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Horizontality in the 2010s

Social Movements, Collective Activities,
Social Fabric, and Conviviality

Yves Cohen



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Horizontality in the 2010s: Social Movements, Collective Activities, Social Fabric, and Conviviality

Yves Cohen

Abstract

Horizontality is a salient social phenomenon of the last decade. It asserts itself against hierarchies in social movements and countless other collective practices around the world. It constitutes a characteristic of an emergent sociality that demands the attention of the social sciences. The 2010s are a moment as important as “the Sixties”, a time when Ivan Illich called for the development of tools of conviviality, and horizontality may be categorized as one of them. Today’s horizontality may be related to that of populations that have been the focus of anthropologists interested in their longstanding propensity to work against the affirmation of the authority of commanding. Public squares, roundabouts, and the courtyards of apartment buildings welcome the early symptoms of democratic experimentation that circulates also among groups, collectivities, and associations with varied purposes. In all these places, equality asserts itself and cuts across differences. The Yellow Vests and an educational cooperative in São Paulo are the empirical foundation of this study.

Keywords: horizontality | social movements | protests | collective practices

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Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Entities of Horizontality	3
3. An Ethnographic History	7
4. The Yellow Vests and the Invention of Roundabout Democracy	7
5. Horizontality, A Difficult Tool to Handle	15
6. Ponte and Collective Action without Direction and Coordination	17
7. The Pathways of Emancipation	24
8. Conclusion	26
9. Bibliography	28

1. Introduction

This working paper offers a snapshot of an ongoing study that seeks to identify and think about a salient phenomenon at the present time: horizontality. I will present some of the findings of this study of the forms of horizontality conducted over several years as well as some hypotheses and lines of reflection. The horizontality in question is observable both in large socio-political movements around the world in the decade of the 2010s and in what would seem to be an increasing number of daily collective activities. The findings relayed here focus principally on the Yellow Vest movement in France and a recently created cooperative school in São Paulo, Brazil.¹

There is much discussion of authoritarian, populist chiefs and dictators around the world who seem to be undermining the emergence of democracies in recent decades. Those figures are highly visible. The horizontal dimension of dozens of social and political movements around the world over the past ten years does not attract as much attention; and even less noticed is the horizontality of egalitarian collective activities that have been more discreet in their pursuit of altering life in the here and now.

“The 1970s mark a turning point in the history of collective action”, write Elena Jordán and David Vercauteren in an extraordinary little six-page text published in the journal *Vacarme* in 2008, in other words before the wave of horizontality of the 2010s (Jordán and Vercauteren 2008: 48; Vercauteren et al. 2018).² In their declaration centred on France, they claim that “put off by the hierarchical excess of traditional parties and unions, a number of collectives are seeking out horizontal forms of organization” (Jordán and Vercauteren 2008: 48). This observation could be applied to events in many other countries over the period from 1965 to 1975 referred to conventionally by many as the “1968 moment” (Zancarini-Fournel 2008).

It was in the middle of this brief period, in 1973, that Ivan Illich published his invitation to develop “tools for conviviality”. In keeping with the spirit of the times, he writes:

I choose the term “conviviality” to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment (Illich 1973: 24).

1 I would like to thank Mecila for its marvelous help and Kathya Araujo, Sophia Deeg, Michel Defalvard, Fabien Granjon, Valentin Schaepelinck, Eric Wittersheim, and the participants in the EHESS seminar Work in Progress in Contemporary History, organized by Juliette Cadiot, for their useful reading and comments.

2 All translations are by the translator unless otherwise noted.

The hierarchy required by production and the obedience toward the humans that direct it and toward the objects it creates are thus central to the definition of conviviality. The horizontality that develops within movements and collective activities does not come across merely as a political alternative but more broadly as a tool of conviviality invented on the spot in the activities and movements themselves and equally transforming social and political relations. The tools Illich evokes are both material and social and include “nations, corporations, political parties, structured movements, professions” (Illich 1973: 29); and they participate in the organization of sociability. Horizontality contributes to answering Illich’s call even if most of the time it is not aiming at conviviality and is simply an anti-hierarchical practice.

1973 is also the year of the first oil crisis that marks the end of the industrial era. Consequently, the crisis of subordination that erupted around May 1968 continues to grow even larger, provoking an accelerated takeover of physical and mental labour by machines, the end of giant factories, armies of conscripted soldiers, and of Soviet-sponsored communism whether in power or not. Conviviality is able to assert itself as an alternative to the demands of industrial society. Illich’s proposition also constitutes an intervention within the social sciences since he proposes to leave behind the concept of society marked by the industrial era and reorient toward the study of ties and practices that conviviality engages in at all levels.³ Conviviality is both a way of conceiving the social reality and behaving in an industrial or post-industrial world. The notion encompasses a wide array of practices that coordinate with each other and call for considering the social fabric as their gathering, or rather as their dynamic assembly.

The last ten years may be considered as a reinforcement of the post-industrial world. They were marked on a global scale by the individualisation of work alongside efforts to individualise the path of one’s life under the supervision of enormous technological and capitalist powers that seek to impose this individualisation via an instrument jam-packed with material, intellectual, and social techniques that barely leave the palm of one’s hand during sleep.

The Chilean sociologist Kathya Araujo (Araujo 2013, 2016) has identified a new historical inflection point, after that of 1968, at the beginning of the 2010s. She writes that equality, which was seeking expression in the form of political inclusion, is now pursuing it in a new way through horizontality:

Equality expresses itself today by a generalised demand for horizontality in social relations. We do not mean by this the expectation of a horizontal world, but rather the desire for horizontal treatment in both symmetrical and asymmetrical

³ See Costa 2019 for an analysis of different approaches to conviviality in tension with traditional approaches in the social sciences.

relations. It is this horizontality of face-to-face relations that is becoming a central requirement (Araujo 2013: 120).

Araujo identifies in Chile an “expectation” and even a “requirement” of horizontality. In this she is close to David Graeber, who, in 2007, noting a shared investment in equality, linked the Zapatistas, the Argentine *piqueteros*, Dutch squatters, and South African township activists as all in agreement about “the importance of horizontal rather than vertical structures” before concluding: “Something is emerging” (Graeber 2007: 329).

After discussing the meaning of the 2010s, I will present the entities where horizontality reigns: the social and political movements and collective activities of daily life. Then I will begin the presentation of the initial findings of a double investigation of both the Yellow Vests in France and a cooperative school I will call “Ponte” in São Paulo, Brazil, and afterwards make some observations about the existence of an alternative social fabric and the anticipation of domination by practices of emancipation aiming to overcome it.

2. Entities of Horizontality

A large and sustained wave of movements without leaders arose in the 2010s. Tunisia inaugurated the wave, followed closely by Egypt. These two countries started the “Arab Spring” whose blossoming would be aggressively suppressed. And yet the wave would continue in Turkey, Spain, Ukraine, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso: a raggedy incomplete list where the old democracies are conspicuously absent – until the Yellow Vests. This French social movement appeared in 2018 and would be followed by a series of leaderless movements in 2019 in Algeria, Ecuador, Bolivia, Lebanon, Iraq, Chile, Egypt, and Haiti (Cohen 2018, 2019). Not all the mass movements of the decade openly declare themselves leaderless such as those in Hong Kong and Sudan. But even though this dimension has hardly been studied by social scientists, this desire to move ahead with no boss should be taken seriously. This is an important part of the renewal of protest movements compared to the previous century, and of contemporary social sciences. It has a major impact on the central theme of the social bond – its composition, dynamic, and history across centuries if not millennia. As suggested by Ivan Illich’s call for conviviality, there’s nothing natural, automatic, or self-evident about this bond, including subordination or hierarchy despite what recent centuries, especially the twentieth, would suggest in a number of locations around the world (Cohen 2013). Subordination and hierarchy are not *always already* written in the great book of the social. They are part of an historical elaboration across the globe that is irregular in the times and places they occur.

The movements of the 2010s seize on very delimited spaces to become the locus of their meetings and their force. One hears the term “democracy of the squares” to convey this use of public spaces (that recalls the medieval use of commons). The Yellow Vests invented the use of traffic roundabouts as a place of action, deliberation, and conviviality. In Belarus, people refusing the electoral fraud of Alexander Lukashenko chose to gather in courtyards of apartment buildings (Shukan 2020). Hitting on the idea of using all of these micro-territories as democratic spaces where people of diverse social origins, genders, races, religions, ages, and professions can meet directly as themselves without representatives on an equal footing in the heat of action has been a first step in solving the deep crisis of representative democracy. It is a criticism through direct action of the preceding century and of its profound reticence toward all forms of open-air free democracy. The solution being sketched out at this beginning of what promises to be a long process is not a substitution of horizontal democracy of public squares and roundabouts to replace the reigning structures in parliamentary regimes around the world. This search for a new democratic legitimacy is not seeking to destroy representative democracy. It aims to radically and democratically question the established powers in all their forms.

Besides public squares and similar venues, horizontality is establishing itself in countless activities that have often prospered silently over the last fifty years in many domains where the participants are unburdened with submitting to hierarchies, vertical chains of command, or with taking on positions of authority. Historically, it is a refusal in deeds of the imperative in force throughout the twentieth century according to which a popular movement, whether social or political, must be organized and hierarchical, preferably under the authority of a political party – in other words, according to the Bolshevik model of an avant-garde where every single collective activity, including the family, had to be conducted under the authority of a chief who would with few exceptions be masculine.⁴ The social bond was endowed with a hierarchical dimension naturalized in a thousand ways.

The social sciences have an interesting worksite to develop around identifying as exhaustively as possible the activities in all domains that have been undertaken recently with no chief, no leader, in an egalitarian, cooperative, collaborative, or autonomous manner. First, squares, roundabouts, and high-rise courtyards are places of conviviality: participants become acquainted by working together; this could be around preparing a meal, taking measures to be ready for winter, treating the wounds suffered during

4 Horizontality, this form of collective action as old as humanity, which was much maligned in the twentieth century, is finding a resurgence in the twenty-first and is expanding its place in the repertoire of popular struggles (Tilly 2006). Braga (2020) shows how two modes attempt to cohabit in the world since 2008 with the advent of precarious worker struggles: the institutions of struggles linked to Fordist-Stalinism and direct horizontal, non-union struggles.

confrontations, organizing the group's self-defence, or by deliberating. Action and deliberation are not the only components of the activity in these public spaces; the communal life is another which, along with action and deliberation, make these places belong along a spectrum of conviviality that amounts to a communal living together that may be familial, relate to a certain community with its proximities and its conflicts of variable intensity, cross boundaries, or envelope some other more or less temporary groupings. One cannot help but think of the *quilombo* of fugitive slaves in Brazil, a territory recomposed since the sixteenth century with a free lifestyle and yet open to others (Streva 2021; Tosold forthcoming).

Secondly, the embers burn red hot under the ashes. Under the surface of the “public” and somewhat out of sight, a deep work on the social fabric is taking place that recognizes at every point a need or even a desire for horizontality. These activities are quite varied: communal gardens in large metropolitan cities, presses, cultural or humanitarian activities, medical and legal offices, cooperatives of production or distribution – countless are the objects for the collectives and collectivities that have emerged, taken shape, and endured in this way for several years now. Many movements and organizations in France have been organized according to such principles of horizontality such as, for example, the movement to support the undocumented migrants and the Réseau Education Sans Frontières (Education Network Without Borders), and this is true in many countries around the world.

Following the example of squatters and the ZAD (a French acronym for “zones to be defended”) which have embraced horizontality, these other collectives are also seeking to offer a vision of the future via a dynamic of struggle and specific claims. In France, for example, they are linking with other transformations of institutions, such as the “collegial associations” that have neither president nor board. A law from 1901 regulates associations by a regime of declaration and not authorization. Over time the habit developed of creating an association “bureau” with a president, vice president, and secretary. This vertically organized structure became the norm and has only been questioned very recently. Association members who came to the prefecture to declare their association but without a president or bureau were told they had to follow the law. And yet the letter of the law includes no such obligation and requires only persons “responsible for the administration” (Legifrance 2020; Assistant juridique 2021). In addition to the growing number of collegial associations, there has been since 2014 and the experiment in Saillans in the Drôme department a flourishing multiplication of ecological municipalities which are non-hierarchical, egalitarian, and more or less directly inspired by the “libertarian municipalism” of Murray Bookchin (Legros 2020). In France, the family unit no longer has a single “chief” as head of the household following a legal reform of 1970, an effect of the renewal of the women's movement, and “parental

authority” is now “shared”. In France and elsewhere, a growing number of organizations have adopted the formula of the Movimento Passe Livre (Free Fare Movement, MPL) in Brazil that erupted in June 2013 with the most powerful demonstrations the country has ever known. The movement, founded in 2005, invented a “charter” that proclaimed it to be “horizontal, autonomous, independent and nonpartisan but not antipartisan” (MPL 2013). Following the demonstrations, all fare increases were blocked, leaving a deep imprint on the political history of the country – until the vultures of the far-right latched onto this popular agitation to turn it toward other goals.

The anti-hierarchical enthusiasm also extends to companies. In order to save itself and preserve the essential elements, capitalism since 1968 has sought to evade the insistent challenges to the authority of chiefs at all levels. For example, in one of the co-optation manoeuvres that are inseparable from all instances of power, it initiated the “project management”, “crushing hierarchies”, and even declared “freedom” (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Carney and Getz 2009). Internationally, one may note that the Internet was created on principles of horizontality that are endlessly opposed by nation-states and multinational companies.

With or without direct connection, from person to person and step to step, these more or less enduring and widespread activities resonate with free communities over large territories such as the Chiapas or the Rojava which have taken on global visibility even without occupying an entire country. The study of this ensemble – horizontal movements, collective egalitarian activities of all kinds, occupations, and free territories of various sizes – would require a global approach whose methods would have to be established carefully.

This article takes up most closely two cases: first, the horizontal practice of the Yellow Vests based on eyewitness observations within an assembly in the Paris region, and secondly, the initial steps of a cooperative school created recently in São Paulo in the aftermath of the June 2013 demonstrations and the occupation of high schools in the state of São Paulo that followed.

One of the challenges of this work is to avoid considering horizontality as an absolute that would arrive in opposition to hierarchy, but to observe instead in a pragmatic fashion what actually happens and attempt to identify the forms, the meandering evolutions, and the meanings, and in this way take part in a reflection that would be both that of the actors and the researchers in mutual reinforcement.

3. An Ethnographic History

This study is grounded in both on my work on the history of authority and forms of command in the twentieth century in several countries (France, Germany, the Soviet Union, and the United States) and my own direct investigation which includes observations in several places: Brazil from the days following the June 2013 demonstrations to the present, Kyiv following the Maidan revolution in 2014, Russia and France for many years with moments of particular focus such as the *Nuit Debout* (Up All Night) events of 2016. As for the *Gilets Jaunes* (Yellow Vests), I participated in the movement from its inception and donned a yellow vest in January 2019. Since June 2019, I have participated in an assembly in the Paris region that I will refer to as the C Assembly. The first names of the people whose words or opinions are stated have been modified. I conducted no formal interviews. Since its beginning in the spring of 2019, I have participated to a lesser degree in the Yellow Vest “collective” within the higher education system. My participation in the Yellow Vests began in the very first days and took multiple forms: direct action at roundabouts, the “Actes” of Saturday demonstrations, and the assembly (I did not take part in the periodic “Assembly of Assemblies” (ADA) that started in Commercy in January 2019). From the start I intended to write about the movement, and I decided to do it as a university professor wearing the yellow vest. Recent social science discussions on this question have articulated a preference for having this stated from the outset, though this does not mean that this document is a Yellow Vest action! In Brazil, I worked under the auspices of the Mecila Fellowship for which I am very grateful; however, the pandemic prevented an in-person investigation on site at the Ponte school. I was only able to conduct ten online interviews and I did not meet with any students. One of the founders loaned me booklets of notes taken during the first meetings. In the last months, at the invitation of Ruy Braga, a professor of sociology at the University of São Paulo, I was able to conduct with him a series of interviews with a number of the coordinators of the education network *Emancipa* that are located in several places throughout the country. I did not include here the preliminary results.

4. The Yellow Vests and the Invention of Roundabout Democracy

A number of university colleagues seem to think that horizontality does not exist. I remember the chuckling of a history professor at a Brazilian university at the end of 2013 when told of the *leaderlessness* of the MPL: “No leader? Ha-ha!” More recently another colleague told me that leaders necessarily emerge automatically. I’ve also heard that horizontality is only a passing phase preliminary to the creation of parties, that one cannot eliminate authority, that horizontality was not only a leftist thing, and

the question “When you’re horizontal, who’s accountable?”. These sceptical remarks must be taken seriously. In their own way, they show the state of the social sciences that sometimes leads to objecting to social reality; but more often the remarks have the advantage of formulating questions because they don’t have the answers or don’t have the proper vocabulary or don’t recognize the thinking at work in the society or have trouble placing themselves in a posture of inquiry with regard to what is happening. This scepticism has oriented the present investigation.

The ethnographer-historian is inclined to have recourse to anthropology. More than relying on class characteristics which are the first and sometimes only reference points in sociological studies, my study’s methodology will focus on the diverse and frequent encounters that take place on the occasion of these events.⁵ It turns out that it’s neither specific groups or classes one observes, but instead “multiplicities”, as the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro writes, taking inspiration from the post-1968 writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari 1972, 1980). If democracy was invented to transform divergence into concord or transaction around a common project, the public square and roundabout become, via these encounters, a location of democracy capable of reconciling and rendering compatible personal action and the expression of groups and collectives no matter how informal they might be. The Yellow Vests are rhizomatic by definition. Put another way, they are what the same anthropologist calls an “a-centric reticulated system”. Multiplicities are “systems whose complexity is ‘lateral’ and resistant to hierarchy and all forms of transcendental unification”. They derive from a “relational mode whose cause (formal or final) is not similitude or identity but instead divergence or distance” (Viveiros de Castro 2009: 82). This last point is fundamental for the Yellow Vests. One comes across it in various formulations within their oral and written communications. For example, “Strike Communiqué no. 1 of the Parisian Yellow Vests” praises the “wonderful quality of the multiplication, divergence, and exploration of simultaneous demonstrations” (Gilets Jaunes de Belleville 2019).

Horizontality is noticeable among the Yellow Vests from the start. Less than one week after Act I on 17 November 2018, the online newspaper *Médiapart* underscored its full significance:

Without representatives, structure or organisation, the occupiers at roundabouts are not backing down. It’s precisely the absence of chiefs, designated spokespeople, and precise demands that “stirs shit up”, they claim. It’s for the powers-that-be to deal with that and find a solution (Bonnet 2018).

5 See, for example, the article written in the thick of the action by Brazilian sociologist Marcelo Ridente (Ridente 2013).

Starting in early December, Raoul Vaneigem was one of the few intellectuals to accurately assess the direction of events. In his view,

the general nature of the anger prevents the traditional commentators from co-opting and manipulating the herd. Because here [...] there are individuals who are reflecting on the increasingly precarious conditions of their daily existence. There is an intelligence of beings and a refusal of the shabby fate reserved for them (Vaneigem 2018).

At the other end of the timeline, in April 2020, when the first measures were put in place to contain the pandemic, the sociologist Karine Clément, a specialist of Russian democratic movements who participated in the roundabout at Saint-Avoid, underlined the full meaning of what was at stake. Her observations are worth citing at length:

With the lockdown and distancing imposed on us today, we are living in the exact opposite of the world that the Yellow Vests had invented and put into practice. It's being said that they recreated the social bond, which is entirely true, and one rarely appreciates exactly what that means. It was the social bond of face-to-face encounters, of emotions, of equality regardless of status, of a mixture of differences, and a surpassing of narrow individualism. It's a social bond built from the meeting of bodies and guts. The role of social media among the Yellow Vests is greatly exaggerated. Social media were above all the tools that facilitated the reanimation of the physical and spatially situated social bond, whether at the roundabouts, in demonstrations or assemblies (Clément 2020b).⁶

Clément, like Araujo, underscores what's at stake in the characteristics of the social bond. She also notes that these new territories of conviviality are also locations of equality between all those present, which is to say an equality created to remedy inequalities.

The force of horizontality incarnated by the Yellow Vests made itself felt beyond the participants themselves in other social movements, demonstrations, and collective practices. This was particularly the case in the demonstrations over retirement reforms that started on 5 December 2019. *Le Monde* reported on an interprofessional meeting to prepare the strike at Saint-Denis:

The horizontal organisation prized by the "Yellow Vests" is what the participants at this preparatory evening meeting are seeking. "In the general assemblies on 5 December, there will be no chiefs, no leaders, no representatives out front", promises a Vincennes bus depot worker. "Some call this anarchy, but it's not anarchy, it's a republic" (Béziat 2019).

⁶ See also Clément 2020a; Gilets Jaunes de Saint-Avoid 2020.

Books and articles on the movements of the 2010s duly note their horizontal character, but they do not make it a central theme; they do not consider it one of the profound characteristics, nor do they make it something worth studying and reflecting on (Gerbaudo 2017; Confavreux 2019; Mauger 2019). The writer Danielle Sallenave in a text with a certain warmth includes this strong declaration: “By appropriating public space, the Yellow Vest movement has confusingly constructed a space of democratic horizontality that reunites with the spirit of 1789, of 1848, and the Commune” (Sallenave 2019: 41) – and never, I would add, with that of 1917. Gérard Noiriel, a historian of workers and migrations, evokes the popular aspiration for direct democracy, but does not treat the horizontality of the Yellow Vests (Noiriel 2019: 69–72). The same is true for Laurent Jeanpierre, a specialist of intellectual and cultural history, who is also sensitive to “the concrete collective life put in place over time at the roundabouts and in certain assemblies” which he refers to as a “new agora” – a word often repeated by the Yellow Vests themselves and by observers (Jeanpierre 2019: 97). These two authors are in agreement about granting the new movement the chance to constitute a turning point in the history of popular struggles in France. A study conducted by a group of researchers in Bordeaux had a major impact in December 2018. It profiled 166 Yellow Vests participants and studied different aspects of the uprising, but horizontality was not one of them (Collectif de chercheurs 2018).

Horizontality is certainly not always completely visible. In my visits to a few roundabouts that I started doing in December 2018, each time I saw people more or less acknowledged as “chiefs” and these leaders had a preponderant role. This was the case at Rungis where Guy, a young nurse, led a spirited and cheerful blockade of the wholesale food market while being constantly threatened by the police. Many participants came up to him to ask his opinion while various other actions were taking place at the same time without the least intervention on his part. While accepting the leadership role, he did not seek to extend it beyond what was directly asked of him. At Voujeaucourt, in eastern France, also in December 2018, I had the opportunity to briefly join a group that circulated between two roundabouts close to each other. I saw that the saraband was being led by someone and I was told that this person was the “chief”. When I remarked that the Yellow Vests claimed to be leaderless, I got no answer; but I was unable to stay longer to pursue my investigation. In February 2019, as I was leaving a roundabout in the Paris region where I had spent the afternoon, Amina, who was folding up materials, said to me, “I take care of this roundabout”, meaning that she was in charge. At the C Assembly which I’ve been attending since June 2019, I had a surprise at the evening meeting on 5 December following the demonstrations associated with the first strike day against the government’s retirement reform. A good fifteen or so of those present were flustered because four or five had not showed up, preferring to participate in

another meeting of interprofessional and regional scope. On account of their absence, we were not able to get anything definite accomplished.

The leader is therefore somehow present, even with a general ambiance marked by the explicit and insistent rejection of leadership. This seemingly paradoxical relation is at the centre of the present study and of that of the São Paulo school. It's something underlined in different ways by both the press and researchers.

In the Yellow Vest discourse itself, the leader is present but in a residual way. A passage in the minutes of an ADA meeting in Montpellier in November 2019 mentions in a note about Besançon, "the leader of the group is a union member, is accustomed to speaking in public, and the police wants to designate him as the leader, whereas he is more of a spokesperson" (Gilets Jaunes ADA4 2019). This passage shows how sometimes the accounts produced by the Yellow Vests themselves are uncertain on this point. It is interesting how while talking about a "leader", the note illustrates how much the police miss having a leader, that they are looking for one and even create one. The same goes for the press that misses not having a spokesperson and goes out to seek and create one. People who had microphones thrust in their faces – Priscilla Ludosky, Eric Drouet, Maxime Nicolle, and a few others – were not called leaders most of the time. Since this role was banished by the movement, the press often respected this preference and got in the habit of calling them "figures". Governments and the powerful in general are also missing a leader to arrest or to address because the traditional doctrine holds that by arresting the chiefs, one puts an end to protest movements. What's more, for those in power, sharing the floor with "partners", as happens when speaking with "social partners" (i.e., traditional union representatives), establishes a common language; however, this putting in place of something in common that engages both sides in a mutual recognition is precisely no longer pertinent in the horizontal approach to things. This withholding of chiefs, which enrages chiefs, the powers-that-be, the police, and the press, is a salient feature of all the leaderless movements of the 2010s around the world. And that rage is proof that something really was going on.

The movements themselves and the groups and collectives that resort to horizontality are the first to reflect on their manner of carrying the project forward, to watch over the effectiveness of its existence, to note infractions – in short, to be reflexive and reactive toward this horizontality that they wish to be real and yet which is anything but flat. Therefore, people have a preponderant role in the diverse activities of the Yellow Vests, but the chief as a function does not exist. People don't give orders even if authority is exercised. This point suggests one should not be confined to a narrow vision of authority. The twentieth century was fascinated by commanding, leadership, and chiefs. As a result, it largely reduced authority to the act of commanding, which is

also true of its greatest thinkers, Max Weber and Hannah Arendt. However, authority must not be conflated simply with the capacity to give orders (Cohen 2016).

What I observed as a member of an assembly is that there is an active watch over the respect for horizontality. Each person takes it on themselves to not appear to want to exercise a position of authority as a commander. Even the smallest crossing of that line is immediately noted. The evolving immanence of this movement is only present in the form of a process.

With the exception perhaps of the chief at Voujeaucourt, I observed no desire to impose oneself as chief, not even the slightest intention. It would have been overwhelmed by a general refusal. Everything occurs as though each person had anticipated this refusal – the result being the removal of this desire from the table, and therefore a prevailing respect for the choice to have no declared leader from the start functions as an imperative.

Thus, the leaders that appear are not really leaders, though there's no other name for them. In fact, it's a vast question – as much for the Yellow Vests as for researchers – to know what to call them. Are they only “personalities” that come forward? As the authors of the study “1968–2008: Being Anti-Authoritarian Today” have stated, it's more about roles taken on, about specialisations within a repertoire, or categories of authority other than that of commanding (Jordán and Vercauteren 2008).

Another aspect is the clear distancing from the role of chief. A characteristic of this new culture of horizontality evident with Guy in Rungis, with Amina, and the members of the C Assembly absent on 5 December is that no one is seeking to have control over everything going on in their supposed sphere of action.⁷ They are not commanding anybody. They certainly have influence, but it is conditioned by their refusal to command.⁸

There are Yellow Vests who are hostile to horizontality. It's the case of certain members at the C Assembly: “Horizontality is stupid. Verticality is indispensable”, Victor told me on 28 July 2020. He said he knew of a text making this claim entitled “The Tyranny of Horizontality”. This text raises one of the main problems encountered by the desire for horizontality. It was written in 1970 by an American feminist, Jo Freeman,

7 The MPL activists in Brazil made it a point to “lose control” (Martins and Cordeiro 2014).

8 Pierre Clastres writes: “[...] the chief possesses no authority, no power to coerce, no way of giving an order. The chief is not a commander, the people of the tribe have no duty to obey. *The space of the chieftdom is not the seat of power*, and the (poorly named) figure of a wild ‘chief’ in no way prefigures that of a future despot” (Clastres 1974: 175, original emphasis). Clastres is speaking here of the commanding type of authority.

revised in 2004, and translated into French only recently.⁹ The translation of the title poses a problem of considerable importance. The original title was “The Tyranny of Structurelessness”, not horizontality (Freeman n.d., [1970] 2004). According to J.-M. Knutsen, who participated in the French publication, the first translation was entitled “La tyrannie de l’absence de structure”, but he and his friends considered that *horizontalité* would be more appropriate because it was more in line with the practice of Nuit Debout, student assemblies, and the Yellow Vests. But Freeman’s essay is not talking about the same thing, and the English word “horizontality” never occurs in the original text. There is almost no discussion of leaders and none whatsoever of hierarchy. Instead, the text discusses structure and the preference given to informal structures or the complete absence of structure in feminist movements especially starting at the end of the 1960s. The claim is made that the refusal of leaders equals a search for an absence of structure.¹⁰ Freeman insists a lot on the illusory quality of this aim insofar as informal structures inevitably emerge, personalities assert themselves, and roles are taken.

In regard to the Yellow Vest uprising, the French translation of the title gets things completely backwards. From the very beginning among the Yellow Vests there’s been a rejection (sometimes violent) of leaders along with the reaffirmation of a desire for structure and organization that has been openly stated. Horizontality and structure are not mutually exclusive. The task they took on and debated is precisely the construction of “horizontal structuration”.¹¹ This formulation, which one might consider to be an oxymoron though that’s not necessarily the case, is criticized by some Yellow Vests because of its accent on structure. One Yellow Vest in the Paris region said she preferred the term *rassemblement* (gathering) over *structuration* (structuring), because it was closer to what inspired the Yellow Vests with their desire for openness and horizontality (Gilets Jaunes 2020d). The main tendency is the search for a horizontal form. Contrary, therefore, to what’s suggested by the poor translation of structurelessness as *horizontalité*, the Yellow Vests are mostly in agreement with Jo Freeman. Especially when she writes that “nonstructured groups are completely governed by informal structures” which are not recognized as such (Freeman n.d.). In such cases, the power of emergent leaders is not seen, may even be denied, and horizontality is in fact non-existent. What’s happening is that the Yellow Vest horizontality belongs to a new generation of movements without leaders, one with a constant presence of

9 I have not found the date of publication or posting of this translation. It is presented by Jean-Michel Knutsen at the beginning of February 2019, and he suggests that this translation was made public shortly before (Knutsen 2019).

10 This is also the fear of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (Hardt and Negri 2017).

11 The “Dossier de candidature à l’organisation de l’ADA6 en région IDF+” proposes, for example, for the ADA to “define a horizontal structure that applies the principle of popular sovereignty, of the people, by the people, and for the people” (Gilets Jaunes ADA6 2020).

reflexivity noted for its mindfulness and active vigilance in favour of horizontality. The Yellow Vests count on this vigilance to make horizontality, structure, and organization compatible.

This desire for horizontal structures is evident from the first ADA, the forum that went the furthest in formulating rules for the conservation of horizontality. The first was held in Commercy in January 2019; in other words, at the start of the second phase of the uprising if one accepts that the first phase was about demands for the cancellation of the diesel tax hike, for lowering the CSG (a solidarity tax) for lower-income retirees, and for an increase in the minimum wage or SMIC. This first phase was victorious already in early December 2018. In phase two, with the same push to find new objectives comes the wish for a certain type of structure. It takes form with the idea of establishing shared rules of horizontality. The ADA started drafting “charters” about their own organization. The ADA meetings had a punctual or periodic existence, and it was not then the goal to establish a continuous organization for the entire movement. Many local assemblies subsequently prepared to establish their own charters. When several assemblies in the Paris region came forward to organize the sixth ADA, it formulated its “structuring” proposal in this way:

The structure is incontrovertibly horizontal, and no person or group has the office of commanding or ordering, including the Collective [of the organization of the ADA]. The latter’s role is to coordinate the divisions and commissions to enhance the efficiency of the project and produce regular synthetic reports (Gilets Jaunes ADA6 2020).

The effort to not direct is thus an important part of the preparation of the ADA and of their forms of expression. There remains a need to closely examine how this intention is carried out in practical terms.

The local assemblies were thinking about it too, and numerous formulations are proposed in written and oral interventions. For example, Henri, one of the creators of the C Assembly, which he left to coordinate a nearby strike, writes about it in these terms:

How to find a lasting form of organization at the local level that would permit the collective to reconcile and practice in true horizontal fraternity, in order to open a space where each person to the extent they wish may contribute to the growth of the group/collective/assembly and experience the force of “us” and its power (Gilets Jaunes 2020c).

The forms of expression and vocabulary are as varied as the proposals.

5. Horizontality, A Difficult Tool to Handle

When it comes up in discussions among the Yellow Vests, horizontality relates to the functioning of the assembly, of the assembly of assemblies, and to its presence in society. It is related to the stakes of equality, such as between women and men. The field notes reported here concern only a single assembly and should not be taken to support large-scale conclusions.

Between twenty to fifty individuals attended the weekly meetings of the C Assembly. The microphone rotates in an effort to have a maximum number express their views. One person is in charge of the mic, another jots down requests to speak, and a third takes notes of what's said for a debriefing, when at least someone remembers the need to do so. These roles rotate among a fairly large but limited number of members and regularly leaves out some participants, men and women, who may otherwise be very active.

Nicolas, a neighbourhood activist and custodial worker, was in charge of numerous social activities and joined the Yellow Vests in the earliest days. He is the member of the assembly most concerned about horizontality. He brings up the topic regularly, requests it be discussed, and demands that it be brought up as a specific topic in the ADA meetings. His oral interventions and group emails on the assembly listserv maintain a lively interest in this dimension of the Yellow Vests which for him is fundamental.

After the start of the strikes over retirement reform and about the Yellow Vests in general, the Algerian Hirak protests, and mass protests in Hong Kong and Russia, Nicolas writes on 9 December 2019:

[These heated events] may be expressing a deep intuition that to free oneself from diverse forms of domination with an increasingly globalized system, one must construct battles to rid oneself of this venom, and that horizontality is a tool for taking back our lives and our dreams from every dominant power (Gilets Jaunes 2019a).

The horizontality meant here is both that of the Yellow Vests and “that which will allow us to be ‘stronger than them’” (i.e., than the powers-that-be), which is a theme of a series of texts in circulation at that time. He continues:

The important thing for me in our movement, the thing which we need to work hardest to nurture, is its affirmation of the sovereignty of the roundabouts and the assemblies; these are thousands of experiments in horizontal functioning, tens of thousands of experiments in emancipation from one's subjugated position (Gilets Jaunes 2019a).

Horizontality is associated both with political tasks of the moment and to the end goals of emancipation. One sees here the plurality of modes of existence that it shares with conviviality (Gilets Jaunes 2019b).

Besides principles, concrete problems are also discussed in assemblies or in writing. In a message following the 6 May 2020 assembly meeting, Béatrice expresses some doubt about its true horizontality:

In my opinion, the dream of horizontal organisation is also sometimes utopic, because without precise rules (such as, for example, the coordination of the [X] strike when remarks were limited to just three minutes with rotating moderators), the reality is that strong egos sometimes hog the floor, inadvertently, and more politically experienced individuals are favoured and the more timid are penalized even if they may be active in other areas (Gilets Jaunes 2020a).

Béatrice is talking from experience: female voices have difficulty expressing themselves in this assembly. As early as 1 March 2020, she had written that interventions should not exceed three minutes, that those who had not previously spoken should be given priority, that the organizing and moderating functions should rotate, and that questions about new events and actions should be discussed first before matters of political orientation. And yet, she never allowed herself to state that women were the first to suffer from the absence of such rules, which are among those elaborated for years by the feminist movement and the alterglobalist movement (on collective deliberations, see Urfalino 2021). These rules are not unanimously supported in the assembly. In reply to Béatrice's requests, Bernard expresses both a quasi-anarchic rejection of constraining rules and a call for autonomy to keep "our meetings in disagreement", according to a declaration of Nicolas:

I am absolutely against a strict accounting of everyone's speaking time. Everything is not quantitative. A quality intervention of forty seconds has more impact than a rambling speech of five minutes. Everybody knows it. That said, I also think that those who have no problem with using and abusing speech have a duty to remember that not everyone's like them. And to remember the larger principle of redistribution that we all cherish, on all topics (Gilets Jaunes 2020b).

I often heard such praise for self-restraint which seems to be a necessary ingredient of horizontality.

The call for rules so that this self-restraint is respected links up, it's no surprise, with the difficulty of speaker parity. Female speech is the first casualty of a non-reflexive, inexplicit horizontality that contents itself with spontaneity and informality. Even if in its development over the last fifty years horizontality is inseparable from feminism, it is not

intrinsically feminine. On the other hand, going against horizontality is often a macho-male infraction.

I would like to introduce here some hypotheses for future research. It's hard to overestimate the role that women's movements have played in the historic dynamic that's led to the present moment. The French Mouvement de Libération des Femmes (Women's Liberation Movement, MLF) was created in 1970 in the aftermath of 1968 and had a constitution that was deliberately non-hierarchical, and this was also true of the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action, FHAR) created in 1971. Many life communities that started around that time rejected chiefs. The rise of women to various positions of responsibility played a major role in the rethinking of traditional hierarchies and probably of hierarchy itself. It's not a question here of hypothetical feminine characteristics, but the fact that hierarchies are historically constituted from the earliest times in antiquity as structurings implying the side-lining of women. Hierarchies are cemented in and by intense masculine sociability that for long went unquestioned. As soon as women came on the scene, hierarchy was undermined and lost its sense. The consequences are not yet all visible or operative.

It would be desirable to also explore in the future the historical sources of horizontality dating back to the nineteenth century, in particular in its French experiences such as those of factory workers' practices or that of the Paris Commune.

6. Ponte and Collective Action without Direction and Coordination

In 2013 the anthropologist Riccardo Ciavolella was asking if it was "possible to constitute, today, forms of collective life founded, for the organisation of social relations, on equality rather than on hierarchy, and, in political organisation, on direct participation rather than the delegation of power to representatives" (Ciavolella 2013). Put this way, the question of equality in politics and in collective life is a good summary of what was already in motion at the time he was contemplating it, and what the 2010s were then energetically furthering: a simultaneous renewal of both social and political relations which one can suppose was not unrelated to the swift succession of the neoliberal turn of late capitalism, the end of communism, and the grieving over the false promise of a glorious future that would follow but didn't.

Thus, egalitarian activities preceded the leaderless movements that occupied public spaces in the last decade in what we could call a phase 0. Phase 1 leads to the achievement of objectives defined on the spot by the movements through their spontaneous forms of deliberation. Phase 2 is most often marked by pushback or brutal repression that wants to stop such movements. Using their momentum in this phase 2, the movements seek a second wind through better structures and by defining new

objectives “beyond” the first ones, and this beyond may go all the way to revolution. Then, more or less intermixed with phase 2, there is a phase 3 where, like in phase 0, one sees the growth of “forms of collective life founded [...] on equality”, as Ciavolella notes (Ciavolella 2013). This was the case in Argentina in 2001, and during the 2010s in Ukraine, for example, with neighbourhood groups in the wake of the Maidan protests creating a theatre or public park, or departures toward the front of anarchist regiments and humanitarians to maintain relations between Russians and Ukrainians.

In the case of Brazil, the June 2013 protests animated by the MPL were followed in 2015 by waves of student-led occupation of middle schools and high schools, in particular in the province of São Paulo, all seeking to defend public education. Between 2017 and 2019, strikes took place in the private middle schools and high schools in the city of São Paulo. In both cases, many professors had participated in the movement in 2013 for free public transportation and they carried its horizontal spirit. This recently initiated study is focused on what followed from the outcomes of 2013, and these are its preliminary findings.

The cooperative school Ponte opened in 2019 in a neighbourhood of São Paulo located between the centre and the outskirts after two years of preparation. It was designed as a “workers cooperative” organized among the teachers and not a parent cooperative as is most often the case. There are 33 coop members and around 120 students at the time of this writing. Two cycles of study are designed to lead students from age six up to entry at university.

Among the founding parents and teachers, many became acquainted during the middle school and high school protests. During the first conversations about the project in March 2017, it was decided that a cooperative school would be created without a board of directors or coordinators. In this regard their project goes beyond the proposals of the Yellow Vests, because, as noted above, their collective organization, the ADA, while refusing to be directive, does give itself “the role [...] of coordinating branches and commissions”. For the creators of Ponte, coordination is also a place of power (Cohen 2020d).

Therefore Ponte belongs to the category of “newest movements” within Maria da Glória Gohn’s sociology of social movements. For her the “classical” movements are those of the landless and homeless, as well as those of neighbourhoods and unions; the “new” movements are those that emerged in the 1970s (identity movements, ecology movements, and rights movements for women and minorities, Gohn 2017: 9, 2014). During the pandemic, Ponte joined forces with other instances of egalitarian collectivism such as those formed in many poor and outlying neighbourhoods of provincial capitals or those that participated in 2020 in the delivery workers’ strike in São Paulo (Braga and

Santana 2020). This school project is part of a new form of revolution, according to Leyla Dakhli, a historian and researcher at the Marc Bloch Centre in Berlin. Without using the word conviviality, she suggestively writes, “The revolution appears as a practice, a shared experience. Rather than throwing itself toward revolutionary horizons, many movements in the world today are adopting specific practices as a way to challenge and to live. In so doing, they are forging counter-systems” (Ayad and Dakhli 2021; Dakhli 2020). On its website, Ponte speaks of its coop members as ordinary people who insist on not bending to the world as it is and who are taking up a new challenge of learning more and doing the tasks that are necessary for the building, opening, and functioning of a new educational and cultural space.

A video recording of an introductory presentation of the school to parents on 19 August 2018, before it opened, shows the diversity of points of view expressed by teachers engaged in the project. One speaks of “the autonomy of the subject in contributing to the construction of a group”, another of “the creative act, the creating act” which constitutes this “recreation of reality” and contributes to both “the construction of the subject and the collective subject”. Another celebrates the kitchen as a “place of encounters, solidarity, and sharing” notably on Thursdays when everyone produces and consumes a meal along with doing other communal activities (Ponte 2018).

Among the founders, two psychoanalysts play an important role: Maurício and Beatriz. Their actions are inscribed within the vast context of group psychology with over one hundred years of history around the world. Contrary to what started in 1900 based on the obvious fact, as observed by the early initiators Alfred Binet and of course Gustave Le Bon, that groups had leaders, Maurício and Beatriz rely on another current developed later in the United Kingdom by Wilfred Bion and in Argentina by Enrique Pichón Rivière: why do groups need to have chiefs? Are not leaders the result of collective resistance to accept one’s own autonomy? (Bion 1961; Pichón Rivière 1971; Cohen 2020a). In various interviews, the names of other educators and psychologists such as Paulo Freire, Henri Wallon, and Dermeval Saviani are mentioned.

In practical terms the school defies easy description. The refusal of directors or coordinators results in the creation of a large number of work groups that interact with the classes. Consequently, for the teachers there is a heavy workload that several of those interviewed underscored as permitting their “deep engagement” (Cohen 2020c). It’s all the heavier since the school has no non-teaching staff and several colleagues work in one or even two other schools. All material chores of cleaning, opening the school, setting up rooms, and so forth, as well as secretarial duties, are divided up among the teachers, and at certain defined moments to the students, such as with the twenty minutes devoted to daily cleaning of the school, or on Thursdays which I will come back to. Ursula comments as follows:

Something that we hear a lot from students and families is how close we are. [...] As a teachers' cooperative, all the teachers are there to speak. This relation is very tense in most schools, between teachers and families; in this case it's diluted, dissipated. The tension does not exist (Cohen 2020b).

The horizontal claim of the school guides its organisation. Classes have two main teachers, and study is divided up into nine subject areas that include language arts, foreign languages, sciences, social studies, art and theatre, wood working, and computer literacy. Organizational cells that aim to solve specific problems have also been put in place: the one for pedagogy and programs, another for school relations that conduct conversations with parents and students. In 2021 several more have been added: planning, program adaptation, and enrolment. Another innovation is the Elaboration Group. Led by four psychoanalysts with no teachers, it is a forum for discussion with students where the most sensitive topics, including personal matters, can be raised. Because the school is private and tuition-based, 20 percent of its slots are reserved for scholarship students. A policy of affirmative action favouring female and non-white students is also practiced. The pedagogy team prepares bi-weekly general meetings which, as their name indicates, unite all the coop members. Students are not invited to these meetings. Maintaining pedagogical authority with a division between teachers and students is favoured. This is one of the traits that distinguishes Ponte from "constructivist schools" which are older and numerous throughout the city and many teachers were either students or professors at one or another. Those schools cultivate the idea that students should collaborate on the definition of their own "apprenticeship". Even if the Ponte students do not participate in defining the direction of the school, all the activities they take part in are horizontal.

Horizontality is not a theme imported by researchers. It is one of the fundamental principles of the MPL that many of the Ponte educators participated in or still do. On the website of the school, horizontality is present in the opening sentence describing its organization. It states that the schools has 33 coop members who gather each week in general assemblies in which all participate horizontally and with equal decision-making power regarding the pedagogical orientation, organization, and administration of the school.

To the question "Is there real equality among all the voices?" Denise replies, "Well, in theory, yes. But I think that horizontality, as I see it, is constantly being pursued. We can say that it does not exist but is being searched for" (Cohen 2020i). This observation is consistent with the summary I gave of the Yellow Vests: the quest for horizontality is its mode of existence. There's no problem with recognizing that some interventions have more weight, such as those of Maurício or Marco. It is said, for example, that there are "strong personalities, both men and women", in the pedagogy and programs teams.

Sometimes there are “lapses in horizontality” (*quebra de horizontalidade*), as Denise reports.¹² For a long time, horizontality was hardly a consideration, but “now we’ve begun to think about it”, Denise adds, and training in “autonomous management” was offered in September 2020. Horizontality is put into practice in meetings but also in a series of activities that stress transversal participation.

For Teresa, “It works well”. The decision-making power is well distributed, she says. However, she adds, “if there aren’t hierarchies here, there are still ideas that count more than others”. Why? Because they are better placed, she explains. There are stronger ways to put oneself forward, to manage one’s public speaking and this leads to giving more value to this or that statement. “I really like this way of organizing ourselves. I’m getting more successful at putting myself forward. For example, I understand that this space is less oppressive for me than others and what I experienced elsewhere” (Cohen 2020e).

On the other hand, even though he thinks that “the experience is interesting”, Nicolau refuses to accept that it is “anti-authoritarian” and believes one can “fetishize by decree what’s new and horizontal. The horizontal is not a decree, it’s work. [...] There’s dirt under the rug” (Cohen 2020f). Here Nicolau is alluding to the fact that one of the coop members loaned the school a much larger sum of money than others, and that as a result it’s “a school with no owner and yet with an owner”. He’s the only one to have broached this delicate topic, and I have not yet been able to raise it with other colleagues.

Putting horizontality into practice appears more complex here than in a movement such as the Yellow Vests. Maybe because it’s more intimately linked to the school project than in the Yellow Vest context? Or is it that the type of activity in a protest movement is not constructed in the same way as in an educational practice which is necessarily more institutionalized?

Do the lapses in horizontality affect women at the Ponte school like they did among the Yellow Vests? It seems not. None of the three female teachers interviewed complained about that kind of discrimination. Teresa says, “as a ‘woman’ and as for the category ‘women’, the space seems well-balanced [...] and we have some great female representatives in the group” (Cohen 2020e). And yet one colleague did point

¹² But like in the past, time, conceived as urgency, is another enemy of egalitarian, horizontal, and deliberative activity. Even in this post-Fordist era, does one always have the time for collective horizontal work? Jérôme Baschet underlines the “very slow” gears of direct or, as he calls it, real democracy that predominates in the Chiapas: “[...] the Zapatists explain, based on their experience, that a project which has not been analysed and discussed by everyone is doomed to fail” (Baschet 2019: 72). Direct democracy is time-consuming, and urgency favors the installation of chiefs, and especially of military chiefs who generally prevail as they did in ancient Greece (see Clastres 1974).

out that even if the administrative roles rotated every two years, the three secretaries are... women.

On the unequal value of ideas, Teresa finds it normal that certain formulations take precedence because they state the argument better than others, and she doesn't see in that any violation of horizontality. In terms of authority, different forms have their place on the condition that at Ponte, like among the Yellow Vests, they are not the affirmation of a commanding sort of power. Nicolau wants to go further and articulates his idea that horizontality is its quest, that its quest is a work, and that this work is a collective engagement and that therefore it has to be a major concern of the group that is "seeking" it.

A recurring topic that I noticed in the remarks of colleagues concerned the goals of the school. Marco and Nicolau stated it in bald terms: the goals consist in disciplining bodies in the name of the parents, which implies as one's pedagogical task teaching subversion and accepting the paradox of an authorized subversion (Cohen 2020a). The ambition is put into practice in part through the (horizontal) organization of pranks which can have a mixed reception.

A school does not operate with the same imperatives as an orchestra with no conductor or a garden plot shared equally among neighbours. It has an obligation regarding duration. As such, even if the term *conviviality* is never pronounced, *convivência*, moments of familiar contact, are not lacking. Thursdays are of special importance in this regard. It is the convivial fulcrum of an experience that wishes to be convivial. Nicolau conveys this when he says, "I want my school to exist as a way of life for me and all those who are with me" (Cohen 2020f). Teachers and students prepare a meal together with a sharing of duties that is as egalitarian as possible. Everyone is at the school from 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. There are lessons during the day, but it is filled with playful and cultural activities where the same teachers and students spontaneously cross paths. Parents are invited at certain moments, and they are often associated with certain activities. For Ursula, "when it comes to Thursdays, there's the feeling [...] of being together for a moment of great intimacy operating there. Because it's the moment of taking responsibility for the collective well-being, for wellness, for the quality of the space we're living in" (Cohen 2020c, 2020b). This day sets the tone for the week and for everything. Thanks to the bonds formed then and the encounters that play out, this day offers everyone other resources to understand and interpret the lived daily experience in the school. Several of those interviewed used the word affection, *carinho* – such as Kevin, speaking of an "affectionate feeling" and a "kindly affection" (Cohen 2020c).

However, the theme of a true tension is not exactly absent. As with Edilson, Teresa sees it come up between students around class and gender:

So there's a social friction [*atrigo*] in this community. One student says, "I can handle it, because I do it already at home. I already do the dishes. Someone who does nothing at home, here they continue doing nothing". So there are these two things, gender and social class, among the students when it's time to clean up (Cohen 2020g, 2020e).

Another student complained to Nicolau saying that at school there was "no place to protest". In a way this does not displease Maurício, for whom not only is conflict inevitable within groups but to be sought out; and Kauê, who considers a certain amount of tension to be normal (Ponte 2017; Cohen 2020h, 2020k). There is even conflict, or at least debate, around this question of conflict. Marco prefers an atmosphere where everyone tries to concentrate in a "pragmatic" way on what is to be concretely resolved by everyone.

These tensions which constantly come up in real circumstances have their echo in the theoretical tensions around the meaning of conviviality. The polarity is noted by Sérgio Costa for whom almost all reflective pursuits that refer to conviviality in the footsteps of Illich "even if they emphasize, in some cases, that conviviality also implies conflict and competition, also tend to emphasize the dimension of cooperation (at times symbiosis) inherent to conviviality" (Costa 2019: 27).

Systematic cooperation and horizontality do not wall off Ponte from the surrounding social context that each member brings into it in their own way. All the more since one of the school's rules is to be open toward the neighbourhood where one might do sports or organize parties, to a wider circumference with excursions and trips, and to the whole world.

Many if not all questions remain open. The cooperative school cannot only be an institutional creation where pedagogical authority is recognized in its actions and its principles. Does not the institution suppose the recognition of other authorities of some type even if it refuses that of commanding? Does not the quest for horizontality, by definition never fully achieved, permit the liberation of energies for self-development within the collective activity ("freedom is marvellous", says Nicolau), whereas the major tendencies of the twentieth century such as communism thought it necessary to crush the self as a condition for building the collective? In this regard, the local experiment of the school is not so different from a broader movement with a will toward horizontality such as the Yellow Vests.

Public squares, roundabouts, apartment building courtyards, and collective activities of all kinds in this era of an egalitarian inclination all become in their own way convivial

spaces marked by sharing, equality, and a local rootedness – without anyone imagining that they could exist without conflict. Like in the words of the old French children’s song, “*Il court le ferret*”, “He runs, he runs, the ferret, the woodland ferret, My Lady [...] He ran by here, he’ll run by there”. But what social and political reality does the passage of the tireless ferret build?

7. The Pathways of Emancipation

The multiplicities evoked at the beginning of this text are very evident in both the Yellow Vest example and in the cooperative school created in a São Paulo neighbourhood. But they also overflow, go beyond their local territory, and attain a different scale.

When he enters into the narration of his relation to Ponte, Kevin notes his steps: those that conduct him “on the autonomous stage” of a horizontal orchestra to occupied places and squats where it plays, passing by the MPL movement since its creation in Florianópolis in 2004, the Espaço Ay Carmela, the Biblioteca Terra Livre, and the like. Kauê evokes the dictatorship and his interest in Vladimir Herzog, the assassinated Brazilian journalist, Pernambuco and the left, the collective mandates which, in a way, depersonalize the elective mandates he’s close to. Each story and all of them together draw stitches of a social fabric coherent in a deliberate adherence to collaborative, egalitarian, horizontal, transversal action in all degrees. One passes from one node of the network to another, comments Marco, who uses another metaphor (Cohen 2020a). The stories pass the buck, even at long range. They resonate with the one who is doing the telling of a circulation that leads, in Buenos Aires, from the big movement of 2001 to the creation of the cooperative and egalitarian cultural centre, then to groupings of neighbours to defend a local way of life (Cohen 2020j). We are in both the multi-belonging and in successive belongings, all more or less connected, at the centre of a landscape with its spatial punctuation marks, its divisions, its geography, but also its temporal spacings which constitute a number of circulations between movements and activities, with varying durations and definitive stops that one accepts when the goal is attained; or that are doubted and interpreted as failures (Cohen 2020j), or that one refuses so as to go beyond (“*além*”), as the former activists in MPL would say when they did not want to stop at only blocking the increase in the bus ticket price.

What name should be given to this third dimension of relations woven between the movements and activities that we’ve focused on? It is probably more than a mere network. The Turkish sociologist Gökçe Tuncel identifies the “constellation of groups, political organisations, and occupied houses resulting from the Gezi movement” that she explored for her thesis starting in 2015 (Tuncel 2020). But “constellation” only evokes a bond made from a long-distance attraction, whereas the presence and

action in common are so important, and in these cases, very real. The rhizome of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari is a useful formulation because it is not composed only of people but also of other analytic unities among which the “group” imposes itself, without erasing the movement, the uprising, masses, and even revolution. The historian of technology Thomas Hughes has coined the term “seamless webs” to name heterogeneous systems made of techniques and social and political relations like electricity (Hughes 1983). “Fabric” appears to be the most promising metaphor, even if it is sometimes very loose, or evanescent such as in China where people who meet on the occasion of a cultural gathering at a public square or a book club association keep things as passing acquaintanceship with no permanent link (Thireau 2020).

This overlap, so difficult to perceive, between horizontal practices of social and political movements and those of egalitarian collective activities calls out again to anthropology. How can one not think of the pronouncements of Pierre Clastres on chiefs without power in *La société contre l'État*?

In “archaic” societies, as Clastres calls them in his study published in 1974, the chief, when there is one, does not give orders. A chief can impose himself temporarily by dint of his competence when facing a problem the group encounters, in particular in wartime; but the one who wishes to transform his temporary authority into lasting power meets the community’s opposition: “in primitive society there’s a refusal of separate power, because that society, and not the chief, is the real seat of power” (Clastres 1974: 136). In other words, “it’s the society that exercises as such its power over the chief” (Clastres 1974: 176).¹³ Very concrete procedures are involved. The first principle of horizontality among the Yellow Vests is the sovereignty of the assemblies from which follow a large number of practical consequences. At Ponte, the original choice in favour of horizontality is constantly reviewed through conscious work. However, these collective efforts are not safe from incidents that may challenge it. Like in Clastres’s “primitive societies”, deliberately egalitarian forms of organization are easier to conceive of for small ensembles than for large-scale groups. Being large, the Yellow Vest assemblies and Ponte meetings devote considerable effort to prevent hierarchies from forming. The reflexivity regarding horizontality involves anticipating the means necessary for avoiding forms of power, hierarchy, and authority that are likely to appear and develop.

In very general terms, may one not say that in a seemingly paradoxical way the emancipation precedes the domination with the search to prevent it from establishing itself and rendering it inoperative in advance? For Clastres, it’s a question of intuition. One may also speak of anticipation:

¹³ I will not enter into a debate over the theses of Pierre Clastres which were discussed early on within the discipline of anthropology itself (see, for example, Descola 1988).

Everything happens as if these societies constituted their political sphere on the basis of an intuition that becomes with them a rule; namely that power is in essence coercion [...]. They chose to be themselves the founders, but in a way that only lets power appear as negativity immediately mastered (Clastres 1974: 40).

The ordinary practices are anticipatory measures taken to prevent power from taking hold. The forms of power are thus present, early and paradoxically, in the practices that seek to unseat it in advance and in those by which it is resisted.

In the footsteps of Pierre Clastres, the American anthropologist James C. Scott in his book *The Art of Not Being Governed* (Scott 2009) offers a portrait of Asian peoples who constantly and even now seek to elude the state by moving toward the mountains of Southeast Asia to continue and maintain horizontality in their social and political life. They are not the only ones to share traits with the peoples studied by Clastres, if one thinks of the Berbers, Tziganes, Cossacks, Chechens, Native Americans, and escaped slaves in the *quilombos*. Are not the public squares and roundabouts of the last decade the reinvention of such places to exercise liberty and direct democracy wrested from the tight mesh of the neoliberal city (Ciavolella 2013)? Kasbah, Tahrir, Taksim, Maidan, and many other public squares on every continent between 2011 and 2019 developed spontaneous encampments and became the site all at once of actions, meetings, deliberations, and life. With a unique local non-interchangeable character, these public squares anchored within territories the beginning of a global experiment in new forms of democratic legitimacy. Another consequence is that one can see an intersection between social protest and ecology in operation here. One obtains in this way a new conviviality not only from the pleasure of equality and contestation, but from the mastery of a relation between emancipation and domination.

8. Conclusion

The savage repression by status quo powers, even the most respectable such as in France, has no chance at preventing horizontality from affirming itself and strengthening at the same time a proven form of mature democracy – not seeking to destroy other forms such a representative democracy, but to weigh into the game as much as possible. Horizontality today reunites with a broad and ancient mode of social existence that was for long held in contempt when compared to the successes of hierarchies of the industrial era and the assurances they gave to those on top. The rejection of neoliberalism and the construction of alternative forms to capitalism find in horizontality a new basis and reason for hope which offers a chance for an expansion

of conviviality as a feature of territories of every scale and a mode of reflection about the future of the social.

One thing becomes certain based on the observations presented here. Horizontality cannot get by without active watchfulness. The experience of horizontality shows that it can constantly welcome expressions of various forms of authority – moral authority, knowledge, initiative, humour, age, etc. – except that of commanding. Horizontality cannot advance without the restraint of assertive behaviours and the acceptance of not being able to control everything. The rules that the Yellow Vests call for and those that Ponte promotes aim as much to affirm in practice a just and egalitarian horizontality as they do to reduce the reflexes very often tainted with machismo due to centuries and millennia of patriarchy. What's more, the responsibilities that come with them are only temporary and revocable (as the workers of the nineteenth century and the post-1968 moment proposed it).

Horizontality does not manifest itself as an absence of rules or structures. It is fated to have rules and structures that are carefully chosen so as not to lead to the reproduction of hierarchies and the crafty installation of permanent chiefs who reign unquestioned and unejectable. Horizontality now operates between forms and the informal, between the instituted and the non-instituted. The mindfulness that must necessarily be maintained makes it a constantly “instituting” process (Schaepelynck 2018).

The concept of conviviality was not used here in the sense of life conditions but rather in two other senses: that of moments of conviviality, those occurring in public squares, at roundabouts and apartment building courtyards during protest movements and uprisings; and that of collective practices such as at Ponte. They allow everyone to unite around collective acts, to get nourishment, to take care of each other, and to collaborate in arranging the immediate environment. These moments, which bear some relation to conditions in occupied factories in France in 1936 and 1968, are of much wider significance, however, than mere moments. They imprint a significance on the action itself, in this case an action that has a more or less accentuated rebellious character.

The other meaning consists in stating that the figures of horizontality developed in the movements and activities discussed above are alternative tools to address the imperatives of capitalism, exactly as Ivan Illich used to describe conviviality. Horizontality is a form of emancipation, and is maintained as such by its inventors and participants. As with the first sense, this meaning is not passive or purely descriptive. It's more about invoking a type of collective agency that encapsulates multiplicities and the various forms in which they are encountered.

Moreover, it is important to recall that horizontality does not directly proceed from a desire for conviviality. Even if it has an obvious effect on and through conviviality, it is, first of all, an anti-hierarchical practice. As such, horizontality does not have the same extension since, far from being always emancipatory, one encounters it, for example, in criminal contexts such as the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) in the São Paulo region (Feltran 2018; Gohn 2017).

Masses, crowds, and groups without chiefs are the complete opposite of chiefs without masses that one finds in today's authoritarianisms and populisms. Horizontality is held up by leaderless ensembles as a chance to rebuild a social bond that rejects the former self-evident character of hierarchy that was carried both by history and a dominant masculinity, by a frenzied race for profits, by behaviours leading to supposed "singing tomorrows", by language itself, by a still-heavy discourse within the social sciences. Horizontality calls for innovating in favour of egalitarian collective practices where people don't get lost but, on the contrary, find ways to construct their full personhood.

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