

# That the Tide Turns!

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*“The industrial wind turbine is nothing but the continuation of industrial society by other means. In other words, a relevant critique of electricity and energy in general cannot be other than a critique of a society for which the massive production of energy is a vital necessity. The rest is only illusion: a masked endorsement of the present situation, that contributes to maintaining its essential aspects.”*

- Le vent nous porte sur le système, 2009

A night of thunderstorms. Lightning illuminates the sky while the thunderclaps seem to announce the end of the world. Even if the latter didn't happen the first of June 2018 in Marsanne (Drôme, France) something did happen that night, or rather two things. Two things that met an unexpected fate; two wind turbines were attacked. One burned totally, the other is damaged. The dismayed cops and the RES group [multinational energy company] could only take note of the signs of break-in on the two entrance doors of the giant columns, on which the generator and wings of these industrial monsters of renewable energy are perched. Two at least, on a total of some thousands erected in France during the last decade. Or rather three, if we include the burning of that one on the plateau of Aumelas, not far from Saint-Pargoire (Hérault), four days later, by one of those coincidences of the calendar that sometimes does things the right way.

That these wind turbines don't have anything to do any more with the quaint windmills of yesteryear – that, we mention in passing, were for the most part important sources of accumulation for the more or less local landlord, often attracting the farmers' wrath – is without doubt obvious. But then, why do the states of numerous countries promote the establishment of these “wind farms” on the hill tops, in the valleys and even in the sea? It's maybe not only because of calculations exclusively mathematical. Even the engineers cannot change all the statistics and have to admit that wind turbines don't function more than 19% of the year (a capacity much lower than the nuclear power plants that achieve 75% or the coal power plants, between 30 and 60%). It cannot be because of a will to transform the whole energy supply into “renewable”, given that is simply impossible when holding on to an equal amount of consumed electricity (for France that would mean a wind turbine on each 5 km<sup>2</sup>). It cannot be because of a concern for the “environment”, unless if one is duped by the smart discourses of a clean technology, given that only the production and installation of the wind turbines (without taking into account the centralised electric network to which they are connected) entails the mining of very rare and very toxic materials, the ships that are big consumers of oil to transport the minerals, the huge factories for producing them, the highways to dispatch the parts and so on and so forth. Finally, it cannot be

because of putting a spanner in the works of the big energy multinationals – that have accumulated wealth notably with oil and gas – because it are the same companies that invest massively in renewable energies. No, in this way we're not going to understand anything, we have to look elsewhere.

Lets do away also at once with all the environmental and ecologist posturing, now not only displayed by the citizens on duty, but also by each company, each state, each researcher. There is no “energy transition” going on, there never was one in history. Whatever the cherished employees of the technology start-ups say, the exploitation of the muscle power of the human being has never been abandoned... The generalization of the usage of oil has not provoked the retirement of coal. The introduction of nuclear energy by force didn't signify at all the disappearance of the “classical” plants working on gas, oil or coal. There is no transition, only addition. The boosted research of new energy sources is only consistent with strategic interests, and certainly not ethical ones. In a world that is not only dependent on electric energy, but that is hyper dependent on it, the diversifying of means of producing it is at stake. To heighten the resilience of the supply – of an essential importance in a connected world that functions just-in-time on all levels – the motto is to diversify and multiply the sources. Also to cope with the famous “peak demands” that – for technical reasons – only can be dealt with by only one type of energy production (nuclear plants, for example). Therefore not only the development of the wind turbines and solar power, but also of power plants on biomass fuel (genetically modified rapeseed as *biofuel* – what acrobatics does the language of the techno-world provide us with!), of new types of nuclear plants, of nano produced conductive materials that promise to reduce (by tiny micro percentages) losses during the transmission of electricity, and the list goes on.

So it's not surprising that from the three fields referred to by the European research programmes funded in the framework of Horizon 2020, one is energy.

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But then, what is this energy, and to what relates the energy question in general? Like numerous struggles in the past have highlighted – notably those against nuclear technology – energy is a kingpin in industrialised society. If energy means production, production allows for profit through commodification. If energy means power, power allows for war, and war means power.

The power granted by control over the production of energy is huge. The western states have not waited for the 1973 oil crisis – when their dependence on the oil producing countries, that wanted to follow their own power plans, became clear to everybody – to realize that. It was one of the main motives for several states, including France, to justify the multiplication of nuclear power plants. To have a relative energy independence and to use it as a weapon to compel other countries to not break ranks. But one thing might even be more important, and it is there that the critique of nuclear and its world allows us to grasp to the fullest extent the role of energy for domination: nuclear technology confirms that only the state and capital should possess the capacities to produce energy. That these capacities represent a relationship relative to the degree of dependence of the population, that every revolutionary surge wanting to transform radically the world will have to confront these energy juggernauts. In short, that energy means domination. As a very backed-up critical essay from some years ago emphasized, linking the question of the nuclear to the wind turbines: “the bulk of the energy consumed currently serves to make function a subjugating machine from which we want to escape.”

Yet, to bring up the question of energy frequently generates – including amongst the enemies of this world – at least a certain embarrassment. We indeed easily associate energy with life. Like

the energetics specialists who have hugely contributed to the spread of a view that explains every vital phenomenon through transfers, losses and transformations of energy (chemical, kinetic, thermodynamic...). The body would only be a cluster of energetic processes, as a plant would only be a set of chemical transformations. Another example of how an ideological construct influences – and is in its turn influenced by – social relations, is the very contemporary association between mobility, energy and life. Moving continually, never remaining, “seeing the world” by jumping from a high speed train to a low cost air plane to cross hundreds of kilometres in the blink of an eye, is the new paradigm of social success. Travel, discover, adventure or unknown are words that appear now prominently on all the publicity screens, destroying by a fake assimilation a whole set of human experiences, reduced to fast and risk-free visits of places developed specifically to that end. Even staying in the room of someone unknown to you is duly controlled, protected and exploited by the profiling and databases of a virtual platform. That’s maybe as well why the cheeks get red or the lips start to tremble when someone dares to suggest we should cut the energy to this world.

To overcome this embarrassment is not an easy thing. State propaganda warns us permanently, with images of war – real enough – as evidence, about what the destruction of the supply of energy entails. Nonetheless, a small effort to get rid of the spectres that hound our minds will be a necessary step. And this, however, without developing “alternative programmes” to resolve this question, because – in this world – it cannot be resolved. The modern cities cannot do without a centralised system of energy, regardless if produced by nuclear power plants, nano materials or wind turbines. The industry cannot do without devouring monstrous amounts of energy.

The worst – and that’s already partly happening, not only inside the struggles against the energy management and exploitation of resources, but also against patriarchy, racism or capitalism – would be that out of concern for being empty handed in the face of an uncertain and murky future, the research and experiments of an autonomy will fuel the progresses of power. The experimental wind turbines in the hippie community of the sixties in the US maybe took some time to make an entrance on the industrial stage, but it is today an important factor in the capitalist and state restructuring. As a recent text, sketching perspectives of struggle inspired on the ongoing worldwide conflicts around the energy question, resumed: “Admittedly, unlike in the past, it is possible that in this third beginning of a millennium the *desire for subversion* intersects with the *hope of survival* on the same terrain that aims to hamper and prevent the technical reproduction of the existent. But it is an encounter that is destined to transform in confrontation, because it is obvious that *one part of the problem cannot be at the same time the solution*. To do without all that energy mainly necessary to the politicians and industrialists, one has to want to do without those that are seeking, exploiting, selling, using it. The energy necessities of an entire civilization – the one of money and power – cannot be called into question just out of respect for hundred-year-old olive trees, for ancestral rites, or for the protection of forests and beaches already in large part polluted. Only *another* conception of life, the world and relations can achieve this. Only this can and should challenge energy – in its use and false needs, and so also in its structures – by calling in to question society itself.”

And if this titanic society is indeed going down – reducing or destroying on its way all possibilities of an autonomous life, all inner life, all singular experience, devastating the lands, intoxicating the air, polluting the water, mutilating the cells – do we really think it would be inept or too rash to suggest that to harm domination, to have some hope of opening onto unknown

horizons, to give some space to a freedom unbridled and without moderation, undermining the energy foundations of that same domination could be a most precious trail?

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Think of what we have in front and around us. Everywhere in the world conflicts are ongoing around the exploitation of natural resources and against the construction of energy structures (wind farms, nuclear plants, oil and gas pipelines, high voltage lines, biomass powered plants, fields of genetically modified rapeseed, mines...). All the states consider these new projects and the existing energy infrastructures as “critical infrastructure”, meaning essential for power. In light of the centrality of the energy question, it is not surprising to read in the yearly report of one of the most renowned agencies for the observation of political and social tensions in the world (funded by the global giants of the insurance sector), that of all the attacks and acts of sabotage reported as such on the planet and carried out by “non-state” actors – all tendencies and ideologies mixed up – 70% took aim at energy and logistics infrastructure (namely pylons, transformers, gas and oil pipelines, cell towers, electricity lines, fuel depots, mines and railways).

Admittedly, the motives that can animate those fighting in these conflicts are very diverse. Either reformist, ecologist, related to indigenous or religious claims, revolutionary or simply to strengthen the bases of a state – or a future state. Far from us the idea to neglect the development, the deepening and the spreading of a radical critique of all the facets of domination, but what we want to emphasize here is that inside a part of these asymmetrical conflicts is spreading a method of autonomous struggle, self-organized and starting from direct action, joining *de facto* the anarchist proposals on this field. Beyond the insurrectionary potentials that the conflicts around new energy projects can have, that maybe give us a glimpse of a more vast and massive revolt against these nuisances, it is clear that the production, storage and transmission of all the energy this society needs to exploit, control, make war, submit and dominate, depends invariably on a set of infrastructures spread out over the whole territory, favouring the dispersed action in small autonomous groups.

If the history of revolutionary struggles has an abundance of very suggestive examples concerning the possibilities of taking action against that which makes the state and capitalist machinery function, taking a look at the chronologies of sabotage during the last years demonstrates that the here and now is also not lacking in suggestions. Getting rid of embarrassment, looking *elsewhere and differently*, experimenting with what is possible and what can be tried. Some paths to explore. Nobody can foresee what that can give, but one thing stays certain: that it pertains to the anarchist practice of freedom.

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