

Working for the Commons





Working for the Commons

Working for the Commons, 2018

Edition 2, February 2022

Typeset in Garamond

Printed in Yau Ma Tei

Copyleft

Free pricing

Photographs (2018):

- *La Grée*

- Construction sheet, Ambazada

- Film still from *DEMAIN S'ENTÊTE*, a ZAD

documentary at *ZADenVIES* 10/07/18

www.studioleung.com/ZADposter

www.insurrectionaryAM.tumblr.com



[...] what matters has everything to do with a logic of difference and possibility, autonomy and self-determination: the perpetuation of the possibilities of common life that place-based social relations can create, even amidst a striking diversity of beliefs. Where once the territory's fight was with the airport or the train-line, it is no longer with high-speed transport per se, but with its world.
- Kristin Ross, *The ZAD and No Tav*¹

Today I said à bientôt to the ZAD (Zone à Défendre in French, Zone to Defend in English) in Notre-Dame-des-Landes and took the train to Paris. On arrival, and as predicted, France won the World Cup.² I decided to take the overnight coach to London, as opposed to flying from Nantes or from Paris.

Last night at the ZAD canteen, C. informed me that after the cancellation of the new airport project, the government is now planning an expansion for the existing Nantes airport. Investing in such infrastructure projects provides jobs and economic growth but only prolongs this phase of late capitalism, and further contributes to climate change and ecological destruction. We see such infrastructure projects with the high-speed rail in Hong Kong, the new metro line eroding the forest in Mumbai, the Turin-Lyon



high-speed rail project (NoTAV), the New Yogyakarta International Airport (NoNYIA) and the One Belt One Road striating China and beyond.³ There are many more around the world. Please share any that you may know.

As I wait for my coach in a cafe near Bercy station, my soul is still at the ZAD, surrounded by the bocage, and with all the people and collectives that I met these past eight days.

Before arriving at the ZAD, two French friends in Hong Kong expressed their disagreement with those who are still on the territory after the cancellation of the airport.⁴ Those people are farmers and anarchists (across a wide spectrum from anarcho-primitivists to anarcho-communists), collectively known as ZADistes. On my way to the ZAD via Paris, I met a lawyer who studied in Nantes. He blamed the ZADistes for the constantly-broken windows at his local bank and also thinks that they should leave the territory. Our conversation met an unexpected halt when I asked him if he believes in ownership and privatisation, and spoke of those who own five or ten houses and those who have absolutely nothing, and how the world's abundant resources could actually be shared equally, in common, or as the current

inequitable system (individualist and "survival of the fittest").⁵

Following the cancellation of the airport, a new experiment is happening at the ZAD. Some call it 'ZAD Par2' (a wordplay on *'partout'* meaning 'everywhere' in French and the sequel to the post-airport cancellation) and some call it '*a new commune for the 21st century.*'⁶ Whether you agree with the two French people in Hong Kong, are unsure like the Parisian lawyer or have a different perspective, why not visit the ZAD and learn about what has been built by the 70+ collectives over the past 10 years?

When I arrived at the ZAD last Saturday afternoon, I saw a group of around 50 people of different ages in a large wooden barn, attending a sharing by philosopher Isabelle Stengers and Serge Gutwirth, an anarchist lawyer.⁷ I sat there desperately trying to understand what they were saying with my five years of GCSE French and taking notes of people and quotes that they mentioned in English. After a collective dinner outside in the evening sun, I went to sleep in the rural brick farmhouse under all the stars.

For the following three days I spent most of the daytime working with others at the Ambazada (a ZAD 'embassy' wordplay), which is a wooden farmhouse built

守るべき土地



Solidarity with Z.A.D. from Hong Kong and Japan

抵抗と再構築

specifically for global assemblies such as the upcoming Intergalactic Week this 27th August to 2nd September, that will include sharings, workshops and debates by those active in territorial struggles around the world.⁸

At the Ambazada, with ZADistes, their relatives and those visiting for ZADenVIES (a nine-day festival organised by the ZAD), we collectively built the 10 x 5-metre concrete platform at the front of the farmhouse.⁹ At times three generations worked together, collecting brick-sized rocks from the road, shovelling gravel, mixing cement, precariously pushing wheelbarrows along narrow wooden planks and carefully pouring the concrete into a reinforced-steel cavity. At lunch we went to a nearby collective and ate organic vegetables grown on the ZAD. At night we ate together, talking until midnight.

Back in Hong Kong I rarely do such physically demanding work. F. joked that the police might think that the ZAD has a “Chinese slave” collecting rocks on the roadside.¹⁰ Because my appearance stuck out like a sore thumb, the thought had already crossed my mind and we laughed together... I prefer to think of the hard work and the muscle ache as a *‘gesture to be performed over and over again,’* in solidarity, and *Working for the Commons* (a title

inspired by Casco in Utrecht).¹¹

In the past few years in Hong Kong I’ve been focusing on our ecological commons, farming in public space and sharing the plants, produce, pollinators (bees) and knowledge in non-commercial ways.¹² Through our community garden at *Kai Fong Pai Dong*, we have grown plants with neighbourhood children, triad gang members, grandmas on their way to church and shops that have been generous in filling our large water bottles on a daily basis.¹³ The Ma Shi Po two-and-a-half-month occupation in 2016 made me aware of ZAD resistance (thanks S.) and two years later I had an opportunity to finally visit.¹⁴

At the ZAD, the commons exist in everyone’s shared and collective way of life. It is visible where collectives: live (in squatted farmhouses, farmlands and forests); farm (the numerous collective gardens whose produce is shared in the canteen everyday, at the Non-Market [free pricing] on Fridays and with struggles elsewhere); broadcast (on a pirate radio station that uses the same FM frequency as the former construction company that was going to work on the airport); produce knowledge (at the boat-shaped library [*Le Taslu*] and through the collective work and sharing of skills such as foraging and cheese making; dress (the

abundance of clothes in the Free Shop); and are connected (pirated water and electricity). It's difficult to imagine a place more liberated than here (maybe Chiapas or Rojava, which I have both yet to visit). Walking down the road, ZADistes will stop their cars and ask if you would like a lift somewhere. Humans and non-humans have the possibility to thrive and evolve naturally in the commons. What if we were more emancipated and shared such collective resources in our daily urban life?

After the construction work was completed at the Ambazada, the following day I worked on the collective garden with ZADistes and those who came for *ZADenVIES*. As we weeded the carrots and applied mulch to the courgettes, a radical pedagogy emerged, where the three of us discussed the recent evictions and shared ideas on how to confront the militarised police in non-violent and creative ways. The conversations continued from plot to plot, and even a few days after at the festival's main tent, when others shared police confrontation stories from Paris, Glasgow and Istanbul.

After lunch, which was cooked and eaten at a nearby collective, concealed in the forest, I weeded more carrots with a ZADiste and

A., a 13-year old boy who had an English oral phone exam later that afternoon. The three of us prepared for the phone exam and in the process of practicing English, I began remembering more French. We discussed etymology and shared contemporary slang, in English and French. I left their company to plant seeds knowing that A. was well-prepared for his exam.

When planting organic beetroot seeds I met two people who came alone to understand what is happening at the ZAD and wanted to offer their support. After hand-watering the one-acre farm (0.40 hectare), we rested and ate three varieties of tomatoes. We then had dinner at the Afghan restaurant at *ZADenVies* and later walked to *La Grée* to climb a multi-storey wooden tower, watch a couple of games of international chess that were accompanied by freestyles by a member of the ZAD Social Rap group and enjoyed a performance in the nearby hangar.¹⁵

During my eight days at the ZAD I was kindly given two "tours" by J. where we walked, cycled and visited many different collectives, anarchitectural cabins and farms, often stopping for him to share a personal history at specific sites (such as destroyed cabins by the police and collective rituals), and elaborate on what the future of

the ZAD might be. I shared social movements happening in Hong Kong and in East Asia, and together we discussed creative forms of resistance and how anarchism can evolve in the present situation.¹⁶

A day before leaving the ZAD I joined T. on a forager's walk and learnt that in July there were over 15 edible wild plants in the territory. She led us past some artistic barricades and visited a collective who were reorganising after the destruction of their beautiful cabin by the police last April. With almost no fixed shelter, I was impressed by their new constellation of spaces, pirated connectivity and to know that they would host a free techno party later that night, equipped with a 12 kilowatt sound system!

During the week at the farmhouse I was reading Starhawk's *The Empowerment Manual: A Guide for Collaborative Groups* and thought about the importance of care within collectives.¹⁷ After being called the "cement chef" at the Ambazada, I suggested that I cook a Chinese meal for the collective with ZAD vegetables filling handmade dumplings. Dinner took longer than expected to cook (haha), but was timely in that student L. returned to the ZAD, with an increased determination in finishing her documentary!

After some memorable

encounters, distributing all of our solidarity posters and even playing a game of *Situationiste* football with "Guy TroisBord," I left the ZAD this afternoon with new friends.¹⁸ Our journey to Nantes train station was a quiet and reflective one, interrupted by boisterous and patriotic French football fans blowing and honking their car horns on the street. Crossing the English Channel, I wondered if all this energy and love for a country could be redirected somehow, away from such spectacles, and towards a more equitable and sustainable future, and everything living thing on this planet.

I look forward to sharing my experiences with the two French people in Hong Kong and different local farming communities, especially Wang Chau Village, who expect an unjust eviction and the destruction of a valuable greenbelt later this year.¹⁹

Today in all corners of the world, we continue, with determination, collectively *working for the commons*.

Michael Leung

15th July 2018, France

¹ Ross, K. (2018) *The ZAD and NoTav*, Verso: xix

² *France, its wine, its revolutions*, a fictional story by Michael Leung

³ www.martinkrenn.net/choi_yuen_village/info.html, www.tinyurl.com/solidaritywithaarey, <https://libcom.org/history/italy-brief-history-no-tav-movement> and https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belt_and_Road_Initiative

⁴ www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/17/france-abandons-plan-for-580m-airport-in-west-of-country

⁵ www.tinyurl.com/wansik

⁶ <https://zadforever.blog/2018/04/24/the-revenge-against-the-commons>

⁷ <http://news.infoshop.org/europe/reviving-the-commons-isabelle-stengers-on-the-zad> and <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/les-invites-de-mediapart/blog/240418/pourquoi-ce-qui-se-passe-notre-dame-des-landes-nous-importe-t-il>

⁸ <https://zadforever.blog/2018/06/15/an-intergalactic-week-27-aug-2-sept>

⁹ <https://zad.nadir.org/spip.php?article5980>

¹⁰ I learnt from C. that the police have the assumption that many ZADistes are from outside France, which is false.

¹¹ *Realizing the promise of communism contained in the world's fragmentation demands a gesture, a gesture to be performed over and over again, a gesture that is life itself: that of creating pathways between the fragments, of placing them in contact, of organizing their encounter, of opening up the roads that lead from one friendly piece of the world to another without passing through hostile territory, that of establishing the good art of distances between worlds.* — The Invisible Committee, *Now* — <https://enoughisenough14.org/2018/02/26/the-invisible-committee-now-full-book>

¹² www.tinyurl.com/TowardsAnEcologicalCommons

¹³ www.paidong.tumblr.com/search/communityfarmingproject

¹⁴ www.dungbak.tumblr.com

¹⁵ <https://soundcloud.com/zadsocialrap>

¹⁶ It is worth mentioning that several ZADistes told me that they were very impressed by the creativity of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement in 2014, and were vocal in encouraging me to share this with people in Hong Kong. One ZADiste even said that the Umbrella Movement was a strong point of reference for her and her partner during the Paris Climate Games in 2015 — www.artcop21.com/events/6450

¹⁷ https://sustainabilitypopulareducation.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/the-empowerment-manual_nodrm.pdf

¹⁸ Collaboration with ITWST and Jon Yu — www.tinyurl.com/ZADposter

¹⁹ www.tinyurl.com/WangChauFlowers



INTERGALACTIC WEEK @ZAD

27/08 - 02/09/2018



**AUTONOMY
TERRITORIES
STRUGGLES
COMMONS**

**DEBATES
WORKSHOPS
CONCERTS
SKILL SHARES**



INFO: GALACZAD@RISEUP.NET

WWW.ZAD.NADIR.ORG

WWW.ZADFOREVER.BLOG

ZAD Par2

VOILA MACRON
QUI FAIT SON
BACHAR A LA ZAD

ZAD GÉNÉRA
GRÈVE À DÉFÈ
CONVERGENCE DE

l'aventure

est

use

