



# **Activism, strategies, and social structures The paradoxical future temporalities of neo-peasant community projects. For an anthropology of incoherence**

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## MANCEPT 2023 Workshop: Activism, strategies, and social structures

The paradoxical future temporalities of neo-peasant community projects.

For an anthropology of incoherence.

### Abstract :

Studying people's relationships to the future and how these shape emotional states (individual or collective) is useful for understanding what motivates social practices (Appadurai, 2013; Persoon and van Est, 2000; Pels, 2015; Bryant and Knight, 2019). In this paper, I propose to study how the collapse theories feed the imagination of some protagonists of the “back to the land” phenomenon. Based on long-term fieldwork among a dozen neo-farming collectives in the Massif Central (France), I will mobilise the paradigm of multiple temporalities and attempt to qualify the effects of this catastrophic and dystopian projection on the daily lives of its members.

These neo-peasant collectives are inspired by libertarian anarchism and settle in the French countryside since the end of Mai 68 to develop agricultural projects based on the mutualisation of property and tools of production. They set up practices of food self-sufficiency (market gardening, animal husbandry, processing of products) and deploy emancipatory practices linked to self-construction, mechanics, collective anti-authoritarian organisation, and are part of networks of initiatives that wish to be subversive of capitalism and the State (Pruvost, 2013; Sallustio, 2022).

I will argue that the projects aiming at rural withdrawal and food autonomy are part of a paradoxical “presentist” (Hartog, 2015) temporality that manifests itself in the existence of antinomic “temporal horizons” (Koselleck, 2016), both pessimistic and optimistic with regard to the future and the social struggle. Their refusal of great, coherent and linear narratives about social transformation and strategic universal struggle allow me to feed the reflections on human action and the relationship to the social and environmental crisis.

Indeed, studying how people relate to the future and how it shapes emotional states (individual or collective) is a way to grasp the configuration of the social world and to improve the understanding of the contemporary dialectic. The “back to the land” movement in France is indeed the manifestation of an abandon of strategic and long-term organised struggle. By favouring the “here and now” perspective for social transformation, they are confronted with the instability of their projects and choose to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016).

Based on this fieldwork, I will propose a broader epistemological discussion related to how anthropology has historically grasp incoherences and contradictions and, with a critique of the bias of homogenisation and ontologisation of the representation of time in anthropology, I will stand for the paradigm of the multiplicity of temporalities.

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