



INTERVIEW

Two Friends and a Camera: Foucault, Livrozet, and the Guerilla Art of Documentary Film

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INTERVIEW. An interview conducted by Perry Zurn with Nicolas Drolc on March 15, 2019, in Nancy, France. Nicolas Drolc is the director of *Sur les toits* (2014) and *La mort se mérite* (2017), two documentary films devoted to Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons (GIP) and Serge Livrozet, respectively. Nicolas is the son of Gérard Drolc, the photojournalist who covered the Nancy Prison Revolt in 1972, a resistance effort supported by Michel Foucault and the GIP. Nicolas is also the informally adopted grandson of former prisoner Serge Livrozet, a GIP member and the founder (with Foucault) of the GIP's successor: Comité d'action des prisonniers (CAP). Here, Nicolas discusses the process of making these films, the anti-capitalist, anarchist ethos behind his work, and the revolutionary character of friendship.

Perry Zurn: How did you get involved in renegade filmmaking?

Nicolas Drolc: When I was a kid, before the internet, I was fascinated with archival footage. Back then the only way to see it was in documentary films. That's how it all started. I said, "Well, I want to work with archival footage, so I'll have to make documentaries." When I was 18, I got in touch with a German independent film company, Slowboat Films. They were really into guerrilla filmmaking, shooting on a shoestring budget. That was really appealing to me. I thought, "This is the best way to tell a story." And then I met people who were actually doing it, and they said, "Just do it! Find an interesting topic and make a film. It's totally doable without much money, technical knowledge, infrastructure, or crew." And that's how I got started. I was already a film buff, into all kinds of films. But I knew that for me, it would be low-budget documentaries. That was the only way I could tell something worth telling. Of course, my story is also rooted in my family. My father was a photojournalist and my mother a radio journalist. So I had the image on one side, and the content on the other. And I thought, "What if I put the two together and start making films?"

PZ: Why are low-budget films so appealing to you?

ND: Well, I was exploring the possibility of making *Sur les toits* for television early on. I was pretty skeptical, though, because I don't really like television. I never really liked it. It's just people throwing films together to make a quick buck. I knew that freedom, real freedom, would be making films for cinema. In television, a big documentary is 52 minutes, for the stupid reason that you put 8 minutes of commercials at the end to make an hour. I'm not willing to do that. But the fact is, if you want to produce a documentary and you need funding, you get a TV channel to buy it. So for *Sur les toits*, I went to three television stations: a local one here in Nancy, another in Les Vosges, and a third in Paris (Planet Justice). I talked with the woman on the phone at Planet Justice. After my pitch, she said, "Oh hang on, I have a guy on the other line who's making a film about a surfer who puts his head in the mouths of crocodiles." And I thought, "This is not going to work." Everyone around me was convinced I was being pretty arrogant. They said, "Don't turn down the offer! People wait until they're 45 to get an opportunity like this." I was only 24 at the time.

But I knew that my idea for *Sur les toits* was a good one. And I thought, "They're going to take my idea and squeeze it and wash it until there's nothing good left. It'll be superficial." It just didn't work for me. I don't want anybody to decide for me what's interesting and what's not about my film. I knew that if I wanted to keep control of the film, I just had to do it on my own, and I had to do it for cinema. That let me make a 95 minute film. And to be honest, a guy like Serge Livrozet, who played a huge role in the Nancy Prison Revolt and on *Sur les toits*, can't be on TV. Not only does he say the poor have a legitimate right to steal from the rich (and you can't say that on TV), but he's an old guy with a speech impediment. They would have cut him.

So, I decided, "Fuck your TV. I'm going to make a low-budget documentary for cinema, and we'll see what happens. If cinema doesn't want it, that's fine. We'll do DVDs, we'll do the internet, we'll do whatever." I decided to make the film I wanted to make and not have people in a suit and tie tell me how to do it. The decision was not good for my career, but it was great for the film, because it allowed the film to really reach its potential. It's fucked up that the funding system for films is easy once you get a TV deal but really hard otherwise. If you do a documentary for cinema, hang on tight because you won't get much money. But that's the price of freedom.

PZ: And how did you get the idea for *Sur les toits*?

ND: I grew up here in Nancy, near the prison. Walking back and forth to school every day in junior high, I would pass Charles-III Prison. At 8am, noon, 2pm, and 5. Four times a day I would hear the prisoners yelling from the windows. I would see families come for visitation. But visiting hours were never long enough, so they would park the car in front of the prison and keep talking through the windows. I witnessed this. The prison was very present for me. In social history—or the "people's history" as Howard Zinn calls it—

the prison is everywhere. I was interested in prison like I was interested in punk rock, the Beat Generation, or other countercultural movements. So many of these topics lead right back to the prison. Given my interest in the history of social minorities, the prison would always be close to my heart. And I had read Livrozet's book, *De la prison à la révolte* when I was a rebel 16-year-old.¹ It was published by L'Ésprit Frappeur, which put out a lot of leftist anarchist books. So I was aware of these issues.

Then, in 2009, my father [Gérard Drolc] retired from the local newspaper and brought home photographs he had taken of the Nancy Prison Revolt. At the time, I was living in Belgium and eager to find a good idea for a film. And I thought, this is it! This is the good idea. And then I started doing research. I had heard the stories, but I asked my dad again, "So tell me about the prison riot thing. What happened exactly?" I tried doing research on the internet, but back then you couldn't find much about Nancy's prison. There was only Philippe Artières' work.² Reading that, I realized, "Wow, this was the epicenter of a movement. Someone needs to do this film." And it was the perfect film for me. Nancy is a small city. People from here pretty much stay here. Chances are that people in prison in 1972 are still around, so they might not be too hard to track down and interview. It might be relatively easy to get everything together to make the film. Pretty cheap, no travel costs, etc. So that's how it happened.

PZ: What did your dad think of the idea?

ND: He was ambivalent. Every parent wants their kid to achieve whatever they want to achieve. He knew it was going to be a hell of a project. He told me it was a great idea, but if it didn't work out it would be okay. And, of course, his position as the photographer was pretty special. He photographed the Nancy Prison Riot because it was his job that day. But for 40 years working as a local photojournalist, his job was not that interesting. As a kid, I remember him mostly covering football games. For him, photography was not an artistic profession. It was a job to feed the kids. So he said, "I don't want to be the highlight of this film, it was just my job that day. I was there and I went and I took pictures. Just like any photojournalist would have done." He didn't glory in it. He was skeptical about Artières' recent photobook about the riot,³ too. Not super enthusiastic about the whole thing. But then my film came out, and he was proud. "You did it!" he said. He was pretty impressed.

PZ: So the Nancy Prison Revolt captured your imagination. What did you find compelling about the GIP, the more you learned about it?

¹Serge Livrozet, *De la prison à la révolte* (1973). The book, for which Michel Foucault wrote the foreword, was then republished by L'Ésprit Frappeur.

²Philippe Artières, Laurent Quero, Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, eds., *Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons: Archives d'une lutte* (2003).

³Philippe Artières, ed., *La Révolte de la prison de Nancy: 15 Janvier 1972* (2013).

ND: It was a unique moment in history. You had the intellectual elite side-by-side with the perpetual underclass. Most of the people who participated in the Nancy Prison Revolt dropped out of school at age 14. So most of them had no idea what philosophy was. The word probably wasn't even part of their vocabulary. But these groups joined forces, they shared in a common goal, a common aspiration. That's really what fascinates me.

The more I dug into the story, the more I realized the revolt was not just a social movement on the inside, it was paired with a social movement on the outside. Contemporary French philosophers served as a credible relay. Guys like Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze – these were huge names. Of course, none of the prisoners knew who these guys were, their names didn't ring a bell, but they were cool about it. Okay, some Parisian guys are behind us, we like that.

Of course, it is important to distinguish between the GIP and the prisoners. The GIP needed the prisoners to give credibility to their movements. And the prisoners needed a relay system to give credibility to their movements as well. So there was a fascinating conjunction of common interests that made the whole thing work. And that's probably what's missing in contemporary social movements like *Gilets Jaunes*.⁴ Where are the Michel Foucault's, the supportive intellectuals in this crisis? It's probably the same in the US with the protests in Black communities and all that. You need an outside support system, a credibility relay. And that's what they had with the prison riots.

PZ: So, you read Livrozet's book when you were 16. When did you read Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*?

ND: I read *Discipline and Punish* right in the middle of producing *Sur les toits*. In high school, I did a year of philosophy, but we didn't talk about Foucault. And I chose not to pursue higher education. I did study some cinematography at the University of Metz, but we never read Foucault there. So it's something I had to learn on my own. I thought, "I've gotta read that book! Sounds like it's filled with stuff for the story." I read it with a pad of paper beside me, taking notes like I was a real philosophy student.

PZ: How would you compare the two books? *Discipline and Punish* and *De la prison à la révolte*?

ND: They are totally different. One book was written by a professor. One book was written by a guy who dropped out of school at age 14 and started educating himself in prison. Their backgrounds couldn't be more diverse. Foucault's book takes a historical perspective. It puts discipline and punishment back into historical context, from the Middle Ages to the present. Livrozet's book is just one guy's experience, but an experience that is relevant to so many other issues. It asks for the first time, "What if it's not some bad

⁴Gilets Jaunes [Yellow Vests] was a workers' movement for economic justice that swept France from October 2018 through Summer 2019. Jackie Hoffman, one of the prisoners to participate in the Nancy Prison Revolt of 1972, was also quite active in the Gilets Jaunes.

chromosome that makes a guy a criminal?" If society manufactures consent,⁵ as Noam Chomsky argues, what if society also manufactures delinquency?

That's Livrozet's idea. It's pretty provocative. Society gets what it deserves. It generates social hierarchies, and then it creates the need to fight over the crumbs of social success. If there's stuff I want and can't afford, at some point I'm going to get it, one way or another. This is down to earth stuff, but it was pretty new back then, and that's what Foucault really liked. Livrozet's book also insists that we break from the prison mentality. He says, let's take another look, let's go behind the materiality of the prison itself. Let's ask why some people tend to become delinquent and others don't. Why are 95% of people in prison poor? These questions might seem really elementary, but that's what Foucault liked about them. Let's go back and figure out why capitalist society needs prison as a tool to suppress revolt. Delinquency is a form of revolt. I don't want to eat soup for the rest of my life while other people eat caviar. Why can't I eat caviar too? We're two human beings, we're supposed to eat the same thing.

PZ: What was it like to track down former prisoners in Nancy for the film?

ND: The process took a while to get started. First, I did a lot of research. I went to IMEC and the Departmental Archive here in Nancy.⁶ I got the names of the ringleaders from Artières' book and from newspapers at the time. In the Nancy archives, there were police records, including a report of the prison riot. It was a 12- or 14-page document, recording the results of the police investigation. Everything that happened that day. 6:30 am blah blah blah, at coffee time this happened, then that guy opened that door, and then this guy was seen on the roof with that guy, etc. At the end, there was a list of a dozen or so names with dates of birth, parents' names, known professions, current addresses, etc. It was a gold mine. I stole the whole thing, took it home, and worked with it.

I looked the names up in a phonebook. I called a guy named Richard Bauer. I saw he was living in one of the largest suburbs on the outskirts of Nancy, so it might be the right guy. I picked up the phone and I said, "Richard Bauer? January 15, 1972, does that date ring a bell?" And the guy was like, "Yeah, the riots, Charles-III, I was there, I was one of the last guys on the roof, who are you?" I said, "I'm Nicolas Drolc. I'm 24 and I want to make a film about it." He said, "Great, let's get some food, let's talk." So I went to his place. He said, "You have to talk to Jacky Hoffman, too. Do you know him?" I said, "Only by name." He said, "I can put you in touch." So he put me in touch with Hoffman. I went to coffee with him, and he said, "I'd love to talk about it. I was tried as the ringleader of the whole thing." He was proud of that. And then he said, "There's my buddy Roberto. I'm having a party with him on Saturday. He was there too. Do you want me to call him up, so you can interview him?" And I said, "Yeah, sure, call Roberto." That's how it went.

⁵ Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (2002).

⁶ The Institute Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine (IMEC) is an archive located in L'Abbaye d'Ardenne, just outside of Caen, France. At the time, it housed the GIP archive and much of the Foucault archive.

The guard had a different story. I placed an ad in the local newspaper saying I was making a film and looking for records. If anybody shot the riots on Super-8⁷ or something like that, I'd be interested in having a look. Someone contacted the newspaper saying, "I was a guard at Toul Prison back then, and I'd like to meet the guy making the film and tell him my story." The newspaper gave me his contact info, and I went and did an interview. In a sense, it was random to have a guard in the film. But it was also important. I got a lot of heat for it from the super radical anti-prison movement in France. They all loved the film, but they didn't like that I included a guard. I thought that was dumb. If you make a film about the Shoah, you talk with ex-SS officers. If you make a film about prison, you need to have the guard's point of view. After all, in the prison system, the guards and the prisoners are at some level the same. They all come from the poor underclass. At some point, a guy says, "Okay, it's a shitty job, but it's a job for someone with no qualifications," and he takes it. But he comes from the same social class as the prisoners he supervises (and represses). And that's the issue. Prisoners hate guards, but it's not the guards that make the prison what it is. It's the people in power who pit the poor against each other, so they don't really see what's happening further up the chain. The guard I interviewed told me a story about how one day a couple [of] newly convicted guys at Toul Prison saw him and said, "Hey, we worked together at the same breeze blocks factory a few years ago!" He said, "Sure enough," and shared his tobacco stash with them.

I contacted Daniel Defert. He obviously had to be in the film to tell the story of the GIP. While there were other possibilities, he seemed like the best character. I gave him a call. He said, "Yeah come to 285 Vaugirard," so I did. The same thing happened with the lawyer Henri LeClerc. "Of course I remember! The Nancy trial was one of the most important trials of my career. I'd love to talk about it." So we did. The last guy I interviewed on the film was Livrozet. Prisoner, writer, intellectual. He merged all the worlds. And I needed someone to synthesize what I was saying. Most prisoners at Nancy didn't go as far as Livrozet went. They would have protested simply for better living conditions, but they may not have been willing to do what the CAP did afterwards, which was question the whole system. Livrozet went farther. And he was brutally honest. We got in touch and he said, "Yeah, I can talk about this, but it's not going to be a pretty story." And I said, "I want to listen to that. I want to hear you out."

It was a provocative way to conclude the film. The story of the prison riots is not just: everything was terrible, they got up on the roofs, they won heat for the winter, and the right to read newspapers, and then everything was cool. It's not that simple. The film ends with the theme of failure. As Livrozet put it, "In 1972, there were 35,000 prisoners in France. In 2015, 80,000 (more than double). So yeah, the Nancy prisoners may have won heat that winter, but the fact is there are more prisoners now than ever before. It's the same in the States. The numbers just keep going up, and up, and up. Our goal was to make the prisons empty, but they have never been so full."

⁷ The Super 8mm camera was first manufactured in 1965 by Kodak.

PZ: The theme of failure comes up in both of your films. Do you agree with Livrozet that the GIP was a failure? Or do you find that it was successful in certain ways?

ND: It's a lot like all the other emancipation movements of the late '60s and early '70s. They were radical movements, but society has since been depoliticized. You could tell the same story about the women's liberation movement. They won abortion rights, and then two years ago you have people protesting it. Or you have the FHAR⁸ in the '70s and then in 2010 people are protesting against gay marriage. This is absurd. There is a weird regression in terms of rights and freedoms for everyone. The prison is no exception. I think society was more politically aware and people were more politically evolved in the '60s and '70s than they are today. In that sense, the GIP was a failure.

But it wasn't a complete failure. Without the Nancy Prison Riot, without the GIP, without the CAP, there would be no abolition of the death penalty in France in 1981. And that's huge. When Livrozet talks about this, he gets tears in his eyes. When the CAP first demonstrated against the death penalty in 1976, advocating that even murderers not be executed, Livrozet recalls, "People looked at us like we were crazy." Now everybody thinks it's great we abolished the death penalty. On a human level, this seems like obvious progress. So the GIP had some concrete results. It was a success. What really hasn't changed, though, is people's sense that prison is legitimate. People believe that now more than ever. If a crime is committed, a person has to pay. They're stuck in the mindset that, "If a guy does something bad, he should go to fucking prison." This is absurd. If I was to have a kid and my kid was murdered, the fact that some guy would spend 30 shitty years in prison doesn't bring my dead kid back. People need to grow out of this vengeance. I really consider it archaic. But public opinion doesn't really evolve. When I say, "Prison is medieval," most people look at me like I'm a freak.

PZ: How did your filmmaking grow or change in the second film, *La mort se mérite*?

ND: In *Sur les toits*, I really liked protocol, we had to do things correctly. I needed friends to help me with the camera. I needed a guy with a boom and all that. With the Livrozet film, I made a bet. In order to get the level of intimacy I wanted, I had to be alone with him 95% of the time. To get that quality of relationship with him, I had to kill part of the technical quality of the film. I would have to do more with less. The lack of technical sophistication in the film, the poor sound quality, the poor image quality, the shaky cameras and stuff turned into a style; something a bit like Cinéma Vérité.⁹ Fuck the technique, we just want to bring the cameras out into the street and shoot in Super 8, amateur-style. The fact that it was technically cheap would ultimately bring more value to the film. At first, I

⁸The Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire (FHAR) was a French gay liberation movement of the early '70s.

⁹Cinéma Vérité was a French film movement in the 1960s emphasizing natural actions and authentic dialogue.

was pulling my hair out because I kept thinking, "This is not well shot, this is out of focus." But I had to say, "Fuck all of that. The whole film is going to look hand-made."

And I really don't regret that. Just let the camera roll. The level of intimacy that provided was worth it. But that made it complicated to shoot and really complicated to edit. By contrast, *Sur les toits* was fully scripted. I wrote the whole film out before shooting it. I knew that it would develop chronologically from the *enquêtes* at Toul, through the trial at Nancy, and then end with the GIP's denouement. The film would scroll logically, from one chapter to the next. But with Livrozet, nothing was scripted. It is a digressive film. There's nothing written. I just had a notebook where I wrote down a couple themes like prison, writing, anarchy, women, getting old, Nice. I circled what I thought I could connect. And then I tried to merge everything, without really knowing how.

It was very much improvised. I would say, "Okay, now we're going to talk about Foucault. Now we're going to buy some cheese and we'll shoot you buying cheese. And then we're going to walk by the seaside and shoot some stuff." The film doesn't have a straight narrative. It moves in every direction. It's a weird way to make a film. Totally unscripted, totally improvised. Everything gets built in the editing process, and that's tricky. I tried it many, many different ways. This is working, this is not working. It was only scripted through the editing, which is how I think documentary films should be. You are dealing with reality, and, in reality, it's not clear what is going to happen. That's definitely not how they tell you to make films. In film school, they say, "You script the thing and then you raise money for it." We didn't do that at all for Livrozet.

I never even really decided to make the film in the first place. I finished *Sur les toits* and was kind of frustrated that Livrozet only got to talk for 10 minutes. "That guy. I could do a whole film about him," I thought. A lot of people told me I was crazy. After *Sur les toits*, we stayed in touch. He called me up not long afterwards and said, "I really enjoyed the interview we did. It was great. Come back to Nice whenever you feel like it. You can stay at my place. I'd be happy to have you here." So I went to Nice two or three times. Time flies by, and it's December 2015, just before Christmas. I'm at IMEC, and I get a call from Livrozet. He says, "I'm dying." I say, "What?" And he says, "My health is getting really bad and I'm probably going to die."

He got an operation in Monaco. Three days after that, I was in Nice. "I have to go there with a camera," I thought, "even if he talks for only half an hour and then he's dead, I would at least have shot that." I didn't even give him a heads up, "Hey, I'm going to film you." I thought maybe he wouldn't make it another a month. That's how we got started. Just filming one or two sequences in December. Then in March I said, "Can I come back? There is more stuff I want to film." It just fell into my hands like that. That was four years ago. I don't even think he knew, in the process, what it would become. When we finished the film and the surgery was over, he said, "Well look at that. Now you'll show it?" But that's what makes the film what it is. You don't watch it and think, "This guy's a serious filmmaker." It's just two friends and a camera.

PZ: In the film, Livrozet says you share the same social and political ideas. Do you agree?

ND: Absolutely. Here's the thing. When there is one cake and four people sitting around the table, we should split the cake into equal parts. Not have one guy eat 2/3rds of the cake and leave 10 guys with the crumbs. What's really fascinating about Livrozet is he's not all talk. In the '80s, he started a publishing company called *Lettres Libres*. At its peak, he had six employees, and his salary was the same as the cleaning guy's. That's a real anarchist idea. From each according to his ability, to each according to his need. That's what we believe. We believe that there's nothing that justifies one human being eating more than another just because he has a better job, because he got a university education, because he grew up in a family with better housing. The boss I have now makes 3000 bucks a month, while the secretary makes 1000. We believe that's not fair.

We share a lot of the same traditional anarchist ideas. We don't believe in the leading political class. We believe in people organizing themselves. We are also both strongly anticlerical. We see religions as the root of all evil. People might think Livrozet was anticlerical because his mother was a prostitute. But she was also a Catholic, so he went to Catholic school in Avignon, where he had to pray on his knees as a kid. As he recalls, "When I was six years old, they told me the Holy Trinity is a mystery, and I should believe without understanding it. At that point, I knew, these people don't want me to think." If you're supposed to believe in something without understanding it, that's the opposite of rationality, reflection, intelligence. You're supposed to just accept something blindly.

PZ: What was it like living with Livrozet while you shot the film?

ND: Sharing his life today as an 80-year-old solitary guy, going through his world. Sharing his past life as an activist, going through the stories he tells, surrounded everywhere by his books and his archives. You're really soaking in the past because it's all around you. He has boxes of letters between him and Foucault. And at the same time, you're soaking in what it is for him to be where he is now. For me, it's like having a grandfather. I lost my own grandfather when I was pretty young, never really had one. When I go see Livrozet, it's like going to my family, my second family. I have a room there. "This is Nicolas' room," he says. It's not just talking about Foucault, it's talking about cinema, cooking together, doing things friends do together. Eating, drinking, watching *Terminator* and *Mad Max*. When the new *Mad Max* came out, he bought the DVD and asked, "Have you seen this one?" I said "No, I missed it." He said, "Okay, we'll watch it together." So we watched it together, then we talked about Foucault for an hour and went to bed.

And it's always emotional because he's a super emotional guy. There's always a point where he talks about his wife who passed away in 2004. There's always a point where he talks about Foucault. He goes deep. It's paradoxical, too, because we end up being disappointed together by our fellow human beings. We're convinced that 90% of people on Earth are doing everything wrong. But then we also find ourselves being super hopeful about the humanity we see in certain people. I think we are two sensitive souls and we are impressed by humans who have that same sensitivity. Sometimes that means we're

super hopeful for humanity, but then we remember that 90% of people just want to watch the football game.

PZ: Why do you think Foucault and Livrozet got along? What was the heart of their friendship?

ND: Well, I would say the heart of their friendship was political. When Foucault started the GIP, I think he dreamed of finding a guy like Livrozet. And when Livrozet was in prison, I think he dreamed of finding a guy like Foucault. They started writing to each other when Livrozet was in Melun Prison. It was like a big printing plant, and the prisoners did the print work. Livrozet organized a strike, heard about the GIP, and started corresponding with Foucault. When he got out (he's told me this story a thousand times), he just went to a phone booth, called Foucault, and said, "This is Serge Livrozet, I'm out now." And Foucault said, "You're out? Okay, great, come to my place. We need to talk." And that's how they became friends. Foucault was super enthusiastic about meeting a prisoner who shared his ideas and probably thought, "This is the guy I've been waiting for." Livrozet probably thought the same thing. Livrozet said he met a lot of these guys (e.g., Deleuze, Guattari, etc.) but they were not his friends. Foucault and Livrozet became friends, real friends. It was more than a work relationship. They just got along super well. They would do friend stuff together. Go to restaurants. One day, Foucault had a problem with his washing machine. He called up Livrozet and said, "Hey, want to come over and help fix my washing machine?" Things like that. They helped each other out in a lot of ways. It was a mutual relationship.

PZ: The Livrozet film has a poetic character, and it is laced with literary quotes. Why?

ND: In a way, the film is really about a writer and about literature. Before he became a political activist, Livrozet wanted to be a writer. Sure his mother was a prostitute, and he dropped out of school and became a plumber, but he always aspired to be a writer. And he did, society be damned. I really wanted the film to represent him as he is, a man of literature. So I thought it would be good to have passages from great literature in the film. I picked quotes from people I like, but also from people Livrozet likes. The first line in the film is from Alfred de Vigny: "The man of the people is necessarily either resigned or in revolt." That sums up everything about Livrozet. It also opens *De la prison à la révolte*. The last line in the film is from Jack Kerouac. "My whole wretched life swam before my weary eyes, and I realized no matter what you do it's bound to be a waste of time in the end so you might as well go mad." That's the insignificance of life.

PZ: What do you mean by the insignificance of life?

ND: Right at the beginning of the film, I have several sentences scroll across the screen. In English it's something like, "How long is history? The earth is a billion years old, and then

you have 5000 years of human civilization. The significance of a life that lasts for 80 or maybe 100 years is just miniscule." This is a Shakespearean moment, inviting us to remember that as much importance as we like to give ourselves, one person's life is nothing in the scale of history. It's insignificant. That's an important lesson. A lot of people say, "Not true! Everyone is capable of doing many things." But I think it's good to keep in mind that people have been trying to do many things for many, many, many years. Each of us is relatively unimportant. We are ships, briefly wandering the universe.

It's a good approach because it forces you to have a lot of humility. Don't take yourself too seriously. Don't think you're going to reinvent the wheel. Keep it modest, you know? What Livrozet tried to do, lots of anarchists have tried to do, whether in the Ukraine, in Spain, or in the US. I'm thinking about Emma Goldman here.¹⁰ You have to put your actions and your life in perspective. That doesn't mean you shouldn't do anything, but you should keep in mind the potential insignificance of everything. That's the great philosophical lesson. It doesn't mean you shouldn't do anything. But you should always keep in mind the relative insignificance of everything you do.

PZ: What keeps you going?

ND: I was thinking about that recently. It's getting harder and harder to find the energy to do everything. With the first film, you are just running around all the time. You rush boldly through every door. But after a while it gets kind of tiring. Filmmaking is really a hypocrite's profession. It's 95% bullshit. Scheduling things, getting people together, doing the communications, the advertising, getting the film screenings, etc. Most of it is not super sexy or super interesting. But it has to get done. You just have to keep thinking, "Well, at the end, it's going to be a good film. It's not going to look like anything else, and people involved in the process are going to be happy." That's what keeps me going. It's also intellectually stimulating. For me, *Sur les toits* was my thesis. If I could go back and do it again, I would. I wouldn't change a thing. But it's not a job for lazy asses, that's for sure.

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¹⁰ Emma Goldman (1869-1940) was an important anarchist political activist and writer in the US.

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