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December 2014

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Agency in Posthuman IR: Solving the Problem of Technosocially Mediated Agency

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Introduction: Posthuman Agency in International Relations—the Agent vs Structure Debates

The emphasis in much of the present volume that any given actor (even the individual human being) is always a nexus of interacting and nested systems, a multifarious assemblage of heterogeneous components, is certainly a step forward for understanding the complexities of the sociopolitical world. But without a clear means for drawing at least contingent borders around even ‘open’ systems and subsystems, the problems of analysis and interpretation can become impossibly vague with little hope of resolution. We would like to address this problem by reorienting the discussion from a focus on the agent—at whatever level of abstraction—to the forces that bind systems of agency together and move them to act. To do so we, like others (e.g. Bennett, 2005 and Connelly 2013), draw from Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) assemblage theory, particularly as extended by DeLanda (2006; 2011). Additionally however, we also draw from American rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke’s (1969a; 1969b; 2003) theory of symbolic action in combination with sociological and social psychological understandings of motivation and intention, which then present two forms of what we consider to be primary binding or assembling ‘forces’ as Latour (2005) has used that term.

The political realm has traditionally focused on the actions of those with the power to meaningfully act, which have traditionally been understood as either individual human beings or ‘state actors’. This dichotomy is the underlying tension of the agent vs. structure debate: Where does power ultimately reside? Are human beings free to make rational, intentional, willful decisions, or are their actions ultimately enabled and constrained, at least to some degree, by social, political and economic ‘structuring structures’? Traditional neo-Aristotelian approaches to international relations (see Brown, 2012) invest the power and authority of action in the state as the agent of consequence. Such perspectives are increasingly challenged by the proliferation of state and corporate networks indiscriminately permeating private and public spheres and posing serious ethical questions about, for example, individual privacy and ubiquitous surveillance. One result of the increasingly apparent entanglement of state and non-state or transnational corporate actors has been the decentralization of political activity in the form of demands from the networked margins and those on the periphery of the world system excluded from its benefits. Conflicts and deliberations now occur in a global, digitally enabled sphere of interaction where ethico-political values and ideologies are debated in floods of posts, comments, links, and likes across a fragmented, geographically dispersed, hybrid-mediated, transnational public sphere where the street and the screen, no less than ‘state’ and ‘non-state’, become difficult to disentangle.

Posthumanist and new materialist approaches to international relations seek to further interrogate the complexities of the contemporary political by emphasizing the agentic capacities of the nonhuman, particularly environmental factors, as nested complex adaptive

systems (e.g. Cudworth & Hobden, 2011, 2013) or assemblages of agents and active forces (e.g., Bennett, 2005) marked by what Connolly (2013, p. 412) describes as the ‘sharp, disjointed edges and loose joints between the heterogeneous human and nonhuman processes composing them’. Such perspectives call on us to think far more broadly about the ontological underpinnings and impact of technosocial transformations on agency, as well as human control in the diverse field of international relations (e.g., Srnisek, Fotou, & Arghand, 2013). Recent applications of these new perspectives include Barry’s (2013) use of actor-network theory to challenge and expand the realm of politics, political expertise, and practice, and Holmqvist’s (2013) elucidation of the agentic capacities of material objects, such as military drones, and the need to carefully rethink related ontological and ethico-political concerns.

Nevertheless, in their desire to address the complexity of sociopolitical landscapes, posthumanist and new materialist approaches have tended to flatten the distinction between human and other kinds of not only agency, but the related concept of ‘intelligence’. When all ‘intelligence’ (typically a requirement for the power to rationally act) is conceptualized, even implicitly or strategically and hyperbolically, as equivalent, then approaches that lean toward the ecological, for example, tend to underestimate the agentic capacities of technologies and technological systems—the technosocial assemblages in which large swaths of mundane social and political activity now occur. The agentic capacities of information communication technologies (ICTs) are important to consider because, as ‘smart’ ‘tools’, they occupy the liminal space between what is thought of as matter and what is thought of as ‘mind’ (or intelligence, whether ‘animal or machine’ as conceived by the early cyberneticists).

Drawing from process philosophies and affect theory, as well as new materialist perspectives, however, we would understand this distinction as being between process and form: there can be no ‘mind’ without a material substrate—nothing is ever truly ‘immaterial’, and thought itself is a very material process, whether understood in terms of ‘computation’ or of ‘affect’. While ICTs provide a material substrate for the transmission of affect, such technologies are not simply inert and passive mediators of ‘immaterial’ interactions among active agents at various levels of abstraction. The sociotechnological systems through which collective action is enacted can themselves be understood to act in and on—to affect—the situations to which they contribute. Sociotechnological apparatus are agentic systems, active assemblages that affect and are affected by political relations and the exercise and redistributions of power. Therefore, accounting for the agentic capacity of technology, particularly ICTs in social and political activity, becomes a vital task.

In media and communication studies, the status of communication technologies as *techne* has offered a rather easy transposition into the Gibsonian (1979) psychological terminology of ‘affordances’. The resulting highly conventional instrumentalization of these technosocial assemblages—myopically defended as a bulwark against ‘technological determinism’—obscures the recognition of the nonhuman and the technological as active sociopolitical agents in their own right. On the other hand, while posthumanist and new materialist approaches share our desire to understand and account for nonhuman or suprahuman agents and agencies, they can sometimes go a step too far by flattening all kinds of action and actors into a single, broad form of agency as the power to affect and be affected, ‘the ability to make

a difference, to produce effects, or even to initiate action distributed across an ontologically diverse range of actors’ (Bennett, 2005, p. 446).

Despite Coole’s contention that new materialist perspectives resist ‘ontologizing agency as such, that is, fixing it in or as a distinctive type of being, especially in as much as this is defined as human or synonymous with (self-)consciousness or rationality’ (2013, p. 453), in practice what many seem to do is simply attribute agency to a higher-order level of actor: the system or the assemblage. This is certainly a broader conceptualization of actor and agency than the traditional locating of the power to act meaningfully in the rational individual or its proxy, the ‘state’, but it can also be seen as simply another form of structuration that may only make the problem of analyzing political landscapes and interactions more complicated without providing tools for dealing with that ensuing complexity. Where traditional theories of international relations draw a firm border around the complex system that is the state, thereby reducing out complexity to an idealistic simplicity in an unrealistic realism, posthuman and new materialist approaches rethink the idea of how such borders are drawn and how actors and agents are defined.

And yet, this offer is limited because they do so without providing clear means for differentiating the ‘individual’ from the ‘collective’—particularly when all ‘individuals’ are understood to be ‘systems’ or ‘assemblages’ at some level of analysis. But what defines a ‘system’ in practice? What holds an ‘assemblage’ together? What is to be counted as an interaction—whether effective or affective? What is to be counted as a link or a connection? The answers to such questions are hermeneutical and rhetorical choices that determine not simply the boundaries of a system or a network, but that system or network as a unit of action: an actor or an agent. Where new materialist scholars often emphasize the possibilities and capabilities, the emergent affects and effects, of primarily nonhuman actants, we will turn some of their theoretical distinctions around toward the understanding of all-too-human political action in order to see action and agency spreading through a variety of technological instrumentalities, on the one hand, and combining in and being driven by broader forces of collective agency, on the other.

We offer an approach to these issues in three parts. The first relies on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), DeLanda (2006; 2011) and Burke (1969a; 1969b; 2003) to discuss the concepts of agency, actors, and *assemblage*. In doing so, we wish to demarcate what continues to distinguish human agency from other forms while rejecting ‘immaterial’ ontological grounds and conventional idealistic and dualistic notions of intentionality. This requires an emphasis on DeLanda’s contention that the assemblage as an actor is not only embodied in the interaction of its material components, but also expressed by the material configuration of those components. In the second part, we differentiate between intentionality and desire. This distinction enables a further elucidation of assemblage agency and the dissection of affective structures of desire in order to better conceptualize posthuman agency in the distributed assemblages of the contemporary technosocial realm. A critical distinction between motivation and intention then points towards the examination of affective-discursive identifications as agencies that push motivated political agents into virtual spaces of possibilities of action toward particular sets of goals. In the final section, we use Rotman’s (2008) Person-Subject-Agent model to further support a theorization of contemporary

political action, which is able to address the relationships among the motivated actor (as Person-Subject) and the intentional actor (as Subject-Agent). The technosocial distributed actor is thereby understood as a materially embodied Agent, generatively constrained by a Subject-constituting assemblage. Such an actor has intentionality but has no motivation of its own unless it can be located in a socially and symbolically identified Person.

Agency, Actors, and Assemblage: Intentionality and Desire

Conventionally, the concept of agency has been inextricably bound to the idea of the volitional agent, ideally defined as a rational human being characterised by implicitly Cartesian, if not explicitly phenomenological, willful intentionality. As Coole points out,

It is not just that agency has conventionally been defined as a property unique to humans; inversely, the characteristics that have traditionally been held to define humans and to render them a distinctive and privileged species have been used to define the characteristics of agency, namely, cognition and rationality (and masculinity). (2013, p. 457)

Conversely, posthumanist and new materialist perspectives emphasize the commonalities and problematize the differences among the embodied and affective human being and the agentic Other of both technology and the material world more broadly. This conjoining of the human and nonhuman as equivalent sources of action in and upon the world involves questioning conventional assumptions about human intentionality, and theoretically separating the thing which acts, i.e., the *actant* in the terminology of actor-network theory, from *agency* as the capacity to act in and upon the world and the things in it. Agency is a force and vector of action—agency is a form of power—articulated by individuals within and upon the worlds in which they exist. These articulations of power serve to bind or assemble such individuals together into larger wholes, systems, or networks.

In their original formulation, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) understand *assemblage* as a process, more verb than noun. Assemblages, as binding processes, are thereby formulated as subjectivizing wholes whose properties emerge from interactions with other assemblages, as well as from interactions among their components, which are bound together by shared desire. The political subject, for example, is understood as one of many potential collective assemblages of enunciation of desire. Deleuze and Guattari therefore understand subjectification as a largely symbolic or discursive ‘organization of power that is already fully functioning in [for example] the economy’ (1987, p. 30): the consumerist generation and manipulation of individual desires. In this way, assemblages are described as passionnal compositions of desire. The agency of the assemblage, or the ‘rationality, the efficiency, of the assemblage, does not exist without the desires that constitute it as much as it constitutes them’ (p. 399). Passions, on the other hand, are distinguished as effectuations of desire that differ with each assemblage, and different assemblages will mobilize passions of different orders. Thus the form of the assemblage ‘is the passionnal regime of feeling’, and the feelings or affects that bind it together also enact ‘a direction (*sens*, also “meaning”) to form and its developments, an economy of force and its displacements, an entire gravity’ (p. 400).

As might be expected, this emphasis on desire at the heart of assemblage theory has been criticized for precisely the kind of human-centered focus and anthropomorphism that posthumanist and new materialist theorists have attempted to transcend. Mark Hansen (2000, p. 286), for example, argues that Deleuze and Guattari's *assemblage* discounts 'technical autonomy in all forms', subordinating nonhuman (or not solely human) technological agency to a 'mathematically and technically embodied semiotics of the social'. By contrast, Hansen argues for the explicit attribution of agentic power to the processes and interactions in which assemblages come to be. Fortunately, the forces of desire that embody, bind, assemble, and 'become' the *assemblage*, while also providing its vector of action, provide a theoretical workaround that Hansen recognizes as capable of bypassing the conventional model of human intentionality, based as it is upon individual phenomenological perception and representation: '[B]y forging rhythmic connections between those assemblages of singularities we call human beings and the material real, becomings hold out the promise for a robust account of technology's experiential impact' (p. 187).

In recent work, Manuel DeLanda (2006; 2011) has elaborated and extended assemblage theory, while adding certain qualifications that accommodate the nonhuman and technological. First, he argues, the identity of an assemblage as an actor is not only embodied in the interaction of its material components, but also expressed by the material configuration of those components. An assemblage thus reflects an individual singularity as the product of a historical and inescapably material process:

the process that brought its components together for the first time as well as the process that maintains its integrity through a regular interaction among its parts. This implies that the identity of an assemblage is always contingent and it is not guaranteed by the existence of a necessary set of properties constituting an unchanging essence. (2011, p.185)

Secondly, DeLanda argues that an ontological commitment must be built into the definition of the term 'assemblage' because these emergent wholes are defined, not only by their properties, but also by their tendencies and capacities. 'Tendencies' are said to make the properties of a whole vary, sometimes even changing its identity, while 'capacities' are potentialities in which wholes may exhibit previously hidden aspects of their identities. The term DeLanda adopts to encompass the tendencies and capacities of an assemblage is a 'possibility space' (2006, p. 29), which, derived from the 'phase space' of mathematics, physics, and chemistry, explains how tendencies and capacities can be real even when they are not actual: the tendencies and capacities of an assemblage comprise a virtual space of possibilities.

An assemblage's tendencies and capacities define its dynamic possibility space and provide it with an identity tied to its possibilities of action. An assemblage's space of possibilities is a set of potentials understood as a measure of degrees of freedom provided to it by the capacities of its internal and external relations. These degrees of freedom, however, have their dialectical counterpart in the constraints upon the assemblage's ability to act, defined by the topological borders—the territory—of that possibility space, to which the identity of the assemblage is bound. For this reason DeLanda speaks of the 'quasi-causal constraints that

structure a space of possibilities' (2006, p. 31). This sort of 'enabling constraint' evokes the language of Gibsonian affordances as much as the 'structuring structures' of sociopolitical theory. But again, the language of affordances is a language of instrumentalities.

In contrast, the emphasis herein is the technosocial assemblage's virtual and actual capacities for action—or, in Latour's language the *intermediaries* of active forces over the *mediators* of acts. This idea of freedom within constraint also resonates with complexity theorist Edgar Morin's (1992/1977) discussion of the restrictions that complex adaptive systems place on their elements as emergent properties of the systems themselves. Hence, according to Cudworth and Hobden,

systems, as well as being more than the sum of the parts, are also 'less' in the sense that they remove some of the freedom of action of the component parts in the way of constraints. (2013, p. 435)

If we can understand assemblages as complex adaptive systems (and *vice versa*), in which the emergent properties of the system define and enable the potential actions of the system within the constraints inherent in and because of those properties, we can define a topology of temporally dynamic possibility space – a space of potential action constrained by a set of agentic forces (i.e., agencies) understood by DeLanda as tendencies and capacities.

While new materialist perspectives, following actor-network theory, tend to emphasize nonhuman technological and material agents and agencies, making the affinity with complexity and systems theory relatively easy to understand, the Deleuzo-Guattarian tradition, in which assemblages are understood as complexes of desire, are more commonly related to discursive, ideological, and subjectivizing formations. DeLanda, for example, specifically understands his assemblage theory as an 'account of the emergence of subjectivity' (2006, p. 33). In this sense, assemblages are also assemblages of ideas, or what Kenneth Burke (1969b) called 'terminologies' of affective and rhetorical identification. According to Burke, a terminology is a set of dynamic, subjectivizing, and identifying, conceptual relations restricted (or 'screened') by a set of internally defined constraints and tendencies. This set of relations he describes as having an *entelechy* to reflect the temporal development of the ideological assemblage's internal and external relations toward a set of attitudes and actions. Burke's entelechy, however, has less affinity with a determining Aristotelian *telos* than with the topological attractors that DeLanda adapts from mathematics of chaos and complexity theory. Just as a possibility space is a material historical formation, it has a set of entelechial tendencies that mutually constitute the emergent capacities of its dynamic internal systemic and external identifying relations.

Applying such a space of possibilities to contemporary hypermediated political activity, Karatzogianni (2012) has described such potentiality as the 'revolutionary virtual', where the affective potentiality for change is materialized in mundane digital interaction:

When the affective structures, residing at the interface between the actual and the digital virtual, enable revolutionary moments, this is an actualization of the Deleuzean virtual – the virtual full of potentialities. (p.52)

It is in this space of networked digital communication that the quotidian becomes political. Despite the insistence of posthumanist scholars, however, political action continues to be understood as all-too-human activity. Nevertheless, not all political actors are individual human beings—or state-actors, for that matter. A wide variety of actants have political effects while not necessarily being political subjects in any conventional sense. In addition to the environmental and material forces elaborated by a variety of posthumanist and new materialist scholars in the present volume and beyond, computer viruses, automated calling systems, AI-controlled military drones, political organizations, non-profit and non-governmental organizations, as well as national and transnational corporations are all political actors in that their acts and behaviors address and/or affect the system of sociopolitical relations and power structures in which they exist. However, the understanding of political relations and their effects is ultimately, for better or worse, understood in their relation to and effects on the human being as an intentional political subject.

The binding of human beings into collective technosocial assemblages through the intermediation of digital communication technologies and networks is illustrated by cyberconflict studies showing that ethnoreligious groups transfer ‘real’ communities, along with their hierarchical notions of ethnicity, nationality, and religion, into digitally networked spaces (Karatzogianni, 2006). The reliance on ethnicity, nationality, and religion to utilize and manipulate emotions such as fear, suspicion, and hatred demonstrates the operation of the politics of emotion and affect in digital cultures (Karatzogianni, 2012). Research into religious practices in digital networks reinforces the idea that agency, and especially communicative agency, is extremely contingent and volatile. Digitally networked technologies and spaces of interaction enable transnational migrants, for example, to defend older loyalties or new religious revivals, old and new friends and enemies, in a constant negotiation of many different—often dissonant—worlds at the same time (e.g., home country and host country, online and offline), and to be loved, appreciated, and safe in each of them (MIGNET, 2013). The migrant mixes and matches her loyalties and tests the primacy of one identity and subjectivity against others, depending on the immediate social context and the fear and uncertainty that needs to be exorcised at any given time in the diverse, hybrid-media environments in which she lives. While new forms of agency enacted in, with, and by digital networks and social media unsettle the closed and fixed ‘tribal’ identities that rely on religion, nationality, culture, and ethnicity, the ‘thick’ identities of these ‘reactive-affective structures’ are much more resilient than the ‘thinner’ identifications of ‘active-affective structures’ of sociopolitical affinity or networks of resistance to hierarchical power structures (Karatzogianni & Robinson, 2010).

The binding power of reactive-affective assemblages reinforces the fact that while the evolving forms of agency available to individual actors negotiating such identities are directly afforded by networked communications technologies and social media, they are not and cannot be solely technological any more than they are merely coldly, rationally instrumental: emotions, affect, and technologies are negotiated in rapid rhythms against the old constants of religion, nationality, ethnicity, generation, and public life, all of which digital networks make more contingent but no less powerful than in the world before wires. Hence, examining affective structures of desire in depth and distinguishing between intention and motivation in

agency may allow a better conceptualization of posthuman agency and the distributed assemblages experienced in the technosocial realm.

Assembling the Assemblage: Intention and Motivation

In order to better understand contemporary political action and resistance in a hybrid-mediated and networked world, we recognize a need to differentiate agentic structures in novel terms that disrupt the conventional theoretical binaries in which theories of action and agency seem to be trapped, such as material/immaterial. But novel terminologies, to be most effective, must be cultivated from familiar ground. We begin, therefore, with Kenneth Burke's Aristotelian distinction between action and motion: where the 'act' requires a conventionally intentional agent, 'motion' is the natural play of purely material (or, for Burke, nonconscious, animalistic) forces—the wind does not 'act'; a 'dog can bark but he can't bark a tract on barking' (2003, p.141). But where Burke tends to rely on a conventional notion of intentionality and its implied im/material distinction as a property limited to the conscious, rational human agent, we make a sharp distinction between intention and motivation that allows us to also address nonhuman agents and agencies.

In most theoretical discussions of social action and intentionality, motivations are understood as a conflation of long-term goals and affective, psychological, and sometimes ideological forces that drive individual decision-making. As DeLanda (2006, p.22), relying on Max Weber (1978) explains, 'while reasons may be exemplified by traditional values or personal emotions, motives are a special kind of reason involving explicit choices and goals'. Conventional intentionality is defined by the capacity to rationally formulate goals (i.e., intentions), a capacity that is often interfered with (i.e., affected) by irrational, affective forces. Weber's discussion of motives in *Economy and Society* (1978) seems to provide an important theoretical foundation for this position in which the goal-formation of rational intentionality is driven, or motivated, by the subjective meaning of experiences and actions. Hence,

we understand in terms of *motive* the meaning an actor attaches to the proposition twice two equals four, when he states it or writes it down, in that we understand what makes him do this at precisely this moment and in these circumstances.

Understanding [of the act] in this sense is attained if we know that he is engaged in balancing a ledger or in making a scientific demonstration, or is engaged in some other task of which this particular act would be an appropriate part. This is rational understanding of motivation, which consists in placing the act in an intelligible and more inclusive context of meaning. (p. 8)

Kenneth Burke, whose theory of symbolic action has been extremely influential west of the Atlantic for more than six decades (prefiguring much of what became the postmodern linguistic and then cultural turn), seems to have drawn upon Weber's notion of motive in his *A Grammar of Motives* (1969a [1945]) and *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969b [1950]). But for Burke motives are not only or simply inherent in the empirically observed intentional agent. More broadly, motives are systemic functions driving entelechial tendencies ideologically

and discursively attributable within a set of historical and material relations that we can understand as DeLanda's possibility space. For Burke, as for Weber, motives are the attributions of an observer. But where for Weber that attribution is made by a sociologist of an observed subject as an interpretation of reasoning and a justification of individual action (i.e., the attribution of 'meaning'), for Burke the observer herself is necessarily imbricated in a web of motives as, for example, the disciplinary motivations and strictures that function as boundaries to the sociologist's possibilities of interpretation. Motivations, for Burke, therefore derive less from individual intention or even 'needs' than from discursive ideological formations that are inherently social, affective, and material in the broadest sense.

Drawing on Burke's concept of motive as social and material influence, we can distinguish between motivation and intentionality. Where motivation is inherently rhetorical and affective, an inevitably embodied, emotional force or capacity grounded in symbolic social identifications, intentionality is a programmatic, even algorithmic, goal-oriented force or tendency characterizing any agent, human or otherwise, pursuing a set of outcomes and having an influence on other agents in its world. If intentionality is an entelechial pull toward a goal or set/range of goals to be effected, motivation is an affective push, which may or may not be specifically or directly related to reasoned or intended outcomes beyond the immediate re/action. Motivation can be an impetus to action apart from consciously reasoned and understood goals, while intentionality is defined in relation to a set of goals that may be innate and/or programmed apart from any affective identification with or within a social system.

This distinction between affective motivation and goal-oriented or entelechial intention effectively removes the conventional notion of consciousness from intentionality, restricting self-consciousness to motivated agents as an effect of affective social identification. From this perspective, a virus (whether biological or technological) has intent but no motivation, whereas an affective, emotional being (human or otherwise) is understood as motivated to the extent that it is relationally (socially) self-conscious within a symbolically mediated social system, broadly defined. In relation to specifically political action, the StuxNet virus, an AI-controlled drone, a robo-calling system, or an automated network surveillance system can be considered an intentional political agent, while a protestor, a political representative, or even a police officer is a motivated agent whose conscious actions are grounded in sociopolitical identifications *as well as* goals inherent to the social collectives with which the motivated agent identifies or is identified from a Burkean perspective.

The affective, social, and symbolic identification that is central to Burke's rhetorical theory we take to be analogous to the central place of 'desire' and 'passion' for Deleuze and Guattari as forces binding assemblages together. Recall the description of assemblages as passional compositions of desire: desires constitute the assemblage as much as it constitutes them, while passions are effectuations of desire. Thus, the assemblage 'is the passional regime of feeling... and its resistances' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 400). From our perspective, however, this represents a confusion based on a conventional notion of intentionality. When intention is distinguished from motivation, *desire* is understood as intention and *passion* as motivation. In this sense, then, *desires* (as intentional forces) are effectuations of *passions* (as motivational forces). This theoretical reversal of Deleuze and Guattari's desire and passion,

as applied to the technosocial, would seem to directly address Hansen's limited critique of assemblage theory as discounting technological agency. As a corrective, we can understand intentional forces as a form of 'machinic desire' categorically lacking the motivation of 'passion' except as it is mediated and instrumentalized by motivated agents within a common assemblage.

Thus, the distinction between motivation and intention points towards the examination of affective-discursive identifications as agencies that push motivated political agents into virtual spaces of possibilities of action toward particular sets of goals. A technology, on the other hand, such as a mediological device (e.g., a mobile phone) or social communication network (e.g., Twitter), can be understood as embodying a set of action potentials—DeLanda's tendencies and capacities—that affect the world and other agents in that world. Such 'action potentials' become 'affordances' when the theoretical focus is limited to the motivated agent making use of the technology (an otherwise intentional agent in its own right) as an instrumentality – a position DeLanda strongly criticizes as the 'taxonomic essentialism' of a reductive 'methodological individualism' (2006, p. 26-32). But such a focus specifically discounts (if not denies) the capacities of the technology itself to affect the material real as an intentional agent—and reverses the emphasis from the far more interesting and politically relevant phenomena of intentional forces mobilizing motivated agents. An argument about 'technological determinism' is relevant here only from a perspective that privileges the motivated human agent based on idealistic and dualistic assumptions of conventional intentionality.

Furthermore, assemblages of motivated and intentional agents can be understood as intentional (collective) agents in their own right without giving up the categorical difference of the self-conscious and self-determining, motivated human agent. The distinction can be made without falling back to an idealistic or dualistic reified conception of human consciousness and identity. The single actor, like the single act, is an abstraction that can be fully accounted for, i.e., rationalized by motivated human understanding, only within an encompassing spatiotemporal context of relation and interaction. And the generation of, the carving out of context—as with the perception and conception of any object or whole, the setting of any boundary—is itself a motivated, hermeneutical and rhetorical act. However, the effective reach (the agency) of the motivated actor to perceive and define such boundaries is, more than ever before, extended by the instrumentalities and intentional agencies that partly define it as an agent for the very reason that individual cognition is itself a sociotechnological phenomenon.

Thus, by understanding DeLanda's 'possibility space' as a generator or virtual embodiment of Burkean motives, we can conceptualize individual identity as a dynamic nexus of situated material practices for a broader understanding of what constitutes an actor, agent, or actant. According to DeLanda, for example,

assemblage theory departs from methodological individualism in that it conceives of this emergent subjectivity as an assemblage that may become complexified as persons become parts of larger assemblages: in conversations (and other social encounters) they project an image or persona; in networks they play informal roles; and in

organizations they acquire formal roles; and they may become identified with these roles and personas making them part of their identity. In other words, as larger assemblages emerge from the interactions of their component parts, the identity of the parts may acquire new layers as the emergent whole reacts back and affects them. (DeLanda, 2006, p. 33)

Human technology, made possible by social cognition, has always been a generative constraint on human subjectivity. Our networked digital tools, by expanding the possibilities of connection and interaction among both intentional and motivated agents, expand the range of influence of motivated agency in the generation, territorialization, and interaction of spaces of possibilities of action, while also strengthening the constraints of the affective social identifications of motivated agents with and within intentional assemblages. Both reactive-affective conservative/fundamentalist and active-affective progressive causes are able to foster deeper commitments through more active and affective engagement while simultaneously broadening their reach by casting wider nets of interaction and through the ‘relentless co-presencing and distribution of the psyche’ (Rotman, 2008, p. 104). This distinction of motivated and intentional agents can be further elucidated in a model that distinguishes the actor from the forces of assemblage in which she is bound and the very different entailing tendencies and capacities for action those forces enable. This allows us to understand what makes the human (or motivated) agent different from the technological instrumentalities she mobilizes, as well as from the technosocial and other assemblages of which she is inevitably a part. This terminology allows a focus upon the forces driving a particular actor, at whatever level of abstraction, which elucidates how such actors are understood as both ‘individual’ wholes and as components of larger systems, and it allows the identification of inherent potentials in intentional forces of assemblage to become dehumanizing structures of violence—as when intentional structures parasitize and mobilize motivational forces toward ‘machinically’ desired outcomes.

Of Actors and Assemblages: Motivational and Intentional Forces in Rotman’s Person-Subject-Agent Model of the Actor

Given the discursive character of social identification, and the subject positions such symbolic and affective identifications engender, the individual motivated actor can be understood as continually negotiating the among various possibilities and constraints on action inherent in the numerous social collectives and assemblages with which she identifies. Brian Rotman (2008) has provided a useful threefold model of what we are calling the motivated actor. At the center is a physical Person – an emotional body/brain, an affective and affected mind – who physically inter/acts in and with the world. But this Person is both enabled and constrained by discursively instantiated social and cultural formations—i.e., passionate assemblages as possibility spaces limited by subjectivizing constraints: Subjects through which the Person is required to interact with the world and others in it. For centuries philosophers and theorists have piled up mountains of terms that address the sort of ideological subjectivizing formations that we here, following Rotman, are calling Subjects. Familiar terms include Foucault’s ‘discourse formations’, ‘disciplines, and ‘epistemes’;

Kuhn’s ‘paradigms’; Burke’s ‘terministic screens’; Gadamer’s ‘traditions’ and ‘hermeneutical horizons’; Wittgenstein’s ‘forms of life’; Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’ and ‘fields’; Toulmin’s ‘fields of argument’; Marx’s ‘social formations’; Althusser’s ‘structures of dominance’; Husserl’s ‘lifeworlds’; Aristotle’s (via Vico’s and then Gadamer’s) ‘*sensus communis*’; as well as full and rich menagerie of other conceptual constructs operating under a multitude of labels including ‘*ethnoi*’, ‘*ethoi*’, ‘*eidoi*’, ‘worldviews’, ‘realities’, ‘frames’ and ‘frameworks’, and ‘master narratives’. From the present perspective, all of these common theoretical terms point, generally, to the assemblage of actors and agents in ideological formations that generatively constrain the possibilities of action by subjected individuals— not only what can be done, but often what can and cannot be *conceived* of as a possibility by the individual, however that individual is theoretically delineated.

As all inter/action is necessarily constrained by such social and ideological formations, all interaction between Persons, all representation and interpretation, all affective-discursive practices (Wetherell, 2012) must take place through the mediation of such a discursively generated Subject. Each Person is constituted as a nexus of such Subjects, some compatible and overlapping, some inconsistent and conflicting, with the contingent of available Subjects determined by access to various discourses or symbolic systems (or ideologies, rhetorics, cultures, metaphor complexes, etc.). Furthermore, each Subject actively constitutes an Agent that is able to act—and only able to act—within the bounds of the specific symbolic/discursive subjectivity, i.e. Subject, which comprises a space of possibilities of action. The Person’s agency in any given situation is both enabled and constrained by the affective-discursive (social and cultural) practices that constitute the Person as a (e.g., political) subject. Put plainly, a Person can only act as an Agent (only *has agency*) through a socially and discursively constituted Subject.

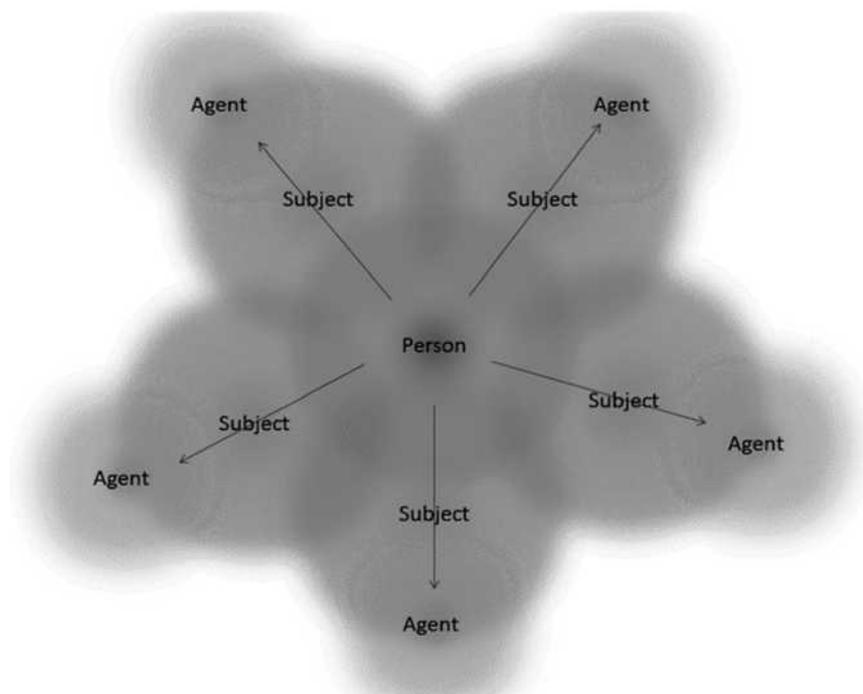


Figure 1. The Motivated Actor: Person-Subject-Agent

Rotman’s anti-essentialist Person-Subject-Agent model allows us to differentiate (without requiring the analytical or dialectical separation of) the ‘embodied’ individual from the discursively generated subjectivities that constitute her multifarious social identities, as well as from the agencies (possibilities of and constraints on action) that each of those identities or subject positions carries by virtue of its specific, relational, social positioning. Persons are affective, Subjects comprise tendencies and capacities of (subjectivizing) affective-discursive practices, and Agents are bound to and within the constraints of discursive subjectivities (i.e., Subjects). Returning explicitly to the main thrust of the current argument, the theorization of contemporary political action must address the relationships among the motivated actor (as Person-Subject) and the intentional actor (as Subject-Agent).

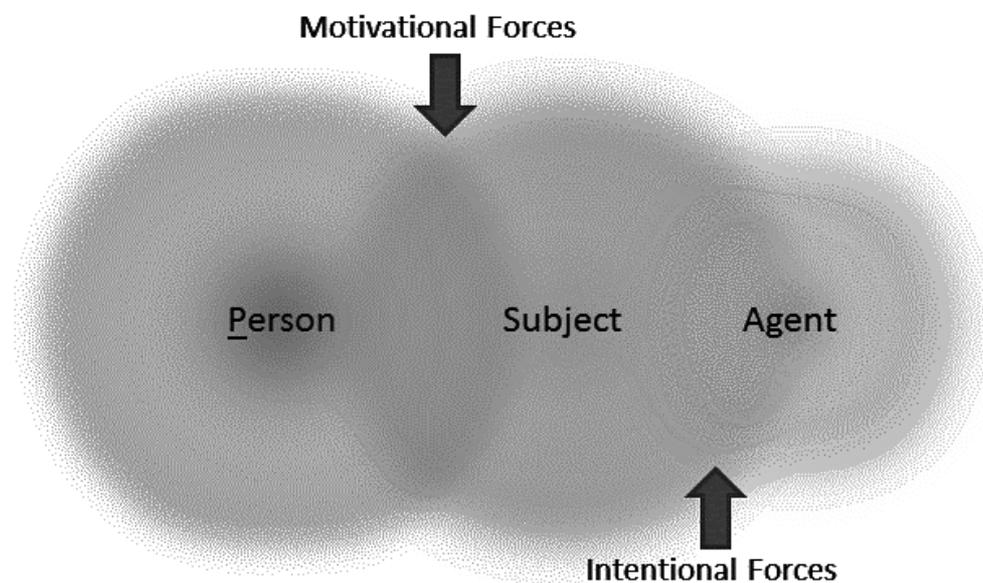


Figure 2. Motivational and Intentional Forces of Assemblage

The distinction between material and ‘immaterial’ becomes unnecessary when this distinction between motivation (embodied in the Person) and intention (enacted by the Agent) is applied to different orders of agents and agencies. We can understand assemblages as intentional actors that programmatically generate and manipulate ‘desires’, i.e. intentions, which serve to bind Subject to Agent. A communication technology, then (whether examined as an ‘individual’ device or a larger ‘network’) can function as an Agent that ‘materializes’ the action potentials embodied in the Subject’s possibility space, defined by the assemblage’s tendencies and capacities. Simultaneously, the affective and embodied ‘passions’ of Burkean identification serve to actively generate those intentional ‘desires’ through ‘passions’, or motivational forces, which bind Person to Subject. Again, this distinction between motivation and intention would seem to mitigate Hansen’s concerns about Deleuze and Guattari’s over-

reliance on ‘desire’ in the theorization of technology since intentional assemblages as actors are understood not to have affects of their own (in the sense of motivating human emotion) but to be parasitic upon motivational agencies which they intentionally and instrumentally manipulate—turning other motivated assemblages into agents for the attainment of intentional ‘desires’.

To understand a technology as an intentional actor is to understand it as an Agent generatively constrained by a Subject-constituting assemblage, both of which are intentional but, by definition, have no motivations of their own because they are not located in or centered upon a symbolically and socially identified Person. Similarly, a technosocial assemblage (functioning as Subject) comprising a multitude of ‘individual’ actors (functioning as Agents), is to be understood as intentional by its being bound together by the ‘machinic desire’ (intentional forces) toward a set of shared goals that are not centered upon a Person, but parasitize and mobilize motivated actors bound to them. To take a relevant example, corporations are not people; they are made of people, among many other things. They are intentional, but not motivated, actors. Every corporation has the same goal (i.e., intent): the maximization of profit. Corporations as intentional assemblages manipulate motivated assemblages (i.e., people and groups of people) toward the entelechial completion of those intentional tendencies. Corporations are not ‘passional’ complexes except as they are able to instrumentalize affective forces toward the ‘machinic desire’ of profit maximization. While certain motivations can push toward the pursuit of profit, profit itself is not a motive: profit is an intent.

Conclusion

The argument of this chapter is that technosocially distributed agency can be explained as the possibilities of action of an Agent generatively constrained by a Subject-constituting assemblage, which has intentionality but has no motivations of its own because it is not located in or centered upon a symbolically and socially identified Person. The problem of the relation between ‘agent’ and ‘structure’ has continued to pose significant problems for explaining political agency and, more broadly, technologically mediated human conduct in individual or collective terms. What is offered here is an explanation of what we think is a way out: differentiating between active vs. reactive desire; motivation vs. intentionality; motivational forces stemming from the structural interaction of Person-Subject vs. intentional forces stemming from the structural interaction of Subject-Agent.

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