

# CULTURES OF REBELLION

## NOTES AGAINST EXTRACTIVIST ART AND FOR THE ART OF LIFE

John Jordan & Isabelle Fremeaux

***Ever since its inception in 2004, the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (Labofii) has sought to overcome the distinction between art and activism, by instigating acts of disobedience that transform situations. It is thus understandable that the focus of this issue of Klaxon has led us to its two instigators, John Jordan and Isabelle Fremeaux. We asked them to tell us about Labofii's motivations and working methods. John and Isabelle shared with us a powerful reflection, directed toward an urgent and imperative rooting out of the extractivist art and replacing it with art of reciprocity and a culture of rebellion.***

Her hand rises up out of the swirling sea. Dark eyes fix deep blue sky. She's drowning, not waving. Water is pushing life out of her lungs, but she just wants to be alive, she coughs and squirms. She's travelled so far to get here. The home is on fire, the climate has broken down, droughts have brought hunger, the fields are becoming deserts, the wars never stop and she is in search of life, that's all. But fortress Europe has made sure she never reaches your beaches with their bronzing bodies and sweet smell of sun cream. Her darker body will wash up on the golden sand days later, when the tourists have gone back to their hotels and after the tides are tired of playing with it. You are moved by the TV pictures of the crowded boats and the drowned children. You are moved to make a work that speaks of how Europe's migration policies are killing the exiled. You cover the columns of a theatre with thousands of orange life jackets, you are the artist Ai Weiwei. When asked why you

helped design Beijing's Bird Nest Olympic stadium for the very government that has repeatedly repressed and censored your work, you replied that it was because you "loved design." Do you love it more than life?

The Arctic is at times 20 degrees Celsius warmer than it should be at this time of year. The ice is melting so fast that scientists say it is literally off the charts, and recent storms are now appearing on seismographic records. What used to measure earthquakes is now measuring storms. The tools to measure the crisis are not even adequate. The waters are rising and the climate tipping points are looming, you are moved. You have hundreds of tonnes of Arctic ice that has broken off the ice shelf transported to Paris during the United Nations Climate Summit in 2015. You leave them to melt in the street. You are the artist Olafur Eliasson. Apparently your studio does not "make things" but "ideas", but that does not stop you

selling your wire and light-bulb foot-ball lampshades for 120,000 pounds to rich collectors.

You are artists and you are working in what some dare to call the era of the *Anthropocene*, suggesting shamefully that we are *all* equally responsible for the radical wrecking of our life support systems. As a recent internet meme reminded us, "*we are all in the same storm but not the same boat.*" We, the *Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination*, would rather call these times the *Capitalocene*, pointing the finger to the system that puts the economy in front of life, and naming the elites who keep its suicide machines and armies of soldiers and police well oiled making sure their profits are safe whilst everyone else's lives tumble towards extinction.

No artist, no activist, in-fact no human being, nor any of the more-than-human species who live inside and outside of us, has ever been faced with

this before. A recent official European Commission policy paper ended with the analysis that if we go beyond 1.5 degrees of warming, “we will face even more droughts, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people; the likely demise of the most vulnerable populations – and at worst, the extinction of humankind altogether.”<sup>18</sup> We are all living within a world where it is now easier to imagine the collapse of all life than imagine reinventing the right ways to live.

Yet for the majority world, the collapse has already happened, the colonisers destroyed their cultures long ago with virus stained blankets, swords, guns, slave and gold ships. The contemporary corporate colonising armies continue extracting everything they can from the lives and worlds of vulnerable beings – wood, metals, minerals, molecules, medicine, knowledge – with their enclosing, digging, mining, sucking and studying machines. It’s what we can call the logic of extractivism, a logic at the heart of the most destructive of all religions, the belief in the growth economy. Extractivists

take “nature”, stuff, material from somewhere and transform it into something that makes profit somewhere else. That profit elsewhere is always more important than the destruction it causes, than the continuation of life of the communities from which wealth is extracted. Extractivism is the opposite of response-ability, the opposite of reciprocity.

And as known worlds collapse, so do our ways of thinking and understanding. In the laboratories of social and natural sciences, “*human exceptionalism and bounded individualism*” writes Donna Haraway<sup>19</sup> “*those old saws of Western Philosophy and political economics, become unthinkable.*” Scientists are showing us that the idea of “nature” as unfeeling machines outside of us is an illusion, and that we all – from the whale to the cell – feel and sense the world, we all share a hunger for life that drives us to create, we all share an inwardness, a felt subjectivity.

And as scientists become neo-animalists, politicians reclaim the tools of

magic. In the government offices and the media they control, truth and causal logic have become unthinkable: from Trump to Erdogan, Boris to Bolsonaro, a post-factual politics weaves irrational images and myths back into our politics, where, writes Kasper Opstrup, “*It is no longer about whether a proposition is true or not, but about how effective it is to make something happen.*”<sup>20</sup>

But in the museums and studios, concert halls and theatres, galleries and street festivals of the Metropolis<sup>21</sup>, it seems that even though this era has made art unthinkable too, so

**18** [bit.ly/31rZYYD](http://bit.ly/31rZYYD)

**19** Donna Haraway, *Staying with the trouble*, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 30.

**20** Kasper Opstrup, *The Untamed craft – Magical Activism as a Reaction to the Reappearance of the Reactionary*, Unpublished essay, in correspondance with the authors.

**21** cf. John Jordan, “*Try to imagine (Letter to a corpse)*”, *Klaxon 2: Political City*, p. 7

[bit.ly/2EgzMrp](http://bit.ly/2EgzMrp)



Map of the Climate Camp at Kingsnorth © Hemant Jain  
Klaxon 13 - TAKING ACTION WITH THE LIVING

many continue business as normal. The catastrophe may well have been integrated as a topic and there is constant inventiveness in art's material forms, but its essence has not been reinvented, partly because *art as we know it* is still very much conceived of as a universal defining feature of civilisation. Yet according to art historian Larry Shiner, *art as we know it* "is a European invention barely two hundred years old".<sup>22</sup> For most of human history and for most of human cultures there was no word to describe *art as we know it* today. Then something unprecedented happened, what some have called a copernican revolution in art. It started around 1750, in the white colonial metropoles of Europe, at the very onset of another revolution – the industrial capitalist one. For the first time, the process of making things became independent of human or animal power, of seasons, of weather, wind, water and sun rays. Making became independent of place as the fossil fuel burning machines of the capitalocene, first coal then oil, amplified the logic of extractivism and our life support system began to be plundered everywhere.

As the capitalocene began to ravage our worlds, the traditional ways of thinking and making art were split apart, and *art as we know it* became the new normal. What was once the process of inventive collaboration became the creation of individual genius, works that once had specific purpose and place were separated from their functional contexts and enclosed for silent and reverential contemplation by the rising middle classes. This new notion of a contemplative universal art – no longer situated nor useful, with its silent polite audience – was pushed worldwide by missionaries, armies, entrepreneurs, dealers and intellectuals as one of the engines of progress. It colonised imaginations everywhere and continues to do so. Without the violent rift that it created between artists and artisans, genius and skill, the beautiful and the useful, art and life, the system of *art as we know it*, that most of us reading this text work in and depend on, would collapse.

And yet it seems so obvious that in this crisis, it is exactly these rifts that must be healed and an extractivist art – that takes value from specific places and regurgitates it elsewhere, from the past to the present, from this messy life to a slick show somewhere else, from this community to my career, – has to stop. Today any look around the *art as we know it* system will show its vampire-like tendencies, sucking value out of collapse, rebellion, migrant struggles, ecology, territorialisation, magic, new-materialism – whatever is a fashionable topic at the time – and regurgitating it into un-situated detached objects, performances or experience elsewhere, anywhere in fact, as long as it is a context where the codes of the *art as we know*

### ***"Extractivist art sucks value out of collapse, rebellion, ecology – whatever is a fashionable topic at the time – and regurgitates it into un-situated detached objects, performances or experience elsewhere."***

it system function, be it the metropolitan street or the museum, the neighbourhood park or the walls of the abandoned factories.

The concerts and performances, the interventions and installations of extractivist art all "speak about", "comment on", or "explore" their subjects; they "invite us to spur a debate" or a "conversation". They involve the attentive transformation of space and bodies, light and time, they attempt to make things beautiful and/or strange, they "make visible" an invisible problem or invite a polemic. Often the artist is deeply "concerned" by the issue, and the communities

### ***"How can art thank life rather than take from it? To give back to life is to enable it to flourish more, to open spaces for the potentialities of the fecundity of the living world to continue to be ongoing."***

affected by it routinely become their material. But in the end, the most important thing is not how the work can be part of strategy against the problem, but that the material is extracted and transformed into good art. Their relationship with life is that of a resource rather than acts of reciprocity. The work does not really "give back" despite all its claims, what benefits most is the artist's career and the further legitimisation of the

institutions promoting *art as we know it*. Whether the work nourishes and sustains the social movements or communities invested in these issues is hardly ever on the agenda. Asking whether the work is useful or contributes in any way as some material solution to the issues it "deals with" is virtually a heresy, leading to accusations of instrumentalisation. If the art is used by political movements, it loses its fantasy of autonomy!

In this extraordinary moment, this crack in the system that is the covid-world, where the line between what seemed unfeasible and what ended up being possible has been smudged, where so few of us want to return to the toxic normal, perhaps

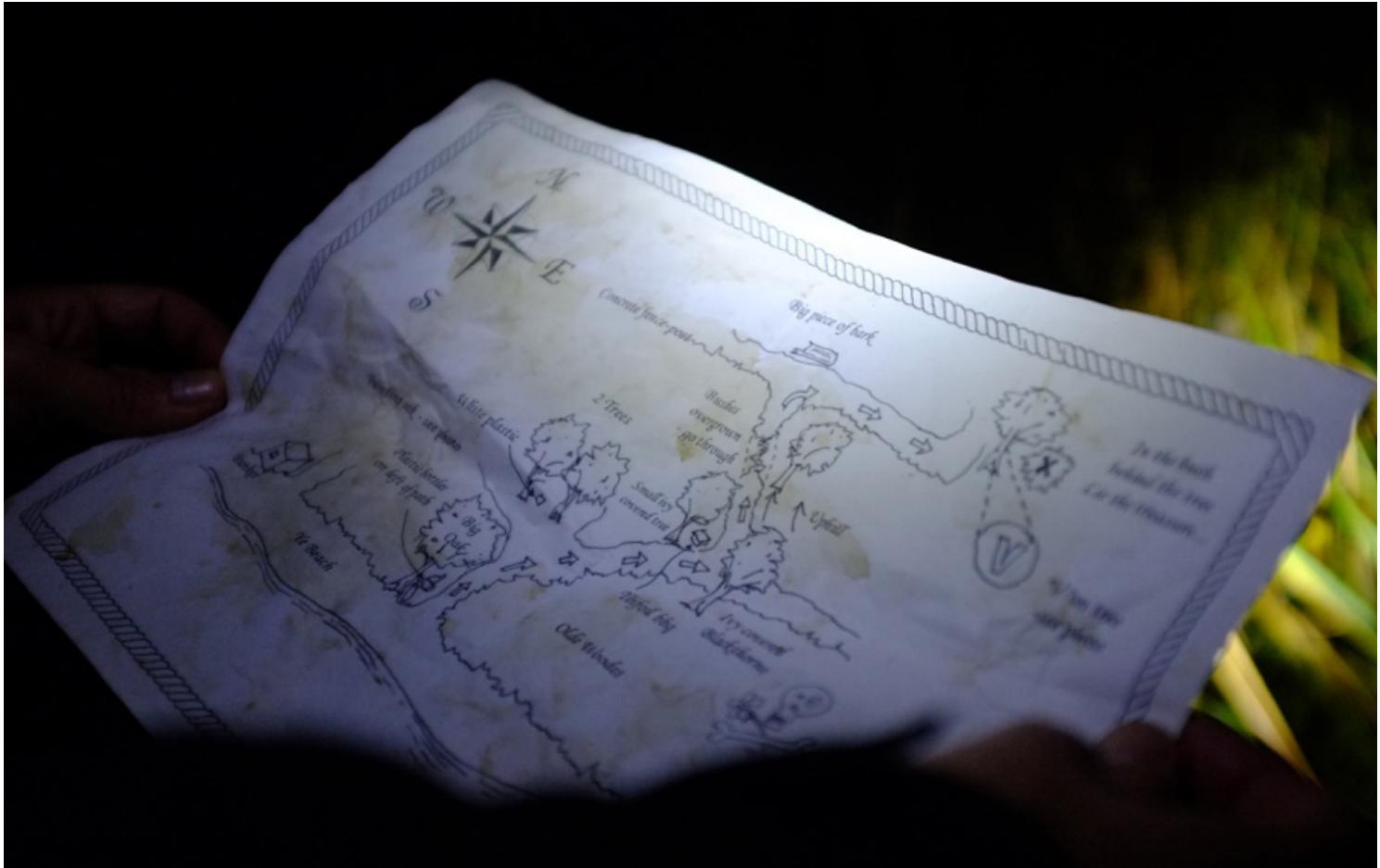
we can take the risk of reinventing this worn out invention of art. Perhaps we can begin shifting it away from the logic of extractivism, towards the art of reciprocity.

Those three letters a-r-t come from a merger of the Latin *Ars* and the Greek *Techne* and that for many thousands of years meant *any* human activity, from shoe-making to verse writing, horse breaking to governing, vase painting to cooking, medicine to navigation, was considered an art. Not because it was done by an artist or because it was separated from life by framing it within the contemplative context of the *art as we know it* system, but because it was performed with grace and skill. Grace is an act of thinking with and thanking the world. The word comes from old French *Grace*, meaning "thanks" – as

in "*grâce à*" – as in "gratitude". To thank life for giving us life, that is perhaps the greatest skill our art must learn. But how can art thank life rather than take from it? To give back to life is

to enable it to flourish more, to open spaces for the potentialities of the fecundity of the living world to continue to be ongoing. To do this our art must defend life from the death machines of the economy and desert the worlds that feed its logics.

**22** Larry Shiner, *The Invention of art. A cultural history*, University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 3.



A treasure island map to find the buried boat and take part in Great Rebel Raft Regatta © John Jordan

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The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination certainly does not have all the answers to these questions, but they have inhabited us since our founding in 2004 and driven us to aim for work that smudges the line between art activism, political movements and art institutions and often forces us to cross line of legality into acts of disobedience. “Disobedience in the eyes of anyone who has read history is our original virtue” wrote Oscar Wilde, poet, playwright and queer activist: “it is through disobedience and rebellion that progress has been made.”<sup>23</sup> We believe disobedient bodies sculpt history much more than radical art ever did. But what art can bring to this disobedience is joy. “Pleasure evokes change” writes US author, doula, women’s rights activist, witch and black queer feminist Adrienne Maree Brown.<sup>24</sup> We have spent years embedded in movements, working as organisers and designers of acts of disobedience that motivate through joy and desire rather than guilt and cynicism, acts that are designed to be useful, in stopping the war that the economy is waging on life.

We would like to take you on a couple of journeys that try to illustrate some of the principles that guide us, show you some acts that were our attempts at reinvention, always rough at the edges but gestures of grace in these trembling times.

**“We believe disobedient bodies sculpt history much more than radical art ever did. But what art can bring to this disobedience is joy.”**

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Sunset. A gentle hillside. Tents fluttering in the wind, whirling windmills, circus marquees filled with animated bodies. 2000 people: talking, eating, working, dancing in a squatted field. Tomorrow is the big day, you can smell the excitement... and the nerves.

Your team is ready, an affinity group of 6 people, new friends made over the last week, living and deciding things together in this field. You are briefed in a tiny tent by a pirate, you like his blackened eyes and tilted hat. He gives you a treasure map and tells you that your task is to launch into the river at 7am, “sharp!” The aim is to shut down

the coal fired power station downstream. “This is where the boat is buried” he says, pointing to a X on the map, a mischievous glint in his eye.

The camp is surrounded by thousands of police officers. They search everything that comes in and out. Later that evening you meet a mysterious man in a nearby railway station, whom you recognise thanks to a secret sign. He gives you life jackets.

The night is warm. You are creeping through the woods. A white column of light sweeps the canopy, the ripping roar of a police helicopter overhead. You know that there are another 12 other groups, hiding, searching for their boats. You listen out for them, the crack of a twig. You read the map by headlamp, and find the spot. You dig. Here it is: your boat! There is even a bottle of rum! You drink and sleep amongst the trees with your friends.

<sup>23</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, 1891.

<sup>24</sup> Adrienne Maree Brown (ed), *Pleasure activism. The politics of feeling good*, 2019.

At 7am, you launch into the river, you see so many others emerging from the forest like you, you paddle as fast as you can towards the power station in the distance. Behind you a huge black police motorboat appears, it is coming after you. You feel so alive and in the world, things make sense again.

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We need moments that inspire hope and adventure in these dark times. Moments where the spectators become the spectacle again. Acts that transform us and the world at the same time. Amongst the ruins of the Second World War poet and dramaturge Bertolt Brecht wrote: "Our theatre (...) must illustrate the pleasure to be had in changing reality".<sup>25</sup> In 2008, we helped organise a Climate Camp on the edges of the Thames valley in the UK, illegally set up on a site, with an extractivist climate crime as a backdrop: Kingsnorth's coal fired power station. Climate Camps are temporary self-managed infrastructures, forms of prefigurative politics that show the desired world in the here and now rather than simply being protests "against" something. On

camp, everyone is crew and decisions are taken horizontally. All the energy for the camps is renewable, the food local and for over a week there are workshops in everything from anti-capitalist degrowth economics to how to build a hand-made wind turbine. It culminates with a mass direct action on the last day.

The Labofii designed an action to shut down the old working power station that stood where a new one was supposed to replace it. The action was entitled *The G.R.R.R. (The Great Rebel Raft Regatta)*. A week before the camp set up, in the dead of night, we buried inflatable boats in the forest along the river. Then, when the camp began, we distributed treasure maps showing the location of the buried boats. On the day of action, despite the huge police presence, and a new by-law banning anyone from taking a boat out on the river, 130 rebel rafters took to the water. One boat managed to partially block one of the outfalls of the power station, closing part of it down. Three of the crew on that boat had never before taken part in disobedience, and over a decade later they are all still active in the climate justice movements. All say that the sense of playful adventure, camaraderie and

excitement of that day was what lit the spark for them to continue to rebel for a future worth living. "Man (sic) is at his most human when he plays",<sup>26</sup> claimed playwright and philosopher Friedrich Schiller. The Labofii would add that when our playing builds joyful communities of rebellion, our humanity is perfected.

"*Direct Action Gets the Goods!*" was the infamous slogan of the International Workers of the World (IWW), the anarchist union that swept across the USA in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They experienced time and again that direct action works, that it costs the industrialists money and thus hurts them where they are most fragile, forcing them to fold to social movement pressure. A year and a half after the Climate Camp packed up from the banks of the river, the plans for a new power station was shelved and the old one was knocked down.

**25** Bertolt Brecht, "Politics in the Theatre", in Kuhn, Tom/Giles, Steve/Silberman, Marc (eds.), *Brecht on Performance. Messingkauf and Modelbooks*, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015, p. 255.

**26** Cf. Lesley Chamberlain, *The arc of utopia. The beautiful story of the Russian revolution*, Reaktion Books, 2017, p. 41



The victorious team's joy of the GRRR © Kristian Buus

Coal is no longer burnt on those drained marshlands, the molecules of CO<sub>2</sub> that remain active for 1 000 years will no longer rise from that place and wreck our climate. To us at the Labofii, this is the work of art, grace embodied: the returning of the complexities of life to a space that was once dedicated simply to the production of money and human technology, building spaces that privilege difference, diversity and the weaving of complex relationships between human and more-than-human forms of life over the monocultures of capital.

In 2015, when Paris hosted the UN Conference of Parties (COP) on Climate Change, climate art was cool once again, and the *art as we know it* institutions brought out their global stars. Eliasson's *Ice Watch*, as mentioned at the start of this article, took pride of place. Whilst *art as we know it* asked its spectators to contemplate the disaster, we did not want to enable people to look at ice liquefying but to encourage them to engage in what would help stop the causes of the ice melting in the first place. By 2015 the climate discourse and the Paris summit itself had been totally taken over by corporate interests, many of the summit sponsors, such as toxic car makers Renault and French coal, gas and uranium burning electricity provider EDF also sponsored art events, such as philosopher Bruno Latour and architects scenographers raumlabor's *Theatre of Negotiations* at the Nanterre-Amandiers theatre. Some art seemed to be directly enabling a vast greenwashing operation, cleaning the dirty logos of climate wrecking corporations, doing the job of public relations companies for cheap, having their value extracted to promote the myth of green Capitalism. To us, there was nothing graceful about that.

Instead, we decided to turn the Climate Summit into the stage for the world's biggest civil disobedience game, entitled *Climate Games* – which would take place online and in the streets, with teams taking creative actions against climate criminals. With its tag line "We are nature defending ourselves", *Climate Games* was developed collectively, a collaboration of hackers, gamers, artists and activists during a series of week long hackathons, taking place in numerous art institutions – from the Berliner Festspiele to Artsadmin in London, the

Vooruit in Ghent to the Lieu Unique in Nantes – which became places to rehearse, plan and design actions that aimed to bend reality.

When the games were launched in December 2015, as the world's leaders arrived in Paris, 120 teams had signed up using the anonymous website, despite the state of emergency declared in France following the terrorist attacks a month earlier which banned all demonstrations for weeks. As the conference unfolded, 225 actions against corporations linked to fossil fuels took place across the world. Each team had put "play zones" onto the map, then uploaded reports of their action. Like in all good games, there were prizes, and these were voted by all the players. This included the most efficient action, the funniest or the most courageous one, or the one that showed most solidarity with other teams.

A winner was the Belgian team Zoological Ensemble for the Liberation of Nature (their French acronym EZLN is a hat tip to the Zapatista insurgency), who dressed as animals, trees and vegetables and invaded Volkswagen show rooms covering the brand new cars with "nature" in the form of autumn leaves, whilst dancing to the sound track of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. Formed especially for the

*Climate Games*, the EZLN continues to be one of the most creative and effective collectives smudging the line between art and activism in Europe. Another one of the teams printed the scientific basis of the conference, the IPCC report, onto brand new toilet paper and put the rolls into the toilets of the heavily guarded conference hall. Meanwhile an international team, armed with allen keys that open the advertising spaces of bus stops, commissioned numerous artists to design posters that were then illegally inserted into 600 bus stops overnight. One team blocked the huge coal mining machines in the open cast mines of Germany and on the last days of the games, a team of one pretended to be a tourist going up the Eiffel Tower and used his crutches (he really did have a broken leg!) to hide a pirate radio transmitter that beamed out rebel messages from the top of Paris' landmark.

Most of the teams did not "aim to inspire action for climate"<sup>27</sup> as *Ice Watch* claimed, they did take action, transforming worlds with their disobedient bodies, without mediation but with audacity and courage.

27 [bit.ly/2YyWkKE](http://bit.ly/2YyWkKE)

See also Klaxon 12: Reconfiguring Ecological Imaginaries, p. 14.

[bit.ly/2YAXrtv](http://bit.ly/2YAXrtv)



The IPCC report printed on toilet roll, placed in the toilets of the conference hall during the COP21 in Paris for the *Climate Games* © Teresa Borasino

Of course not everyone is able to be active on the “front lines”, to be openly disobedient. Many of us are not psychologically suited for it, many have life circumstances that restrict the capacity to take such risk as being arrested. But everyone can be part of building a culture of rebellion, a set of values that embrace, encourage and promote political transformation. It is about learning to no longer “play safe” but instead identifying what one can do from wherever s/he is in order to support all those who are actively fighting.

A year after the *Climate Games* we moved to the ZAD (zone to defend) of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, in Western France, where a struggle against an international airport for the city of Nantes was coming to a peak and illustrating the power of a culture of rebellion in an extraordinary way. This “laboratory of commoning” situated on a territory of 4 000 acres was once a place that French politicians called an “outlaw zone”, “lost to the republic”. In 2009, the struggle involving local farmers and villagers had already been going for 40 years, but people who had visited the Kingsnorth Climate Camp in 2008 had taken that inspiration across the channel, and France’s first Climate Camp set up on the wetlands. After the week long camp packed up, some people stayed and squatted the land and empty farmhouses and learnt to grow food, build incredible architecture and live life in common with the human and more-than-human inhabitants of the land, as a creative living barricade against the climate wrecking infrastructure. Meanwhile the entire movement kept the fight in every way possible.

When in January 2018, the French government finally cancelled the airport, it was obvious that the victory did not happen by itself, it took a rich composition of opponents, and a culture of rebellion to support them. On one of the squatted farms was a banner that read “*Pas de barricadières sans cuisiniers*” (no women on the barricades without men in the kitchen), to remind everyone that a strong social movement will always need all roles to be fulfilled, from the most spectacular to the most seemingly mundane. Every revolution has been held by the art of care and a culture of rebellion be it cooks, medics, legal support, media relations, child care, safe places to rest or hide, etc. When



A specially commissioned poster inserted illegally on a bus stop during the COP 21 in Paris for the Climate Games © Brandalism



EZLN (Ensemble Zoologique de Libération de la Nature) © RR



EZLN (Ensemble Zoologique de Libération de la Nature) © RR

squatted dwellings were at risk of being evicted, local farmers organised so that cattle could be looked after whilst others took turns to come with their tractors and defend them. Residents from surrounding villages offered beds, showers and food to those who had been on the barricades when military operations struck and were resisted. Supporters from afar sent clothes, money or medical supplies; doctors tended wounds, lawyers offered legal advice, mechanics fixed vehicles, carpenters built cabins and houses; naturalists and scientists helped make an inventory of all the species threatened on the land and set in place legal challenges for endangered species, welders from the St Nazaire ship yards helped build an illegal working lighthouse on the very place where the control tower of the airport was planned... All worked for free to ensure that every aspect of the fight was covered.

Cultures of rebellion can take so many shapes, and sometimes, can take an unexpected twist. We write this piece in 2020 during the hottest summer on record, from our home on exactly where the duty free shop of the airport should have been, had people not stepped out of their roles and refused

to follow the laws of a government that wanted to suck these wetlands dry and cover them in concrete. As we write, a new form of rebellion has taken the world by surprise, co-designed by K pop (Korean popular music) fans, using public virtual tools to have real effects on the territory of the enemy. They have organised their communities of tens of thousands to torpedo white supremacist events. These teenagers who spend most of their lives on screen posting billions of tweets with dance routines and futile memes have actually become experts at social media. They know how to play the algorithms so as to boost their own messages where they want. When George Floyd was killed by a cop kneeling on his neck for almost 9 minutes, the worldwide fury that erupted flooded the streets and the cyber space. #BlackLivesMatter and #BlackOutTuesday trended social media for days, which was not without triggering some angry response from white supremacist users who countered with their own #WhiteLivesMatter or #WhiteOutWednesday. And so, the supposedly apolitical and frivolous K pop crowd rallied and took over the racist hashtags by drowning them with memes and music videos, so that when looking up for those tags you went

through an inexhaustible stream of performances and pictures of their favourite artists.

Empowered by their success, they struck again a few weeks later, by forging a powerful alliance with "alt tiktok", a queer counter subculture to the mainstream side of the video platform, in order to sink Trump's rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma. When the presidential campaign announced that tickets could be booked by phone, a few users saw an unmissable opportunity: reserve a seat, never show up and most importantly encourage everyone one else to do so. Except that when you are social media savvy, "everyone else" can actually become almost "everyone else". One of the first post suggesting the strategy was liked over 707 000 times and viewed over 2 million times. It was so successful that despite Trump boasting about millions of tickets being booked and the entire rally being organised on that basis (with overflow events planned outside the arena), only a few thousands supporters turned up, the stadium was two third empty and the President was very visibly humiliated.

The use of social media can also be more straightforward, as archaeologist

Sarah Parcak demonstrated.<sup>28</sup> The Egyptologist decided to put her expertise in ancient obelisks and how they were raised to good use. On June 1<sup>st</sup>, amid the same anti-racist demonstrations, she gave step-by-step directions on how to bring down racist monuments over a series of a dozen tweets,<sup>29</sup> illustrated with explicative diagram, safety instructions and advice to keep good rhythm. It is difficult to know whether people actually followed the instructions, but it certainly helped a great

deal legitimising the numerous topplings of supremacist statues all over the world.

### ***“Why make an installation about refugees being stuck at the border when you could design tools to cut through the fences?”***

Cultures of rebellion can be clandestine too, but not necessarily underground. A friend was chatting to municipal street workers in Nantes in 2014, following a riot against the

airport project. They were re-fitting cobblestones that had been dug up from the pavement. Noticing that they were putting very little mortar between the stones, our friend enquired gently. “You never know when they could be useful again”, responded the street worker, with a wink and a smile.

**28** cf. Our article Jalons – “The fine art of iconoclasm”, by Isabelle Fremeaux, p.10.

**29** [bit.ly/3i401j3](https://bit.ly/3i401j3)



The ZAD lighthouse, erected on the very place where the airport control tower was to be built © John Jordan

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About 10 years ago, scientists identified 15 potential tipping points in the Earth system that could spell disaster.<sup>30</sup> The classic example of a tipping point that causes a feedback mechanism is when ice melts in the Arctic. White ice reflects heat, dark rock underneath absorbs it, the more the ice melts the hotter the area becomes and so the more ice melts. Today, there is evidence that 9 of these feedback mechanisms are already active. *"If damaging tipping cascades can occur and a global tipping point cannot be ruled out, then this is an existential threat to civilisation"* the

world's most eminent climate scientists wrote last year in the renowned journal *Nature*.<sup>31</sup>

**"Why not dissolve art back to its ancient roots in ritual—the age old theatre of magic, where communities of bodies perform a desire that is so intense and focused, that it bends reality?"**

It feels that a much more hopeful tipping point in the world of *art as we know it* could occur, if artists increasingly joined movements and applied their creativity to them rather than *art as we know it*, and if more art institutions opened their doors to nurture real cultures of rebellion and closed their doors to toxic corporate machines of the capitalocene.

Why make a dance piece about the coming food riots when your skills as a choreographer could help crowds of rebels move through the streets to avoid the police? Why design a mural about the violence of debt when you could be organising ways for communities to be less dependent on the dictatorship of the

markets? Why make an installation about refugees being stuck at the border when you could design tools to cut through the fences? Why make a sound work in a forest about the

30 [bit.ly/3ggfmwe](https://bit.ly/3ggfmwe)

31 [bit.ly/30kesCH](https://bit.ly/30kesCH)

 **Sarah Parcak**  @indyfromspace · Jun 1  
PSA For ANYONE who might be interested in how to pull down an obelisk\* safely from an Egyptologist who never ever in a million years thought this advice might come in handy

\*might be masquerading as a racist monument I dunno

5.6K

32K

85.5K



 **Sarah Parcak**  @indyfromspace · Jun 1  
My Bona Fides: I'm an Egyptologist. I have worked in Egypt for 20 years and know a lot about ancient Egyptian architecture. Especially how they raised obelisks.

344

542

10.8K



 **Sarah Parcak**  @indyfromspace · Jun 1  
The key to pulling one down is letting gravity work 4 you. Chances are good the obelisk extends into the ground a bit, so you want to get CHAINS NOT ROPE (it's 2020 AD not BC let metal work for you) extended tightly around the top (below pointy bit) and 1/3 down forming circles

162

998

12.3K



 **Sarah Parcak**  @indyfromspace · Jun 1  
For every 10 ft of monument, you'll need 40+ people. So, say, a 20 ft tall monument, probably 60 people. You want strong rope attached to the chain---rope easier to hold onto versus chain. EVERYONE NEEDS TO BE WEARING GLOVES FOR SAFETY (there is a lot of safety first)

199

895

11.8K



 **Sarah Parcak**  @indyfromspace  
You probably want 150+ ft of rope x 2...you'll want to be standing 30 feet away from obelisk so it won't topple on you (your safety! first!). This gives enough slack for everyone to hold on to rope, alternating left right left right. Here's the hard part...pulling in unison

3:48 AM · Jun 1, 2020 · Twitter Web App

501 Retweets and comments 8K Likes



 **Sarah Parcak**  @indyfromspace · Jun 1  
Replying to @indyfromspace  
You have two groups, one on one side, one opposite, for the rope beneath the pointy bit and the rope 1/3 down. You will need to PULL TOGETHER BACK AND FORTH. You want to create a rocking motion back and forth to ease the obelisk from its back.

 **Sarah Parcak**  @indyfromspace · Jun 1  
I recommend a rhythmic song. YOU WILL NEED SOMEONE WITH A LOUDSPEAKER DIRECTING. There can be only one person yelling. Everyone will be alternating on rope left right left right not everyone on the same side. No one else near the obelisk! Safety first!

67

519

9.2K



 **Sarah Parcak**  @indyfromspace · Jun 1  
Start by a few practice pulls to get into it. Think of it like a paused tug of war, pull, wait 2, 3, 4, 5 PULL wait 2, 3, 4, 5. PULL AS ONE, PAUSE 5 SECONDS, you'll notice some loosening, keep up the pattern...you may need more people, get everyone to pull!

45

390

7.3K



 **Sarah Parcak**  @indyfromspace · Jun 1  
Just keep pulling till there's good rocking, there will be more and more and more tilting, you have to wait more for the obelisk to rock back and time it to pull when it's coming to you. Don't worry you're close!

47

367

7.1K



 **Sarah Parcak**  @indyfromspace · Jun 1  
WATCH THAT SUMBITCH TOPPLE GET THE %^&\* OUT OF THE WAY IT WILL SMASH RUN AWAY FROM DIRECTION.  
Then celebrate. Because #BlackLivesMatter and good riddance to any obelisks pretending to be ancient Egyptian obelisks when they are in fact celebrating racism and white nationalism

234

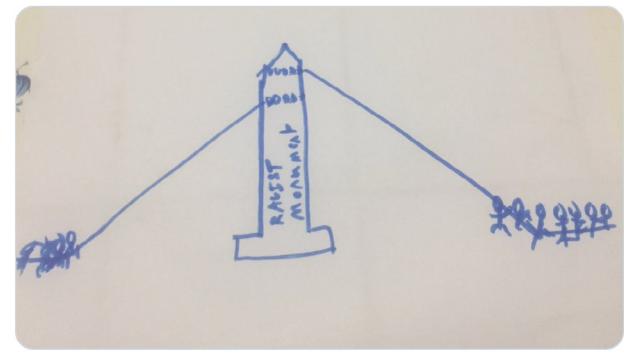
1.5K

21.7K



 **Sarah Parcak**  @indyfromspace · Jun 1  
OK because this is twitter I need to clarify: PLEASE DO NOT PULL DOWN ACTUAL ANCIENT EGYPTIAN OBELISKS that was not the point of this thread.

 **Sarah Parcak**  @indyfromspace · Jun 1  
Here's a rough schematic. I note this is experimental archaeology in action! Just my professional Hot Take and you may need more people, longer rope, etc. everything depends on monument size.



Sarah Parcak's Twitter feed, instructions for knocking down an obelisk

Claxon 13 - TAKING ACTION WITH THE LIVING

silence left where there were once songbirds, when you could be creating an ingenious way of sabotaging the pesticide factories that are annihilating them? Why not dissolve art

back to its ancient roots in ritual – the age old theatre of magic, where communities of bodies perform a desire that is so intense and focused, that it bends reality? Why continue to

extract life when we could be giving back to it?

### The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination

## John Jordan & Isabelle Fremeaux



Art activist John Jordan has been described as a “magician of rebellion” by the press and a “Domestic Extremist” by the UK police. Co-founder of Reclaim the Streets (1995-2000) and the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, he is also co-author of *We Are Everywhere: The irresistible rise of global anti-capitalism* (2003, Verso). Isabelle Fremeaux is a popular educator, action researcher and deserter of the academy.

Co-authors of the film-book *Les Sentiers de l'utopie* (Zones/ La Découverte, 2011), they coordinate The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (Labofii), through which they work in diverse contexts from museums to squatted social centres, from international theatre festivals to climate action camps. The Labofii brings artists and activists together to design tools and acts of disobedience, infamous for launching a rebel raft regatta to shut down a coal fired power station, turning bikes into machines of disobedience, using ants to sabotage banks and refusing the attempts at censorship by the BP sponsored Tate gallery.

[bit.ly/3gDzhp3](http://bit.ly/3gDzhp3)

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