

Disobedient Desires

We may see the overall meaning of art change profoundly—from being an end to being a means, from holding out a promise of perfection in some other realm to demonstrating a way of living meaningfully in this one.¹⁴

Allan Kaprow, performance artist

Every form of collective action we know—boring A to B marches to barricades, hunger strikes to boycotts, flash mobs to occupy camps—emerged out of the coordinated imaginations of people in struggle. Many of those who pursued these tactics knew that disobedience is what makes history. From the right for women to wear trousers to the legalization of contraception, from the work-free weekend down to the fact that you can read this independently-published (and not government censored) pamphlet, all these ‘privileges’ were the result of people disobeying the laws, and often the norms, of their epoch.

When we found one another, we also found we shared this conviction, as well as the knowledge that for radical action and disobedience to take hold of the imagination and become meaningful, it also needed to be deeply desirable, changing our worlds had to be as joyful as it was irresistible. Within months of meeting each other, we launched the *Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination* from an East London squatted social center. We wanted to bring artists and activists together to co-design tools of disobedience. The artists would bring imagination and poetics, and the activists

would bring courage and context. The formula worked, especially when sprinkled with some of the key ingredients of rebellion: passionate pleasure and adventure.

Over those years you might have found us at a Climate Camp in Kent distributing pirate maps to indicate the location of buried boats with bottles of rum, ready to launch a mass rebel raft regatta to shut down a coal fired power station. You might have heard of the scandal that ensued when we refused to let London's prestigious Tate Modern museum censor our workshop that dared to do more than 'reflect' on the relationship between art and activism, and instead acted against the museum's fossil-fuel sponsors. Maybe we met you at the Kampnagel summer festival in Hamburg, where we turned a stage into an assembly space to decide on the ethics of leaving the theater and injecting ants that sabotage computers into the city's fossil-fuel financing banks. Maybe we crossed paths during the protests at the Copenhagen UN climate summit when we were transforming hundreds of abandoned bikes into tools of disobedience, to protect a public assembly of Indigenous and Global South climate justice activists from police violence. Or perhaps you were a player on one of the 120 teams participating in *The Climate Games* we coordinated in Paris, defying the State of Emergency and ban on demonstrations, with the slogan: *We are not fighting for nature, we are nature defending itself.*

All these experiments had something in common: they were based on direct action. We weren't protesting, we weren't begging, we

were taking life back into our collective hands, unmediated, material, now. Often, those that govern are flattered that there are protests, that people make demands on them: it legitimizes their power. “Protest is begging the powers-that-be to dig a well” wrote our late friend, the radical anthropologist David Graeber. “Direct Action is digging the well and daring them to stop you.” It is what he called “acting as if you were *already* free.”

Despite the collective joy and the victories that resulted from many of the movements we were entangled with, we often felt a kind of emptiness in between the adventures. Like a sort of activist comedown. It took years to realize that perhaps this was linked to the fact that these actions somehow never seemed totally embedded into our everyday lives. They felt separate from the neighborhood that we lived in, as if floating above our daily needs. We were radical activist artists, but we still had that sensation of being detached from worlds, moving from one place to another, from event to event, activist camps to theater festivals, giving conferences in one place, teaching in art schools in another, shutting down an open cast coal mine elsewhere, always returning to the suffocating concrete of London, where home had become a mere landing pad. Like so many captured by the metropolitan logic, we were body-minds without anchor, we were discombobulated beings who had lost any true sense of place.

It would only be here on the zad, defending this threatened land from the spread of the metropolis, that we began to feel what it meant to be truly free and that meant being caught up in the necessities

of a shared everyday life. When you become attached to somewhere, when you realize that you can become the territory, freedom no longer floats in the air but lives in the relationships and the ties of need and desire that you build. We fell in love with this place and its rebel inhabitants and thus became free to overcome fear and put our lives in the way of those who wanted to destroy what had become our home. And when we let ourselves do that, we discovered that the more we inhabited this place, the more it inhabited us.

Following Swallows

Compost toilets should always have good views; ours is exceptional. Especially at this time of year, as the golden autumn sun tunes itself to the colors of the meadow. With the deep green edge of the forest as a backdrop, the long flat field becomes the stage for a final aerial ballet show of swooping swirling barn swallows preparing to migrate, 10,000km away from this western edge of Eurasia all the way to West Africa. This theater's best seat is right here, in our living collective toilet, where, daily, our bodies return some of their nutrients back to this land that nourishes us. We could watch the swallows' duets with the air for hours.

They glide, flutter, then dive, opening and closing their wings with a lightning snap, their tiny white bellies caressing the grass as they skim the ground feasting on insects before speedily spiraling up to join their fellows, high in the sky chirping shimmering sounds of pure pleasure together.