

Book presentation at Fort van Sjakoo

## **We Are 'Nature' Defending Itself**

((My name is Toni, and I was kindly asked to speak a little bit about the importance of this book. I won't speak long, because I'm very excited to hear your words, Isabelle and Jay.)))

My edition of "We are Nature Defending itself" is muddy. It is mud from a place that no longer exists. I read this book exactly a year ago. And as this book teaches us so much about the importance of place - specific places, specific landscapes - I want to tell you about the specific place where I read this book. I read it while I was in Lützerath: Lützerath was a village in West-Germany, and it was located right on the edge of the largest brown coal mine in Europe. The energy company that owns the mine wanted to destroy the village to get to the coal underneath it, the burning of this coal is absolutely disastrous for the climate. In resistance to the expansion of this mine, the last remaining farmer living in the village invited activists to join him in the struggle and soon enough, Lützerath was a thriving community, a village of treehouses, tents, kitchen for all, and squatted houses. Lützerath was a place for learning from each other, for connecting our struggles across differences, a place, in short, where we could embody the world we are fighting for. It was very much held in the spirit of the commons, though many people had many different names for it. I still lack the words for this utopia, all I can say is that being there was deeply radicalizing and transformative. ~~A friend of mine I met there said, when I asked her what being in Lützerath did to her, "that she won't be fooled any longer. She has seen that another world is possible". This was Lützi!~~ And all of it was located next to this mine, on the edge of incredible environmental destruction. One thing I learned there is that utopias are a lot of work - food for hundreds of people needs to be made, vegetables need to be harvested from the local solawi, paths need to be build, solarpanels installed, another treehouse built in the tops of the trees. I read this in the book, too, all the things that need to be done and undone, all the struggle necessary - but how beautiful to know that we can get there, if we work for it.

The village of Lützerath has been destroyed and the mine is bigger still, a gaping hole in the landscape. Exactly a year and 11 days ago, 35.000 people gathered to protest the destruction of the village, but at this point, it was completely cut off by thousands of police officers and fences, and half of the buildings were already demolished.

The following ten days I spent at the legal camp in the next village. It was freezing cold and incredibly muddy, until the ground froze, and then it was incredibly slippery. We welcomed our friends that came right out of their eviction, we cared for them, and we joined actions. It was rough, and maybe needless to say, the police violence was off the charts. It was also good to be there, to be with people that knew what was being lost here. There was so much grief and anger and exhaustion, people lost their homes, or the place where they felt like they belonged. We met this time with what we know how to

do: to be with each other in solidarity, to share meals and a cup of tea, and to discuss how to continue the fight over the dishes with frozen fingers.

In this camp, I read “We Are ‘Nature’ Defending Itself”. Throughout the entire time in the camp I carried the book in my pocket, almost as an amulet, a talisman. To read about a place that went through all of this and IS STILL THERE was so, so needed. I needed - and I believe many of us do - these stories. Stories that tell of what we can achieve, collectively, stories that tell of the most resilient imagination, stories that tell of real-life magic. “We Are ‘Nature’ Defending Itself” is so packed with courage and joy: After reading this, it feels naive not to believe in the possibility of a better world!

In the landscape you write from and in the landscape you write of, we find ourselves in an assemblage of possibilities, in a thriving habitat that nourishes our spirits of resistance. The way your two voices meander through the pages, they carve out creeks and rivers and streams through the landscape of art and activism. They bring movement, motion, mobilization, as they rush towards a better future-in-the-present. The rivers in this landscape are muddy, are rich with life, as they dissolve the boundaries of ecology, art, life, and activism into a potion of potentiality. Whether it is in the beautiful description of great compost toilets, or in the community rituals you unfold in your words. And it's not only your voices, but it's the voices of the salamander, and the scream of the owl, it's the rustling in the leaves and the squishing of the mud below your feet. - there is a story in here of a very muddy eviction attempt, and me being completely crusty from the mud of Lützerath, I felt very seen.

. You write: “*Our muscles are tired, but our veins flow with that deep joy and profound sense of aliveness that emerges when disobedient bodies are working together. “Our accomplices that day are human and mud: that dark humid complex holding billions of bacteria, fungi, viruses, actinomycetes, algae, protozoa and nematodes, recycling the the flesh of plants and animals, turning decay into food, transforming death into the gift of life.”*

These pages are parts of utopias-in-the-present, of working towards “making life live more”.

Since then, I have read this book out loud to many people, borrowed it to friends, read it and read it again. There is many many more teachings in here than I can tell you, for this, you have to read it - and listen to Isabelle and Jay!

This book has certainly nourished my spirits of resistance, may it nourish your love and your rage as well.