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Toward a Time Manifesto

The previous chapter identified the coalition of political forces necessary for establishing a counter-power to global capitalism. Disrupting the fragile just-in-time networks of supply chain capitalism, forging solidarities between organized labour, precarious workers and the informal poor, fashioning anti-austerity political projects, and sustaining a networked protest culture against financialized capitalism must occur simultaneously. This is a key precondition for sustaining oppositional solidarities and for effectively exploiting the likely repercussions of a future financial crisis. It will also be necessary to rupture the real-time reflexivities and detemporalized presentism endemic to global capitalism. To help coordinate these objectives, I provide a set of time principles that move beyond familiar homilies about remembering the past, creating new futures, slowing down the pace of life and respecting other cultural histories. The central principles are succinctly formulated as calls for action centred upon the four epistemes of time: epochality, time reckoning, temporality and coevalness. Taken together, these calls will enable the construction of a more substantive and programmatic time manifesto.

Advance global-epochal consciousness

Global capitalism’s capacity to erase or ex-nominate its own historicity is of epochal significance. As Alain Badiou has remarked, “we have entered a period of a-temporality and instantaneity” such that time is a “political construction” rather than a “shared individual experience” (Badiou, 2008, p. 105). Rupturing this construction necessarily requires a collective sense of globality which extends beyond the general nomenclature of globalization and the linear periodicity denoted by the locutions of
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pre-, early, modern, advanced or late capitalism. The naming of “global capitalism” bespeaks a plurality of historical experiences arising from local, intertwined legacies of cultural narrative, imperialism and anti-colonial struggle. Thus, oppositional coalitions must nurture a two-level epochal awareness which stresses global capitalism’s universal structure as well as the multi-perspectival standpoints of those who confront its material reach and power. Such an accomplishment will enable serious public reflections on the epochal finitude of global capitalism – a necessary precursor to the rupture of the system. Global capitalism’s relentless drive toward inter-networked simultaneity throughout every aspect of life constitutes a new form of Chronos, in the name of progress. Under these conditions, Cairotic interruptions of Chronos necessarily entail a consciousness of global epochality and the continuities/discontinuities of world history.

Reclaim tempo

From a time-reckoning perspective, it is crucial to remove the capacity of real-time to subsume and “game” chronological time (and the calendar-clock sequentialities it contains). This tendency allows capitalists to drive the tempo of work and worker exploitation as financial institutions and the transnational state set the tempo of reactive government decision making. Popular control of tempo is inherent in the principles of democratic representation, consensus decision making and prefigurative public assemblies. Contesting the real-time logics of finance capital requires a reclamation of tempo such that variously scaled economic structures develop over sequential time rather than against it.

Re-temporalize real-time

From standpoints opposed to global capitalism, the “now-ness” of simultaneous and synchronized political events opens up new temporalities of experience and possibility. However, this cannot be assumed. The media coverage accorded to ill-formed or isolated oppositional groups will simply reproduce the detemporalized presentism of global capitalist hegemony. An effective re-temporalization of real-time first requires a clearly articulated defence of temporal autonomy and temporal pluralism (on behalf of workers, citizens, community groups and governments). Sustained construction of new temporalities in the course of struggle will enable new memories of past political struggles to be activated for a future which is now in-the-making. This entails an