACIPA created, local people's association against the airport.

2007 - Les Rosiers squatted, first political anti-airport squat on the ZAD.

2009, August - Climate action camp, week of actions, debates, a group of locals, "the resisting inhabitants," invite people to stay and occupy to fight the airport. Ten people stay, squat "la Gaite" and start the occupation as a conscious strategy.

2009, Late - During a picnic at a worksite to protest drillings and earth samplings, a farmer and a squatter find all the earth samples, two weeks of work, and dump them on the ground. They are arrested and

charged with "stealing the earth."

2010, August - First general assembly in NDDL, starting a period of more interaction with locals outside of the ones we knew already.

2010, Fall - VINCI named as contractor for the airport.

2010, November/December - Public inquiries in Notre Dame, a time for discussing with locals and also trying to block the inquiries from happening.

2011, February and All Year - Blocking Biotope (environmental studies company) at least a couple times a week, to take their equipment or make them leave etc, then people started doing actions at their offices, like daytime raids.

2011, May - Occupation of the Sabot (farm), first big collective public-callout-type occupation, made in conjunction with the Reclaim The Fields Network. People were encouraged to bring pitchforks.

2011, June - Earth sample drillings at the Rolandiere, whole crazy week of actions, the first time that it was like war. Big meetings in a barn lasting all night.

2011, July - Occupation of the airport in Nantes with a couple hundred people, fighting in the airport, first time the police really started hurting and arresting people.

2011, August - Socialist party (in power) caravan attacked in the afternoon while they were campaigning, caravan destroyed, 4 arrested.

2011, September - Tree occupation in a park in the middle of the city to “bring the ZAD to Nantes” and be able to discuss with people. Violently evicted, 35 arrests.

2011, Fall - Radio Klaxon created, the pirate radio of the ZAD, (squatting the radio waves of VINCI) operates out of a treehouse a couple nights a week. It becomes a vital mode of communication during the evictions, and is emitting all the time, only to be destroyed by internal conflict in the radio group in the spring of 2013.

2012, March - Biggest demo in Nantes until then, 8-10,000 people, collective organization between different parts of the movement. ACIPA, squatters, Greenpeace, political parties etc.

2012 - Repression! At least one trial every month, and at the demo outside the trial at least one person arrested every time, meaning always more trials and less energy for more offensive things. Lots of people questioning if they would stay or not.

“Remember when the judge used to come every Tuesday? Oh yeah that was 2012. And the Action Samba would always go play? Yeah, and just kind of chase him around, annoy the police a bit. But I feel like we used to talk about it every Monday, like ok what are we going to do for the judge tomorrow?”

“It’s funny to imagine the police driving down the road. I remember getting pulled over on my bike and harrassed all the time”.

“I remember building my treehouse and getting pulled over with my bike trailer full of beams, and they passed all the time in la Saulce, like you would say, oh yeah there’s a cop car passing again. You would see them almost daily. Now it’s unimaginable.”

2012, Summer - Lots of international meetings/convergences, there was an intersquat, a skillshare, that got interrupted in the middle to go squat a house that was getting boarded up and then I don’t think there were any more discussions.

2012, October - Noise Fest. The party theme was to have everyone dance on the ground to flatten it to build a new cabin. *“Ah yeah, where everyone was on LSD?”* *“I think so, I mostly remember that everyone was fucked up but me. LSD is not a good drug for stompy dancing”*

2012, October 16th to November 7th - Evictions.

2012, November 17th - Reoccupation demo, 40,000 people come to rebuild and build a village (la Chateigne) in a day.

2012, November 24th - Military police come back for a final eviction and stay, occupying all the entrances, exits and crossroads, 24/7 until April, asking for ID several times a day, randomly beating and arresting people, forcing everyone to walk around the crossroads through the mud while being followed with spotlights. They are ambushed from time to time.

“The first Thursday meeting—which one? The first one after evictions, that huge messy meeting when we were like, right, ok this a Thursday meeting. And it was kind of horrible but also a turning point, when we decided that we were going to re-establish some kind of stable idea of what is the ZAD. Because there were so many people coming and going all the time, it just seemed crazy to have a inhabitants meeting.”

Post eviction wave of successful and united actions of any attempts to further the airport project, strong period when we could do actions with hundreds of people, including local farmers, at night, cause lots of damage, and not face very much legal threats.

2013, April - Some ta ZAD demo to start new agricultural projects on the ZAD (all the old gardens and collective fields having been bulldozed). The police leave the crossroads for the first time, there is a huge party with all kinds of different people for two days in the crossroads, then people find the police one kilometer away and go attack them. They immediately take back the crossroads extremely violently, some cops get beaten or set on fire, lots of comrades get hurt.

Agriculture becomes an important part of everyday life and also of political organizing. Most agricultural projects operate out of Bellevue, a house squatted by local farmers.

2014, February - Demo in Nantes, 50-60,000 people, the police block the path of the demo and it turns quickly into a riot. Giant paper mache tractor puppet of a Mohawked Salamander (endangered species that is one of the legal reasons for protecting the ZAD). Police station set on fire, tourist and public transport offices destroyed.

2014, June/July - Repression and trials following february demo.

2014, April - Disagreements between people who want the forest to grow back and people who want to harvest hay in the fields to support other struggles. Several long days of meetings, with the people of “the East” making a “non-motorized zone”, effectively dividing the ZAD. Maybe there are too many nuances to put in a timeline, but it was definitely a turning point.

2014, October/November - Remi Fraisse killed by the police at the ZAD du Testet, followed by three demonstrations/riots in Nantes in 2 weeks.

Transmission from the ZAD de Notre Dame

What follows is the transcript of a conversation between Ana, Moonbeam, Sarah and Gaia, four participants in the ZAD de Notre Dame reflecting on their experiences within that struggle.

G: Ok, lessons learned—it's really easy to be united when the police are evicting us.

All: Yeah, surprisingly so, yeah.

S: Yeah, it's really easy to be united with each other but also to get people on our side, generally. Like the media's a lot more sympathetic with us...

G: That you get local farmers saying things like “come and get us.”

A: And with this kind of support, and especially local support during evictions, I found it quite surprising how unpredictable it could be, the support, and not only local but farther away, networks of comrades, etc, and how also it was partly years and years of building up communications and stuff, of preparing for evictions, alarm lists, reoccupation demo... And we felt so unprepared before evictions, but partly it was due to the work that was done before, and partly things you can't really anticipate so much, like how many people are coming from the villages around, and how much it really does touch people, and you never realized before, you thought it could be great. But you do some general assemblies and put invitations in everyone's mailbox but not many people come, and then if evictions are happening or a strong moment like this, for me that was really...Wow. And for me that was something that you couldn't really count on before, but then you can't totally exclude it either. That this is possible... and also a lesson of it's actually worth putting lots of energy into things even if you don't really feel they're working out so well, or trying to imagine the scenario of evictions and thinking, “*Whoa there's so many points where it can fail...*” For example, at the end the communication thing worked so super good, and there's lots of things that got put together last minute also, and it could have not worked if they decided to completely cut radio and mobile signals, and it could have not been possible but at the end it was possible and worked super great.

M: And even if they cut all the communications everyone was walking back and forth all the time, I mean it would have been a big problem if they cut the communications, but there were people crossing each other all the time on foot in the fields, and then there was E [local woman] on a horse... ah that was the best part of the forages [June 2011], E on a horse making the rounds and yelling at the cops.

G: Methods to successfully resist an eviction include: having loads and loads of people, being spread out across 8 kilometers by 2 kilometers, having police that don't come with that many people, having years to prepare and knowing the date beforehand...

M: The mud helped a lot though, because they couldn't run in the mud, and would think twice before chasing us through the mud.

S: Maybe that's another thing we learned, gendarmes; not very equipped to run in mud. (*laughs*)

M: And afraid of the forest—like one time with a couple people making animal noises hiding behind trees and they felt unsafe and left. Oh maybe that was against Biotope*... And also during evictions, a few people with slingshots in the big forest making noises and the cops just fucked off because they weren't comfortable...they got more comfortable though.

S: I think they got a lot more comfortable when there's 1,000 cops in the forest. They weren't good at walking in the forest though, they fell over a lot.

A: I think it played a lot into our advantage that in the beginning of the evictions for weeks they were more in this thing of not really arresting people, not really being super offensive, like hurting people. It more started with the attack on the Chat-teigne and the eviction of the big forest, the last eviction of the forest, and before that I don't think they really hurt people badly...

* *Biotope is an environmental surveying company that was cataloguing the plants and animals to "compensate" by making them a habitat/ moving them elsewhere. They were subcontracted by VINCI, the multinational building the airport, and gave them the right to call it a "high quality environmental project". Biotope got attacked on a daily basis while on the ZAD, but also in their offices, at their homes, then in their new offices that were supposedly secret...*

G: But did that help us?

A: Well, it helped in the way that a lot of things were possible, like at the Sabot and around that area, people fighting back against the cops, it would have been still possible with arrests, but I think it was this thing of OK—you throw all kinds of stuff at them, and they shoot back tear gas grenades and flashballs, well maybe flashballs came later. I don't remember exactly but mostly teargas, teargas, teargas and then feeling like they hold their position (the police) and don't actually come and get anyone. Like they already have trouble with other parts of the ZAD, just keeping their line, and in that way I think it helped that lots of people joined this quite offensive resistance around the Sabot. And same with other places, like the barricade situations that were getting quite a lot of people on board. I don't know if it changed in the moment when there were the cops disguised in black-bloc that arrested people on a barricade, it was in a time when there were less (manned) barricades but there were still some near the far west and Sabot and stuff.

S: Yeah and also I feel like they chose that tactic, going for two places at once, so there wouldn't be loads of people in one place, so if they've got people in the Sabot when they're not really trying to evict it then they can evict the big forest more easily.

M: And when people tried to leave the Sabot like to make a demo to the Planchettes or go to other places, they were violently and quickly pushed back, which showed that keeping people stuck in the path of the Sabot was to distract them.

G: And anyways once they started using force, well maybe not arresting, well that was good for them in that it got people scared of being on barricades, but once they started using stronger weapons and more scary eviction tactics, that got loads of bad media and loads of public support for the struggle.

A: That was probably the turning point in evictions.

G: Yeah, why they gave up.

A: And then they couldn't get it under control, the area.

M: And I still think that the mud played a big role, like the machine that

was destroying my house, and V's house, it got stuck in the mud several times, and they had to have another one come pull it out, and I heard of other houses where the same thing happened. And places like the Far West and the Gare were protected because they didn't want to lose their machines, have them bubble under the surface, never to be seen again.

Evictions for me changed how I saw... well I was always really anti-journalist, because I felt like whatever we had to say that was important, they were never actually gonna print, they would only print what was possible to recuperate. Like they're gonna print how we eat communally and how we compost our shit.

And they're not gonna detail the political positions that we hold, or our critiques of hierarchy or capitalism. And so I was always anti-journalist, because I felt that if we used them to pass a message, they wouldn't be able to transmit it because what we had to say was directly threatening to their job and social position, so what was the point? And then in evictions, well, I still have the same opinions about journalists, but seeing the difference that they made in publicizing what was happening, made me re-think the utility of talking to them. Also because most of my comrades felt similarly towards journalists and so it was the people that I had the least political affinity with talking to the media, presenting an image that I felt was boring and liberal and lifestyle centered, so I figured if people are gonna talk to them, I might as well do it too.

A: But partly it was us talking to them, and partly it was just them coming, filming, and putting it in the newspaper. And it did change public opinion or whatever, and it's seen as a danger. What I think they wanted to avoid in the beginning with evictions was that it becomes such a big thing, but also the fact that there were so many people that were there so they kind of had to make media coverage on it, and also so much was happening that you could make daily headlines with it, pages and pages in the newspaper, and even without us talking to them, they already made a big media coverage.

But there were actually places for different ways of doing, like I had a urinary tract infection and was feeling super tired for two weeks, and it was possible to still do things even being down or sick or tired, and have a place, like a role—not necessarily a warm nice sleeping place, I mean I was still sleeping in the hay in the barn with everybody else, but that there was space for not being full-on every day, and knowing there are still all these people around, and everyone gives what they can when they can. It

was different than other forest evictions, where there are only ten people, and so you have the feeling that you have to be full-on, if not you can't be there. And maybe it's a fucked up logic and we should put it into question anyway, but the fact that there was so many people and the infrastructure worked so well, it made it possible to step back sometimes.

S: I feel like when we had debriefings after evictions that the thing that nearly everyone said was “*I felt really bad because I wasn't being useful enough,*” “*This was happening somewhere else and there was nothing I could do,*” “*I didn't know what I could do to be useful,*” and all the people that I thought were the most on it, and feeling bad that you were not doing as useful things as them, were in this meeting saying “I felt bad because I wasn't being useful” and it was really telling.

G: And so what other lessons did we learn... [*in ironic voice*] that diversity brings conflict...

M: Oh we didn't talk about the hay. Like the field of disagreement.

G: Well we learned that it's really difficult to organize when you're a completely fluctuating group of people that never show up to the same meetings.

S: Especially when half of them hate meetings...

G: And are in political disagreement with the act of organizing. But that's kind of obvious, maybe it's not a useful lesson to many people.

But in a way, I think it showed that we weren't really in agreement on the main things, that we agreed on this vague thing of resisting police and the eviction of this site, but not really on why. And so some people were like “But I came to save nature, and to save nature we need to turn this field back into a forest,” and some people said “We came to resist an airport, and to do that we need to support the farmers in struggle as much as possible,” and other people said, “We see the ZAD as a possibility, and a place for doing social experiments, including cultivating the land and trying to feed ourselves,” and there were all these perspectives that weren't compatible.

S: I think it's also that all of our conflicts are in the open, like I don't think we have more disagreements than you would expect from a group

of people that all came together for kind of a common objective, but for lots of different motivations... I feel like, the way that it happened and the way that it is, living here, with the ways of communicating between people, even if we think that we don't communicate that much, I feel like compared to a village with the same number of people, we actually know each other and our points of disagreement quite well, and I feel like that's got something to do with it, that you actually know what everyone else is doing, you hear about it, you react to it, people shout at each other in the street about it, rather than muttering about it to their families in the evenings.

G: Also a lot of it had to do with really strong emotions, people feeling "I have fought for this, I spent a month defending this place" and even though we say that the evictions were a period of really strong unity in the movement, a lot of people, especially around le Sabot, felt like they were abandoned by the rest of the ZAD, that they fought off tear gas and police while thinking that the rest of us were safe and comfortable. And after having fought for something, I think there were vague agreements on the eastern barricades as to why they were there, and just the barricades in general, a lot of people spent months after eviction doing shifts on the barricades, and feeling like the rest of the ZAD didn't care and were getting on with their lives, having meetings, knitting, rebuilding... While they were there on the barricades waiting in case the police came back. And both felt like they had fought for something, so they weren't gonna give it up just like that, and people were saying "*We stopped the police coming to destroy this area, and now we're not gonna just let you come destroy it by driving a tractor down the Chemin de Pimky.*" And the idea of, "*We've spent a lot of energy, risked our health, went through a shit period, to gain control over this area, and we won't just give it back because you say you've got something important to do with it.*" A lot of people felt also like the farmers had abandoned them, that this was their struggle (the farmers) originally but they didn't come regularly to the barricades so why should they hand it back...

M: I feel like part of that view, at least what I understood from people that I spoke to in the east and who were at those meetings, came from the fact that they arrived after what I would consider to be the period of evictions. And so yes, they were on the barricades, but they didn't really have the same experience. And so for people that were here for the evictions, or what I would call the evictions, saw it as being very improbable with the political climate that they would re-attempt to evict right after, and saw it as not being strategic to spend 24/7 on the barricades. And so people

decided to do different things with their lives and go about the struggle in other ways, and the people who had just arrived found it strategic to be on the barricades. And so they felt like they had been abandoned, like they had never seen the farmers, didn't even know who they were, when my experience of eviction was that the farmers were highly present, were making barricades with their tractors, even leaving farm machinery or tractors to protect houses, like in front of the Rosiers, when the cops slashed all the tractor tires, that they definitely put themselves at risk.

G: Yeah, but for the amount of time that people were at Sabot, it was only one time. And there was always a new place being evicted, so the new people and new energy was getting dispersed but never going to the Sabot. I feel like most of the people at Sabot arrived during evictions but weren't there before. And so they felt like it was really important to do barricades because they felt like that was what the ZAD was all about and they'd seen it as successful during evictions.

M: I found it hard in the hay discussions and for the non-motorized zone, like that there had already been an agreement the year before, that wasn't respected, and I found it really strange that people would make an agreement with a farmer, break it, then say, "We want all we've taken and more," and I found it hard to take them seriously because they didn't really have any bargaining power, and they weren't enough people to have a rapport de force, so the only thing they had was their word, and they broke it, and then expected people to trust them to make a new agreement. Like how do you make an agreement with people that break the only agreement you've ever made together?

A: Yeah but a lot of people had totally different ways or ideas of organizing (or not organizing), and so on one side there are people that are used to having meetings and making decisions together, and we count on everyone respecting what we've agreed together. Or at least people who are concerned, or who were there, and also that it's passed on to those who arrive, and we expect them to respect it too, because we just spent all this time talking about it to find something we can agree on, and on the other hand there are people who don't want to organize like this at all, who say, "We do as we feel and we decide for ourselves."

S: I think a lot of it depends on how long people have spent on the ZAD, and I don't mean it in a patronizing way, like "Oh, you don't know, you've only just arrived." But it does have an effect, because it depends on where

people were before and what they were doing before, but I feel like the idea of being in a place where we're supposed to be non-hierarchical or there's like all of the things that you've felt oppressed by or all of the rules that you've had put upon you for your whole life and you dream of having a place where that doesn't happen. And then you come to the ZAD and somehow you feel like there are rules being imposed upon you because there are people having meetings and things are being decided, that you haven't been able to get involved in or you haven't figured out how to, or you can't find your place in it, and I can totally imagine that people would feel restricted and have the need or the desire to rebel against it and get pissed off and say, "But no, fuck you actually. I'm here because I don't want to be involved in long boring meetings or listen to other people."

Or like taking the piss out of the "ZAD-Elders" because they are rolling their eyes in meetings, saying, "*We've already talked about this before,*" but at the same time we've seen it happen really often that after being on the ZAD for a while, when someone sees that actually it is really annoying when there's no rules, and that it is really annoying when everyone does what they want without talking to each other, it's not a good strategy, just for getting on and having nice relationships with each other because you have to have some kind of guidelines about how the way that you're living stops other people from living the ways that they want to. I feel like we have more of a stable population now and it helps because we learn to live together and the things that we disagree on and that actually it's quite selfish to think you can arrive and do whatever you want and refuse to talk to people about it.

A: And I do understand, this thing of arriving on the ZAD, and this wish to be finally in a place where there are no rules, where you can supposedly be really "free" and decide "freely" what you want to do. And I understand that there is a longing for this place, and a vision that people put into it, that there is a place where all your dreams can be coming true, like this utopia. But it pissed me off so many times, the attitude that comes with it, especially coming and expecting that it is that way, and maybe not even moving around enough to realize how things work and how they came to be put into place, and coming and seeing how it is now but not how it came to be, and seeing it as a "liberated area" in some ways, at least for the moment. Or a temporary autonomous zone, or however you want to see it. But not seeing that there was lots of work preceding it, lots of work to put the structures into place, like lots of people who struggled and had many disagreements before you came. But also it's not easy to come new.

A: For me it's also on the ZAD where I became the most sensibilized towards this whole idea of nature, and how twisted it is.

S: Well you can twist it to whatever you want. It's THE argument against vegetarianism—that's it's natural to eat meat. And then you're like [*smacks fist into forearm*].

M: Or as an argument against homosexuality.

S: Exactly. I think one thing that upset me about the discussion around the non-motorized zone, in loads of discussions actually, was the territorial aspect. Like during and after evictions I felt quite criticized for concentrating all of my energy into the forest and not really being involved in other ZAD-wide structures. And when I say criticized I mean by other people but also by myself. Before but especially since the evictions I've had this feeling of a "ZAD-ness," of wanting things to be available for other people on the ZAD. I don't care if we don't ALL talk about things, I don't think people should have to talk about things that they don't want but I like that there are things that are available to everyone on the ZAD, or things that everyone on the ZAD is invited to, things that we can all kind of be part of if we want to, things that we all share, and for me that's a really important thing because we're all living in the same place. And in a lot of meetings, like in the "grand moment" meetings, I found myself talking to mainly people in the East. Like when this question was brought up of what decisions do you think are relevant to you, what kind of decisions do you want to be involved in, they were like, "Well it depends where it happens."

If it's a decision that's gonna affect where I live then I wanna be involved, but if people are gonna do things where they live or in their houses then I don't care, they can do what they want. And it just made me so sad. Because for me that's like no longer at all thinking of it like a community or an area where we share things or whatever, because if I don't care at all what people do in their homes, then that means I don't consider their home to be my home and that I consider it to be completely separate and that there's some kind of weird border so I don't care. So people in Bellevue can raise animals, and I don't know, beat their animals and have some kind of weird factory farm and I won't care because it's not my house.

A: I feel like it's just more rich, it makes more sense politically to see the ZAD as a whole. When we have the non-motorized zone it's like dividing it up, it takes away from us all sharing land and discussing together how we

use it and what we want to happen here.

M: And it's like "No I don't want to leave you alone" (the east) like you do your thing and I do mine. I want to organize together, because we live together, we're in a struggle together. And maybe we don't want the same things but that's kind of the point. Like we stand to gain so much from each other, from exchanging ideas, like with permaculture I don't want to be in this confrontational standoff of tilling vs. permaculture, I think there's a lot to discuss and learn, but there's just a block. It's like we have to fight someone, so we went from fighting the police to fighting each other.