



---

# ***RE-ATTACHMENTS***

TOWARDS AN ECOLOGY OF PRESENCE

---

*dispositions*



I.

It is said that eco-anxiety will be the affliction of our generation. When the flow of catastrophic information on climate change resonates with the feeling that we are powerless to stop it, we are sent reeling. We become obsessed with anything that is within our control: zero waste, veganism, public transit for the poor, electric cars for the rich, greenways for good citizens, climate marches, and always the same refrain “we must pull together, as a society...”

Through these acts we assist in a terrible transfiguration. Our genuine concern for the world is remade into a pathology, and our desire to change it is channeled into inert policies. The force of these proposed escapes emanates from the fact that we know we are bound to the rest of the living world. We are inhabited by a commitment to defend what is sacred, and by the desire to live somewhere other than in the middle of a sea of concrete, eating GMO vegetables and meat from industrial slaughterhouses. The authenticity of our senses, the feelings running through us pushing us to act, to find a way to live that doesn’t destroy life but encourages it to flourish—are all transfigured away through the spell of their hollow escapes.

*THE FASHIONABLE CRITIQUE on the left that individual actions are useless and that the only path forward is government intervention – does not interest us any more than the guilt and sacrificial impulses typical of activist groups.*

*The hypothesis that we wish to elaborate, and bring to its full political conclusions, is situated at the level of inventing ways of living in and against this catastrophic era. Because the way forward is not yet clear, we seek to open the space to begin in what follows.*

While we celebrate the fact that hundreds of thousands of people feel this desire to act, committing themselves to changing their lives, stepping out of their comfort zones, and taking risks, we posit that this energy has thus far been diverted. We must recognize that the paving over of the world, the destruction of all living things, and our growing inability to feed ourselves, are not incidental; they are political projects of dispossession in the service of wealth creation. Halting this project won't be easy. Until now, our efforts have been captured by all sorts of pathetic solutions, as impotent as they are irresponsible, and nothing has changed.

Facing this crisis, we are typically offered two proposals: on the one hand, the demands-based activist environmentalism, in which we urge our governments to intervene; and on the other, an individualist environmentalism in which we modify our daily choices as consumers.

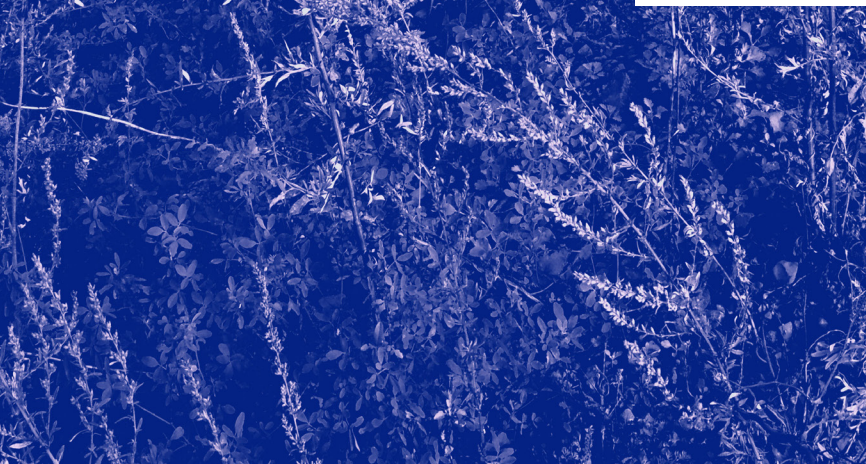


These two forms of environmentalism dovetail in their effectiveness. Our objective cannot simply be to make our voices heard, seeking the ear of popular opinion—everyone is already aware of the disaster. The media, engineers, politicians, and bosses are well-aware of the magnitude of the problem and each waits to turn it to their advantage. An ecological political practice must not settle for working to prevent climate change.

The climate is already changing, as every heatwave and snowmelt, and every hurricane and forest fire attest. In either of their offered proposals, our ability to act is so limited that our actions have virtually no impact on the scope of the catastrophe.



**CLIMATE CHANGES** are feedback cycles over the long term. Even if we stopped the production of greenhouse gases today, we would still have decades of violent climate change ahead of us. The question is not so much how to slow them down, but how to inhabit them. Climate change seems to open up two options for the economy and the government: it will either undermine their legitimacy or tighten their grip on our lives. In our moment, the outcome remains indeterminate.



We believe that ecological struggle must be fought on two fronts, which are, in fact, inseparable. It must first disrupt the course of economic normalcy — the economy of the exploitation and the destruction of living beings. Disrupt, and through forms of attack — blockades and reoccupations, strikes, and sabotage — it must also elaborate other ways of living. Forming attachments to places, and inventing other ways of being, new sensitivities, and new relationships with ourselves and with others, which we hold dear and which hold us. And above all, learning to defend these relationships, a position which invariably will bring us back into conflict with the economy. We need to learn to organize ourselves on the basis of our needs and then gradually respond to collective questions that arise through the confluence of life and struggle, little by little, moving away from the functional separation specific to classical activism.

The usual ecological positions suggest that activist efforts be situated at the level of values, on the ethical orientation of the action. But isn't the task of ecological struggle ultimately about restoring our presence in the world, our capacity to act in, and on, the situation: is this not then a question of our power? If this understanding is all too often lacking in classical environmentalism, it is clear to us that it is here that the pivotal point of ecological struggle is to be found.

We understand action as a vector: ethics is its orientation, while power is its magnitude. The epoch imposes the orientation upon us; but it is only by re-centering what we call 'power' in the discussion that ecology can become, strictly speaking, political.

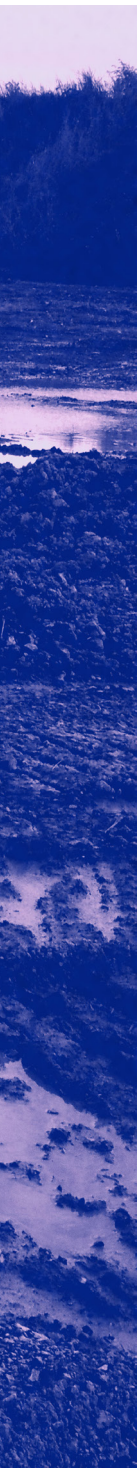
An orientation without magnitude, an ethic without power, remains a moral. It does not concern itself with what it means to live well, nor does it attempt



to act on the world. It is only interested in designating what it does and what surrounds it as 'good' or 'bad'. Understood in this way, a moralist logic does not result in experimentation or in seeking new ways of living in struggle, but instead results in affects and judgments that either comfort (I'm doing my part!) or induce guilt (we are the monsters...). It's the difference between the judgement that owning a pick-up truck is the choice of a barbaric polluter, and knowing that a truck is a tool to build infrastructure that will allow us to live differently. A tool that allows us to access the roads used for resource extraction, and to block the economy on the stolen lands we inhabit.

It is the difference between feeling a sense of panic combined with the urgency borne out of inaction, and knowing that all the components for a magical life are already there waiting for us — understanding that we are acting in the long term.





WHAT DO WE CALL "THE END OF THE WORLD"? Is the end of the industrial world the end of the world (as collapsology claims), or is the modern/colonial Empire itself the realization of many ends of worlds through its creation of a 'non-world'—barren to the senses and without definition? Rather than mobilizing nihilistic affects and calling for another end of the world, we frame this apocalypse as an ongoing process that began with the colonization of the Americas, and we want to be done with this end of the world. Let us imagine what this end of the world could mean: in short, the restoration of this world made up of a multiplicity of worlds.

AS EARLY AS THE 1960s, studies on the notion of the "end of the world" revealed a distinction between those apocalypses without an eschaton and eschatological apocalypses. The eschatological apocalypses are the most culturally and historically widespread notions of the end of the world. They see the end of the world as the herald of a regeneration of existence — millenarianism, prophetic decolonialism, and Judeo-Christian messianism. They are ends of the world that end, in a way. The apocalyptic tone that characterizes western modernity — thematised as at once nauseating and absurd — of which eco-anxiety is only its most recent manifestation, typically produces impressions of an end of the world without end, excepting the extinction of all species, which cannot, strictly speaking, be considered an end.









## II.

In order to surpass the current framework, in which crisis is simultaneously imminent and permanent, it is necessary to build a political ecology against a powerless environmentalism — a political ecology that can rise to the challenges we face. It must deconstruct the foundations of both citizen and state proposals; those that seek to “save the environment”, as well as those that aim to control resources in order to better manage them, that is, to govern the disaster.

*HOW do you want to speak about 'nature' to the subjects formed by the metropolis, for whom the only non-human living things they perceive are either contrived landscapes, pets who wait all day for their masters' return, or the parasites they fear? They have learned from social media that to give up plastic straws is to save the turtles.*

This current disposition is what we call an “ecology of absence.” From this lens, one must protect Nature: an object outside of us, made up of species and habitats that are distant and detached from our lived realities. The situation before us becomes a statistical one. They’re throwing figures at us: percentages of greenhouse gases, a degree centigrade more or less, or the number of species that are going to disappear. What we are faced with is an abstract representation, a model of nature that we are told will be disfigured, that all this is quite sad and more, that this horror is somehow our fault. This represented ecological disaster is not territorialized; rather, it affects everyone and so everyone must do their part to make a difference. By pointing fingers at the rest of us, those to blame melt away and disappear into the crowd.

The very use of the term “environment” designates a separation between humans and other beings. It designates what surrounds ‘Man’, and what distinguishes ‘him’. This conception of the world, far from being universal, is inscribed in that separation proper to colonial modernity by which humans are torn from all living and non-living things. If environmentalism is the product of this separation

it is because, once isolated, the individual has choice and can relinquish all responsibility for what sustains them — forgetting the fundamentally relational nature of existence. Or again, the individual can decide to view the environment as an object to be protected or saved, they can believe they can create a bond with their environment through sheer force of will. In both cases, the individual remains on one side and Nature on the other: the only engagement possible is either exploitation or protection. But in neither case do we embody it, we never inhabit it, we never find ourselves in it. To exploit or protect; the environment remains forever torn from us.

It is from this foundation that two environmentalisms have emerged: individual and governmental. Two distinct melodies, but in perfect harmony. The first intones the need for five-minute showers, carbon calculators, and zero waste blogs. It's the one that buys the organic tofu produced from the deforestation of the Amazon, rather than the tofu produced from the deforestation of the Amazon but which isn't organic. No political horizons emerge from this individual environmentalism. There is only the isolated and distraught consumer armed with purchasing power as their sole lever against ecocide.

The second is that of effective disaster management, of the State as the heroic actor coming to the rescue of humanity/ the polar bears/forest caribous/beluga whales, dressing-up a pernicious economy with the help of carbon taxes and the progressive banning of polluting vehicles. The State, as an apparatus for capturing ecological affect, is thus able to pass off any policy as a measure that will ultimately promote a green transition. And since the economy enables this transition to take place, any measure that might foster the health of the economy will foster the transition. This logic manifests in the building of a transcontinental pipeline through Indigenous territories to finance the transition to green energy, or the construction of a third bridge to link Quebec City and Levis<sup>1</sup> to 'reduce' traffic.

*IF THE FIRST FRAMING RECOGNIZES the importance of the political orientations of the economy, it misunderstands the importance of the economy in the government apparatus. If the second sees in daily life the possibility for concrete changes, it limits itself in its reach to the grandeur of purchasing power. Whether by structuring supply (prohibiting, regulating, taxing) or acting at the level of demand (boycotting), the current logic of ecology is largely caught up in economic considerations.*

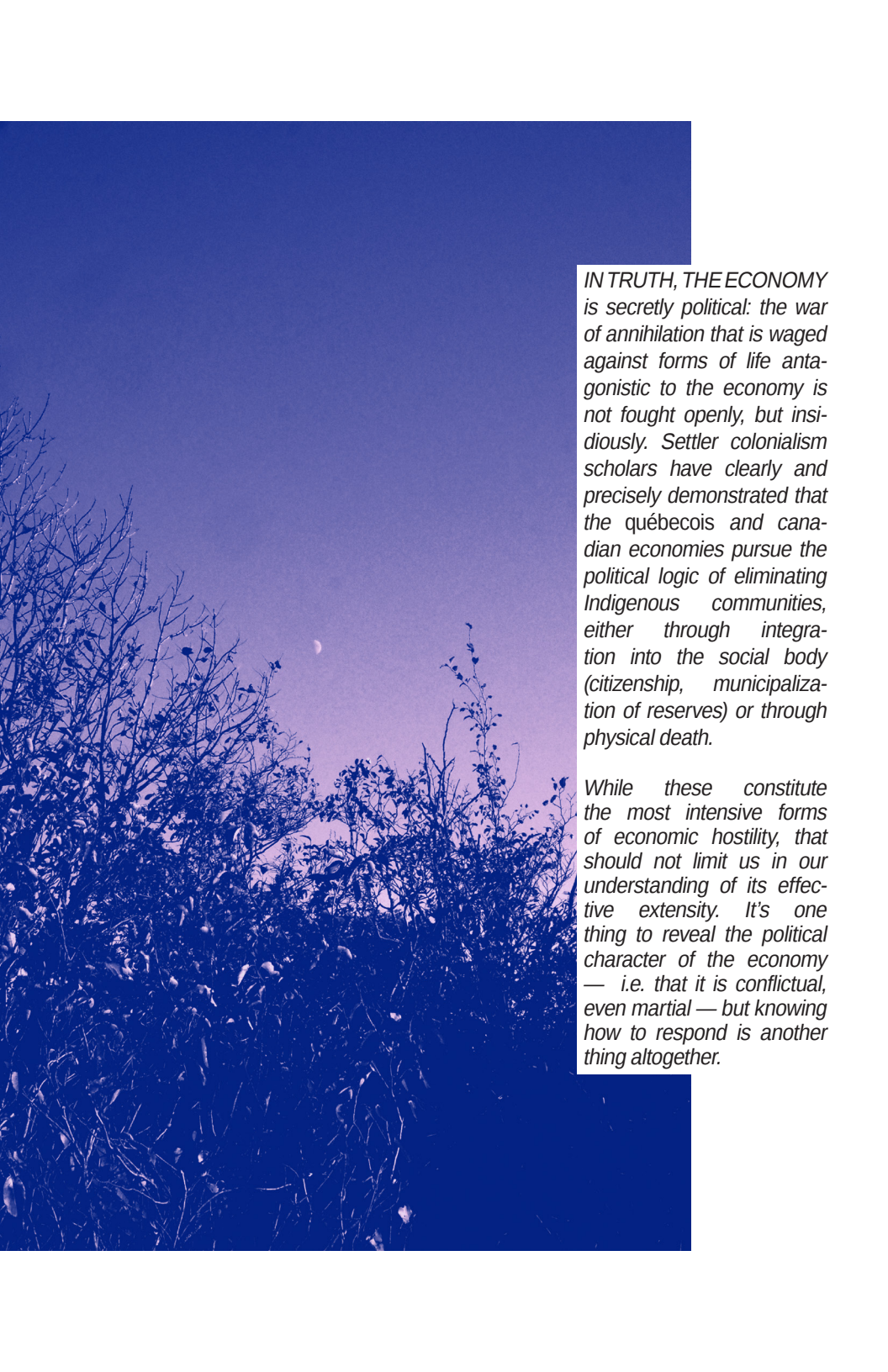
---

1. Levis is a Quebec City suburb on the far side of the river.



It is customary to criticize each of these perspectives by accusing them of not focusing on the right level of analysis: for some, it is necessary to focus on macroscopic problems, for others, to settle for small-scale changes to create large-scale effects. However, the problem does not simply lie at the level of analysis, but in the fact that no matter the level, it is always on the economic plane that thinking is deployed. The hallmark of liberalism, the form of thinking par excellence of the Economy, is to make competition the only acceptable mode of antagonistic relationships.

In order to develop a truly political ecology, we must put the notion of conflict back at the center of our inquiry. Ecology must be extracted from the economic realm and become not only a part of politics, but of life itself, understood as a political phenomenon. For it is neither a question of convincing, nor of 'selling ourselves better', nor of winning a debate or reaching an agreement. It is a question of defending forms of life from that which denies their possibility. It is about fighting and defeating the enemy (whose many forms lurk both within, and outside of us).



*IN TRUTH, THE ECONOMY is secretly political: the war of annihilation that is waged against forms of life antagonistic to the economy is not fought openly, but insidiously. Settler colonialism scholars have clearly and precisely demonstrated that the québécois and canadian economies pursue the political logic of eliminating Indigenous communities, either through integration into the social body (citizenship, municipalization of reserves) or through physical death.*

*While these constitute the most intensive forms of economic hostility, that should not limit us in our understanding of its effective extensity. It's one thing to reveal the political character of the economy — i.e. that it is conflictual, even martial — but knowing how to respond is another thing altogether.*

These ecologies of absence are products of spectacle and are solely concerned with a simulacrum of Nature, one that we see on TV, or on the internet. They are fueled by our lack of power over our lives, our lack of connection to what feeds us and what we produce, our alienation from the world, and the pain of dislocation. They inscribe themselves in the desert of the economy, and our atomization stands as their conditions of possibility. In this context, therefore, defending an 'ecological' position does not imply a real territoriality — a presence, a reattachment to worlds rich with relationships—in short, the possibility of concrete conflictuality. This is why these environmentalisms, both those of the state and the citizen, are able to find no one else but us as the problem. On this point, our friends recently reflected: "It is a struggle without conflict, without antagonism (as such, it is not a struggle). These citizens think of themselves as at once in both complete agreement and totally at fault (of course, this itself is the essence of citizenship)".

From this conception of the world — with no one to blame but ourselves — only a sacrificial politic can emerge. A politics of repentance and sadness. Avoiding air travel while the rich galavant daily on private jets, minimizing the heating of our apartments and homes while they are buffeted by frigid drafts of air in the winter, or refusing to take a paper flyer at a demonstration while newspaper giants print millions of pages daily, devoted solely to advertising. Or, alternatively, taking the activist route and chaining yourself to something until you get arrested, torturing yourself in the public square, trying to shock the media and the politicians, who forget it all in a blink of an eye.

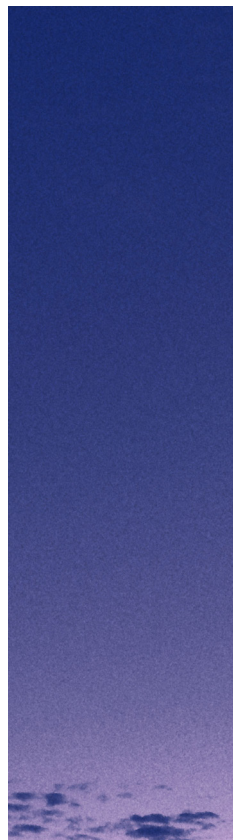
From victims of climate change, we quickly arrive to designate ourselves as the guilty ones. If the original sin that preceded us was to have defiled Nature, then we too have come into the world as sinners repeating these forbidden acts. The new sacrificial forms practiced in environmental activism may feel like atoning for one's sins, but they won't make the world a better place.

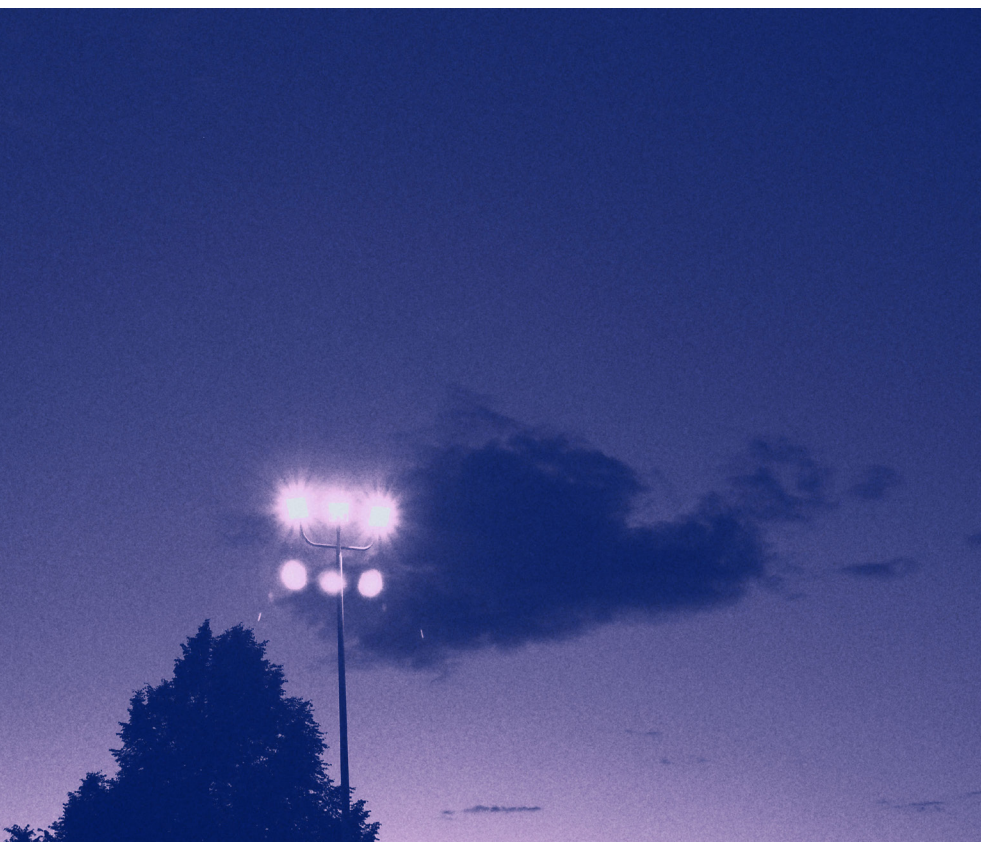


This political logic aligns with the logic of making demands, solicitations from the dispossessed who beg and wait in an aspirational ether. People who make demands know that they have already lost their grip on the situation, or rather, that it has been ripped out of their hands. In short, they know they have been dispossessed of the possibility of action. Between petitioning the government for change and chaining oneself to block access to the Parliament buildings, there is only a difference of degrees; the two converge under the aegis of weakness.

Power is inseparable from the capacity to be affected. We find potentialities in our shared sensitivity: that sense of urgency that pushes us to seek new ways of living — to want to change this world; that feeling of belonging that pushes us to act, and likewise to risk everything. How can we unleash these potentials? The paths suggested by the existing order — call it what you will, Empire, capitalism, colonial modernity, white supremacy, the cosmophagous world — aim to capture the affects that make life worth living.

Neither sinners, nor victims: we inhabit climate change. We see that this period of disillusionment with centuries of misdirection is also one of infinite potential. Each of us have within us the remote possibility of stemming the tide of the catastrophe. By organizing pessimism, the fundamental affect of the times, and giving it a creative consistency, we can hope to bring about other worlds. But first, it is essential to make a break with this one. We did not choose to be thrown into a world that seems doomed to its own destruction, but we can decide to continue it or break free from it.





Becoming responsible for and within this situation appears to be the only option. In so-called “North America,” Indigenous thinkers of resurgence are writing about the question of responsibility. For them and for us, responsibility holds the very possibility of life, being understood as an exigency for a good life. Responsibility is to live in a way that promotes rebirth, renewal, reciprocity, and respect. This responsibility is intrinsic to the relationships that bind us to other humans and to the rest of the world, and interdependence is at the heart of its conception of all life. In this sense, it is distinct from blame, guilt, and shame, as it is not imposed by any legal or moral authority, but rather emerges from the imperative interweaving of our lives with others, with the world we belong to, and with the rest of the universe.



Breaking free from the grip of guilt (of finding ourselves in a world that devours other worlds) is a necessary response to our climactic conditions, not as a moral imperative, but as a way of being. To exist in the throes of action, to live a life that regenerates other life, that generates more — a life that sustains us — we can no longer allow our sensitivities and the possibilities they contain to be captured by the apparatuses of power. Our modes of action must take the place of institutions and our strength must be measured by our capacity to care of each other, to take care of our world and grow in our knowing of it.

It is only after a community affirms that they themselves belong to a specific territory, to this forest, to this river, to this neighborhood, and that they are ready to fight for it, that the possibility of a political ecology becomes clear. To make ecology truly political, we must ask the following question: what makes it possible for this or that community to live a fulfilling life, to increase its happiness? And, to the contrary, what threatens it, what makes life difficult? Conflict, which is present in every political configuration, necessarily stems from the answers to these questions. Without the distinction between the enemies and friends of the life that inhabits a territory, without considering the force necessary for victory in a conflict, ecology is bound to remain a matter of principle.

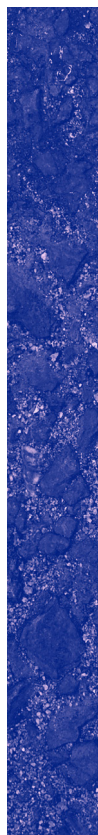


THOUGH it has long seemed that infrastructure, political struggle, organization and expansion require the greatest efforts, there is perhaps on another front, that of being fully present, that we have the most work to do. We have lived too long as ghosts in our relationships, our collective houses, and our political meetings — our presence haunted by our obligations and duties, and by screens that capture our attention.

An Italian anthropologist wrote that the starting point for all thought and practice surrounding magic is an understanding that presence in the world is not a given, but a fragile thread that can be broken or restored by objects, spells, and conjurations. While it seems that magic has been completely removed from the world, the apparatuses of enchantment are found all around us, and in everyone's pockets.

The fear that circulates in radical communities around the use of phones as surveillance devices, captures only a small part of what makes these objects truly dangerous. These machines offer us an intensified reality, offer proximity and intimacy distilled, and immediately palpable. If these snippets extracted from life and then transformed by illuminated screens seem to ask nothing of us, how is it that our machines are strangely alive, and that we, in contrast, are so dreadfully inert in the face of what surrounds us?

Our pursuit of a life worth living must confront the mechanisms (the objects, and especially the use of objects) that distance us from a fuller presence in the world. Cultivating greater attention to our attachments is what a reflection on magic can provide in relation to ecology. In this reflection, we must recognize and be responsible for the fragile and indispensable components of life: the beings, the customs, and the relationships that sustain this world that we inhabit.













### III.

Ecology is not a party, but a paradigm. It allows us to situate realms of life in their interdependence, in their reciprocal relationships. Ecology as such does not insist that we must block capitalist infrastructure, impede oil extraction, nor the environmental destruction caused by mining projects. Likewise, it does not teach us how to become inseparable from the world by centering an intentional sensitivity in our ways of being. It doesn't necessarily frame ecosystems as sites of struggle, as spaces in which distinctions between friends and enemies are drawn, and when it does, it can still be used as a support for domination.

Within ecology, it is still possible to take the side of the economy, that is, of the network of habits, objects, and people that allow Empire to maintain itself. By whatever name, be it permaculture or sustainability, short supply chains or eco-capitalism, let us have no illusions about a systemic commitment to upholding the normal order of things. Evidently, it is not a question of opposing permaculture or short supply chains, but of highlighting that they often remain little more than the alternative within the economy itself. As always, it is towards the question of their use that we must turn; making them means in our struggle instead of means of stabilizing capital.

What opposes us to the advocates of the economy is not that we will be ecologists and that they will not. If they too start from the premise that something must fundamentally change for us to live on, two things continue to radically oppose us to them. Their “change” comes down to the deepening of a technological logic, one which locates the only possibility for salvation in its progressive innovations. Their diagnosis is statistical, and their tactics consist in the introduction of new modalities

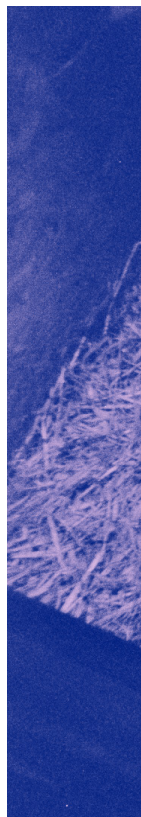
of management. What concerns them is allowing the modern era to run its course without noticeable changes — without us becoming aware of its destructive effects. They strive to deepen and reaffirm the impression of our complete absence in the world. That things are working, that the economy is running, without any one of us being directly affected, and without protest. It is an 'ecological transition' that no one would notice. In short, as it always was, but in a green way: crushing fragments, flattening the worlds inhabited by all manners of beings, and making a smooth totality (society) capable of governing and exploiting itself, all while turning a profit. The economic ecology they support is fundamentally an ecology of absence.

For us, to the contrary, change implies re-anchoring ourselves in practices that bind our lives to the living world, influencing the environments we inhabit and that inhabit us. In order to do this, we must relearn ways of taking action that resist the detachment that modernity imposes upon communities and their habitats, and between bodies and communities.

*WE KNOW THAT connecting humans to the rest of the world will not, by itself, make ecology a threat to the trajectory of our epoch. In effect, passing from an ontology that places nature to one side and culture to the other, to a relational ontology which centers relations of dependence, cooperation, predation, etc. between the constituents of a milieu is also, in recent history, largely tied to a systems science in which ecology was developed as a tool for the governmental management of territories. Here it's guiding question was determined: how might one minimize the consequences of territorial exploitation while limitlessly augmenting the extraction of value?*

*IF WE MUST CHOOSE, we prefer the possibility of a deeply felt climate crisis. One that forces a reconfiguration of life, the creation of bonds, and the reinvention of our ways of being as opposed to one that is so well-managed by the state apparatus that the impending mass extinctions simply go unnoticed. If we must choose, we prefer the ruin of the global metropolis to the potential resilience of its green shift.*

Indigenous communities are bound to their territory through a sense of belonging and responsibility, making it an integral part of their being. The peasant's love for the entangled and flourishing life of the pasture and their defiance of industrial claims on the land it has captured; the Zapatistas' insurrectional irruption against the Mexican government; the material and territorial autonomy of the Kanien'keha:ka: these ways of living are all lines of struggle that cross our path. All of these traditions feed our imaginary of a political ecology – one that opposes the idea that being an ecologist is the equivalent of minimizing our 'ecological footprint'. They are living examples of the intensification of life. They are ecologies of presence.







*IT IS NOT out of economic or moral concerns that the Anishinabeg of La Vérendrye Park are organizing to obtain a moratorium on moose hunting. Moose are much more than an autonomous 'food source'. Those who hunt in these territories know moose as forest dwellers with whom they must maintain 'diplomatic' relations in order to ensure their return year after year. The challenge for both the moose and the hunters is to preserve a different form of consciousness, one that exists-in and is proper-to the forest: "to not end up alone", as a friend said.*

Defending territories necessarily means learning how to inhabit them and, inversely, to truly inhabit them necessitates their defense. The political experiments we turn to in order to find other ways of living require us to find ways to become re-attached. Living well means living a life more expansive than the self — ‘life’ — a life multiplied. Living well implicates each and every one of us in a life in common. What we mean by a political ecology of inhabiting is a struggle that is inseparable from life itself. Inseparable because its force, the momentum that propels it, emerges from a life that defends itself, that blooms and scatters its seeds. Inseparable because this political ecology cannot survive without the whole of the world it inhabits. It knows how to draw lines. Struggle and life cannot be surrendered to hands that would destroy it.


That is why the non-violence brandished as an absolute principle by mainstream activist groups is both irresponsible and toothless. Through their injunction to detachment, tactical and strategic questions that, in every case, are always relative to their context, are replaced by lazy self-sacrifice.

Putting one's name in the hands of the police and putting one's body behind bars are two fairly effective ways of restraining one's ability to act. Despite appearances, sacrificial logic implies a delegation of responsibility, not agency. It is a command to be weak, to put the most important issue of the twenty-first century in the hands of the guilty parties. In order call oneself peaceful, one must be capable of deploying force. To call oneself peaceful without the capacity for violence simply means to be powerless.

*LET US NOTE THE SHORT-TERM vision that comes with letting oneself be arrested. After such actions, environmental activists are stuck in legal labyrinths that prevent them from continuing their activities. Even those who know that the struggle will one day require more radical steps condemn themselves to being spectators to avoid jail time. Delegation and re-delegation. This will to self-destruction is the greatest unifier between activist groups and Western civilization.*

We contrast the morality of activist self-sacrifice with the need for ecstatic forms of life. Ecology, now eagerly adopted by citizen groups and government institutions, bears the banner of a weak politics that seeks to sabotage any attempt at real organization — anything that requires the deployment of concrete force. Doing more, making a greater impact. Taking better care, feeling more. Finding money, acquiring buildings and land to put in common. Watching life flourish. Thinking strategically. Giving ourselves the means to resonate in the world. Fighting, hitting harder, using the right weapons. Stealing, and making the best use of the time it frees up. Traveling by car, or by plane to rekindle the embers of old friendships. Finding comrades in the most unexpected places. Being receptive to the community that flows around us — to the commune that is latent in every place.

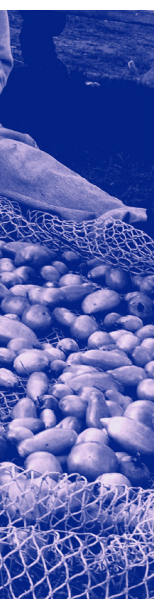




*Ecstasy: bliss provoked by an exit, a departure from the "self" we have been made into, from the self as our 'social position'; as our 'identity.' An exit from the world of the commodity. Far from all liberal conceptions, a break with 'society', and therefore necessarily with 'the individual', its smallest unit. Secession with the nothingness that surrounds us. Joy. For a life that overflows and pulls us along in its wake.*







The commune as a line of flight makes it possible to elaborate ecological, sensitive forms-of-life. The commune is a force of gravity, a mass that attracts and welcomes those who seek it, and allows them to hold on. The commune materializes in openings, in spaces to invite and to be invited, in sharing meals and home-made preserves. The commune is the moments when we gather; when we show each other what we wrote last night, what our aunt taught us about plum trees, how to sharpen our wood carving knives, how to can ten bushels of tomatoes, or how to weave blankets for winter. In order to develop constituent forms of material and political autonomy, we need to communize spaces, land, wastelands, buildings, churches, houses, and parks. The possibility of unraveling this world lies in our capacity to make these spaces habitable, to foster the circulation of bodies, affects, and ideas between these nodes into autonomous material power. A possibility capable of definitively suspending the progress of the catastrophe.

The classic blueprint of revolution would have the economy pass from the hands of the bourgeoisie to those of the proletariat. The current situation shows that the economy itself is at the core of the problem: its massive and deadly infrastructure, its pacifying and leveling logic, its force of capture and dispossession, its impoverishment of experience. What lies at the center of our idea of revolution is that people can live and be joyful: that we can subtract ourselves from the economy and government, weave alliances of presence with existing forms-of-life, and develop ecosystems that bloom and multiply, far from the logic of progress and of governmental normalcy.

For years, militant ecologists have been striving to underline the incompatibility between capitalism and the environment, it is now clear to us that this problem of ecology can be manipulated and fit perfectly within the modern colonial project of absence in the world, of generalized dispossession. Under the pretext of reducing our ecological footprint, we are given the order to disappear.

The ecologies of absence speak to us of where we are not, and propel us into a nowhere. They consume us and propose that we consume differently. They may be cowardly or brave, but they never put themselves on the line. They bear witness to the carnage of the world and live within it. The opposite of these political proposals toward absence are ones that are embodied in places, and neither serve to regulate commodities nor exist as spectacular representations. They are political propositions that cannot be conjugated in the first person, that cannot begin with an 'I'.

The question of presence that we wish to center in our understanding of ecology concerns the concept of political action itself. Understanding the environmental catastrophe as a problem to be solved, or aiming to defeat climate change, deludes us into erasing ourselves from the world.

What needs to be restored is not the climate, but our attachment to the world. What makes the catastrophe possible, as much as what leaves us so indifferent to it, is our inattention—our detachment from the whole that we constitute and that constitutes us. Suspending this suspension from the world lies in an attention to the ‘how’. It lies in the means and not in the end, in daily practice, in our intimate presence in the intricate ways that worlds are created (and the earnest joy of learning to play in them).

An ecology of presence unfolds in a double movement, that of a material and existential reattachment to the world we inhabit. Positions and dispositions. To become present is a practice which consists of breaking with our absence from the world through an elaboration of new sensitivities, but also new positions from which to act on them, from new consistencies.

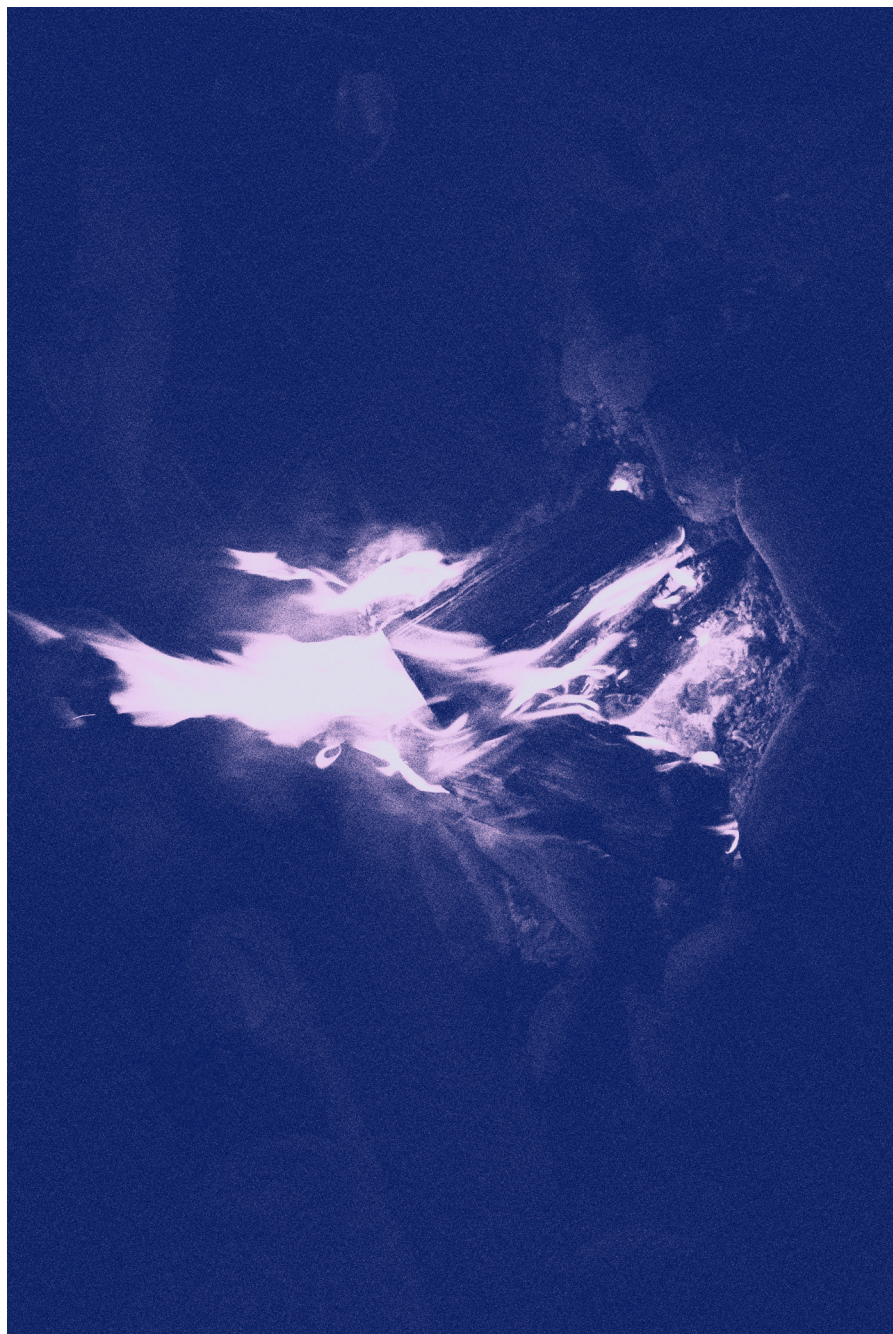


To make oneself both perceptible and open to perceiving. Affect and power, orientation and magnitude. It is not a question of fighting on ‘two fronts’, but of the practical elaboration of the double meaning of “presence” and “sensible”.<sup>1</sup>

The totality can only be governed, managed. To attach ourselves to even a fragment of the world is a thousand times better than spinning in the void, waiting for the enemy to act against their own interests. This reattachment, besides being the foundation for any effective and responsible practice, also brings the joy of restoring texture to our lives, of densifying our presence in the world.

---

1. In French, “*présence*” designates both being present, in the straightforward sense of being ‘here’, and also being ‘here for it’ in the sense of active participation or inclination. While ‘sensible’, simultaneously carries the meaning of being sensed by another and being sensitive to another’s person or situation.



In a wasteland (*terrain vague*) on the edge of a working class neighborhood of Montreal, there is a new intensification of life, created by those fleeing strict confinement measures and social control that claimed to care for us, when we know that we actually care for ourselves. Today, the possibility of losing spaces—a process accelerated by economic infrastructural projects—expands and intensifies the ways we use those spaces, and forces us to think about how to open them to others, how to share our attachment to them. These events invite us to return to the question of presence, from which, by publishing this text over a year ago, we tried to situate ourselves within the environmental movement at a moment when it was seeing a zenith of the politics of representation, demands, and sacrifice. In republishing this text to share it with our anglophone comrades, we wanted to re-examine the supposed dichotomy between absence and presence, a question that was left underdeveloped in the first edition of the text.

When you arrive at the *terrain vague* for the first time, what hits you first are the absences that it renders so apparent. What makes the space unique is its discontinuity with the rigid denomination of space that characterizes the rest of the city. If it was

inhabited at the same density as the neighborhood that surrounds it, it could host 5,000 people. Currently, there are fewer than ten shacks in active use, the foundations of a few abandoned buildings, railroad tracks, wooded areas, and huge piles of dirt and rocks that are occasionally pushed around by heavy machinery.

In a space like the *terrain vague*, the question is not how to preserve the space, but instead, how to use it: the freedom it represents currently, as a place open to multiple uses, which is threatened by its potential transformation into a park or a port-industrial zone. It is a place inhabited by all sorts of entities, memories, and futures that force us to face certain contradictions; on the one hand, wanting keep our hands off the few remaining wild spaces in the city and let them run their course, and on the other, the need to mobilize in its defense, to build on it in order to protect it. Demobilization and mobilization, inoperativity and the ecstasy of action.

It is here that presence and absence unveil themselves as belonging to each other, rather than appearing in the metaphysical opposition between authenticity and inauthenticity. Making oneself present for, is always to be absent from something

else. Going into a *terrain vague* is also always leaving city life for a while, as it is making oneself present with all the entities that live there. Before the beginning of Greek philosophy, the term *Eris*, the name of the goddess of conflict and war, was also used to designate *physis*, nature, and more specifically the struggle between presence and retreat. Absence, here, is not a void, but a retreat. In the same way that Agamben argues that power is cut through with the tension of the ‘power not to’, constituting oneself as a revolutionary force capable of making an impact also requires a certain form of withdrawal.

The other large green areas of Montreal are spaces of social control made to be legible to the eyes of the law, through the use of police patrols, cameras, and anti-sex and anti-homeless crackdowns. But here, in the *terrain vague*, we rarely see the railroad police, and they rarely see us. It is the perfect spot for hanging out all day, for partying with a roof over your head without having to worry about laws or property. In summer, you are hit with a wave of fresh air when you reach the space, because the temperature is several degrees lower than the concrete-covered surroundings. This means that even the particles of air move slower here than the usual



urban rhythm. So, we make a fire.

Across the island of Montreal, the most basic human act is forbidden to us: lighting a fire and contemplating it. Here, among the tall weeds, in the ruins of an old building or in a stand of trees, we find artifacts that, in the midst of a metropolis, seem to have dropped out of a different time: stones arranged around charred wood, half-burned trash. These circles lead us to recognize ourselves as located in a space that is heterogenous to the metropolis; that it is with these type of acts that we distance ourselves from the social, and unveil that which returns of eris in the coming to be, so little questioned, of the administrative infrastructure of the world

It is not by accident that fire is so central to our adventures outside of the metropolis, or against it. Agamben writes that telling a story (literature) and making history are one and the same act, that of telling the progressive loss of fire. Through history, the mysteries of the world are simultaneously commemorated and distanced, secularized in narrative (distancing the ritual origin of literature) and in a scientific enterprise (distancing the divine origin of the world). “We can only access the mystery through history, and yet

history is that in which mystery's fires have been extinguished or hidden." Whether we're camping with friends, in a riot, or on a blockade, contemplating a fire signals our awakening, on this second-to-last day of Earth's existence, before the evidence that history has not completely succeeded at severing us from tradition.

On any given blockade, we gather around fires to warm up and chat. On native territory, stories and prophecies are told, helping us understand the uses and means that exist for defending these lands. Our meetings over the last few months have pushed us to develop a new conception, a horizon for understanding a possible alliance between various relationships to the territory. We call it "redneck ecology," half-jokingly, ourselves surprised by the vision of a use of the territory that is so profound and sincere, which by definition can neither be pure nor impure. Environmentalism primes us to see a rigid 'sacredness' in nature, something distant from us. But instead we found its profanation, in a sacredness that allowed for life, since it supported life so concretely. We found backhoes for destroying the road and uprooting trees, in order to erect barricades and stop enemies from using the territory, whether for hunting animals whose population is

declining, for a construction project, or for establishing a police presence.

In this conception, it is more important to be able to raise your children in the forest, to be able to teach them about trees, plants, Bigfoot, and animal spirits, than to preserve a version of nature that is absent of human traces. It is insignificant, then, to worry about a piece of trash on the forest floor or to make a big drama out of using non-reusable plates—instead we must be concerned with the survival of species and assuring our access to making our own medicine.

Clean ecology is disappearing. This is a tension that cuts through the writing of *Re-attachments*, and that continues to hone our reflections. The power that blockades have represented and the meetings that this other relationship to the forest have permitted allowed us to imagine what an ecology of presence could create. Far from the clichéd image of environmentalists, these youthful armies in camouflage on their four-by-fours, led by women in pick up trucks, are writing a different future for environmentalism, a non-leftist future. We see an orientation for revolutionary ecology in this horizon, a version of it that could go farther in reaching people from very different

places socially and geographically than ecology can as it exists today. Not farther than what every person who calls themselves an “environmentalist” could do, but what ecology, as a movement, a movement that could finally be critical and not simply “political”, could do for the horizon of the revolution— a horizon that at is at the heart of *Re-attachments*— could become *sensible*.

In the *terrain vague*, the presence of fire is a sign that, like the Mexican comrades of the *Consejo Nocturno*, that we must not inhabit the metropolis, but inhabit against it. As in any space that is targeted by modernization, we find here different ways of joining together and experimenting. This means opposing the temporality of the metropolis with something profoundly contemplative, as if to demonstrate that we have understood it completely: its projects of administering the world, in their fundamental anarchy, are dragging us towards extinction as a species—in other words, the end of fire. The Book of Changes (*I Jing*) has this to say on the subject: “Fire has no predetermined form, but attaches to bodies that burn, and through this, gives off light”.

*Written in French by the fleuve, the Saint  
Lawrence River, between cannings and the first  
frosts of 2019*

*Translated by Frances Nguyen and edited by  
Germ(e), during the first months of pandemic.*

*This zine exists in electronic form under the  
project "Dispositions" at [www.contrepoints.  
media](http://www.contrepoints.media)*

*Contact us at [10positions@riseup.net](mailto:10positions@riseup.net)*



## DISPOSITIONS

AN ASSEMBLAGES OF PEOPLE,  
OF THINGS. AN ORIENTATION OF  
THOUGHT. VULNERABILITY, KNOWING  
HOW TO BECOME OPEN, A PUTTING  
INTO COMMON USE, A PREPARATION  
FOR COMBAT... AND AS TO WHAT  
WEIGHS US DOWN, GOOD RIDDANCE!





*With the ecological question on everyone's lips and visible on every screen, environmental groups are calling on their activists to sacrifice themselves to save Nature. Their injunctions to self-sacrifice and non-violence articulate their all-too abstract political positions that, untethered from any specific territory, issue forth from a phantasmatic nature. Against the weakness of this politics, this technological environmentalism of transition, we propose a political ecology that will permit us to have done with catastrophe: an ecology of presence.*

*WE DID NOT CHOOSE TO BE THROWN INTO A WORLD  
THAT SEEMS DOOMED TO ITS OWN DESTRUCTION  
WE CAN DECIDE TO CONTINUE  
OR BREAK FREE FROM IT.*