



BENEATH THE
CONCRETE, THE FOREST

ACCOUNTS FROM THE DEFENSE OF THE ATLANTA FOREST

IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA, THE CITY GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO DESTROY large swaths of what remains of the South River Forest—also known by the Muskogee name for the river, Weelaunee. In place of one stretch of woods, they aim to build a police training compound; they have sold the neighboring part to Blackhall Studios executive Ryan Millsap, who intends to build a giant soundstage. Yet for more than a year now, activists have protected the forest against their plans. In a previous article, we chronicled how this campaign got started and the strategies that have driven it; in the following collection of narratives, participants in the movement describe their experiences and explain what makes this fight meaningful to them.

The fight to defend the forest brings together locals whose neighborhood will be gentrified by the developments, environmentalists who recognize the importance of the forest in mitigating the impact of climate change, forest defenders who have been occupying the trees for months, abolitionists who oppose the expansion of racist policing in Atlanta, and young people who desperately need a free space to build community outside the high prices and profit imperatives of Atlanta corporate nightlife. These are not discrete issues, but aspects of a coherent whole.

The destruction of the tree canopy and the gentrification of neighborhoods are stages in the same process: the former paves the way for

the latter. Forcibly displacing Indigenous peoples, carving up the natural world into private property, burying the fertile earth under concrete, and terrorizing the inhabitants with police violence are all expressions of the same logic. Catastrophic climate change is the large-scale consequence of a series of smaller steps that are no less catastrophic in the lives of individual human beings.

The defense of the forest in Atlanta is only one of many such struggles over land and housing across the continent, including People's Park in Berkeley, Echo Park in Los Angeles, and the camp defending the UC Townhomes in Philadelphia. As investment capital floods the real estate market, it has become increasingly difficult for to afford housing, let alone maintain collective space in which to experiment and build a common context. These movements have responded by defending a shared space of life and struggle.

Most of the following accounts describe the events of the week of action at the end of July 2022, when people from around Atlanta and other parts of the United States gathered for a week of discussions, protests, and concerts. The week of action culminated with a festival during which DJs, bands, and speakers performed, showing how the forest serves as an autonomous zone beyond the constraints of the capitalist economy.

The forest is not just a particular concentration of trees; we can also understand it as a network of relationships between living creatures of all species. Life flourishes when it is liberated from control. This was palpable in the festival at the conclusion of the week of action. In a club, a breakdown or a breakbeat functions as a kind of lubricant to grease the gears of exploitation, bringing in business and (at best) advancing the career of a particular DJ or band. In a liberated zone, the collective experience of music can signify shared power, the joyous realization of potential, showing how each person's creativity can contribute to the liberation of all.

The South River Forest is not an old-growth forest. If anything, this makes the movement to defend it more inspiring. This land was already brutalized—yet, given a few years of peace, it became a wilderland capable of sustaining spaces of freedom. Any patch of flowers growing out of the cracks in the concrete could become a forest if we defend it. The possibility of freedom awaits all around and within us, even in the most repressive environments.

The forest—which is to say, the web of life—extends beyond the bounds of any designated park, into each of our bodies. This web is what

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APPENDIX: (NOT) A MUSIC FESTIVAL

THE FOLLOWING TEXT WAS DISTRIBUTED ON A FLIER DURING THE FOURTH week of action in the Atlanta Forest.

THIS IS NOT A MUSIC FESTIVAL

...BECAUSE WE ARE NOT HERE AS CONSUMERS OR AS MERE SPECTATORS. This is not another photo op, another “networking opportunity.” We are here because our need for a free forest, culture, and existence can’t be crushed by the police, nor can it be sold back to us as an image in an uninspired Hollywood rip-off.

In a cave called Divje Babe, located in present-day Slovenia, archeologists have recently discovered a 60,000 year old flute. The human need for music has been with us since the very beginning. We are here to affirm that this deep and timeless desire, which has survived an Ice Age, the rise of empires and states, the advent of borders; slavery, war, famine, and Holocausts, is an important part of the current struggle.

This movement is not just about a piece of land. It is not being fought between the police and their goons on one hand and some activists and their friends on the other. We are witnessing the collision of two competing ideas of life and the future.

If they win, they will pollute all of the rivers, destroy all of the forests, pave over everything beautiful, and they will use the police to assure unlimited profits as our civilization chokes out its dying breaths.

If we win: human needs will be measured against the imagination, against our collective ambitions and dreams, not held hostage by a system of artificial scarcity and waste. Our communities will not be held together by their ability to kill and maim enemies or heretics. They will be held together by music, and the ability to generate common luxuries.

So let’s not say, “*Oh, THEY don’t really care about the struggle, they are only here for the party,*” or, “*This is not about music and festivals and all of that crap, this is about serious politics and organizing.*” Instead, let’s say the truth; this is only a glimpse of what we could give one another if we manage to outlive the oil-based economics of the current world system. The emancipation of the senses, the free development of the imagination and the passions: this is precisely what we are fighting for.

No cop city, no Hollywood dystopia!

sustains our lives, not the extraction industries that are currently destroying the basis of existence for countless species.

Two decades ago, the authors of *Fighting for Our Lives* suggested that “The best reason to be a revolutionary is that it is simply a better way to live.” As state violence accelerates the catastrophes resulting from capitalist industrialism, it may turn out that it is also the *only* way to live.

“THE FOREST WITHIN ME”

THE FOREST IS A BREATHING BARRICADE. LIKE ANY BREATHING MECHANISM, the boundaries continuously undo themselves. Inputs and outputs collide—between the city and the woods, the feral and the tame, the safe and the dangerous. What qualifies as violence becomes murky in the woods. Violence as negation manifests itself in the form of the state, helicopters flying overhead and cops on the edge of the barricade to arrest the forest dwellers, sometimes they dare to enter, with their machines and their armor. Violence as creation manifests in the destruction of this negation: playful sabotage and joyful tricks. Anarchic violence becomes a productive flux of becoming. For the police, the inputs and outputs are far clearer and qualifications are far more rigid: the forest is a dangerous place, unknown territory understood in opposition to their cosmopolitan terrain.

For us, the forest is a haven. The threat of the state is different than the peril of the woods. Stumbling upon a decaying coyote carcass feels like a blessing—to witness a transformation of flesh into soil in the soft fallen pine leaves is nothing like stumbling upon a clear cut where the limbs of trees lie severed, their torsos hacked up into discarded bits. The severing of trees is the precondition for the construction of the dystopian simulators through which the apparatuses of power will perpetuate their orgiastic fantasies of violence and capital. But this will not happen, because the forest is an ungovernable, indestructible, breathing barricade.

In the forest, the boundaries lapse between the content of space, how things were constructed—by machine or by hand or, often, a combination of the two—and to what degree things become consumed and consumable. But there are also lapses between different kinds of time. The time it takes to walk from one patch of woods to another may take

minutes or hours. It's easy to get lost under the trees, to lose yourself in movement and return to the slimier flows of collective being within the barricade. To lose yourself intentionally or try to make yourself unlocatable—from the helicopters overhead and what lies beyond the barricade.

Yet the barricade does not delineate a concrete edge. The edges of the forest do not indicate an end. The forest is indestructible because it is ever-expanding and constantly transforming. The forest here is a node that connects to many nodes and has many nodes within— including our bodies. The boundary of the body slowly erodes here. A viral outbreak reminds us we are perforated bags of water within perforated bags of water, including the forest.

Find ticks burrowed in your skin and you slowly become a deer. In our camouflaged garb we cosplay trees. It is something erotic to live in trees and to dress like them. We multiply ourselves through pseudonyms and costumes. We multiply ourselves by becoming deer, becoming tree, becoming decaying matter and waste. Eventually, in our deterioration and deterritorialization, movement and occupation, gathering and dispersal, taking up of space, and place taking us up, we become forest. We become barricade. Forever ungovernable and infinitely becoming.

“THE FOREST IS A PORTAL”

THE FOREST IS A PORTAL. THE CONCRETE BLOCKS SPREAD WIDE, ALLOWING entry into the graffiti-filled lot. Anarchist sprites and other mischievous spirits have painted, scratched, stapled, pasted, singed signs everywhere conveying our welcome, our allegiance to this new world that calls to the depth and courage of our hearts. As I walk the liberated path, purple swirls form messages that guide me like breadcrumbs. My fae kin appear around me in gauze, denim, and metal, resplendently eschewing gender. Entering the wild, I return to my stirring self: this intimate green.

REVOLUTIONARY LETTER #34

hey man, let's make a revolution, let's turn off the power, turn on the stars at night, put metal back in the earth, or at least not take it out anymore, make lots of guitars and flutes, teach the chicks how to heal with herbs, let's learn to live with each other in a smaller space, and build hogan, and domes and teepees all over the place BLOW UP THE PETROLEUM LINES, make the cars into flower pots or sculptures or live in the bigger ones, why not?

REVOLUTIONARY LETTER #35

rise up, my brothers, do not bow your heads any longer, or pray except to the spirit you waken, the spirit you bring to birth, it never was on earth, rise up, do not droop, smoking hash or opium, dreaming sweetness, perhaps there will be time for that, on the long beaches lying in love with the few of us who are left, but now the earth cries out for aid, our brothers and sisters set aside their childhoods, prepare to fight, what choice have we but join them, in their hands rests the survival of the very planet, the health of the solar system, for we are one with the stars, and the spirit we forge they wait for, Christ, Buddha, Krishna Paracelsus, had but a taste, we must reclaim the planet, re-occupy this ground the peace we seek was never seen before, the earth BELONGS, at last, TO THE LIVING

“TO DEFEND THE FOREST, EVERYONE HAS TO FIGHT”

THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE MUSIC FESTIVAL I HAD AN AFFECTIVE EPIPHANY. I was humbled by the glowing social atmosphere of everyone around me. Yet when standing still, I realized I felt out of place. When in movement, when busying myself with tasks, I felt necessary, like I was a part of something, but I found myself unable to relax, unable to dance with friends and strangers.

The second night, I examined the faces around me—so many unknown youth, people who are just coming into the Atlanta music scene or who have been occupying a different section of it. For a moment, the nostalgia for people and places long gone overtook me. My surroundings, my home, friends, were foreign. I started ignoring people, walking alone. An old friend who had performed the night before came up to me. He said he was looking for a familiar face. I felt massive roots pulling me back down to earth, to the moment.

Saturday morning, Ryan Millsap’s truck drove an excavator into the ICP parking lot. The driver slammed the excavator into the roof of the gazebo where people were standing. He dug a random hole in the path. He screamed profanities at people and threatened more violence. People fought back. They destroyed his excavator, chased him and the police out of the park, scavenged the good bits from the truck and burned the rest.

Encouraged by the exuberance of the morning’s win, my band played later that night. As a band, we are situated in realistic grief for our apocalyptic era, but we know that we can still fight for a freer future. I don’t think I’ve ever felt more grounded than when I took the stage that night. My goal was to portray the desperate reality: that to defend the forest, everyone has to fight. We can no longer be idle spectators of the state’s capitalist war on our bodies and our futures. Watching everyone move together in front of the stage, I felt a release of hopelessness. I felt the creative force of bodies moving and breathing together. There, we shaped a brief temporality, an energy that will live forever in us and in the forest as long as it stands.

During our set, I read this excerpt from Diane di Prima’s *Revolutionary Letters*:

“LETTER FROM A TREESITTER”

I’VE BEEN PREPARING MYSELF FOR WHAT FEELS LIKE THE INEVITABLE: A raid, an attempted extraction—or will they choose to siege?

I’ve become attached to my treehouse, thinking of it almost as an extension of myself. I found myself questioning this, questioning the connection I feel to a temporary structure. But I realized that what I was feeling was beyond that. From my feet high above the canopy to the roots buried deep in the ground, I could feel it. I wondered if this energy was spiteful, a land so scarred and blood-stained, never given a moment to heal. Was I here because of spite? Yes. But the spite I feel toward the police is also born of love: love for the land and all of my friends here and beyond. This forest is not something I am going to give up without a fight.

Every delay opens up more possibilities. Every contractor that backs away brings us closer to victory. Each of our moves keeps them guessing. Whether or not they choose to destroy our homes, I’ll be here keeping up the struggle. I’ll be here for as long as I can, for as long as it takes. They can try to evict us, but they will never be able to make us stop fighting.

There’s joy in our fight. This spirit, this forest, will never be able to be contained. Everywhere you look, the police are trying to shrink our worlds, shrink our lives. But we have chosen to say no. Our fight extends beyond the borders of this forest—it extends through our expressions of collective and individual joy, incomprehensible to the narrow imaginations of the police and the ruling class that they protect. We laugh harder than them, we feel more pleasure even in the midst of their assaults. Falling in love with these woods has meant falling in love with one another and with the possibilities of this world—a love that the police will never understand, and therefore cannot crush.

“WHEN THE BARRIERS CAME DOWN”

WHEN THE CONCRETE BARRIERS WENT UP AT THE PARK AT THE BEHEST OF a local real estate baron, it felt so banal. What—another space in the city enclosed, forbidden, made concrete? Long before this struggle began—a struggle for my neighborhood park, my local forest—I could trace my

life through a string of interactions with police in public parks, or a string of neighborhood parks and natural spaces closed, contaminated, forbidden. I could trace a line through this life: if you want to be outside, you have to pay or you have to trespass.

The concrete road barriers were standard issue, but the real punch was when I saw that they took the sign and replaced it with a much smaller one, a generic one reading “Park Closed.” As if the public park, the forest, our entitlement to the land could be made or unmade with a sign. As if we would abide by the sign, something so “neutral,” produced to justify the land grab as official. It might as well say *Forget being outdoors, catch the forest on Netflix*.

Like me, my neighbors didn’t stop when they saw the barriers. If they noticed that the park sign was gone, it didn’t turn anyone around. The stream of cyclists, trail explorers, and dog walkers continued, pushing through the small opening that immediately appeared between the barriers. Soon enough, just as I expected, the barriers were pushed open all the way, the parking lot effectively re-opened. People make the spaces they need. I smiled when I saw them opened up: a sign of complete indifference to the roadblocks in our way. A disregard for property lines.

A week has passed since the barriers went up. Today is the first Saturday of the fourth week of action. Hundreds of people stream into the forest to enjoy a free concert, a barbecue, the company of others in the movement.

As the day cools down, a crowd gathers around the front of the barriers. I notice that people are hoisting a new sign, painted with a new name. They welcome me in through the barriers. I help hold the sign, heavy in my hands, as it is affixed to the old sign stand. We drape a sheet over it. A few moments later, a Dekalb County police SUV slow-rolls by, but a crowd has already started to amass at the barrier entrance. Some shouts of mocking harassment from a crew of masked people send the cop down the road. “He won’t be back.” Maybe he will, but with a different kind of calculus.

The crowd murmurs, carrying plates of grilled chicken and vegan hot dogs to come perch on the barriers. Someone has strung a fancy red ribbon across the barriers, tied in a bow. It feels like we are saying: this forest is ours, and these barriers are a gift. We call to others in the lot to come watch the sign unveiling unfold. Some make speeches, reclaiming the park. Excitement in the air, true feelings of power, laughter at the exaggerated speeches.

Now the sheet is finally pulled off, revealing the sign: “South River

grimey hardcore sounds. Two hours to release anger, anxiety about what will come in the next few days, weeks, months, years to the forest, to my friends, to my life in Atlanta.

The Weelaunee Forest is a land of resistance. The lineage of the land of Muscogee people, their forced removal, enslaved West Africans, incarcerated people in the Atlanta Prison Farm, and the fight to resist the state and colonialism continues in Weelaunee every day. DJing is an extension of my everyday acts of resistance, feeling true to the roots of Techno and Jungle that grew out of Black curiosity to find a place. DJing in a constructed money-maker will never compare to DJing in the fight for open spaces. My place is nuzzled between the pocket of trees.

“THE SWEAT LODGE”

SCRAPPIN SLOP AND TARPS, FROCKLING AMONG CARCASS AND DEBRIS, screaming songs of moto exhaust and white throated swallows, here among the Weelaunee.

Mudtracks of ATVs lead us to wheelbarrows, tarps, abandoned clothing, slashed and trashed camps. Above, glorious clouds threatening us with a humid breath. That same rain that, we fear, will revolt in the strength of the kudzu and multiplying mold spores is also the rain that we crave to feed our gardens and creeks. A humidity that encourages the vining reach capable of overpowering the forgotten billboard, tagged with evidence of an incredible feat. So high, we both reach. Palpating canopies alive with green lichen, expanding arms for a choking embrace. Waterlogged tarps fastened into a caved dome, slugs fling in every direction as we snip the paracord that held this forgotten structure in place. Spiders emerge from the folds, where mosquitoes breed in stagnant puddles. Not so long ago, this sweat lodge was sanctuary for the ritual of gathering—of celebrating this forest—this land that haunts us with tragic horrors of nightmares past and the future that may emerge without our presence. We break down and repurpose our leftovers, we dismantle sites of abandon and create through decay. With the speed of acceleration, the drops that were once tender, hit like pellets, blinding my ability to admire the canvas of lightning against the dank green horizon.

dusty rain tarp. I see friends that I have known for the past decade carrying guitars and speakers, noting that we have come to be the elders of this scene. We are weathering life's seasons in this world that we are building. Spring and summer happen simultaneously; slowly, we are bringing fall and winter back into the fold.

By the time you get the notifications, it's already too late. The forest has been sealed off by police or barricaded by protesters. You're left pacing the hardwood floors of your apartment, wondering how you can help from afar. In the world we're building, you just have to be there. News of the forest isn't digested over breakfast, it's made before a drop of coffee hits your lips. When morning comes and the cops raid, or defenders reduce construction equipment to rubble and ash, you're either in the woods or you're at your table. This time, we were in the forest.

"DJING IS AN EXTENSION OF MY EVERYDAY ACTS OF RESISTANCE"

ALL WEEK THE SUN IS BEAMING, SWEATY BODIES RUSTLING THROUGH THE woods, minds wondering what will come next, what will I need to do next? The threat of downpour loomed all week; it finally blessed us briefly on Saturday when the full rinse came. The darkening yellow sky, lightning pulses, damp pine starkly reminds me of early memories of Atlanta sunshine unveiling after afternoon showers. I worry how today will go after the downpour.

The tarp bowl quickly fills up as the day continues and the pines dry. Suddenly, it feels like a music festival. There are pockets of people laying down on blankets, dancing, moshing, talking, and looking at zines.

As it gets darker and darker, I start hearing "When are you DJing?" I'm the last to play to close out the Fourth Week of Action and the music festival. I've DJed in the Weelaunee forest before, but, this felt different. As I stepped to the stage, I stepped into the hips of the woods. Swaying, Jungle-infused pop and locking, and Techno bouncing between the bones of the forest. The bowl flowed into late-night freaks, dancing to the hard bass, fuzzy mids, and ethereal highs. An all-consumption by the woods, by the energy bouncing off the pine, by my love for dancing and

Forest Park" reads one side; "Weelaunee People's Park" reads the other. Within seconds, I hear loud pops and champagne sprays, covering us all, showering a 20-foot radius. Cheers rise from the people gathered, then a chant: "People's Park! People's Park!"

With a dramatic flourish, R— cuts the red ribbon, and everyone is yelling, celebrating, a burst of joy. Spontaneously, now we are running. Running past the new sign through the barriers, as if for the first time, as if something has been unveiled to us: a gift we've given ourselves.

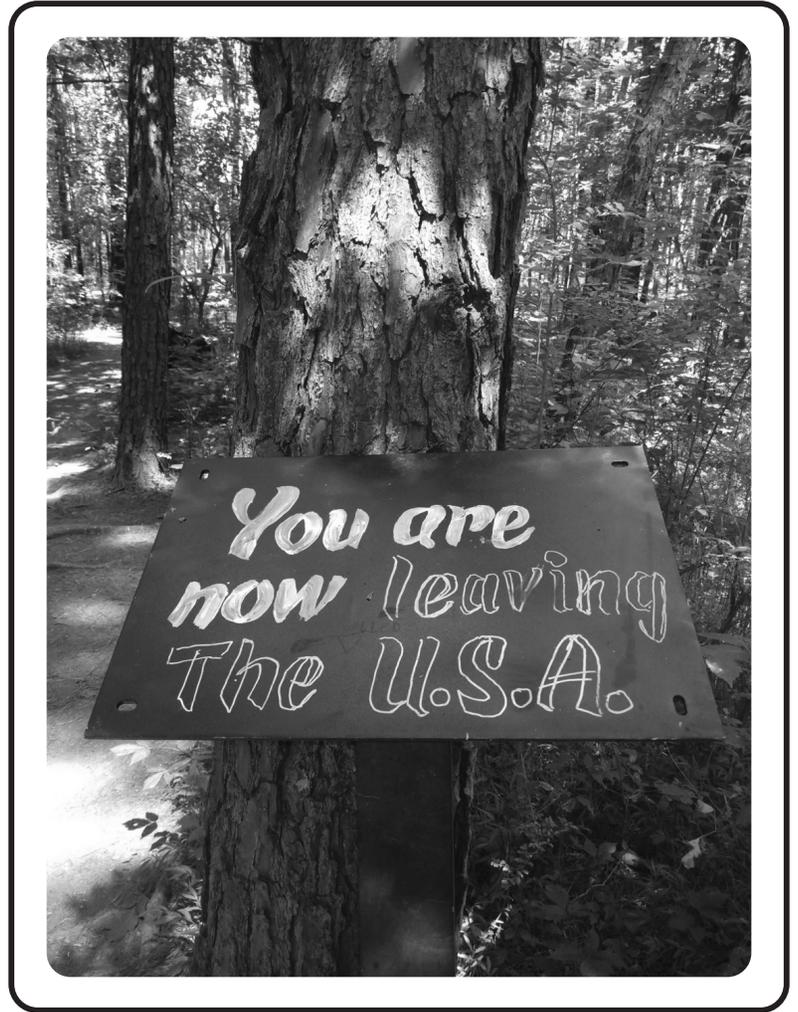
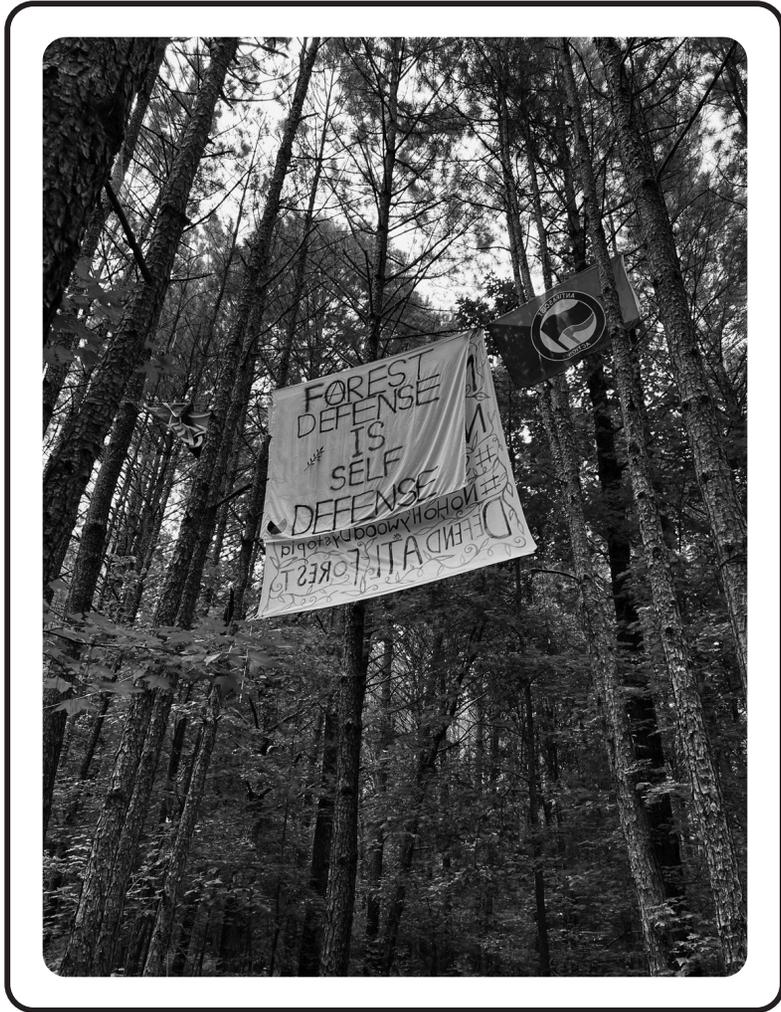
"A TOUR OF THE FOREST"

AT DAYBREAK, THE BIRDS TURN ON AS THE MUSIC TURNS OFF. I'VE BEEN dancing for almost twelve hours. It's early Sunday morning, the end of my birthday. I feel blessed to have spent it in the forest with my friends and many strangers. This was the last day and night of the three-day Defend the Atlanta Forest music festival, an explosive culmination to the fourth week of action. We spent whole days and nights dancing, grooving, moshing to the rhythms of the free forest. My body is filled with an energy that I know doesn't come from it, from the food or water or sleep that sustains it. It comes from a more diffuse and mystical power. A power that only emerges in the connection between many bodies engaged in freely creating a shared world.

The festival began with a friend speaking about the movement to the growing assembly of people standing under and around the massive tarp and stage that has been constructed here. It serves as a temporary venue, no less historic, for shelter, gathering, rage, expression, joy, communing. As she explained that this is a *decentralized* and *autonomous* movement, inviting everyone to repeat back those two fundamental words, I felt a buzz of excitement.

This is an almost 800 acre autonomous forest within the city of Atlanta. It was abandoned, then reclaimed, then sold, swapped, and again abandoned by the city. Now it is used and cared for by us—the people, the public.

When my friend wrapped up her welcome speech, another friend caught my attention through the crowd and asked me to lead some newcomers to the forest on a tour to a treehouse. I made an



at the police. Elsewhere, someone was anxiously hiding the sound equipment in case a raid was imminent.

I still can't believe we managed to pull this off. I shouldn't be so surprised, but it's hard to overstate the magic of what took place. There we were, perhaps 500 punks, dancers, anarchists, artists, partiers, rappers, indie rockers, forest defenders: if the police couldn't stop us, if the developers couldn't disperse us, the rain certainly wouldn't. How many people had come over the previous days? There's really no telling. The only thing certain is that on this final night, all of them walked through the cement barriers past the smoldering truck, deep into the forest, deep into the future.

"THIS TIME, WE WERE THERE"

ROCKING WITH THE PINES, AIR THICK WITH CICADAS, THE FIRST NIGHT, the night of my arrival. The breeze shakes the treetops, rustles their needles together, cradles me in the sway of this forest.

I miss my friends back home already. I wish they could be here with me, looking up at the cloud-mottled night—my last sight before shut-eye, giving myself over to the charming clicks of bugsong. A hammock can be a lonely place to sleep, but less so when you find that people you once knew in a past life are suddenly your neighbors once more, stepping through the portals of their tents and raising their arms to the sun.

As camo-clad demonstrators beat that truck mercilessly with a shovel, ripped its doors from their hinges, emptied its cab, I told the *Rolling Stone* reporter that what we were doing was building a new world. The music of these woods shows how we can find beauty in the scraps we've been handed, the cut cleared and replanted like the weeds growing from the old prison farm. Punk asks for no more than three chords, a rave no more than bass and bodies to populate the dance floor. In this world, we sway unbound by the weight of debt that is intrinsic to the success and poverty of city life. In this world, I find I can stretch my sleeplessness a few hours longer, waking life more nourishing than slumber. At night, our generations constellate with the stars.

Along the glowing trails, I find faces new to these woods. I see kids ten years my junior showing up bright-eyed and ready to mosh under the

announcement and a couple dozen people followed me along a path through the trees.

I made stops along the way to point out where the kitchen is and the additional do-it-yourself kitchen where there are always snacks and sometimes people cooking special additional meals. I pointed out the sweat lodge that a Lakota comrade built during the last week of action. I told the story of how this movement became one of the many embers that were scattered when the boot of the state violently stomped out the sacred fire that was Standing Rock. I led them up the hill and encouraged everyone to look up. High above us, we saw a large platform in the tree covered by a domed tarp. There was a hanging potted plant with flowers; someone said, "Ooh, look, they are making it cute, like a home." I answered, "That is her home." Others asked, *How do they get up there? How did people get everything up there?* Everyone looked up at their childhood dreams come true.

At dusk, the sky glows out from the negative space, forming shapes between the thin pine trees. The sun is lighting up the world from below. People roam around the Living Room, our name for the part of the forest where pine straw provides a clean ground for public gatherings, meals, meetings, events, music, and art happenings. Everyone is standing or sitting in circles, eating, chatting, scheming, encountering or reencountering each other; dogs run around us playing and chasing with abandon. It is dinner time. All the hard work of carrying boxes of produce, jug after jug of water, chopping vegetables, stirring massive pots, washing the dishes from lunch, carrying them and the fresh hot food from the kitchen (in the woods) to the serving area in the living room has paid off. Everything we do here, we do voluntarily—a labor expressing faith in abundance, creating a free meal, a free show, a free experience. This simple fact is more significant than I know how to explain.

One of the highlights for me, this week, has been seeing some coworkers from the restaurant I work at come out into the forest. At work, I'm always bringing fliers, putting up posters, begging my coworkers to come. The way we normally relate is always mediated by work—how miserable but resigned we are to be there, doing what we are doing, day after day, cleaning the bottles and floors just so we can clean them again when we close the next night. Out here in the forest, they ask me, *Do you live out here? Did you put this all together?* I say, *Sometimes*, I say, *Yes*, *we all did*.

“THE TRUCK BECAME AN ATTRACTION”

WHEN THE FIRST CAN OF DR. PRIESTLEY’S SELTZER WATER FLEW THROUGH the air and exploded onto the windshield of the excavator, temporarily blocking the view of its operator and complicating his attempt to destroy the parking lot gazebo at the newly opened Weelaunee Peoples’ Park, it felt to me like a small but important milestone had been reached—another indication that the movement to defend the Atlanta forest continues to grow and to outgrow its limits.

The sudden ubiquity of the cans of seltzer water themselves, cases of them sitting around the forest free for the drinking, felt like one such milestone in its own right. When an occupation reaches a certain level of power and prominence, resources begin to flow and strange abundances appear. I remember boxes of thousands of loose cigarettes arriving at Standing Rock and a small pious circle of chain-smokers forming to package them for distribution to the wider camp. Nobody knew where they came from. As far as I know, the seltzer water came to the Weelaunee Forest from the warehouse of a failed startup somewhere and quickly became the unofficial beverage of the week of action.

The confrontation with the excavator ended with its operator, a neighbor and henchman of Hollywood billionaire Ryan Millsap, fleeing along with the off-duty police working security for him. They left behind Millsap’s truck, a 2020 Dodge Ram 5500, which was soon set ablaze. This ended Millsap’s second attempt to close down Intrenchment Creek Park and establish his private ownership over it. His first attempt had occurred over a week before, when he sent workers to remove the official park sign, close the parking lot with concrete barricades, and put signs up around the area declaring it “private property.” Our response had been to paint the barricades vibrant colors, keeping them in place but open them enough to allow vehicles through, and to declare the opening of a Peoples’ Park.

The park feels different now. Millsap attempted to forcibly impose his private ownership but instead shattered it, and now the burnt-out husk of his \$80,000 truck serves as visual proof of how easily such illusions can be dispelled. Instead of scaring away regular park-goers, the burned truck has become an attraction. People come just to look at it and take pictures of it. Something about it brings them joy; they leave visibly elated by what they’ve seen.

It’s also clear that nobody misses the police, who no longer feel comfortable circling the parking lot or coming at night to harass “suspicious looking individuals” despite the old park being open 24 hours a day. Unlike a public park, which is defined by a list of things you’re not allowed to do, the peoples’ park invites your participation on all levels. You can drive on the bike path. You can dig up the grass and plant a garden. You can put up signs asking people to drive slower on the bike path. You can get a piano on Craigslist and bring it to the woods and play it at 3 am. You can park your car and sleep here because it’s safer than the Walmart parking lot and the communal kitchen is cooking a meal every day. You can throw a huge dance party under the canopy and the stars and fall asleep on the soft pine straw.

“DEEP INTO THE FUTURE”

WHEN IT STARTED RAINING ON THE THIRD NIGHT, I WONDERED HOW I would make it back to my tent. I also wondered what that truck looked like in the parking lot, soot washing off its charred remains, perhaps mixing with the paint and chalk that redecorated the iron frame. In the madness of the night, the status of the music was the only thing I did not question. One of my friends spun in circles, shoeless, in the downpour. I saw people kissing in the mud. The large blue tarp overhead, which just an hour earlier had almost come crashing down on our heads as reckless punks used it to facilitate stage dives and other antics, now shielded hundreds of people from the storm.

I was standing on the side, beneath a smaller tarp, next to the makeshift bar. The pulsing of the dance music wasn’t quite so loud that you couldn’t talk, but with the sound of the rain on top of it, I had to yell to be heard. My friend and I were discussing the morning. We had woken up with a start some 18 hours earlier to the sound of yelling: [self-described owner of the forest] Ryan Millsap had brought police to the parking lot and they were threatening to tow cars. Although we had only slept in our tent for a few hours, my friend and I pulled on our shoes and jackets and rushed through the forest to defend the newly christened Weelaunee People’s Park. In the parking lot, people were throwing stones and cans of sparkling water