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Technecologies

Milieus, Midstreams, Subsistential Territories

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In 1992, shortly before his death, Félix Guattari wrote: “Most older methods of communication, reflection and dialogue have dissolved in favor of an individualism and a solitude that are often synonymous with anxiety and neurosis. It is for this reason, that I advocate - under the aegis of a new conjunction of environmental

ecology, social ecology and mental ecology - the invention of new collective assemblages of enunciation [...]. Similarly, intelligence and sensibility have undergone a total mutation as a result of new computer technology, which has increasingly insinuated itself into the motivating forces of sensibility, acts, and intelligence. We are currently witnessing a mutation of subjectivity that perhaps surpasses the invention of writing, or the printing press, in importance."[1]

A radical mutation of subjectivity that accompanies the proliferation of new informatic machines – 26 years after the publication of Félix Guattari's final text the magnitude of this technopolitical mutation in its monstruous multiple meaning between authoritarian truth production, micro-fascisms, and new modes of subjectivation is recognizable in new form. Fake news, alternative facts, *Lügenpresse*, post-facticity, post-truth – the amalgam of old boulevard media and newer "social media" appears to establish a new formation of technologies of hatred and agitation. And precisely in this fatal situation it also applies, completely in a Guattarian sense: whenever a new techno-dispositive is set in motion, affective and revolutionary machines concatenate with it, there occurs an intensification of desires on all imaginable and unimaginable levels. Romances in unexpected constellations, new forms of affection, unheard collective assemblages of expression, institutings of a non-fascist life. Technecology.

Guattari's three ecologies,[2] the environment, the *socius*, and the mentalities, are not intertwined with techno-dispositives in such a way that a fourth could simply be added to the three. It is much more an integral concatenation of technical dispositives and desiring machines, which cannot be reduced to questions of the usability and innovative use of new media and technologies: the

alter-globalization movement used text messages to spread the word about protests, and it used the internet to broadly organize apart from mass media, yet at the same time throughout this use a surplus of desire manifested that could not be explained only by technical utility. The Iranian Green Revolution agitated successfully with smart phones and YouTube to circumvent the censorship of mass media, and here too the fascination of the new gadgets combined with desiring machines that would be uncontrollable over time. The "Arab Spring" did not become known as the Facebook Revolution because it was another marketing gag of the monopolist or because Facebook is simply a powerful technical tool, but because as a trigger at the time it entailed a monstruous bundling of desires. And Twitter is ultimately not necessarily the name of a vehicle for the whimsical messages of people like Donald Trump, it is also one of the technical dispositives behind, below, and around the current Spanish movements from 15M to the municipalisms.[3]

1. Where is midstream? Where does the current flow that goes through the middle?

"The middle is raging, because in it things pick up speed, a stream overflowing in all directions, the opposite of regulated mainstream, mediocrity and mediation. The middle is not simply along the way between a beginning and an end; linearity and myths of origins are sucked into its maelstroms." One of us wrote these lines and they are not entirely false. But they do create an ambiguity that occurs first by way of translation from French into German. Gabriele Ricke and Ronald Voullié shaped the German reception of the famous end of the rhizome plateau in *A Thousand Plateaus* by translating 'milieu' as *Mitte*.[4] And this translation, too, is not false, but in German *Mitte* carries the sense of a concrete place

much more than *milieu*. Precisely this tendency to determine its place harbors the problem of the translation as *Mitte*.

The milieu is no center, no core, no middle point, and it is also no middle between two points. At the same time, however, it is not simply on the edges, as peripheral, ephemeral opponent to the center. The milieu cannot be fixed, the question of its spatial determination goes nowhere. The milieu is a diffuse terrain, surround, ambit, swimming, pulsing, flowing ecology, not fixable to a certain, separated realm. And it is in no way a repetition of the central figure of Western thought, which consists in *medi*ation as taming, as satisfying mixture and integration of the other in the self, violent unification or self-governing adaption to a given unity. The milieu is no mediating, pacifying figure, it is dangerous, a simultaneously raging and halting stream, strewing over its shores and simultaneously washing them out – *midstream*.

2. The subsistential territory as milieu

Rather than possessing it, we are possessed by it, and we are possessed by its spirits, its rhythms, its dreadful haltings, its sweeping flow: the subsistential territory is milieu, insofar as it brings forth an ecology of the surround and its things, an ecology of the social machines, and an ecology of the mentalities that inhabit it. For example, Lagunillas: the subsistential territory of Lagunillas moves with the people who walk through its streets every day – residents of Málaga on their way into the city and out of it, tourists on the prowl for photos of street art, propane tank transporters, dog owners, meandering flaneurs; with the gulls who draw their lines in the air over the same streets, when they are not hunting down pigeons crossways in wild flight, with the architectures, in part preserved with love, in part surrendered to

decay and threatened by demolition, with the empty lots that wait for their speculators, with the inconspicuous plazas where people meet without needing to consume, with the mixture of the various social machines that convene in Enrique's bar, in the Frutería Celia, or in the Salon Mounir, with the spontaneous performances of its transversal intellect. And it also moves with the spirits of the lagoons on which it is built, spirits of the Arab cemetery on which it stands, spirits of the Reconquista, the victory of which gave the nearby Calle Victoria its name, spirits of those displaced by rising real estate prices and those who in the days of the junkies opted to move to better areas, spirits of Francoism, more alive than dead. As Walter Benjamin suggests there is a meeting between the genders that have been and our own: in the voices to which we grant a listening ear here and now, there is an echo of those who have long been muted, it streaks us with a breeze of the air that was among those of before.[5]

Dividual lines through time and space. The subsistential territory is a manifold ecology. *sub* in the sense of near something, immediately around something, sometimes covered, hidden behind something; *subsisting* in the sense of insisting, persisting, resisting underground, in the background; *subsistential* in the sense of becoming, mutually shaping, condividual, never fixed in being, never locked in an individual existence. The territory is the milieu in which humans, things, socialities exist not through blood and soil and being born or through property and law and individuality, but rather subsist through their singular subsistence. Subsistential is the territory, because it erodes the strongholds and grooves of every state apparatus, its logic of property, law, and individuality; and at the same time every totalizing closure in stable communities.

The subsistential territory is a territory of care. Subsistence here does not mean reduction to an economy of needs that arises from lack, but a queer-feminist ecology of care. The ecology of care means for the subsistential territory that caring sociality is produced and preserved in it. Preserving the subsistential territory does not mean keeping it the same forever, conserving, it means caring for the social machines, the mental machines, the thing machines and to care with them, to insist on their care, to make them persistent, to become persistent with them. Not only for each and every the one and the same, but in an asymmetrical way all that is subsisting cares differently for its specific subsistence. And at the same time the subsistings and their subsistences are mutually shaping, they conform to one another and open up dividual lines that cross through the milieu: building machines, mixing machines, guitars and wash machines, and the mixings of their sounds, ritornelli of the surround and the reterritorialization, life rhythms, siesta calms, bird sounds, spirit traces, singular encounters, streams of gestures, deep conversations in the middle of the buzz of activity, affections of all kinds.

Urban planning technocrats and investment scouts greedily grasp for every piece of this manifold ecology, for the inconceivable milieu of Lagunillas. They want to extend the center. They want to iron out the streets and build pedestrian zones. They want to include the residents. They want to develop a model district. But the subsistential territory is no object that can be screened onto the map of urban planning, an asset to which valorization, added value can be attached. Pseudo-participation, extending the center of access, the creatives as colonizing vanguard and lubricant of gentrification. The grid striates the city, valorization smoothes its streakings, but they never reach the subsistential territory. That has already long had its mixed zones of acceleration and deceleration, of

walking and the diverse motorized movements, of encounter and passing by. And it is monstrous and dangerous because it is also precarious and endangered. It is nothing but a fleeting ritornello, which in its repetitions, in its heterogeneous modes of reterritorialization and deterritorialization constantly drafts and differentiates the territory anew. It is a fleeting ritornello of the flows, the breaks, the deterritorialization, but it also carries earth, the *terra* of territory and the objective earth, and below it the water of the old lagoon, returning gushes of the *tromba*, and above it the empire of birds.

3. More milieus

But how does the territory evade localism, the closure through property, individualism, and legalism? How can concrete machines of milieus prevent separating themselves from the abstract machines that emerged together with them and are always in emergence? In the urban meshwork of contemporary Spain a first answer to these questions lies in reference to the spreading municipalisms. Barcelona en Comú, Ahora Madrid, Málaga Ahora, and many others have arisen in urban contexts not simply for pragmatic reasons, as an emergency solution to take over small state apparatuses, maneageable mini states, as the national scale would be too large. The size is important, but this is particularly the case because precisely at the scale of the city there is a chance to not simply take over the institutional apparatus but to change it, to set in motion instituent and constituent processes that place the form of institution itself in question and open for experiment.[6]

The concrete municipalist machines are reaching into the city apparatuses, they are trying to reconstruct them, they are trying to change the modes of subjectivation of those working in them

during and amidst their work. But in order to accomplish this difficult task, desiring machines are needed, translocal concatenations, abstract machines that cross through the concrete municipalist machines and pull things along. Here we might first consider the networks that developed with the municipalisms: the inter-urban bundling of energies in assemblies such as macuno in Málaga (July 2016)[7], makdos, mactres, maccuatro in Pamplona (January 2017), A Coruña (October 2017), and Madrid (June 2018), where hundreds of protagonists of the municipalist movement come together to discuss current problems and challenges; but also emerging translocal networks such as that of the refugee cities or the digital sanctuary cities[8].

And yet the concept of the network as a retroactive concatenation of already existing points does not suffice to think the relationship of concrete and abstract machines. With respect to the complexity of development of subsistential territories and their abstract machines it is perhaps better to speak with Anne Querrien of nets of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, of streams that flow through cities and neighborhoods. Querrien prefers "to speak not of the city, but of a net of cities, therefore of territories crossed by streets and other paths of transport, which are connected to historically established and destructured relations of force, and which connect the hierarchized cities for their part to these relations of force. The city deterritorializes itself, it steps aside in relation to the streams flowing through it, which multiply over the course of time."[9] These streams, which pull through not only entire cities but also the subsistential territories in themselves, shape and warp the open field of immanence of the territory. While the subsistential territory is in no way a closed field, never the same and balanced, the streaming, dividual, translocal, abstract

machines as well as the subsistential territory are to be understood as milieu, as midstream, as swarming middle.

4. Technecology

These milieus of the concrete and abstract machines, the subsistential territories, and dividual streams can be thought not only in direct communication through classic collectivity, be it local or translocal. The care ecology of the subsistential territories is always also linked to new medial dispositives, to "social" media and abstract machines, therefore they are also technecologies. In Lagunillas, for example, Whatsapp groups are used for organizing, Facebook messenger is re-purposed to a rebellious information platform spreading news about city planning or organizing small actions like the occupation and re-designing of the small Victoria Kent lot. The mural designed in association with this action asks: Whose Victoria? Whose victory? After whose victory is the Calle Victoria named? And above all: Whose Victoria Kent? To whom does the memory of the socialist republican Victoria Kent belong? Who gave the administration the right to tear down the building in which Victoria Kent was allegedly born, which just one year ago still stood on the now empty lot? To whom does the lot now belong? What should happen with it in the future?

Involved in the organizing of a film series, which involved showing films about gentrification at the Victoria Kent lot for three days parallel to the City of Málaga's large, official film festival, I had to travel for exactly these three days to Zurich for meetings and to teach. But even from afar I felt like a wheel in this machine, as if I were part of that which was happening in Lagunillas. An extremely intense stream of Whatsapp messages accompanied my days in Zurich – three Whatsapp groups being overflowed with hundreds

of messages about organization, technical details, and political expressions. I was in the raging middle of the construction of a small new world. I experienced the hectic preparations, the pressure to be ready in time, the ever-new ideas for framing the film presentations, the search for technical equipment, the red carpet and the many small details regarding the performance. And I found out about the abrupt ending of the event by the police and the breakdown of the social machine on the second day. Whose victory?

On the question of the function of media for micropolitics and social movement, the classical answer holds that media are deployed as mediation, to spread the message, as a direct line from the few who make the statement to the many it is supposed to reach. But the medium itself is a milieu, not a secondary means of mediation. It doesn't just transmit content, and even the idea of a viral medium remains too influenced by the linear imaginary of content to be spread. It is not about milieus as micro-socialities, which are to be magnified, enlarged, made macro. The abstract machines are built not of smaller, concrete machines, but develop together with them.

Modes of subjectivation in the "old" media were conducive to a small number of producers taking on the role of public intellectuals, mostly masculinist-narcissistically fused with their stage, and ultimately becoming entirely a function of media as mass media intellectuals. Sartre and Habermas in the feuilleton, Sloterdijk on the talk show, the "new philosophers" in all media their narcissism could grasp. Modes of subjectivation in and with newer media work in a fundamentally different way, dispersed, manifold. The change that took place between the invention of the internet and the developments of social networks since Guattari's final text concerns on the one hand a fundamentally dispersed

structure and its rapid appropriation by a few. But the internet was not only captured by a few monopolists, as many commentators would like to have us believe. Facebook & Co have above all shaped the new modes of subjectivation that confront us in the "social networks." Not subject, not statement therefore, but rather subjectivation and mode of expression. It is not that the true statement stands against the false statement, and with them the more or less trustworthy subject of the statement - Angela Merkel who makes sincere expressions that withstand every fact check, against Donald Trump who lies like a mad man. In the place of statement and subject come subjectivation and expression. Increasingly in the form of anger, fear, hatred, and malice.

But precisely here, in the middle of medial subjectivation, new forms of affecting, new modes of expression emerge. It is possible then as now to cross over from the machinic use of social media into a machinic dissemblage, affirming dividual streams instead of the amalgam of ultra-individualization in the network and competition amongst the networked individuals. We could call this possible turn the postmedia era following Guattari, but better yet let's refuse the "post" and foster that technecology, in which things, surrounds, machines, and socialities multiply and concatenate.

For the promotion of such a technecology it is first necessary to invent fundamentally open and inclusive technical structures and apparatuses. Secondly it will also be a matter of keeping an eye on the property relations of these structures in the future. Thirdly the technecological modes of subjectivation and expression that develop in, with, and around them be brought to the center of focus: instead of hate, malice, envy, socio-narcissim, individualist delineation, and isolation in the middle of sociality, technecologies that produce and preserve the milieu, the subsistential territory,

the surround come into place. Again with Walter Benjamin: it is a matter of those fine and spiritual things that even in raw and material class struggle are lively "as confidence, as courage, as humor, as cunning, as steadfastness." It is about technecologies that promote those fine things, those small gestures, those affections in the situation of affect-enveloping. Not as increasingly real technofantasies of the invasive encroachment of technology into the human body or of the non-organic feeling of machines, but as enveloping surround, which produces and preserves the social, the milieu, the subsistential territory. Right here, in the fine envelopings of technecology, a potential for new collective assemblages of expression is found, for the next monstruous mutation of the modes of subjectivation, for a milieu that becomes a raging midstream.

[1] Guattari, Félix. "Remaking Social Practices". In: Genosko, Gary (Ed.), *A Guattari Reader. Pierre-Félix Guattari*. Blackwell (1996), pp. 262-272.

[2] Guattari, Félix. *The Three Ecologies*. Bloomsbury (2005).

[3] See the issue of the web-journal *transversal* http://transversal.at/transversal/0916

[4] Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Tausend Plateaus*, Berlin: Merve 1997, 41f.

[5] Benjamin, Walter. "On the Concept of History": http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm

[6] See http://transversal.at/transversal/0916/raunig/en

[7] See http://transversal.at/transversal/0916/manifesto/en

[8] See http://transversal.at/transversal/0318/kaempfrogers/en

[9] Anne Querrien, “Von der Architektur für die Psychiatrie zur Ökologie der Stadt. Ein Ensemble von Aktionsforschungen inspiriert durch Félix Guattari”, in Lorey, Nigro, Raunig (Eds.), Inventionen 2; See also CERFI, “Les équipements du pouvoir”, Recherches, Nr. 13, Paris 1973.