02 2019

The Molecular-Feminist Strike

Sublimity and Now-Time in Machinic Capitalism

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> “The ability to make of this moment a total modification of life” can be the motto, the image, that exemplifies what happened on March 8, 2017, with the global women’s strike. The line of time was suddenly bent, and the linear and progressive chain of events—or, we should say, the regressive chain in this era of barbarism—was broken and in an instant, in *that* instant, flashed a revolutionary spark. Drawing on all the past struggles and resistances of women, this spark sought its own redemption in the creative imprudence of the present action.”
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> Marina Montanelli, “The Unforeseen Subject of the Feminist Strike”

I.

In the last few decades, violence against women* has been escalating into a "war on women," as Rita Laura Segato calls it: all kinds of structural and sexual violence, including feminicide, brutal discursive tendencies of misogyny and transphobia, the devaluation

of care and reproduction, and "anti-genderism". Since 2017, a movement has spread outwards from Latin America that builds on the 8th of March, the day of women's struggle, as the turning and boiling point of an intersectional and transversal struggle. "This is the gain of the strike as a political transnational feminist instrument open to a multitude of actors, not only to women*, but also to precarious and migrant workers," writes Isabell Lorey in her foreword to the German version of the book *8M. Der große feministische Streik*.

What's enormous is not only the number of participants in the strike - in Spain there were over five million in 2018. The feminist strike is also an example of current struggles beyond measure, of sublimity. Beyond the limits of measurement, below the threshold of measurability, and at the same time above. Smaller and bigger than linear time allows.

II.

The sublime is the terrain of a temporality that machinically takes us into service, at the same time prompting us to think non-subservience in a new and machinic way. In the Kantian mathematically sublime, magnitude is impelled beyond every form, all the way to the threshold of deformation, formlessness, the dissolution of space and shape. Yet it is the other dimension of the sublime that interests us far more today – time and its measurement, temporal measuring and becoming immeasurable, as this is taken to an extreme in a new way in machinic capitalism. It is not an empty spatial form, an empty measure that is created, filled and disciplined; rather, time is expanded, impelled beyond its boundaries, a wholly new, immeasurable and immeasurablely measured time. Far from dissolving the old asymmetries of gender

and racialization in its smoothness, machinic sub-limination drives them into the infinitely small and infinitely big.

And yet, machinic non-subservience, non-compliance, monstrosity do emerge – not as a heroic break with full space, limited shapes and beautiful form, but rather as a lasting, repeated and recurrent, queer-feminist breach in the abundance of measured and immeasurable time.

III.

Machinic capitalism goes hand in hand with a double form of modulation: modulation as measure, measurement, subdivision and standardization, as *modularizing*, but also modulation as immeasurableness, endlessly deforming, *modulating*. Impelling time beyond its boundaries in all directions is the sublime aspect of modulation: increasingly compartmentalized striations of time, measuring smaller and smaller parts, endlessly shrinking measures, but also and especially breaking through the measure all the way to the immeasurable valorization and smoothing of time.

In the midst of double modulation machinic modes of subjectivation arise that increasingly generate subservience: compliant subjects of self-government ready to an extreme degree to striate and smooth themselves and their times. And it is the same compliant subjects who constitute the machinic assemblage, through their compliancy placing machinic subservience next to social subjugation.

IV.

The Benjaminian now-time loads the past, it charges the past, it fulfills the writing of its history, its stories. Yet the sublime is not simply – as Badiou says about the two-hundred-year-old Wagner – the solemn declaration that something has passed and something new, unknown begins, in a clean separation between the past and the future, but rather the expansion of the present in the folding of this linear notion of time.

So this time it is not purely a problem for the history of philosophy – or rather, it was never purely such. It is not only the subsumption of the sublime event into the course of history forced into linearity that must be broken open with tiger's leaps into the past. It is the measuring/measureless grasp of machinic capitalism, its instrumentalization of measuring endlessly small magnitudes and of immeasurableness into a boundless magnitude that requires a tiger's leap. Now, however, it is a tiger's leap in one place. The leap is a rupture of machinic-capitalist time, it establishes the urgency of re-inventing in the machinically expanded present. This new tiger's leap is intended to remind us about the genealogies of past struggles and to explode the continuum of history, and with it above all the machinic present, in order to newly and repeatedly detonate the "splinters of messianic time".

V.

Exactly the terrain of the immeasurable present is the terrain in which subservience can be transformed into non-subservience with the same machinic weapons. The time of this transformation is now-time, its pure means is the feminist-molecular strike: not a holiday strike that merely modifies the conditions of subjugation and subservience, and also not a strike leading from one nation-state to another, from one legal order to another, from one

subjugation to another. A strike that permeates the molecules of machinic sociality and interrupts, overthrows, reverses the immeasurable time of machinic capitalism. No longer acting in such a way, no longer governing oneself in such a way, suspending subservient action, halting subservient deterritorialization, at the same time beginning anew, no longer subservient reterritorialization of smooth time.

The feminist-molecular strike is a pure means. It is not a means to the end of achieving certain demands, but rather a means beyond any demands, ends, purposes. It addresses neither the agents of economic machines nor the administrators of state apparatuses. It applies no extortive violence, violence as a means to an end, such as the end of only modifying temporal arrangements. As pure means and rampant middle, it does not draw a straight line from a bad past to a promising future, but rather about a completely different chronology, a different way of living in present becoming – with Walter Benjamin's words in "Critique of Violence": "an upheaval that this kind of strike not only occasions, but indeed carries out." It is not *after* a major event, after a sublime moment, after a unique break that the change of working and living conditions comes. This strike already *is* the change, the constituent power, the breach; it *carries out* the break, rather than just occasioning it.

The feminist-molecular strike is not legislative, but is instead, at the same time, destituent, instituent, and constituent. It decomposes the existing order of time, posits manifold beginnings, and creates new monstrous compositions. The social movements of recent decades centered around the *space* of occupation. Now it is about a queer-feminist experimenting with economies of time. This strike is sublime, not because it results in a heroic capture of space, but because when it is being carried out, new experiences of

temporality emerge, and when it recurs, it brings about monstrous modes of non-subservience.

VI.

Molecular is the strike that affects the pores, the molecules of everyday life, as an everyday epiphany, breaking in and breaking with subservience in machinic capitalism, as an immanent-messianic now-time. But at the same time, like Veronica Gago writes in *8M. The big feminist strike*, the strike is not constituted just as an event, but as a process: "This means concretely producing the time of the strike as a time of organization, of conversation, of building a common web, of coordination in assembly, of bringing subjectivations into play that elaborate a new type of radicality."The molecular-feminist strike is not a single moment, which is first anticipated and then only documented and reflected - it is the chain of meetings, actions, assemblages of affects, images and texts that escalates into the everyday life of those involved and even those not directly involved. Based on the concept of day of women's struggle, 8th March, this present expands in all directions. "The strike then disrupts its own temporality as a “date.” It began to be imagined – in the imagination to navigate such close walls – in the maquila, it continued in houses, it transpired in assemblies, it was discussed in unions and community soup kitchens, it became a collective breath in the streets, but it had been brewing since times of sabotage folded in ancient memories."

Foldings and floodings of time: The molecular-feminist strike is a whirling and disruptive movement, in memory of Rosa Luxemburg's image of the mass strike as multiply bubbling and re-seeping into the ground, as an ocean wave, which “is divided into an enormous network of narrow streams; now it springs forth from

the depths like a fresh spring, now it sinks completely into the earth [...] all of this flows chaotically, it disperses, it intersects, it overflows ..."

This text will be published in Swiss Psychotropic Gold, molecular refinery!, *ed.: knowbotiq, Nina Bandi, Zürich/Berlin 2019. My thanks go to the reading group "8M. la constelación feminista", February 2019 in Casa Azul, Málaga.*

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