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Beverly Naidus: The ZAD Becomes Compost? LONG LIVE THE ZAD!

By [Chrisfremantle](#)

This post comes from Beverly Naidus, a friend and colleague. Her attention is focused on the ZAD (*zone à défendre*) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zone_to_Defend) after visiting in October. Recent events have made it urgent to relay her experience and why the destruction of this place in France matters. A month ago [we drew attention](https://ecoartscotland.net/2018/03/17/the-climate-atlas-and-the-cost-of-belief/) (<https://ecoartscotland.net/2018/03/17/the-climate-atlas-and-the-cost-of-belief/>) to the Journal of Aesthetics and Protest's issue #10 Climate Atlas. The point of the Atlas is to focus on where new forms of relations between humans and other living things are being developed. The editors of JOAAP #10 said, "In the face of climate change, we prioritize lifes' capacity to organize its own variation." The French State is attempting to stamp out a beautiful example of self-organisation.

April 10, 2018, Tacoma, WA, USA



When something you have witnessed, loved and cared for is destroyed and uprooted, whether it is a forest, a species, a community or a culture, it can wreck the spirit. The trauma of these violent actions, informed by greed and ignorance, can ripple out widely, encouraging resistance, but it requires attention. In order for the suffering to become compost from which we can plant our visions again, it needs amplification. Writing in the wee hours, on the Pacific coast of North America, I am hoping that these words will be heard, knowing that our peaceful warrior friends in the northwest of France are facing violence today.

Yesterday evening I learned that the ZAD had been invaded by 2500 French police wielding tear gas and driving bulldozers. They destroyed hand-built homes, greenhouses and community spaces and have been pushing people off the land. Gardens that have been lovingly tended and harvested for

many years have been trashed. There seems to be not enough bodies assembled to create the physical resistance required to stop the perpetrators. It feels like a lost cause. I am breathing through the shock of this and hoping that a phoenix will rise out of the ashes. Here's today's news (<https://zad.nadir.org/spip.php?article5344#info2018-04-10-16-34>) and here's another blog (<https://enoughisenough14.org/2018/04/10/live-blog-the-eviction-of-zad-nddl-day-2-zadresist/>) [and this Call for Intergalactic Solidarity Actions (<https://zadforever.blog/2018/04/11/a-call-for-intergalactic-solidarity-actions-everywhere-to-end-the-destruction-of-the-zad-of-notre-dame-des-landes/>) was published recently. Ed]



Zone À Défendre

@ZAD_NDDL



#zad #nddl la force des gens contre les blindée 3 ième partie

7:44 PM - Apr 11, 2018

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In October 2017 we were able to visit the ZAD, a wonderful and complex community in France that inspires revolutionary thoughts and actions. Most folks, including activist folks, on this side of the pond have never heard of the ZAD. We've been too busy with the ever-escalating messes in our own backyards to pay much attention to visionary projects elsewhere. But fortunately, I have known of the activist artist, John Jordan, one of the key residents and spoke-persons for the ZAD, for many years. He made a contribution to my book, *Arts for Change: Teaching Outside the Frame* (New Village Press, 2009) and has kept me informed about the ZAD via email and social media.



For those who are unaware of this remarkable place, it's been a European symbol of contemporary resistance against development and fossil fuels. A coalition of movements including environmental activists, local farmers and unionists, anarchists, students and creative resisters of all sorts has prevented the building of an airport, and formed the largest autonomous zone in Europe, 4000 acres inhabited by 250 or so squatters who make up about 60 collectives. The land has been occupied since 2009 as part of a 50 year struggle against the development of the airport.



This is not going to be an essay to describe the history and theories informing the ZAD. The reader can research [that information online](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zone_to_Defend) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zone_to_Defend), but instead this brief piece will attempt to frame a vision before it slips the collective memory. ZAD is the acronym for *zone à défendre* (translated as “the Zone to Defend”).

We arrived at the train station at Notre-Dames des Landes on a sunny afternoon in late October 2017. John and his partner, Isa, met us and drove us to the beautiful bocage (a landscape that mixes woodlands and pasture) that makes up the ZAD. John explained that designing a landscape to feature “bocage” is one of the best ways to sequester CO2. Many traditional, small farmers have been working the land this way for centuries.



John told us that our visit was well-timed, a party was already in progress at the Ambazada, a newly built barn-like space for meetings, dances, concerts and feast. We joined this celebration of the community that gave everyone an opportunity to share updates on different coalitions and actions. People of all ages were sitting around on benches, inside and outside this structure, many in deep conversations. Laughter often erupted, local wine was being shared and a pleasant haze of French cigarette smoke greeted us. John introduced us to people, some were local residents, and a few were visitors, like us, from all over the world. We were invited to grab plates and fill them generously with delicious home-made cuisine. I was struck by the plenty. Huge blocks of cheese and pâté were laid out along with bowls of salads and fruits. A crepe station and the lovely people working there

supplied the crowd with warm, tasty regional fare (on the southern edge of Brittany. We made our way to one of the big tables to learn more about this unusual community.

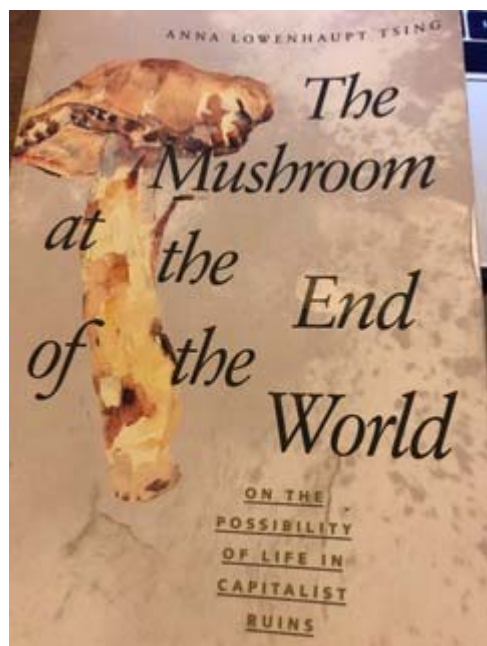


Over the past three decades, my partner, Bob Spivey, and I had been eager to learn about alternative communities, places where people were living out a vision of how to resist the dominant culture and its rape of the land and community. I had first been interested in collective living when I was a teenager and tasted a bit of it by living on a kibbutz. Unfortunately, the joys of sharing abundance, child care and work, were drowned out by the poison of the racism I witnessed there. Along with government policies that over the past five decades have become increasingly fascist. I was determined to look for other models, ones that were not so contaminated by an ideology of superiority and the propaganda of "safety through aggression."

We visited co-housing communities on the west coast of the US, the remnants of back-to-the-land communes in New England, NY and Canada, as well as an eco-village in the north of Italy, and while they all had pieces of the puzzle that attracted us, certain vital qualities were missing. Our years of working with the Institute for Social Ecology had given us a vision of what a non-colonizing, permaculture design-informed, ecologically sound, equitable, diverse, revolutionary, liberated world might look like. We saw evidence of this vision at the ZAD.



Every morning we would wake up to the sounds of John's collective making breakfast in the house where we were hosted. The pantry was filled with boxes of fruit and vegetables. Fresh bread and eggs seemed to magically arrive. A chalk board displayed the tasks of the day and people took up their responsibilities with apparent ease.



In the four days we were there we walked the land meeting members of the 60 collectives that have carved out space, built amazing structures and gardens while sharing childcare, bread, cheese, produce, tools, skills and libraries. We spent time in long conversations, climbed the beautifully built lighthouse for an exquisite sunset view, shared meals, sank into the literature provided at the welcome house, met grad students and journalists who are studying the ZAD, talked about the art and cultural democracy that was emerging from daily life, learned about ongoing conflicts between the specie-ists (those who are informed by deep ecology, who don't believe that humans are special), the global justice activists and the traditional farmers, and discovered that this is the real work of making this vision come alive.



John shared the history of battles on the land and how old coalitions between trade unions, farmers and activists were revitalized to create solidarity against the airport. We learned how art, play and humor kept the whole process joyful, even in the face of violence. It was inspiring, but we left knowing that romantic dreams were not enough to make this community sustainable. It required gritty, uncomfortable, daily work to keep people communicating productively with each other.

Solidarity was not a given. Doing ongoing anti-oppression work and non-violent conflict resolution would be the continuing task of this visionary place.



Now in this moment of extreme attacks from the State, it is important to remember that the seeds planted by ZAD can be broadcast widely, and we can be encouraged that it has survived and thrived in very difficult conditions. New communities of this kind will be forming all over the world as the dominant culture continues to crumble. We must take heart, be resilient when there are losses and persist in making our visions emerge. Share this story with others, find ways to organize and educate in your own communities. LONG LIVE THE ZAD!

Long Live La ZAD!

The ZAD, or “zone to defend” of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, France, is a commune of 4,000 acres of wetlands, fields, and forests involving local farmers, villagers, activists, naturalists, squatters, and trade unionists who have been part of a growing movement to take back control of their everyday life. The land has been occupied since 2009 as part of a fifty-year struggle against an airport project for the nearby city of Nantes.

This long struggle has culminated in a wild, fertile zone unlike anywhere on earth. With its bakeries, pirate radio station, tractor repair workshop, brewery, banquet hall, medicinal herb gardens, rap studio, dairy, vegetable plots, weekly newspaper, flour mill, library, and even a surrealist lighthouse, the ZAD is more than a worldwide symbol of autonomous revolutionary struggle. It is a partisan reality where thousands of people have been making another life possible, succeeding beyond anyone’s dreams in creating a vibrant space for encounter, experimentation, and freedom.

Yesterday the French state began evicting the ZAD, despite having officially abandoned the airport project. 2500 police with armored vehicles and demolition machinery have been unleashed in an act of cheap revenge, targeting everything the occupied territory stands for and all it has achieved in its brilliant life. Today the transoceanic dimensions of our local struggles grow ever more apparent: just as Occupy encampments were raided around the US in 2011 and the camps of Standing Rock dismantled in 2017, so too with the destruction of the ZAD they seek to make an example.

The ongoing evictions are a serious blow to the collective material power built on the occupied territory in the last decade. As the police operation continues, we do not know what the coming days will bring. Structures have been destroyed, and many friends and comrades arrested or injured. Major demonstrations have erupted across France, while other actions are being planned all around the world. To the ZADists, partisans, and revolutionaries across the oceans, we say: *this will not be how things end*. Spring is coming.

zadforever.blog | zad.nadir.org | woodbine.website

Beverly Naidus, interdisciplinary artist, author and facilitator of a socially engaged, studio arts curriculum, has been creating interactive installations and mixed media projects for several decades. Inspired by lived experience, topics in her art focus on environmental and social issues. After tasting success in the mainstream art world, she became deeply committed to art that emerges from communities struggling against oppression of all kinds. She is currently on the faculty of the University of Washington, Tacoma.

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All photos courtesy of Beverly Naidus

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