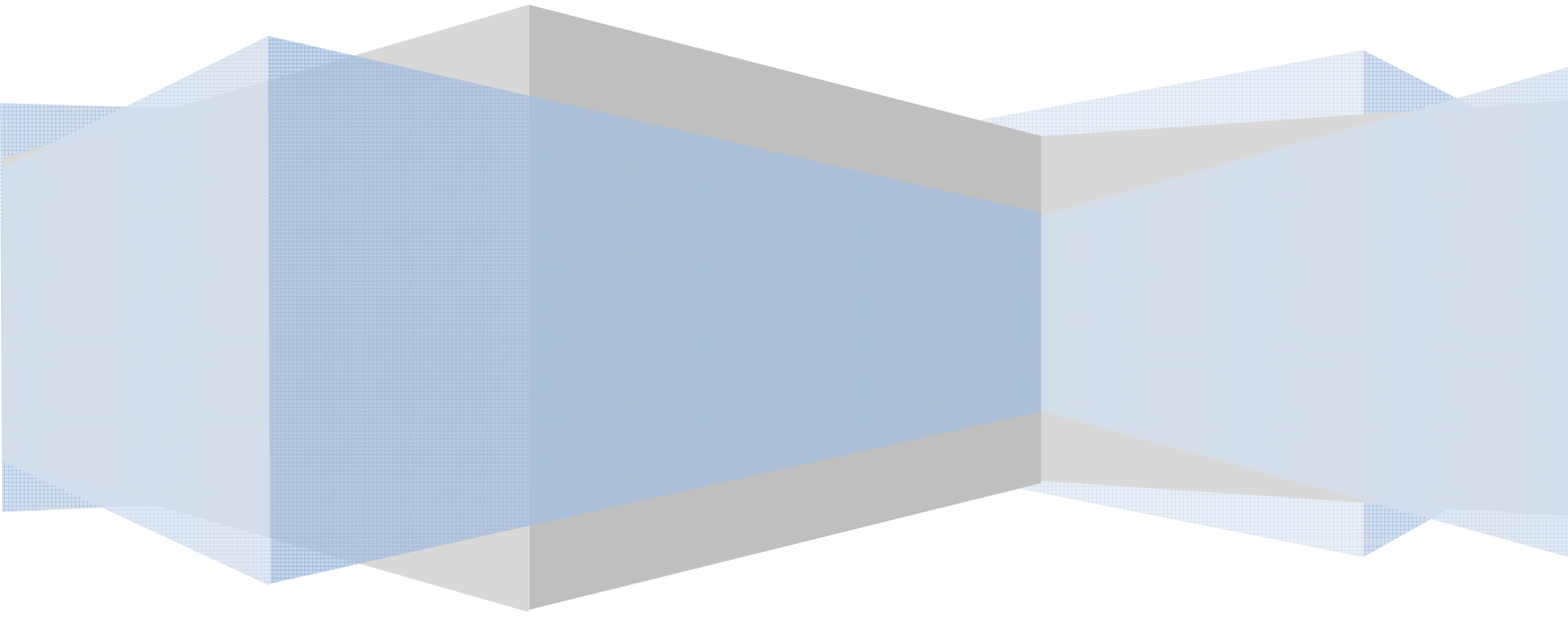
Assemblage Theory, Complexity and Contentious Politics

The Political Ontology of Gilles Deleuze

Nick Srnicek



Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to reconsider the nature of ontology in contemporary political science, with the belief that such a move can be of great benefit to understanding changes in our era of globalization and terrorism. This is accomplished by examining the ontologies of both social constructivism and critical realism in order to show their reliance upon illegitimate presuppositions, and then developing a novel ontological position on the basis of these criticisms.

Gilles Deleuze's concept of assemblages – and his ontology, more generally – are examined as particularly powerful ways to conceptualize the complexity, dynamism and differences that are inherent to the political world. This is brought out concretely in a study of recent academic work on contentious politics in order to show the centrality of conflict and difference to politics, and to show the power of a reconceptualization of ontology.

Keywords: Deleuze; Bhaskar; individuation; ontology; complexity; contentious politics; critical realism; assemblages; social constructivism

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Introduction

Our modern political world is dominated by discussions of terrorism, by fears of nuclear proliferation and global warming, by increasing tensions between states, and by the unsettling dynamics of globalization, all contributing to a palpable sense of uncertainty about the future. The still ambiguous fate of the nation-state and the increasingly obvious failings of advanced democracies have all furthered the sense that the future must bring something different – without, however, any obvious alternatives being available. Moreover, the rise of technology, and the speed of communication and interaction have all made the rapid dynamism and change of our world increasingly difficult to ignore. The proliferation of identities and collective movements, the tendency towards non-state movements (whether at a global or local level), and the Western world's recognition of Otherness and alterity have, in turn, made any notion of a homogeneous people impossible to sustain. The result of all these tendencies has been to produce an increasingly complex and dynamic world – one to which political science is still trying to acclimate.[1]

Nevertheless, despite these major shifts in the world, Anglo-American political science has largely remained bound to ontologies which privilege simple and static entities. Their very presuppositions about the nature of reality tend to reflect a previous time in which clarity and simplicity could (more plausibly) be considered intrinsic properties of the world. Most glaringly, rational choice theory often presents itself as "a

[1] See, for one of many examples, the burst of writings declaring the end of the state, and the post-9/11 responses arguing that it was re-establishing its power. Similarly, the declarations of the end of history immediately post-Cold War were quickly set aside as it became obvious that liberal capitalism faced challenges throughout the world as it attempted to become the sole model for socio-economic systems.

new master social science"[2] capable of a single, comprehensive analysis uniting political, sociological, and economic behaviour. Its reliance, by its own admission, on axiomatic, unnaturally perfect conditions make it a frighteningly poor tool to analyze the complexity of contemporary politics, yet its supporters continue to be blinded by its illusory clarity. More generally, contemporary social science is dominated by inquiries in which there are almost no "systematic explanations for political and economic outcomes being integrated with contextually informed analyses of social relations. Yet we need works of such combinatorial weight more than ever before, in a world where global endeavors cross multiple contexts."[3] The aim of this thesis is precisely to develop an ontology which is capable of overcoming this deficiency of modern political science.

Therefore, in chapter 1 we will examine two predominant ontologies available to contemporary political science. On the one hand, is social constructivism which tends to analyze meaning and base its ontological theories upon discourse and 'objectivations'. On the other hand, is critical realism, which searches for the real causal mechanisms which produce our experiences, thereby basing its ontology on a transcendental study of these mechanisms. We will see that in different ways, both fail to escape the dominant influence of a classical form of ontological theorizing, characterized by an inability to move beyond the bounds of anthropocentrism. The result is that they are left impoverished in comparison to a truly materialist and dynamic ontology, shorn of its traditional prioritizing of Being over Becoming.

Chapter 2, therefore, will be an attempt to outline an alternative ontology based upon the writings of Gilles Deleuze. In his work we will find the conceptual and

[2] Hall, Peter. "The Dilemmas of Contemporary Social Science."
[3] Hall, Peter. "The Dilemmas of Contemporary Social Science," 14.

philosophical resources for reinvigorating contemporary ontological theorizing – effectively bypassing both the hermeneutical tradition's tendency to deny the possibility of thinking ontology,[4] and the empiricists' reliance upon a world of stable and identifiable objects. Instead we will develop a dynamic and materialist ontology that not only philosophically takes account of and moves beyond postmodern criticisms, but also draws interesting connections to the contemporary scientific paradigm known as complexity theory, thereby opening up possibilities for fruitful communication between political scientists and other disciplines. The key to this ontology will be our concept of individuation, which drastically alters the ontological status of individuals.

In chapter 3, we will take this novel ontology and place it within the framework established in Deleuze and Felix Guattari's political writings. Continuing with individuation as our guiding concept, we will examine how this process of being made an individual occurs in a political ontology. Our aim here will be to encompass the general dynamics which transpire amongst a variety of levels in a political situation. Thus, we will not be concerned solely with how subjects are made subjects, nor solely with how a particular social structure arises. Rather, we will seek to analyze these individuals (and here, the term 'individual' must be expanded beyond its usual connotations) as instances of general ontological dynamics. The framework for establishing such a political ontology based on individuation will be supplied by the concept of assemblages – a term which is beginning to gain currency in a number of different fields.[5] Through the conjunction of

[4] Characterized perhaps most clearly by Jacques Derrida's (following Martin Heidegger) crossing out of the word 'Being' in his writings. For more on this rejection of ontology in continental philosophy, see: May, Todd. *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction*, 13-15.

[5] Not only in political science (e.g. Saskia Sassen and Manuel DeLanda), but also in cultural studies (e.g. Brian Massumi), organizational theory (e.g. the *Tamara* journal), and science studies (e.g. Bruno Latour).

assemblages and individuation we will see how this ontological model makes possible a thinking through of the immense complexity of our contemporary world.

Finally, in chapter 4, we will turn to recent work in the field of 'contentious politics' in order to give a more concrete example of how our ontological theories can be productive for political science. This example is chosen, not only because of the degree of sophistication that has been reached in recent theoretical analyses of modern contentious politics, but also because it will allow us to examine in detail precisely those moments in the political world when stability and order falter. If it is accepted that conflict and change are integral to the political world, and that social order is often the product of difficult consensus-building and the victory of one group over another, then the study of contentious politics must be given a central place in political science and in political ontology. Rather than seeing these moments of contention as aberrant episodes to be theoretically marginalized or simply done away with, our ontology of dynamism and change will seek to face up adequately to the centrality of deep contention in the world of politics today. Thus, this final chapter will aim at providing some key conceptual tools to analyze contentious episodes, and it will illustrate our earlier (relatively) abstract theorizing with examples drawn from real-life processes of contention.[6]

Our Conclusion will look back at what we have achieved, and will ask to what degree we have met the goal we set forth earlier of producing an ontology capable of

[6] A FOOTNOTE ON FOOTNOTES: Since academic form demands a linear progress of arguments, throughout this paper we will frequently use footnotes to expand on ideas or information that are intriguing, but not necessarily central to the main line of thought. In part, they are there to suggest the various capacities that this thesis has to connect with other areas and thus expand beyond its current form. Therefore, in true assemblage fashion, some of the footnotes will highlight connections that can be drawn from heterogeneous fields such as mathematics, biology, and philosophy of mind. In effect, this creates a functioning paper that at the same time attempts to refrain from homogenizing its content. In a second sense, the footnotes also exhibit the lines of flight which carry this thesis away from any stabilization in the form of a particular argument. In both senses, they are there to performatively display the concepts and theories that will be developed within this paper.

accommodating the dynamics and complexity of the contemporary political situation. If all goes well, the importance and the force of our ontology should be clear to the reader by this point, and it is hoped that this thesis will ideally spawn a number of productive lines for the reader's thoughts to follow. In this regard, we hope to follow Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's conception of a text as an assemblage that produces real material effects, rather than solely transmitting information:

> "An assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously (independently of any recapitulation that may be made of it in a scientific or theoretical corpus). There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders, so that a book has no sequel nor the world as its object nor one or several authors as its subject. In short, we think that one cannot write sufficiently in the name of an outside. The outside has no image, no signification, no subjectivity. The book as assemblage with the outside, against the book as image of the world."[7]

[7] Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 23.

Chapter 1
The Ontologies of Critical Realism and Social Constructivism

In this first chapter, we will examine two major ontologies that can be taken to represent a wide swath of political science (though they by no means exhaust the possibilities). On the one hand, there is what is referred to variously as transcendental or critical realism (or critical naturalism), and on the other hand, there is what is commonly called social constructivism (or hermeneutics).[8,9] However, since each of these ontological terms encompasses a multitude of variants and since we do not wish to criticize over-generalized characterizations, we will focus our attention on the influential works of Roy Bhaskar, Alfred Schutz, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann since they provide an explicit account of the philosophical and ontological groundings of these theories. The choice of these two theories is motivated in part by the intention to examine two of the major representatives of what, in analytic philosophy of science, is known as the realist/anti-realist divide. Put roughly, the split between these positions has to do with

[8] It should be clear from the beginning that it will not be possible for us to give a thoroughly adequate analysis of these two ontologies, considering the vast amount of scholarship that has been done on them. Instead, we hope to trace out their general structures and to point towards significant drawbacks in their conceptions of ontology. In order to be properly understood, much of the critical work in this first chapter will be retrospective – in the sense of depending on the alternative ontological perspective developed in later chapters.

[9] As will become apparent through their conspicuous absence, two influential theories in political science will be considered largely insignificant for our purposes here. In the first place, rationalism and its variants (e.g. rational choice, IR influenced by game theory, and neo-classical economic theory) are not covered here simply because they do not offer an ontology. As Roy Bhaskar concisely puts it: "it may be best regarded as a normative theory of efficient action, generating a set of techniques for achieving given ends, rather than as an explanatory theory capable of casting light on actual empirical episodes". (Bhaskar, Roy. *The Possibility of Naturalism*, p. 30.) Similarly, the theories proposed by quantitative statistical analysis are irrelevant for ontology; they simply detach identifiable variables from their embedded contexts and attempt to model abstract correlations between them. This in no way offers an ontology, but only a reconstruction of repeated social occurrences in an generalized conceptual model. They never achieve the contextual specificity of actual ontological situations. Furthermore, both rationalism and statistical analysis are exemplars of the various problems that will be outlined within this paper.

whether we can consider an objectively real world to exist independently (in some fashion) of our conceptualizations and linguistic statements, or not. Realism[10] is a widespread (albeit usually implicit) ontology of political science – particularly in international relations (IR), a field which has developed ontological and epistemological arguments to a relatively high level of sophistication.[11] Hermeneutics,[12] on the other hand, has been a highly influential theory in the social sciences overall and particularly in much of political science. To foreshadow our conclusions, we will argue that while social constructivism has many benefits (particularly in its polemics with positivism), it is critical realism that currently provides the most fruitful account of political ontology in established political science. Bhaskar's realism, however, is still subject to a number of criticisms that will only be overcome when we later turn to the realist ontology of Gilles

[10] I take this term to include those groups often labeled under the terms of 'positivists', 'critical realists', and 'classical materialists'. Briefly, classical materialism is the philosophical doctrine that derives the ideal realm of subjectivity from a (variously defined) material base. Positivism is the doctrine that an objective world exists and is immediately present within subjective experience; moreover, what is real is limited to what is observable. Critical realism, while retaining the notion of an independent, objective world, refuses the limitation of ontology to epistemology, and argues that unobservable entities are derivable from their effects on experience. (We will see later the importance of this detachment of ontology from empirical experience.) For the purposes of this essay, we will focus on critical realism (also referred to as transcendental realism) – it being the most significant representative of the realist position because it is the most widely practiced theory, and the most philosophically advanced.

[11] IR theorist Alexander Wendt, often characterized as a social constructivist, in fact argues for a realist ontology in his major work, *Social Theory of International Politics*. As he notes, "Most IR scholarship, mainstream and critical alike, seems to presuppose these [realist] assumptions, which means that most IR scholars are at least tacit realists. When they make their philosophical views explicit, however, they often take *anti*-realist positions." (Wendt, Alexander. *Social Theory of International Politics*, 47.) This contradiction between scholars' implicit presuppositions and their explicit ontologies, combined with the fact that Wendt can argue for a realist position while nevertheless retaining major elements of social constructivism should make it clear that the two positions are not mutually exclusive. Our two representatives have been chosen to maximize the difference between the two, but this does not preclude their interweaving.

[12] This term includes, as a rough grouping, 'social constructivists', and any number of 'idealists' (e.g. German idealism and phenomenology). The idealists are distinguished by their focus on the subjective aspects of mediation (e.g. the Kantian categories, or the phenomenon as opposed to the noumenon), which ostensibly serve to distance us necessarily from the world-in-itself (Hegel being an important exception). The social constructivists, on the other hand, are more or less focused on the intersubjective discursive construction of meaning, noting that language preexists and mediates our relation to reality. Against oversimplified readings of these traditions though, we must note that it is often the case that they do allow for non-interpretable events to impinge upon an otherwise discursively constructed experience (e.g. in Immanuel Kant, the 'empirical intuitions'; in Jacques Derrida, the 'force of the general text'; and in Jacques Lacan, the 'non-signifiable Real').

Deleuze. The aim of this first chapter, therefore, will be to outline and draw a map of the various convergences and divergences that occur in relation to this distinctive Deleuzian ontology. By contrast, it will be seen that while both critical realism and social constructivism offer highly sophisticated theories, and have much to offer, each of them nevertheless falls into a number of intractable problems.

From a general perspective, one of the major challenges for social science research is that whereas the natural sciences can take their object of study to be empirical occurrences of conjoined objects, the social sciences must take their object to be the empirical occurrence of actions or behaviours that include some element of intentionality and meaning behind them (unless, of course, one is a dogmatic behaviourist). This added feature of social studies has generated two differing conceptions of what social science's aim should be. On one hand, there are those who seek to *explain* phenomena, traditionally by subsuming empirical events under a general law that determines their (ideally) necessary conjunction. The source of such a concept of science stems from David Hume's analysis of causality – which concluded that we can only ascribe causality to events that we experience as being repeatedly conjoined (in time and space), without, however, ever being able to determine it as necessary relation. These constant conjunctions form the basis for our empirical generalizations concerning how events will unfold causally. As we will see with critical realism though, this positivist idea of establishing general causal laws is futile for social ontology; while positivist are correct in focusing on explanation, the emphasis must instead be on discerning causal *mechanisms*. On the other hand, social constructivists have taken the aim of social science to be a matter of *understanding*, where this includes reconstructing the intentions and meanings that actors and collectivities have ascribed to their actions and their surroundings. For the realists,

therefore, the object of study is considered to be fully present, immediately before us in empirical experience (e.g. as in behaviorism, positivism, and critical realism[13]). For the social constructivists, the object of study is never fully present; in studying the social world, the other's subjective meaning is never available to us in-itself. Instead, we always have to undertake an interpretive process in order to understand it; meaning therefore becomes a problem insofar as the 'objective' meaning of a sign cannot be considered as identical to the 'subjective' meaning that was intended. In a social constructivist's ontology, it is argued that there are ultimately no pure objects, but only signs that refer to the intention they represent. As a result of all these factors, the social constructivist argues that there must necessarily be a focus upon the ontological givens of language (and semiotics as the general science of signs) and the construction of meanings. While each position has much to offer, they nevertheless both stumble in developing a rigorously materialist political ontology.[14] For critical realists, criticism arises in relation to their essentialism and their conception of a dynamic ontology. For social constructivists, the problem is their reliance on phenomenological experience and its semiotic object. For both positions, however, we will see that their primary mistake is to tie their ontology too closely to subjective experience.

Considering their polemical struggle with positivism, we will begin by looking at the social constructivists, a group who more than the critical realists (the latter being an

[13] As we will see though, while the object of study is considered fully present, critical realists in fact argue that we can transcendentally determine the *unobservable* generative mechanisms that produced an event. This is one of their crucial and critical moves away from positivism, which limits ontology to experience.

[14] Since the immediate association with the term 'materialist' is likely to be Marxist, it should be made clear that, while sharing some of Marx's inclinations, we are nevertheless looking to develop a materialist ontology shorn from his dialectical basis. We will clarify this notion of materialism in chapter 2.

approach which is held in natural *and* social sciences[15]), believe they have tailored their approach to the unique properties of social reality. Rising up against the dominance of positivism, hermeneutics argues that what characterizes a social ontology is precisely the importance of non-empirical intentions and meanings. So, rather than observing the social world in terms of fully present objects and behaviours, social constructivists emphasize the importance of the actors who constitute the social world and the interpretations and meanings they ascribe to their actions. An immediate qualification needs to be made though – 'social constructivism', as the term is presently used, is far too vague to be anything more than a straw man.[16] As a result, for the purposes of this essay, we will focus on its phenomenological foundations as found in Alfred Schutz,[17] and the sociological extension found in Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. Put briefly, the aim of Schutz is to analyze the phenomena that appear in the everyday experience of the social world.[18] This approach contests the usual scientific method by striving to move beyond a study of objective patterns of empirical occurrences, to incorporate an intersubjective world populated with meaningful objects produced by intentional subjects. Since for Schutz it is only within direct face-to-face contact that full knowledge of the other's 'subjective meaning-context' (the context within which an action or expression

[15] In our section on critical realism, we will not make any reference to a distinction between social and natural ontology since Bhaskar himself contends that the two can be modeled in similar ways, and even methodologically approached in largely similar ways. This unity of method is the meaning of 'naturalism' in his book, *The Possibility of Naturalism*.

[16] See Ian Hacking's work, *The Social Construction of What?* for a critical analysis of the various ways in which the term is used.

[17] It can be noted that a significant philosophical criticism could also be made of social constructivism based on its phenomenological heritage. While phenomenology aims to bracket the existence of objects and the world, this is done only in order to determine how a supposedly irreducibly given subject constitutes objects and the world *as* given. Our aim, on the other hand, is to bracket objects, the world, *and* the subject, in order to determine the nature of a truly materialist ontology. This is a point that will be developed in more depth later in this chapter.

[18] Schutz explicitly sets aside the problem of proving whether others truly exist or not. Instead, he takes up the 'natural attitude' found in everyday reality, where the assumption of an existing other is already present.

makes sense for the producer) is possible, social science must instead rely upon 'objective meaning-contexts' (more or less abstracted, indirect models developed around ideal types,[19] such as a political actor, an economic actor, or a rational actor).[20]

As the Schutz-influenced sociologists, Berger and Luckmann, would go on to note though, it is this objective meaning-context which provides the conditions for an "*inter*subjective commonsense world [to be] constructed".[21] This everyday idea of reality is constructed through the process of 'objectivation' in which "human expressivity […] manifests itself in products of human activity that are available both to their producers and to other men [sic] as elements of a common world".[22] Our pre-theoretical sense of social reality presents itself as intersubjective, meaning that we ascribe intentions and reasons to the behaviour and structures of social life. Our guides for these attributions are, in turn, derived from our interactions with others and our own self-knowledge. On the basis of this constructivist notion, Wendt has produced an important critique of realism in IR.[23] The central tenet of most IR – that anarchy (the absence of any real power beyond states) is the determining force in how states will interact – is shown by Wendt to be less entrenched than realists believed. They have argued that anarchy entails an international

[19] Ideal types, in Schutz, "are constructed by postulating certain motives as fixed and invariant [with] the manner of construction [being] abstraction, generalization, or formalization" (Schutz, Alfred. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, 244).

[20] The distinction here between objective and subjective meaning-contexts is further developed by Schutz. Roughly, the observer has the subjective context in mind when s/he analyzes a particular product (e.g. an expression, action, or artifact) and attempts to model the meaning-context of the actual producer. The objective context, on the other hand, is in mind when the theorist analyzes a particular social product without reference to its producer.

[21] Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*, 20. This intersubjective world, as the title of their book suggests, is focused upon 'knowledge'. What they designate by this term, though, is not simply theoretical knowledge; rather they seek to understand the construction of all types of knowledge, especially the knowledge of everyday, pre-theoretical perspectives, i.e. the phenomenology of knowledge.

[22] Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*, 34.

[23] This realism of IR is different from the philosophical realism we have been referring to. IR's realism is a reaction to the early idealism of the discipline, which was relatively utopian in its faith in international law and morality. IR's realism, by contrast, emphasizes the centrality of power and its ability to overcome any "idealist" tendencies.

state of nature, where each state strives to the best of its abilities to impose its will on others. Wendt, however, notes that anarchy can entail not only war and fear amongst states, but also friendship and alliances, through the reciprocal and repeated interaction between states. Hence, friendly relations between Canada and the United States tend to beget more friendly relations. In other words, the meaning of 'anarchy' is not intrinsic, but must be socially constructed through interactions among state actors.[24] However, through alienation – "the process whereby the unity of the producing and its product is broken"[25] – the social world detaches itself from its immediate production and takes on its objective, imposing, and external character. For example, after a process of alienation, authority is no longer necessarily manifested through direct punishment; instead it becomes a symbolic structure that in fact functions best by *not* being employed. When an authority figure is forced to use their power, it is perceived as the result of their loss of control, i.e. a weakness.[26] Social constructivism argues that it is processes like these which establish social structures *as* objective structures. In other words, our sense of an objective social reality is the product of individuals' actions (including their use of language) being separated from their origins and taking on a life of their own. This is the sense in which the social world presents itself phenomenally to subjects as always already there – as the a priori of human action. The most significant case of this objectivation process is the production of language, which, in its ability to refer to non-present times and spaces, gives meaning to the world as a unified horizon encompassing the present

[24] See: Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy is what States make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics." and Wendt, Alexander. *Social Theory of International Politics*, Ch. 6.
[25] Quoted in Bhaskar, Roy. *The Possibility of Naturalism*, p. 33.
[26] Wright, Ben, dir. *The Reality of the Virtual.*

experience.[27] This integrated, everyday sense of social reality includes not only direct contact with others, but also indirect reference to people from the past (through their products), people in the present, and people in the future. It is only within this holistic context that our everyday sense of reality is constructed through processes of objectivation. Berger and Luckmann's sociological background means they are concerned primarily with the ways in which such a sense of reality is constructed; however, for our purposes, the limitation of their social constructivism is already revealed through their focus on objectivation.

By focusing so strongly on the objective expression of subjectivity (whether it be language or any other social product), social constructivism neglects the transcendental conditions for, on one hand, language itself to emerge, and on the other hand, subjectivity to arise. As Gilles Deleuze will argue, language is not self-sufficient nor is the subject a self-positing individual.[28] The critical realist position (with which we agree on this point) would argue that while language itself may explain much within the social world, it cannot itself be taken as a given. What is taken as unproblematically given in one study, must be put into question in another. In other words, while language may provide the conditions for any number of social processes, what are the conditions of language? In this regard, critical realists have made an important point in highlighting the need for transcendental study. Without it, science becomes dogmatic, locked into an assumed point of origin. Moreover, it reduces the likelihood of interdisciplinary communication by

[27] Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*, 39.

[28] "First, language has no self-sufficiency, at least that is my view. […] It is composed of signs, but signs are inseparable from a whole other element, a non-linguistic element, which could be called 'the state of things', or, better yet, 'images'. As Bergson has convincingly shown, images have an existence independently of us. […] Second, utterance does not refer to a subject. There is no expressing subject, i.e. subject of utterance, but only assemblages. This means that, in any assemblage, there exist 'processes of subjectivation' which assign various subjects: some are images, and some are signs." (Deleuze, Gilles. "Letter to Uno on Language," 201.)

ignoring the possibility that other disciplines may provide the conditions for a particular discipline. For instance, what sorts of biological and neurological mechanisms support the capacities of language? By contrast, in social constructivism (particularly its modern-day mutation into a catch-all term that equates it with the belief that "everything is language"), language and other objectivations are given the status of ontological fundamentals; what is is simply the *structures* of discourse and meaning, from which *particular* discursive objects, identities, and meanings emerge. Taken as simply given to us in phenomenological experience, objectivations become the sole framework for empirical research. As a result, Berger and Luckmann's social constructivism falls into the same trap as the positivists: they reduce ontology to a matter of empiricism – what Bhaskar will refer to as 'empirical realism'. In other words, by resting their ontological foundations on Schutz's phenomenology, they take what exists to be limited to what can be experienced from a subjective perspective. Epistemology and the question of what we can know through experience are consequently privileged over ontology and the transcendental search for the conditions of a phenomenon.

Critical realism, on the other hand, argues that such a privileging of epistemology concedes too much to our subjective position. It implicitly renders our ontologies entirely anthropocentric by postulating that reality exists in such a way as to be seemingly teleologically driven to fully express itself in conscious experience.[29] It suggests that reality was ordained to perfectly fit our experiences of it, rather than our experiences

[29] Mark Seem explains the political significance of such anthropocentric ontologies: "The human and social sciences have accustomed us to see the figure of Man behind every social event. […] Such forms of knowledge project an image of reality, at the expense of reality itself. […] They blind us to other realities, and especially the reality of power as it subjugates us." (Seem, Mark. "Introduction," xx.)

emerging out of a larger, presubjective substratum.[30] Critical realism, by contrast, argues for the value of ontology over epistemology, and turns to the transcendental project as the best method for such an approach. Roy Bhaskar, the original proponent of this view, explicitly aligns his work with the Kantian project.[31] Like Kant, the critical realists employ transcendental[32] arguments to establish the conditions for phenomenal experience, in this way moving beyond subjective experience to (metaphorically) deep structures. Unlike Kant, however, critical realists refuse to immediately locate these transcendental conditions within the structure of our minds. Moreover, these constructed transcendental models are then subjected to empirical scrutiny. For the critical realists, therefore, the transcendental is neither a universal nor a subjective structure (or rather, it cannot be *assumed* to be universal or subjective), but must instead be subjected to criticism and the findings of new evidence. To mark this distinction, in this section we will follow the critical realists in referring to the structural distinction between the empirical and the transcendental as the ontological distinction between empirical 'experiences' and 'events', and transcendental 'mechanisms'. Events are what (natural and social) scientists study, or more specifically, their experiences *of* events, since it is a constitutive part of experimentation that we suppose that events need not be observed.[33]

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[30] Interestingly enough, the latter idea has some parallels in what analytic philosophers of mind refer to as 'cognitive closure'. In attempting to solve the so-called 'hard problem' concerning the mind/body relation, some philosophers have suggested that our minds are constructed in such a way that we will *never* be able to attain self-reflection on our subjective foundations in the brain. In other words, there are real ontological limitations to conscious experience.

[31] See, for example, Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* where he argues for what he calls 'transcendental realism' (as opposed to Kant's transcendental idealism).

[32] 'Transcendental' must be rigorously distinguished from 'transcendent'. The latter is the target of Kant's criticisms and consists of knowledge which is beyond and outside of any possible experience; the former, meanwhile, is considered to be within experience, providing the underlying necessary conditions for it to possibly arise. A transcendental argument, therefore, is a form of argument which seeks to discern the *immanent* necessary conditions that make a particular given possible.

[33] In Bhaskar's terms, these events (and not their experience) form part of the 'intransitive' dimension of science – that ontological realm which functions independently of a human observer. The 'transitive'

Traditionally, as we briefly noted earlier, social science has taken its task to be establishing general relations between conjunctions of these experienced events (based upon a Humean conception of causality). But, as Bhaskar argues, such a position reduces all ontological realism to empirical instances, and is hence unable to account for an intransitive dimension that would exceed experience and provide the conditions for intelligible scientific practice. Instead, critical realism argues that we must search for the transcendental mechanisms which produce events. Mechanisms, in this sense, act independently of the experiences of events they produce, i.e. they are the intransitive and real causal powers[34] of an object which produce the recurrence of events discovered in scientific activity. Thus, Bhaskar argues that from the regularities observed within experience, it is the function of the theorist to build models of the specific mechanisms which account for the existence of the observed phenomenon. For the most part, with the exception of highly artificial experimental conditions in natural science, the difficulty of establishing mechanisms results from their interaction with numerous other mechanisms – what Bhaskar refers to as the 'open' nature of ontology, as opposed to the 'closed' conditions of controlled experiments. This contingent multiplicity of interacting causal mechanisms means that it is challenging to find a simple correspondence between the produced experiences and the underlying mechanisms. In natural science, this is mitigated to some degree by controlled experiments; but in the social sciences, the open nature of

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dimension, by contrast, is the realm of socially produced knowledge, theories, techniques and tools used to study intransitive objects. Without this presupposition of intransitivity, there is no possibility of scientific self-criticism or change, i.e. the conditions for the intelligibility of scientific practice are undermined. Furthermore, the absence of this intransitive dimension capitulates to the ontological structure which supports *both* the positivist position (equating reality solely with experience) and the constructivist position (all of reality is a social construction, since there is no outside of discourse).

[34] Power, here, is understood to be the capacity of a thing to do something. We will see in chapter 2 how this concept of capacity can be made dynamic and shorn from Bhaskar's essentialism concerning natural kinds.

ontology makes mechanisms difficult, but not impossible, to identify.[35] The crucial point, though, is that for critical realism, the experiences of events that science derives evidence from are undergirded by a transcendental ontology of causal mechanisms.

In terms of our own ontological position, there is much of critical realism that supports our contention that it is the most sophisticated social ontology in the discipline of political science. We have already observed a number of these positive characteristics – for example, the emphasis on transcendental studies, and the priority given to ontology over epistemology. Both seek to undermine the traditional anthropocentrism of positivist and social constructivist thought (which rely on reducing ontology to experience). Given our earlier arguments that science and scientific practice presuppose an intransitive dimension, it follows that ontology must not be limited by questions of what we can know (although, as we will see, critical realism itself shies away from the full repercussions of this idea). This detaching of ontology from epistemology also makes available the possibility of establishing the existence of unobservable mechanisms and processes. Ontological theorizing is no longer limited to what can be experientially given, although this is not a license for constructing dogmatic metaphysical theories. Both critical realism and Deleuze's transcendental materialism emphasize that the empirical given must be a starting point for further elaboration, thereby limiting the range of possible theoretical models. The emphasis on matching the empirical data to the transcendental structures highlights another benefit of the critical realist's position – namely, their refusal to posit their transcendental models as being universal and ahistorical. As people like Foucault have shown, the a priori conceptual and material systems in a given historical age are

[35] It is not our intention here to look at the methodology developed to deal with this difficulty, since we are concerned with ontology. Suffice it to say, social science has already produced a number of techniques in order to cope with it.

always themselves contingent, historical products.[36] These structures can change, and any modern day transcendental project must recognize this dynamism. Tied to this dynamic conception of the transcendental is the argument that, outside of controlled experiments, ontology forms an 'open system' where various mechanisms interact, without necessarily producing a constant conjunctions of events. In other words, our world tends to generate chaotic phenomena, which science then attempts to limit by establishing controls over experiments. In political science, controlled experiments are virtually impossible to produce let alone replicate, and so what the theorist is presented with is almost always a mass/mess of data that requires fine-tuned (statistical or theoretical) instruments in order to organize. Critical realism, by explicitly noting the open nature of ontology, has arrived at a conception of *interacting* mechanisms in order to account for widely varying outcomes amongst otherwise similar sets of mechanisms.[37] By making mechanisms, rather than Humean causality, determinative of the events in the world, critical realism also lends the intransitive realm its own unique dynamics that are, significantly, independent of our observations of them. "That is to say, it is not the character of science that imposes a determinate pattern or order on the world; but the order of the world that, under certain determinate conditions, makes possible the cluster of activities that we call 'science'."[38] This is a radical reversal of any philosophies (of science, or otherwise) which would seek to place the subject at the foundation, since this materialist hypothesis states that reality itself generates determinate objects and subjects, rather than subjects themselves imposing order on the world. To summarize, the following six characteristics

[36] For more on the relation between Foucault and Kant, including on the issue of the a priori, see: Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*, 60-61.
[37] This is an idea that we will return to in more detail in the fourth chapter, albeit with a slightly revised conception of mechanisms.
[38] Bhaskar, Roy. *A Realist Philosophy of Science*, 30.

of critical realism – its transcendental method, its dynamic a priori, its privileging of ontology over epistemology, its focus on mechanisms rather than covering laws, its focus on open systems rather than closed, and its (implicitly) materialist consequences – all move its ontology beyond the empirical realism of traditional positivism and social constructivism, in effect making it the most developed ontology available to contemporary political science. The other alternatives – social constructivism and naïve positivism – rely upon outdated conceptions of experience and ontology that have been subject to criticism in both the social and natural sciences (e.g. unobservables within the basic physical world). That is not to imply that critical realism is without fault, however.

From our perspective, the most significant drawback of critical realism is its inability to move fully beyond anthropocentrism, despite its stated intentions. This inability manifests itself in a number of different ways. The first to note is Bhaskar's explicit intention to examine the transcendental conditions for the *possibility of our knowledge* of the social world.[39] By framing the question in this way, and making the transcendental method dependent upon our knowledge, Bhaskar has remained largely within the Kantian framework which also sought to determine the conditions for the possibility of knowledge. The transcendental realism of Bhaskar thus falls into the same problem that both Salomon Maimon and Deleuze[40] pointed out in Kant: in striving to determine the necessary conditions for the *possibility* of knowledge, they have neglected the genetic conditions of a *real* individual.[41] Critical realism's inquiry remains within the

[39] "The question to which this essay aspires to make a contribution may therefore be set as follows: *what properties do societies and people possess that might make them objects of knowledge for us*?" (Bhaskar, Roy. *The Possibility of Naturalism*, 13.)

[40] See: Smith, Daniel. "Deleuze, Hegel, and the Post-Kantian Tradition." for more on this close relation between Maimon and Deleuze.

[41] 'Individuals' here and throughout this paper will be taken to mean any number of typically bounded things, including, but not limited to, individual natural objects, individual humans, individual experiences,

boundaries of representational thought by limiting the nature of objects to the aspects that make them objects of knowledge.[42] In other words, it subtly reintroduces the anthropocentrism that critical realism earlier criticized. In this case, it is no longer an epistemological question of how we know some thing (as in empirical realism), but rather a transcendental question concerning what objects must be like in order for them to be possible objects of knowledge. By establishing the starting point of the transcendental question in such a way, critical realists have already presupposed the formal nature of the transcendental. This nature they take to be structurally homologous to the form of representational thought. (We will analyze representational thought in more detail in chapter 2, but it suffices for now to note that it depends on identity.) In effect, the transcendental is modeled on the image of the empirical, with the assumption here being precisely an unwarranted anthropocentric projection of thought onto being. By contrast, Deleuze argues that the transcendental must be rigorously emptied of all subjective remnants, including any form of identity.[43] To do so, the transcendental project must search for the *real* conditions of an object. This entails looking for its *differential* and *generative* conditions, or, what amounts to the same thing, its 'individuating' conditions. While this idea will be developed systematically in the next chapter, for now we can argue that critical realism's mechanisms are not differential (although they may be

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individual social groupings, or individual political-economic systems. In each case it is a matter of highlighting the non-generality of the specific circumstances and the identity which makes it *an* individual. All can be considered as concrete individuals at smaller or larger scales. Individuation, therefore, will be a process that is played out in a multiplicity of different ways.

[42] "For transcendental realism, it is the nature of objects that determines their cognitive possibilities for us; that, in nature, it is humanity that is contingent and knowledge, so to speak, accidental. Thus it is because sticks and stones are solid that they can be picked up and thrown, not because they can be picked up and thrown that they are solid (*though that they can be handled in this sort of way may be a contingently necessary condition for our* knowledge *of their solidity*)." (Bhaskar, Roy. *The Possibility of Naturalism*, 25, emphasis added.)

[43] "We seek to determine an impersonal and pre-individual transcendental field, which does not resemble the corresponding empirical fields, and which nevertheless is not confused with an undifferentiated depth." (Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense*, 102.)

considered generative). Simply put, they are not truly differential because they are based upon an identifiable *thing*'s powers to act. Furthermore, as we will see in the next section, these powers are definable in terms of self-identical essences. While mechanisms do enter into a relational (hence differential) network in open systems, there is still nevertheless a remnant of atomism in the fact that they are defined as "the causal powers of things."[44] On the other hand, mechanisms are arguably generative, although in Bhaskar's formulation they appear to be plagued by an aspect of metaphysical vitalism. This generative capacity relies on the distinction made by Bhaskar between 'tendencies' and 'powers'. Powers, as we have seen, are the capacities of an object to act; tendencies, on the other hand, are "powers which may be exercised without being fulfilled or actualized".[45] Thus, for example, an individual may have the tendency (or vital impetus) to seize as much power as possible, but his actual powers may be limited by physical, moral, legal and social constraints. However, beyond claiming it is in their essential nature, the source of these tendencies is left largely unexplained by critical realism. When we examine Deleuze's ontology in more depth, we will see through the concept of 'intensive difference', a more precise and non-vitalist account of tendencies.[46]

Another remnant of the form of representational thought is to be found in Bhaskar's essentialism. As he argues, "In general to classify a group of things together in science, to call them by the same name, presupposes that they possess a real essence or nature in common, though it does not presuppose that the real essence or nature is

[44] Bhaskar, Roy. *A Realist Theory of Science*, 50.
[45] Bhaskar, Roy. *A Realist Theory of Science*, 50. Also see: Ibid. 229-233.
[46] As Deleuze will repeatedly argue, against any interpretation of desire as spontaneous and natural, "desire must be assembled." (Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 531n39.)

known."[47] Despite Bhaskar's insistence that these natures can change through evolution,[48] the fact remains that he still determines things through their participation in a common essence. In chapter 2, we will see how this leads critical realism to remain at the level of the general, and to forgo the search for real ontological individuals. Their reliance on essences and common categories for determining the nature of transcendental generative mechanisms means that, again, critical realism has been unable to fully draw out the consequences of its key insight: that ontology and the intransitive dimension are larger than our experience and knowledge of them. If the intransitive dimension has its own dynamics independently of how we think or perceive of them, then there is no reason to believe that individuals (things, mechanisms, systems, or processes) are ontologically definable in terms of generalizing categories or essences, since they are themselves subjective, transitive products. Defining things in these terms therefore reveals Bhaskar's residual adherence to the anthropocentric position. By contrast, in chapter 2 of this thesis we will examine the emergence of ontological individuals through their own immanent processes – without recourse to general categories or essences.

Lastly, the two problems cited so far can be seen as instances of the tendency of transcendental projects to project an image of the empirical onto the transcendental. Bhaskar, by making the transcendental a possible object of knowledge and by defining its elements in terms of essences and their essential powers, has removed the ostensible difference between the empirical and the transcendental. The problem with this effacement of the difference is that the transcendental is supposed to provide the conditions for experience, and as a result cannot itself be an empirical instance. To argue

[47] Bhaskar, Roy. *A Realist Theory of Science*, 210.
[48] Bhaskar, Roy. *A Realist Theory of Science*, 213-4.

otherwise is to establish a vicious circle whereby the condition refers to the conditioned. According to Bhaskar's own criterion for a philosophy of science, critical realism, therefore, fails by not keeping the objects of science truly independent of the knowledge of these objects.[49] In this regard, critical realism fails to truly explore the transcendental field of production. Therefore, the three problems outlined here – Bhaskar's essentialism, his search for the conditions of the possibility of knowledge rather than of real objects, and his subsequent interpretation of the transcendental in terms of the empirical – all show that while critical realism makes significant progress towards removing anthropocentric biases from our ontological theorizing, it nevertheless remains attached to them at certain key points.

With this criticism though, we can link up the errors of social constructivism with the errors of critical realism: both commit the fallacy of projecting anthropocentric images onto the nature of being.[50,51] Social constructivism limits itself to the empirical study of objectivations and determines them to be the ontological basis of everyday

[49] "Any adequate philosophy of science […] must be capable of sustaining both (1) the social character of science and (2) *the independence from science of the objects of scientific thought*." (Bhaskar, Roy. *A Realist Theory of Science*, 24; emphasis added.)

[50] This argument can be seen as an instance of Deleuze's more general refusal to accept the 'hylomorphic schema' which entails that matter receives its form from a source that is transcendent to the material. This source has been variously embodied in the essentialist categories of critical realism and the social conventions of constructivism, but also in the ontological Ideas of Plato, or the very form of identity central to representational thought, among other cases. Against this view, Deleuze argues for a 'morphogenetic' (the concrete emergence of form) view that sees form and matter as irreducibly intertwined and co-created through spontaneously generated cancellations of intensive differences. Politically, the hylomorphic schema has been excellently analyzed in John Protevi's *Political Physics*. He examines Plato, Aristotle and Kant and discovers within their notions of the body politic the subtle denigration of artisanship and material self-ordering in the name of abstract formal/forceful imposition by a transcendent power.

[51] To be clear, we are not suggesting that ontology should remove all subjective and anthropocentric concerns, such as meanings, thoughts or affects. Rather, we are claiming that the subjective and the anthropocentric cannot provide a *foundation* for ontology, and thus we must remove them when clarifying the nature of any ontology. We still leave room for the subjective to be assembled from ontological processes and, as we will see, believe that people can have some measure of emergent agency over and above the elements and processes which constitute them.

reality.[52] Critical realism, on the other hand, makes significant progress in overcoming empirical realism, but still remains unable to determine the nature of a truly transcendental materialism cleared of subjective biases. It is this problem that drives Deleuze to argue that what is needed instead is a thoroughly 'de-subjectified' and 'de-objectified' study of the transcendental realm.[53] By emptying the transcendental of all empirical and subjective remnants, we will be able to determine the nature of a novel materialist ontology.[54] This will result in a differential, self-differing materialism capable of accounting for how individuals and identities emerge from the processes of becoming. As a rigorous process ontology, this materialism must "be capable of doing without subjects steering the process (or being steered by it), without substantive names designating 'blocks' in motion, and without points of origin or destination marking the allowed trajectory."[55] Only by avoiding these traditional markers of stability can the continuity of becoming be upheld, and the paradoxes of Zeno avoided. In brief, Deleuze's ontology will be one that truly follows through with the idea of studying all identities (social, personal, or objective) as constructed through processes of continual individuation.

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[52] "The reality of everyday life is not only filled with objectivations; *it is only possible because of them*." Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality* 35, emphasis added.

[53] As he argues in *The Logic of Sense*, there "are nomadic singularities which are no longer imprisoned within the fixed individuality of the infinite Being (the notorious immutability of God), nor inside the sedentary boundaries of the finite subject (the notorious limits of knowledge). This is something neither individual nor personal, but rather singular." (p. 107.)

[54] It would be perhaps more accurate to characterize the movement not as an 'emptying' or a 'reduction' as in phenomenology, since it is a matter of opening up actual objects to their larger, 'virtual' horizons, and not reducing their diversity to a single identity.

[55] Boundas, Constantin. "What Difference does Deleuze's Difference make?", 3.

Chapter 2
Individuation and Complexity in Deleuze's Ontology

As we saw in the last chapter, the weakness of contemporary political ontologies is their residual anthropocentrism, which makes itself manifest in a number of different ways. To overcome this limitation, we contend that Deleuze's ontology can be central to a reconstruction of political ontology through its elaboration of a novel philosophical basis. In this section, therefore, we aim first at uncovering the methodological guidelines and general characteristics that a Deleuzian ontology entails. We will then examine in more detail the nature of this ontology, but considering that it was constructed over the course of nearly 40 years and numerous works, what we aim at here is necessarily a simplification. The goal will be to coherently reconstruct his ontology in such a way as to reveal the usefulness of this way of thinking for a contemporary world characterized by (often rapid) change.[56] With this reconstruction concluded, we will finally turn towards this ontology's incarnation in the explicitly political writings of the 'Deleuze-Guattari-Parnet assemblage'. Two intertwined themes will help to structure this section, and provide an overarching perspective from which to grasp the nuances of this ontology. The first is the emphasis on recurring processes of individuation, rather than a focus on fully constructed individuals. The second is the notion of assemblages, which will provide a

[56] The most glaring oversight in my reconstruction will be the complete absence of Deleuze's philosophy of time as developed in *Difference & Repetition*. In part, this move seems justified as Deleuze himself tends to avoid speaking in terms of the present, the pure past, and the eternal return in his political writings. A possible explanation for this is that while an analysis of temporal syntheses is central to any transcendental study of consciousness, in studying the transcendental conditions of social structures, these syntheses are no longer as integral. It should be noted though, that Deleuze does continue to speak of the three modalities of time throughout his career, and that a very productive analysis of the relation between this notion of time and his notion of history could be made. Jay Lampert has attempted such a study in his *Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy of History*, but largely leaves open the precise connection between the syntheses of time and the production of history.

way to think of heterogeneous systems as they are continually individuated. Since it is of such key importance to the whole of Deleuze's philosophy, we will begin here with an explanation of our focus on individuation.

As has been well-rehearsed throughout the scholarly literature on Deleuze, the distinction between the virtual and the actual lies at the base of his ontology. What has been less widely noted is the significant third term in the ontological series, which encompasses the intensive, individuating level.[57] This dearth of commentary is surprising because Deleuze himself is explicit in highlighting the importance of this level, stating that any reduction of the virtual-intensive-actual series to the virtual-actual process "compromises the whole of the philosophy of difference."[58] The question remains, however, why is this level so important? Since it will tie in directly with our later work on assemblages, the next section will answer this question and use individuation as the guiding perspective from which to view Deleuze's work on ontology.

The short answer as to why Deleuze is interested in individuals and individuation has to do with the stated aims of his project, beginning with his earliest writings[59] and continuing to his final works[60]: that of grasping individuals in their singular nature.[61] In constructing any ontology, grappling with the problem of how to theorize the beings that compose reality would seem to be almost mandatory, yet it is remarkable how many

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[57] Notable exceptions to this trend include three of the best works on Deleuze: Alberto Toscano's *The Theatre of Production*, Manuel DeLanda's *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, and Miguel de Beistegui's *Truth & Genesis*. Toscano's work is the major influence here for viewing Deleuze from the viewpoint of individuation.

[58] Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference & Repetition*, 247.

[59] 1956: "If philosophy has a positive and direct relation to things, it is only insofar as philosophy claims to grasp the thing itself, according to what it is, in its difference from everything it is not, in other words, in its *internal difference*." Deleuze, Gilles. "Bergson's Conception of Difference", 32.

[60] 1988: "Sufficient reason proclaims, 'Everything has a concept!'" Deleuze, Gilles. *The Fold*, 41.

[61] The longer answer will emerge in the progressive unfolding of his ontology, as it constructs a novel perspective from which to view ontological concerns.

political ontologies have remained theoretical and abstract, rather than actually tackling their subject matter – ontology![62] The claim that working with abstractions and generalities is a 'close enough' approximation of reality is belied by any number of case studies which discover the importance of minute details, and the complete failing of social science in general to approach the success of the natural sciences.[63] The solution, when faced with the irreducible complexity of the social world, is neither to extrapolate convenient generalities and then be assured by the ease with which they fit together (such as in covering law accounts), nor to construct abstract models based on empirically false presuppositions (such as in rational choice[64]). Instead, the solution is to tackle the complexity head on.[65,66] It is only by understanding the relational networks within which individuals emerge as constituted subjects, objects and systems that we can truly say that our concepts grasp real things.

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[62] In this regard, IR theorist Colin Wight is emblematic of an entire tradition: "This position [that theory refers to *real* entities] should not be confused with the idea that we should attempt to construct 'realistic' theories in the sense of theories that grasp the totality of the object under study." (Wight, Colin. *Agents, Structures and International Relations*, 121n2). Deleuze, on the other hand, takes this view to task, arguing that such a position is an "empty generality" whose "outcome is an empty discourse which lacks a substantive." (Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference & Repetition*, 182.) In other words, the type of abstraction used in IR (and political science more generally) contradicts precisely their stated intention to speak of *real* entities. Granted, any sort of theoretical representation must of necessity be less complex than its object, but this does not justify eschewing any sort of attempt to think through it (although we should mention that this view, perhaps problematically, assumes that representation is the aim of conceptual creation, rather than, for example, pragmatic use). Political science has tended to develop ontologies of theory (the presupposed basic existents of a theory), but has almost entirely neglected a theory of ontology.

[63] Witness, most glaringly, the almost complete inability to predict the collapse of the Soviet superpower.

[64] Rational choice theory assumes perfect rationality and perfect knowledge and then works backwards to try and account for empirical discrepancies. They never consider that there may be a fundamental gap between knowledge of a situation and the act that it produces. In such a case, there is necessarily an element of irrationality or faith or decision (to use Badiou's term) that is irreducible to the positive knowledge of the situation. In a world where religion is becoming increasingly central (in spite of general trends towards secularization), rational choice's limited definition of rationality may prove to be less valid than is widely assumed by their practitioners.

[65] On this issue, recent studies focusing on the significance of context are exemplary. Undoubtedly, the best representative of such work is the massive *Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis* (eds. Charles Tilly and Robert Goodin).

[66] "So long as the concept corresponding to the object itself has not been found, so long as the unique concept has not been identified, we remain stuck within the order of generalities and abstract ideas. [We] can achieve this by following the real in its self-differentiation, by pursuing the thing all the way to its internal difference, at the stage at which it becomes a 'this'." (De Beistegui, Miguel. *Truth & Genesis*, 242.)

An important qualification needs to be made though: if individuals are of the order of the actual, then what we need to concentrate on is the 'intensive' register of individuation in which individuals are considered as a process that is more or less stable, and which always retains an open reserve of virtual potentials. This focus on individuation avoids a number of problems associated with the typical privilege afforded to constituted individuals.[67] The first of these is the fact that a focus on the already produced individual means that explanation only seeks to explain the characteristics of the individual, neglecting any influences that may arise in the process, but disappear in the product. Methodologically, this entails that we look not to classify political entities by their characteristic qualities, but rather by the processes which produce *and* continually function to sustain them. Similarly, a focus on individuals neglects a second aspect: the effects that an individuation process may produce that are not necessarily embodied within the individual. For example, if one is looking only at stable democracies (however defined), then one may miss the process of democratization that entails any number of *other* socio-political-technological-economic shifts and their ensuing effects throughout that particular country and the surrounding world. Democratization does not occur in a vacuum, but rather in a whole field of intensive relations between states, groups, and individuals. Thirdly, the search for a transcendent individuating principle (such as "immaterial laws, eminent entities or separate aspects of being"[68]) that determines the genesis of a constituted individual is in fact simply a case of taking an empirical term in the process (including the emergent patterns that laws are based upon), extracting it from the processes of individuation, and labeling it accountable for the individuation. The

[67] The following criticisms are modified from Gilbert Simondon's essay "The Genesis of the Individual."
[68] Toscano, Alberto. *The Theatre of Production*, 3.

result is that this principle is responsible for contributing all the essential properties of the individual, leading us "to look at the properties of an actualized individual as innate dispositions in the individual itself rather than results of interaction with a field."[69] A truly empiricist theory must not take these principles as transcendent givens, but instead account for how they themselves were individuated. Fourth, and finally, there is the fact that concrete individuals are never ontologically isolatable from their environment. Real individuals are inseparable from the pressures and resources presented by the (external *and* internal) milieu within which they function and from which they are produced. In fact, the division between individuals and their environment is in many ways already an abstraction from the real situation.

Instead, if focus is given to processes of individuation, one of the significant advantages is its resolution of the structure/process tension; individuals (whether structure or agent, system or actor, etc.) are both process *and* result. The appearance of being static is itself a temporary product attributable to individuation mechanisms. Another benefit of this change in focus is its avoidance of essentialist thinking which would attribute, for example, an essential nature to democracy, or an essential nature to the proletariat. The generalizations that undergird such essentialist thinking are higher-order abstractions that result from actual historical processes of democratization or proletariat formation. The fact that democracies routinely contain certain elements, or that the proletariat occupies a certain more or less homogeneous socio-economic identity are contingent factors that result from concrete processes of individuation. At other times, such general entities may be more heterogeneous to the point where it is difficult to say that there is such an entity

[69] Bryant, Levi. "Interactive Individuation and the Relational Being of Individuals." <http://larval-subjects.blogspot.com/2006/09/interactive-individuation-and.html>

as the 'proletariat' (which is precisely the modern day case, with the division of labour becoming ever more differentiated).[70] What must be accounted for in each case is not the general qualities that entities have in common, but rather the contingent, historical individuations that have generated more or less homogeneous groupings of individuals.[71]

The basic problem surrounding individuation can thus be stated succinctly enough: "how is it that *something* comes to be counted as one?"[72,73] The emphasis on 'something' (which is precisely not 'some thing') already highlights the difficulty surrounding such a question. On the other hand, despite the simplicity of the question, its significance is enormous, as aptly summarized by Alberto Toscano:

> "It has been argued that the notion of individuation emerged alongside an image of philosophy as a search after conditions of intelligibility, whose central requirement was that of accounting for the division or differentiation of the real into distinct, discernible or determinate entities. *[It was] an attempt at determining the 'correlates' of thought, and at securing this grasp by accounting for how thought could carve the real at its joints*."[74]

With such importance attributed to the problem, it is not surprising that it has been a common theme throughout philosophical history, from Aristotle to Duns Scotus to Kant, Nietzsche, Peirce, Simondon, and Deleuze. Traditionally though, the solutions to accounting for individuation have faced an impasse in making the individual intelligible *as such*. In Aristotle's dominant formulation, individuals are subsumed under the

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[70] Although, see Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's *Empire* for an attempt to re-fashion the proletariat's social position as a 'multitude' of heterogeneous actors.

[71] The added philosophical bonus of shifting our focus to individuation is that we avoid the critiques of presence put forth by Jacques Derrida. Being, in this situation, is never fully present as it is never fully individuated. Instead, since Being is Becoming for Deleuze, it is in fact a matter of self-differing.

[72] Brassier, Ray. "Alien Theory: The Decline of Materialism in the Name of Matter", 165.

[73] While it cannot be developed in any detail here, as will hopefully become apparent, such a question refutes, from the outset, any attempt to model reality in solely quantitative terms. What is being asked in the question of individuation is, in part, precisely the origins of quantifiability – what permits us to say that numbers are adequate to ontology in the first place? This is not to say that statistical and other quantitative measures have no use; only that their scope is limited to what we will call the actual.

[74] Toscano, Alberto. *The Theatre of Production*, 4, emphasis added.

requirements of universal knowledge and are ultimately knowable only by virtue of their unique set of *common* predicates. In this regard, the actual singular individual was strictly speaking unknowable; only the universal, intelligible properties were comprehensible. According to this conception, while we are always presented with singular cases to study in reality, the operation of knowledge consists of abstracting and applying predicates, thereby transforming the unintelligible individual into an intelligible concept. More generally, this is also the means by which representational thought determines what makes an individual an individual. It consists of a movement from the most general and abstract concepts, to the genus of different kinds, to the species, and then to the specific differences which determine the thing in terms of its intelligible classification. It is this rational system of categories (and the logical relations[75] between them) which undergirds the most basic theoretical move of defining ontological units and which characterizes the form of representational thought we referred to in chapter 1. The major problem with such a perspective, in all its ancient and modern forms, is that it reduces beings to simply instantiations of human concepts. On the one hand, what is is what is intelligible. On the other hand, it remains the case that what is unintelligible is precisely beings as such. However, there is an alternative way of formulating the problem – one that makes Aristotle's specification of individual predicates secondary from the perspective of a material genesis of individuals.[76] In this case, material being is itself active and generates

[75] As Deleuze says, "There are four principal aspects to 'reason' in so far as it is the medium of representation: identity, in the form of the *undetermined* concept [the basic form of the concept]; analogy, in the relation between ultimate *determinable* concepts [the relations between the most general concepts]; opposition, in the relation between *determinations* within concepts [the exclusive divisions between species in a genus]; resemblance, in the *determined* object of the concept itself [the similarity between objects falling under the same kind]." (Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference & Repetition*, 29.)

[76] It is significant to note that in this shift, we can see the reason why the search for transcendental conditions must no longer be for the conditions of *possible* subjective knowledge, but rather for the *real* conditions of the material individual.

individuals, which thought can then encounter in all their novelty, wresting similarities and identities from the experience. "The important consequence is that the actuality of the empirical, instead of instantiating a rule or concept given by the understanding, is empirically constituted through *a chance concatenation of forces,* of *converging and diverging series,* or *differentials of intensity and rates of change,* which together produce something new and unforeseeable."[77] Or as Deleuze will succinctly state it, "determination itself presupposes individuation."[78] It is notable, from this perspective, that being is subsumed under neither representational thought nor the form of identity. Being is therefore not simply productive, but also creative, unbounded by the limits of representational thought and capable of generating new individuals that elude current classification schemes. Being, therefore, is that 'something' from which individuals emerge.

While this something cannot be another form of identity (which would reinstate the individual at the preindividual level), neither can it be determined as difference, at least as difference has classically been understood. The problem with the traditional concept of difference is that it has always taken shape in relation to a logically prior identity (difference *from* A, or difference *between* B & C, for example). To state that the preindividual was composed of this negative difference, therefore, would be to again (indirectly) reinstate identity as the basis of ontology. It is in large part to this problem – of how to think the preindividual – that the Deleuzian ontology is a solution. It is this problematic that leads him to claim that the actual (the world of individuated objects, subjects, and systems) does not exhaust ontology. Rather, in order to account for the

[77] Baugh, Bruce. *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism*, 154; emphasis added to highlight the various ways in which Deleuze will speak of the non-representational, individuating realm.
[78] Deleuze, Gilles. *The Fold*, 64.

emergence of individuals out of “something”, and in order to account for their change through “something”, Deleuze argues that we must also take into account the virtual and the intensive registers of being. These levels will allow Deleuze to paradoxically determine being as both more than one (being includes a virtual excess of potential) and less than one (being as not yet individuated). It is these registers which Deleuze will characterize in terms of ‘differential relations’, ‘singularities’, and ‘intensive differences’, thereby resisting the tendency to fashion the transcendental (individuating intensities) in the image of the empirical (constituted identities).

This priority afforded to individuation also has important implications for the ontological nature of laws and regularities throughout the political world. If regularities are correlations between stable phenomena, then the theory of individuation put forth here accounts for how these stable terms of a correlation first emerge. The constant conjunctions of events and the patterns of behaviour from which laws derive their evidence, are the secondary results of contingently habitual interactions between these constructed individuals. Moreover, a theory of individuation also provides an ontological account for the variance of the correlation itself; since individuals are not simply instantiations of universal properties (e.g. “middle-class-ness”), they are not simply carbon-copies of each other. Instead, they must always be produced as a singular group with more or less similarity to how political science eventually defines them. The correlation between, for example, the rise of a middle class and the emergence of demands for democracy, is therefore far from being a sure thing. Instead, the intensive relations that come together to produce this singular middle class group and to produce a democratizing system must also be taken into account. What tensions exist between the emerging (more or less homogeneous) grouping of the middle class, and the other

significant (more or less homogeneous) groups in the region? What sorts of problematic relations exist between the present moment of increasing wealth for the middle class, past traditions constituted in a milieu of relative poverty, and future potentials for change? What sorts of disparities exist *within* the middle class, such as the division between rural and urban, male and female, etc.? It is these types of questions which enable the theorist to see the middle class, in its singular nature, as the result of intensive differences between its emerging individuality and its surrounding socio-politico-geographico-historical context.[79] Focusing solely on the properties of a constituted middle-class group overlooks not only the process through which it came to exist, but also the recurring processes underlying the changes (subtle or otherwise) that continue to recur.

However, prior to examining the intensive and virtual levels responsible for these processes, it will be important to quickly examine two further methodological guidelines: empiricism and immanence. From what has been said, it is clear that Deleuze's empiricism cannot be the traditional idea of empiricism which takes the given as an already individuated atom of experience. Following upon the problematic of individuation, we see that to make empiricism consistent with the imperative to see individuals as processes, we must search for the genesis of a particular given itself. Hence, Deleuze's empiricism is a transcendental empiricism that seeks the real conditions sufficient for a given individual object of experience. Our brief discussion of laws and regularities also makes it clear that this empiricism cannot be a search for universal laws that supposedly regulate the production of a given phenomenon. Following Alfred North Whitehead, Deleuze instead argues that empiricism requires two principles: "the abstract

[79] While this position will not be developed in any great detail in this paper, it should be made clear that while context provides the conditions for an individual entity to emerge, it is also the case that these emergent entities have real powers to affect others, and therefore real powers to avoid determinism.

does not explain, but must itself be explained; and the aim is not to rediscover the eternal or the universal, but to find the conditions under which something new is produced."[80] This conception of empiricism accords with the fundamental imperative to think individuals: abstractions will never overcome their generality to grasp the concrete, and representational concepts based on identity are always secondary to the novelty produced by movements of difference. So instead, thought must tackle individuation from a different direction – not solely through representational concepts and specifying predicates, but also through the generative, intensive processes that produce them. It is transcendental empiricism that is up to this task, seeking the real conditions of an actual individual, as opposed to the merely possible conditions provided by the conceptual objects of knowledge. As a result, "the targeted conditions do not exceed the conditioned, and, therefore, the concept they form ends up being identical with its object".[81] These conditions, on a political level, will include things like the institutional context, the cultural context, the technological context, and even supposedly non-political fields like the geographical and climatic context. It is the empirical study of these contexts and their specific intensive mechanisms and virtual potentials that must be examined.

While empiricism is a common position in most political science, the next meta-philosophical imperative – immanence – is relatively rare (Marx, under the influence of Hegel, being the major exception). It is perhaps surprising that immanence is so absent from political science's ontological discussions since it can be found in many of the most influential philosophers, such as Kant, Hegel and Husserl.[82] In Deleuze's work,

[80] Deleuze, Gilles and Claire Parnet. *Dialogues II*, vii.
[81] Boundas, Constantin. "What Difference does Deleuze's Difference make?", 9.
[82] It is also a very significant concept in recent philosophy as a number of important thinkers have struggled over what it might mean to be immanent. For a significant overview, see: Mullarkey, John. *Post-*

immanence is also tied together with a number of closely related, yet still potentially obscure concepts: univocity, monism, and materialism. As a first approximation, we could say that immanence is a form of radical empiricism – an empiricism that refuses to explain empirical phenomena on the basis of transcendent, other-worldly principles (such as God, or universal laws, or a transcendent subject). In the context of our discussion of individuation, what is immanent is the process itself, which thought then extracts from to construct conceptual entities. Significantly, this entails that the common presupposition that 'all observation is laden with theory' is only partly true. Our everyday experience is, in fact, partly determined by the conceptual schemas we use to organize the world; but these conceptual schemas are themselves constructed as unifying forces from the immanent flux of becoming. Concepts therefore function to group together otherwise disparate phenomena, and to reduce the differences between them to being "non-conceptual differences" covered over by a repetition of the self-same generality. In this regard, a concept – much like the centralizing political figures we will see later – is an emergent force that reacts back to draw together the very phenomena which gave rise to it. The immanent level of individuation, however, still proceeds, always in excess of any attempt at homogenization. On a more basic philosophical level, Christian Kerslake has concisely shown that immanence entails two primary features: "Formally, a philosophy of immanence is a philosophy that does not appeal to anything outside the terms and relations constructed and accounted for by that philosophy. Ontologically, we might say that in a philosophy of immanence, thought is shown to be fully expressive of being; there

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Continental Philosophy: An Outline. In the history of philosophy, Hegel has provided the most sophisticated version of an immanent theory, as the dialectic is ostensibly generated from the internal contradictions of immediate sense-perception.

is no moment of 'transcendence' of being to thought."[83] The latter characteristic accords with Deleuze's insistence on the monism of being. This is a view which refuses any ontological (while allowing a formal) distinction[84] between thought and being, culture and nature, or ideas and power, instead arguing that "being is said 'in all manners' in a single same sense, but is said thereby of that which differs".[85] What should be emphasized in Kerslake's quote though, is the fact that thought is "*fully* expressive of being". While we will equate thought and representational thought (which experiences the differential field of the transcendental as "vertigo"[86]) in this paper, Deleuze argues that thought is more than simply representational thought. As theorists, we are capable of encountering the differential field and creating concepts, rather than solely fitting objects into pre-ordained categories.[87] The formal aspect of immanence also plays a significant role in theorizing. It admits of no presuppositions, no modeling of non-existent actors as in rational choice theory, and no transcendent entities. This means that immanence entails a non-teleological conception of history (since it rules out a transcendent goal that would determine otherwise immanent processes). Neither a socialist, nor a capitalist, nor any other alternative model of uni-linear development is applicable here. Adherence to immanence also entails a refusal to posit a pure voluntarism on the part of individual agents. While there is some measure of emergent agency available in Deleuze's ontology,

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[83] Kerslake, Christian. "The Vertigo of Philosophy: Deleuze and the Problem of Immanence", 10. Although we will not look in depth at it here, Kerslake's essay (and his other work) is also an excellent account of how Deleuze justifies his work, particularly on the significant issue of access to noumenal being.

[84] 'Ontological distinction' refers to two things which are really separate, such as mind and body in Descartes. A 'formal distinction', on the other hand, is a distinction made in thought, but that is concretely inseparable, such as the distinction between colour and space.

[85] Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference & Repetition*, 304.

[86] "Immanence is the very vertigo of philosophy." (Deleuze, Gilles. *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 180.)

[87] As Deleuze will say in *Difference & Repetition*, "Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*." (Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference & Repetition*, 139.)

he steadfastly refuses the idea of a transcendental subject independent of the world that would guarantee a secure, universal position from which to build a theory (or, it should be mentioned, a historical narrative).

With the importance of individuation and the basic approach outlined, we are now in a position to examine in more detail the ontological system. In doing so, we will follow a number of recent commentators[88] who have analyzed the close relations between Deleuze and complexity theory.[89] From this perspective, Deleuze is seen as examining the ontological implications that complexity entails. As already mentioned, this model of reality can be abstractly analyzed into three realms: (1) the actual which consists of the stable, identifiable systems and individuals that tend to cover over (2) the intensive process of individuation which produced them, consisting of 'far-from-equilibrium' processes that are 'metastable' and that embody (3) the virtual structure of potentialities that are immanent to a situation. It is important to remember that these three areas are, strictly speaking, not separate or based on a hierarchy. While we can break them apart for convenience, each is real and always in a concrete mixture with the others.

The actual is perhaps the simplest and most straightforward aspect of Deleuze's ontological system. In his early, philosophical work, the actual consisted of the individuated phenomenon of a present experience (i.e. the basis of empiricism). In his

[88] The most important of these connections (but certainly not all of them) are to be found in Manuel DeLanda's *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, Brian Massumi's *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Miguel De Beistegui's *Truth & Genesis*, and John Protevi and Mark Bonta's *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*.

[89] It is worth noting the distinction between two commonly confused theories: complexity and chaos theory. While both deal with dynamic, open systems (which make them especially suited to the social sciences), there are nevertheless some important distinctions. On the one hand, chaos theory remains basically positivist by attempting to explain the emergence of unpredictable behaviour from the interactions of a few basic mathematical equations (e.g. explaining how turbulence arises in currents of fluid). Complexity theory, on the other hand, seeks to explain how relatively simple structures (individuals) emerge from the enormous complexity of their parts (multiplicity). For further discussion on these differences, see: Protevi, John and Mark Bonta. *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, 192n2, Mackenzie, Adrian. "The Problem of the Attractor." and Kellert, Stephen. *In the Wake of Chaos*.

later, more explicitly political work with Guattari and Parnet, the actual found multiple new expressions as the stabilized systems of power and desire, such as those found in individuals, communities, classes and states. The link between these various examples of the actual is their reliance upon identity – the point at which 'something' coalesces into an individuated object or subject. In terms of complexity theory, this individuated product acts as a system[90] in a state of equilibrium or stasis.[91] In social systems, this means that a certain form of order or organization has been instilled into the bodies and subjects that compose it. However, since an individual, and in particular a social system, is never ontologically independent of its milieu, the individual is always an 'open system' through which various materials flow. Given this openness, the stabilization of the individual relies upon the existence of certain equilibrium points[92] (called 'attractors') that have been endogenously generated by the relations between the system's forces. They can be thought of as patterns of behavior that emerge within a system. Western democracies, for example, have a certain set of patterns and established responses that tend to preclude any drastic changes: they cyclically replenish an established political hierarchy through elections, and employ well-grounded channels for the voicing of various perturbations to the system as whole. By and large, a given Western democracy is a stable system then – the vast majority of external and internal fluctuations remain within the basin of its

[90] The equating here of individuals with systems reinforces the notion that at the basis of ontology is not identity, but multiplicity.

[91] A common physical example of an equilibrium system is after the diffusion of a concentrated area of gas into a closed space. As the gas slowly diffuses, it eventually reaches a point at which it is evenly spread out over the entire space, thereby reaching equilibrium – a point of stasis or identity with itself (although there are always small perturbations). In a similar although much more complex way (to be analyzed in more detail later on), social systems also tend towards equilibrium points in which they take upon the normality of everyday life.

[92] While we will use the term 'point' for convenience, it is important to note that these attractors are not solely 0-dimensional points. There is a whole class of attractors which take on a variety of topological shapes, such as toruses or knots, and which reveal that equilibrium can also include a number of periodic movements. Moreover, the use of the adjective 'topological' is not by accident since, as we will see, the singularities' shapes can be deformed and altered radically through what are called 'phase transitions'.

attractor. Attractors, however, must not be thought of as transcendent, determining teleologies – as though there were some natural or ahistorical tendency towards liberal democracies, for example. Rather, these attractors are the immanent products of the interactions between the various trajectories which define a particular system. In other words, the attractors are simply the results of the forces operating within a unique system. When the path of a system comes within a certain distance of an attractor (the 'basin of attraction'),[93] it inexorably advances towards it.[94] Since it is open, however, the system never *actually* reaches the attractor; instead it asymptotically approaches it, subject to constant, generally minute, fluctuations resulting from various perturbations. The attractor itself is "real without being actual, ideal without being abstract".[95] Having approached an attractor, however, the individual-system takes on a stability which lends it a sense of solidity, and permits theorists to draw out its 'essential' properties, without which the system would become something different. The actual is the space where representation in concepts, in language, in discourse, in images, becomes possible – but it is dependent upon the virtual and the intensive for its conditions to even arise. The essence constructed from the actualized system is then retroactively used to explain why the individual is the

[93] The basin of attraction is determined by what mathematicians call singularities. These are points at which a curve or vector takes on a significant value, such as a change in direction or a zero point. As such, singularities mark out both the points at which a trajectory begins to curve towards an attractor, and the points at which a particular trajectory qualitatively changes and potentially generates a shift in the overall system.

[94] We should immediately counter a likely conclusion that will be drawn from this idea of attractors, namely that social systems naturally tend towards equilibrium or order. As Marx, Deleuze, and Guattari were all well aware, capitalism is precisely a socio-economic system which thrives upon disequilibrium. For example, as Marx famously said, "All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind." (Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*, 36-7.) Similarly, natural systems can and do thrive upon permanent states of non-equilibrium that depend upon internal or external constraints in order to be maintained.

[95] Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference & Repetition*, 208. This is also one of Deleuze's favourite ways to characterize the virtual.

way it is; e.g. "it is a nation-state *because* it has the properties of x, y, and z". In other words, the essence becomes a transcendent entity that is posited to explain the empirical world. As we saw with Aristotle, however, this form of thinking overlooks precisely the real, systemic processes which led the individual to converge upon a particular singularity in the first place. Similar to our earlier criticisms of focusing on the individuated product, focusing solely on the stable systems which permit a certain traditional mode of theorizing (e.g. susceptibility to classification, linear causality where A affects B without B affecting A, etc.) neglects the ways in which the actual effaces its intensive genesis. It is to these key intensive processes that we turn now.

As noted earlier, the intensive level is an aspect of Deleuze's ontology that has been relatively neglected. This is unfortunate, because the reduction of his ontology to the virtual and the actual means that there is no account of how intensive 'spatiotemporal dynamisms' "immediately incarnate the differential relations, the singularities and the progressivities immanent in the [virtual] Idea."[96] In other words, without recognition of the intensive level, Deleuze is susceptible to the criticisms of people like Alain Badiou who wish to radically separate the actual and the virtual, and present the virtual as a modern day version of Platonic Ideas.[97] Against this tendency, we must insist upon the intensive level which "incarnates" the virtual and produces the actual, while also being itself reciprocally determined by the actual situation. In this regard, complexity theory is

[96] Ibid., 218. There is a parallel here, which Deleuze himself notes, between the spatiotemporal dynamisms and Kant's schemata: each are taken to relate the transcendental conditions with the empirical actuality. The significant difference, however, is that Kant's own theorization of the schemata leaves them external to what they purportedly unite. Deleuze's intensive individuations, on the other hand, are immanent to the virtual multiplicities (they are structured by them), and they construct the actual by effacing themselves through a sort of inversion (the intensive differences are inverted into everyday, extensive differences. i.e. differences *between* things).

[97] Badiou makes explicit his avoidance of individuation in stating that for Deleuze "the nominal pair virtual/actual exhausts the deployment of univocal Being." (Badiou, Alain. *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, 43)

again a useful means to explain how these three moments can still be conceived as monistic. Whereas the actual consists of the stable, equilibrium states of systems, the intensive field is populated by systems far-from-equilibrium. These are systems which, unlike the actual, have been pushed outside their basin of attraction. Instead, they are systems in becoming, subject to the constraints of the heterogeneous elements and forces which constitute them. These multiple forces, pulling in different directions, compel the system to waver on the edge of a variety of attractors. This makes them extremely sensitive to their environment and to their initial conditions, as the slightest inclination can send them off in a particular direction.[98,99,100] Intensive systems are further characterized by a number of other properties that John Protevi and Mark Bonta outline:

> "Processes exhibiting intensive properties are those that (1) cannot be changed beyond critical thresholds[101] (the 'line of flight') in control parameters without a change of kind (a 'becoming'), and that (2) show the capacity for meshing into 'consistencies', that is, networks of bodies that preserve the heterogeneity of the members even while enabling systematic emergent behaviour."[102]

It is these 'preindividual' processes which both produce stable, identifiable individuals, and are retained alongside the constituted individual, thereby leaving it open for further

[98] Moreover, this places fundamental limitations on prediction, since the degree of accuracy necessary for the initial conditions is far too sensitive to ever be accurately mapped.

[99] This is also the reason why the actual tends to efface its own individuation process, since the set of attractors which determined it as an intensive system and the precise individuating factors which sent it towards an attractor are nowhere to be found in the actual. All that is visible (through its effects) is the sole attractor which determines the present actualized system.

[100] In political science, this concept of sensitivity to initial conditions has been picked up by path-dependency theorists. Undoubtedly, an excellent and productive analysis could be made of the relations between path-dependency theory, complexity theory and assemblage theory. Unfortunately, such a project must wait until time permits! For an exceptional work on path-dependency, see: Pierson, Paul. *Politics in Time*.

[101] The most recently popular (and extremely political) usage of the concept of thresholds has occurred in the science surrounding climate change. Many scientists and politicians are warning of these types of thresholds beyond which our ecosystem will irrevocably change in a short period of time. It is these types of thresholds that we will later analyze as 'lines of flight' or 'bifurcations'.

[102] Protevi, John, and Mark Bonta. *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, 15.

"individualization".[103] What is particularly unique about the intensive level is the fact that it is a realm of inclusive disjunction, where heterogeneity is retained and each virtual attractor really exists despite the fact that they cannot all be actualized at once. It is in the process of individuation, therefore, that the inclusive disjunction (and…and…) becomes transformed into an exclusive disjunction (or…or…).[104]

This idea of inclusive disjunction also reveals the in-between nature of the intensive. In virtue of embodying the multiple, incompatible potentials of the virtual (through a superposition of their attractors), the intensive is *spontaneously* drawn towards minimizing the tensions and individuating itself into actual systems; they are between the virtual and the actual.[105] In order for this to be possible though, they must embody a particular type of relation. This is significant because our emphasis on individuation means that the ontological status of relations must take on a new shape. They can no longer be thought of as *between* pre-constituted substances, since this would presuppose what has already been put into question. Neither can we simply posit that relations take precedence over terms, since that would entail *identifying* relations and thus returning to a form of constituted individuals. At the same time, however, relations cannot simply be internal to some larger unity, such as society or Being. It is here that the concept of multiplicity plays a central role. With multiplicity, the heterogeneous multiple itself becomes a substantive, rather than some form of overarching unity (the One), or some

[103] 'Individualization' is here a technical term, referring to "the ways in which the developing [individual] functions as a resource for its own further development" (Oyama, Susan, et al. (eds.) *Cycles of Contingency*, 5.) We will see later that this means development progresses by 'recursive evolution' or in a similar way to how Markov chains progress.

[104] The key political point here, which we will return to later in our discussion of social movements, is that the apparently exclusive possibilities posed by the actual world are in fact merely a small subset of the potentials encompassed within intensive fields.

[105] Ultimately, they are indistinguishable in concrete situations, and this is in part what the concept of 'assemblages' will attempt to demonstrate. Assemblages are precisely both the intensive systems which incarnate virtual structures, and their temporary coagulations into actual identities.

collection of basic units (the Multiple).[106] There is no external principle (such as economic determinism) which would determine the nature or progression of the multiplicity; there is only the immanent measure reciprocally determined by the intensive differences between its elements.[107] These intensive multiplicities are distinguished from virtual multiplicities by the nature of this intensive difference.[108] As DeLanda argues, "the key concept in the definition of the intensive is *productive difference*."[109] Intensive difference is productive because the tension between the multiple trajectories and attractors of a system is capable of spontaneously generating the movement of a system towards an *emergent* stable state.[110] (Here, moreover, we see a better explanation for the generative powers of the transcendental than Bhaskar's concept of tendencies.) In other words, intensive difference is capable of producing order from chaos, without any mediation by an external and transcendent authority (such as concepts, social movement leaders or the state). An intensive assemblage, therefore, is 'metastable' meaning that

[106] Politically speaking, this classical opposition between the One and the Multiple occurs between those who see the state as founded upon individual rights and those who see the state as subsuming citizens into a unified whole.

[107] These 'elements' are in fact dimensions of variability. As a result of the system being in a state of becoming, there are no definite identities to be found since each 'element' is continually, reciprocally determined by the changing relations it is entering into. In other words, these elements are themselves temporary products of their own individuation processes. An element, while retaining what we will call properties, is also determined by the various capacities it exerts, and is therefore dependent upon the entire relational context that it is embedded within.

[108] Virtual multiplicities and intensive multiplicities share the same resistance to identity and homogeneity, but differ in the types of elements which compose them. For a brief analysis of virtual multiplicities, see the next few paragraphs.

[109] DeLanda, Manuel. *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, 71.

[110] Emergence here refers to the fact that the product of the tension between various attractors and forces is often an unpredictable sum larger than its parts. For example, Brian Massumi illustrates this process through the heating of water from below. Two attractors are at work here: one to dissipate the heat and achieve thermal equilibrium, the other to lose momentum (as the hot water rises) and achieve gravitational equilibrium. Within certain constraints, these two independent tendencies of the system conjoin to produce a stable state far from equilibrium (patterns of vortexes in the now boiling water). (Massumi, Brian. *User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 58-61.) As Massumi notes though, "there is a crucial difference between the dissipative structures that fill our lives and the structure we have analyzed thus far: there were only two attractors in the liquid system." (64) We will analyze emergence in more detail in chapter 3.

"'prior' to individuality, being is affected by inconsistency, populated by divergent tensions, and pregnant with incompatible potentials."[111]

How then, do the various dimensions of an intensive system combine heterogeneous aspects to produce a functioning system? Since a multiplicity can consist of neither atomistic individuals, nor a totality in which all relations would be internal, the solution is to insist upon the externality of relations.[112] "It is not the elements or the sets which define the multiplicity. What defines it is the AND, as something which has its place between the elements or between the sets."[113] An element, in this view, is not simply defined by its intrinsic characteristics but also by the relational network it is embedded within. This system relies, therefore, upon a distinction between the 'properties' of a term and its 'capacities'.[114] Properties, simply enough, are the extensive and qualitative characteristics that we can attribute to a term at a present moment. They are intrinsic to and determined by the nature of the individual (an individual which is itself subject to an analysis of individuation). Thus, for example, a communication network has certain properties such as the number of input and output points, and the speed and strength of the connections. Capacities, on the other hand, are not limited by the actualized system. Like singularities, they are real without necessarily being actual; that is to say, they are virtual. They are the potential ways that an individual can both

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[111] Toscano, Alberto. *The Theatre of Production*, 138.

[112] "'Peter is *smaller* than Paul', 'The glass is *on* the table': relation is neither internal to one of the terms which would consequently be subject, nor to two together. Moreover, a relation may change without the terms changing. One may object that the glass is perhaps altered when it is moved off the table, but that is not true. The *ideas* of the glass and the table, which are the true terms of the relation, are not altered. … Empiricists are not theoreticians, they are experimenters: they never interpret, they have no principles." (Deleuze, Gilles, and Claire Parnet. *Dialogues II*, 55, emphasis added.)

[113] Deleuze, Gilles, and Claire Parnet. *Dialogues II*, 34.

[114] In some of the literature on Deleuze, capacities are also referred to as 'affects' – both the capacity to affect and the capacity to be affected. My own use of the term affect, influenced by Brian Massumi, will retain it for referring to pre-subjective feelings.

affect and be affected by the external relations it enters into. An individual, in this case, is never completely defined by its properties, instead always retaining an indefinite number of unexercised capacities. Using our earlier example, the communication network could enter into a novel assemblage with a group of disillusioned individuals, who then exert the capacity of the communications infrastructure to mobilize and organize an emergent terrorist network. This capacity is not intrinsic to the communications network nor to the group since it relies upon an element that is external and heterogeneous to either one on its own. Since there is no a priori way to determine the possible ways in which a term can exert its capacities, it is always a matter of empirical study, and therefore always open-ended.[115] Intensive systems, as a result, are networks in which a number of different capacities for terms are simultaneously capable of being actualized. Individuated systems, by contrast, are those in which only a single set of capacities have been actualized into definite properties and relations. Again, the actual covers over the intensive potentials – both the tendencies towards attractors, and the capacity to enter into new relations.[116]

Finally, we reach what it is the most abstract portion of Deleuze's ontology: the virtual. In part, the difficulty of understanding the virtual is that it eludes any empirical realization; it provides the transcendental conditions for the empirical and, following upon our earlier arguments, it must therefore avoid placing an empirical instance as the transcendental principle. In other words, it must eschew any idea of founding itself upon an identity, whether it be an a priori principle, a universal law, or a self-identical being.

[115] "We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body." (Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 257.)

[116] Deleuze will refer to this ability of the actual to cover over the intensive as the 'transcendental illusion'. It is easy to see that positivism is the position most blinded by this illusion, according reality solely to what can be identifiably experienced.

Instead, the virtual is the realm of multiplicities. Our task, however, is made easier by the fact that we have already encountered a number of different aspects of the virtual (albeit in their embodied modalities) – namely, singularities and capacities. Both of these elements exist as unactualized potentials immanent to a particular situation. They exist, moreover, as a virtual structure:[117] a multiplicity composed by (1) reciprocally determined differential relations[118] (each element is defined in relation to the others), and (2) the various attractors/singularities that emerge through the potential interactions of these relations, which mark off various stable points and thresholds beyond which a system bifurcates. This latter notion of bifurcation entails that virtual multiplicities are divergent in their incarnations; they can be actualized in an infinite number of ways. The image of the virtual we have developed here then is akin to a diagram which would map out the immanent potentials hidden within a concrete social situation. The transition from this ontological potential to actual circumstances is carried out by the intensive processes, which embody a virtual *differential relation* and its *variable elements* and incarnate them in actual *spatio-temporal relationships* and a *variety of terms*, respectively.[119] Before proceeding, however, we need to detail in more depth two aspects of the virtual: the modal status of the virtual, and the nature of singularities.

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[117] This 'structure' is, unlike typical structuralist accounts, dynamic and subject to reciprocal determination with the actual. Later on, we will speak more about how the virtual multiplicities change by developing the concepts of phase transition and individualization, and in chapter 4 we will see how contentious politics looks to concretely alter the virtual structures.

[118] Mathematically, differential relations are symbolized by *dy*/*dx*, where each term equals the infinitesimal, instantaneous rate of change in a variable. As Deleuze notes, either term on its own (*dy* or *dx*) is strictly speaking nothing, since as infinitesimals they are posited to equal 0. In other words, they are 'undetermined'. It is only in their reciprocal relation that they become 'determinable' through a process of 'reciprocal determination'. The interesting mathematical (and metaphysical) point here is that their relation *dy*/*dx* equals 0/0, without however equaling 0. What subsists at the virtual level is therefore the pure potentiality of the differential relation, devoid of any substantial term. For a more in depth analysis of Deleuze's use of calculus, see: Duffy, Simon. *The Logic of Expression*.

[119] "A multiple ideal connection, a differential *relation*, must be actualized in diverse spatio-temporal *relationships*, at the same time as its *elements* are actually incarnated in a variety of *terms* and forms." (Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference & Repetition*, 183.)

The first of these tasks is essential to avoiding hasty conclusions concerning the virtual and key to understanding the ontological nature of the movement from the virtual to the actual. Throughout his work, Deleuze continually distinguishes between the virtual and the possible. Stemming from Kant's argument against 'being' being a predicate, the possible is based upon the idea that it mirrors the real, but lacks reality. While there are a number of reasons Deleuze gives for distinguishing between the virtual and the possible, two are most pertinent for our concerns. Badiou acutely synthesizes the first problem encountered in a transition from the possible to the real:

> "if existence is all that is lacking, if all the rest is determined as possible in the concept, then existence is 'a brute eruption, a pure act or leap'. Such a conception of existence is pure anathema for Deleuze. Existence is never a brute eruption, or a leap, because this would require that possible being and real being constitute two distinct senses of Being. But this is excluded by univocity."[120]

The idea that Being proceeds from the possible to the real[121] is untenable in an ontology which seeks to preserve the univocity of Being. By contrast, Deleuze will repeatedly insist that the virtual, the intensive, and the actual are all real. This leads us into the second reason why the virtual is opposed to the possible. In the real/possible model, the real incarnates a *pre-existing* possible by *limiting* which, out of all possibilities, gets realized. By contrast, in the actual/virtual model, the actual is *novel* because it is individuated by a unique set of conditions, and a *creation* because the product (individuals) in no way resembles the virtual (differential relations and singularities). The

[120] Badiou, Alain. *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, 48.

[121] The most obvious use of such a view was by the 'preformationists' in evolutionary biology, who argued that an embryo was simply a minute version of the adult-form. In other words, the adult was possible in the embryo, and then realized in the fully constituted individual. Modern day developmental theorists are much more in line with Deleuze's virtual, seeing the individual as a product of the various tensions in the embryo and in the environment (ultimately making them indistinguishable). For more on this shift in perspectives, see: Depew, David, and Bruce Weber. *Darwinism Evolving*.

result is an ontological model which accounts for the openness and the novelty within the world – aspects that are central to the dynamics of socio-political reality.

Besides being distinguished from the possible though, the virtual must also be distinguished from any conception of general potentiality.[122] This distinction concerns the fact that the potentials that inhere within the virtual are *immanent* to the situation at hand, rather than being a matter of abstract possibilities. For example, in terms of political dynamics, it is quite simple to conceive of the potential for a world state that would, as Immanuel Wallerstein has noted, be capable of overriding economic concerns in favour of political imperatives.[123] What such a concept overlooks, however, is the individuating environment which would provide the sufficient and necessary conditions for such a state to emerge. It overlooks, for example, the entrenched interests behind nation-states, the tensions between states, the near impossibility of establishing governance in particular areas, and the numerous problems plaguing international institutions such as the UN. *Real* potential, as opposed to general potential, must take into account the various systemic conditions which would provide the sufficient reason for such a system to be individuated.

It is the use of the concept of singularities which allows us to avoid the image of the virtual as an indeterminate reservoir of abstract potential. Singularities are what permit the theorist to give determinacy to the real potential inherent within the trajectories of the current socio-political order. By finding the range of virtual singularities towards which a system tends and at which it changes, we can diagram the transcendental virtual.

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[122] The following distinction between general and particular potential stems from some of Levi Bryant's writings on his blog, *Larval Subjects*. See, in particular: Bryant, Levi. "Potentiality and Virtuality."

[123] This corresponds to Wallerstein's idea of a 'world empire', where a single political authority rules over the entire system. See: Wallerstein, Immanuel. *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*, 57-8.

How then do we determine the existence and nature of these attractors? Here we hit upon an important ontological distinction. As Deleuze says,

> "a singularity may be grasped in two ways: in its existence and distribution, but also in its nature, in conformity with which it extends and spreads itself out in a determined direction over a line of ordinary points. This second aspect already represents a certain stabilization and a beginning of the actualization of the singularities."[124]

On the one hand, we can vaguely sense the existence and distribution of singularities by examining the various instantaneous tendencies in the empirical world (e.g. we can see a tendency towards neoliberalism in particular parts of the world, a tendency towards a world state in other parts, and a tendency towards re-fashioning the position of women in a particular society). Judging from these, we can already tell that singularities exist (since they are "the shape towards which lines and points tend"[125]) and that they are distributed in a certain fashion (each tendency having its own attractor). They are not yet, however, determined in any precise sense. To determine the nature of the attractors requires that we extrapolate from the instantaneous rates of change and theorize about their long-term interactions.[126] Their nature can include not simply points that attract a set of lines, but also various types of shapes (such as knots or toruses)[127] that suggest a periodic or cyclic form of equilibrium. In order to discern this nature we must take into account the whole system of relevant singularities, and map out the various ways in which their interactions will reciprocally affect their future. The key ontological point here is that while the

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[124] Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense*, 109. Also: "We know of the existence and distribution of singular points before we know their nature (bottlenecks, knots, foyers, centers…)." (*The Logic of Sense*, 104.)
[125] Žižek, Slavoj. *Organs without Bodies*, 3.
[126] This two step process is modeled, albeit not quantitatively, after the operations of 'differentiation' and 'integration' that are central to calculus (the mathematics of continuous change). For a more in-depth look at this process, see: DeLanda, Manuel. *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, 28-9, 80-1.)
[127] "Singularities are turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation and boiling; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, 'sensitive' points." (Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense*, 52.)

second step involves actualizing the singularities into their determinate nature, it is the first step which is virtual – the existence and distribution of singularities that are not yet individuated. Time is the progressive actualization of these virtual singularities into identifiable socio-political systems.

It is obvious from the empirical world, however, that singularities do not remain the same. History is filled with examples of seemingly unassailable political systems that nevertheless succumbed in the end to some sort of disruption, setting off a process whereby the singularities structuring the actual world were reconfigured. In this regard, unlike typical structuralism, Deleuze's virtual structure is dynamic and subject to change through a special type of singularity called a 'bifurcation point' or a 'threshold' or, in Deleuzian terms, a 'line of flight' (with the process of changing being called a 'deterritorialization').[128] Here again, as with the attractors, we must distinguish between an intensive and a purely virtual line of flight. On the one hand, there are the intensive and 'relative' lines of flight which model the thresholds at which a system transitions into a different, already established behaviour pattern. The transition from being a liberal to being a conservative, the shift from a democratic to an authoritarian state, or the migration of refugees from a war-torn nation to a neighbouring country, all exemplify such a transition. In either case, the individual undergoes both a deterritorialization from a stable state and a reterritorialization onto a new (relatively) stable pattern of being – the two being ultimately inseparable. On the other hand, we have the 'absolute' line of flight, which entails a return to the virtual and "the creation of new attractors and bifurcators."[129]

[128] Therefore, for Deleuze, there is ultimately no contradiction between structure and process, since the virtual structure is subject to change, nor between structure and genesis, since the virtual multiplicity provides the real differential conditions for the actualization of individuals.
[129] Protevi, John, and Mark Bonta. *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, 106.

Whereas a relative deterritorialization moves between already constituted attractors, the absolute form returns to the unactualized potential of the virtual in order to escape from dominant ways of individuating. It is here that true novelty, creation, and possibly freedom emerge. In Protevi's terms, this constitutes the moment of 'diachronic emergence' – one of the three types of ontological emergence we will examine in this paper.[130] The virtual, therefore, is the realm of entirely non-individuated multiplicities populated by differential relations and their emergent non-determined singularities (both attractors and thresholds). In brief, it is a diagram of the potential immanent in a particular situation.

[130] The three types of emergence, in the order we will analyze them, are: diachronic emergence, transversal emergence, and synchronic emergence. For more detail on these, see: Protevi, John. "Deleuze, Guattari and Emergence."

Chapter 3
Assembling Assemblage Theory

With the general ontological structure set out, we can now situate the concept of assemblages. Up to this point we have focused on the general ontological dynamics that occur in every type of system, and while these aspects are crucial to everything that follows, we have not yet tailored our concepts to the structures that populate the socio-political world. In part, this has been intentional insofar as ontology cannot be rigidly divided into social and non-social domains. While there are certainly assemblages that could be designated (relatively) unproblematically as 'political', it is always the case that these assemblages are inseparable from other domains. Thus, in the study of any particular political assemblage, one may be compelled to study social assemblages, cultural assemblages, financial assemblages, and even (with the increasing significance of global warming, resource shortages, and genetically modified food) climatological assemblages, geological assemblages, organic assemblages and scientific assemblages. All of these interact to produce our world, contributing more intensive tensions and multiplying the potential singularities of any stable outcome. Especially as conflicts over resources and drastic climate changes become increasingly prevalent, it would be a mistake to assume that the political world operates independently of dynamic, natural systems.[131] However, what have been left out so far are the unique individuating processes which emerge in the social world, and go on to interact in various ways with

[131] Another key example of overcoming the divide between the material world and the social world would be the emerging work that connects neuroscience with political topics, particularly the role of emotions and affects in establishing individual and group identities. For a good example, see: Connolly, William. *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, or *Neuropolitics*.

natural movements. Assemblages,[132] and their actualized dimension in 'strata', will resolve this deficit by giving us the tools to analyze how elements like desire, power and semiotics combine to produce the dynamics of the political world in conjunction with non-social elements (technology, biology, geography, etc.).[133] This entails that assemblages must be capable of taking into account not only the production of objects, but also of subjectivities and larger-scale social systems. This shift in our analysis mirrors an apparent shift in Deleuze's own work. His earlier work, pre-*Anti-Oedipus* is still largely situated within the philosophical tradition, taking on the dominant modes of thought posed by Hegel and Kant. His work with Guattari, on the other hand, is explicitly political, aimed at creating concepts that make sense of the contemporary world. The shift here, however, is not as drastic as it may seem.[134] Whereas in Deleuze's earlier work, he focused on the abstract, philosophical means by which pure difference created identities (and their corollary, negative differences), in his later works with Guattari, he would

[132] On the translation of the original French word: "The term *agencement* is a French word that has no exact English counterpart. In French its meaning is very close to "arrangement" (or "assemblage"). It conveys the idea of a combination of heterogeneous elements that have been carefully adjusted to one another. But arrangements (as well as assemblages) could imply a sort of divide between human agents (those who arrange or assemble) and things that have been arranged. This is why Deleuze and Guattari proposed the notion of *agencement*. *Agencement* has the same root as agency: *agencements* are arrangements endowed with the capacity of acting in different ways depending on their configuration. This means that there is nothing left outside *agencements*." (Palmås, Karl. "Deleuze and DeLanda: A New Ontology, A New Political Economy?", 2) As will become clear, assemblages are a versatile concept capable of accounting for any number of micro-, meso-, and macro-level phenomena.

[133] "What we are saying is that the idea of assemblage can replace the idea of behavior [i.e. patterns of behavior], and thus with respect to the idea of assemblage, the nature-culture distinction no longer matters." (Deleuze, Gilles. "Eight Years Later: 1980 Interview." 179.)

[134] It is also wrong to assume that Deleuze's solo philosophical work was anti-political as some critics have suggested in denouncing him as an elitist who only turned to politics under Guattari's (implicitly negative) influence. Deleuze's very first work on Hume is populated with reflections on self-interest, politics, culture and society. His Nietzsche book examines the varieties of force-relations and how reactive forces can overtake active forces (which he will take up again in his Foucault book). His studies of Spinoza are consumed by a concern with ethics, affective passions and how to compose bodies in the best possible ways (according to an immanent principle). Finally, his major work *Difference & Repetition* contains numerous references to Althusser, the sociologist Gabriel Tarde and socio-historical situations. For another perspective on Deleuze's early political thought, see: Hardt, Michael. *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*.

examine the *political* mechanisms by which unity was produced from a multitude. The dynamic is abstractly the same; the concrete content under inspection is slightly different. The dynamic is different to the extent that the political world presents its own unique mechanisms by which identity is produced, but there is still a concern for individuation and the specific intensive systems which construct these identities.

To draw an immediate connection between our previous work and assemblages, we can say that they occupy the position we previously designated by intensive systems and their actual products.[135] That is to say, assemblages are formed by the reciprocal relation between the intensive and the actual (and the virtual, via their effectuation of it).[136] In fact, this continuum between the intensive and the actual forms the first of four dimensions characterizing assemblages. Moreover, assemblages follow our principle of individuation since, as DeLanda says, "the ontological status of any assemblage, inorganic, organic or social, is that of a unique, singular, historically contingent individual."[137] Now while Deleuze and Guattari commonly situate assemblages in terms of two dimensions, there is in fact a third dimension which can enable a simplification of

[135] This uniting of the two is corroborated in a number of places by Deleuze and Guattari; e.g. "We must avoid an oversimplified conciliation, as though there were on the one hand formed subjects, of the thing or person type, and on the other hand spatiotemporal coordinates of the haecceity type. For you will yield nothing to haecceities unless you realize that *that is what you are, and that you are nothing but that*. […] It is the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity." (Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 262, emphasis added.) Or as Toscano, perhaps provocatively, suggests, "The disjunction between the virtual and the actual in [*Difference & Repetition*] is in fact a disjunction internal to, and generated by, the processes of ontogenesis themselves." (Toscano, Alberto. *The Theatre of Production*, 174.) In this regard, the actual formed subjects and objects are in fact one pole of the potential dimensions of an assemblage.

[136] "Assemblages are necessary in order for the unity of composition enveloped in a stratum, the relations between a given stratum and the others, and the relation between these strata and the [virtual] plane of consistency to be organized rather than random." (Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 71.)

[137] DeLanda, Manuel. *A New Philosophy of Society*, 40.

the terminology (without, however, sacrificing any nuance),[138] and a fourth dimension which will encompass a closely related issue. The first dimension is the types of *roles* that a component can play – a dimension that spans from a purely 'material' role to a purely 'expressive' role. The second dimension encompasses the types of *processes* that a component can be involved in – ranging from those which stabilize or 'territorialize' an identity to those which undermine or 'deterritorialize' an identity. The third dimension is the one which DeLanda adds: the degree to which an expressive medium either consolidates and 'codes' a territorialized identity, or destabilizes and 'decodes' an identity. Finally, the fourth dimension is the distinction between the 'molar' (statistical aggregates) and the 'molecular' (intensive populations) which coexist in every assemblage and function as two ways of perceiving it. At their most abstract level, assemblages consist of heterogeneous elements and their symbiotic relations through which previously disparate elements are gathered into a co-functioning system.[139] They have no overarching unity[140] but instead establish a degree of consistency which allows for them to be analyzed as *an* assemblage without however reifying it into an independent

[138] As DeLanda notes, Deleuze and Guattari themselves suggest that this third dimension can be considered an integral part of assemblages, insofar as they explicitly state that the distinction between strata and assemblages is a matter of degree. See: "From this standpoint, we may oppose the consistency of assemblages to the stratification of milieus. But once again, this opposition is only relative, entirely relative. […] Thus it is not surprising that the distinction we were seeking is not between assemblage and something else, but between two limits of any possible assemblage." (Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 337.)

[139] This emphasis on heterogeneity explains why Deleuze's examples always cite things like ecosystems, made up of plants, animals, and weather patterns, rather than focusing on individual organisms.

[140] A unity *can* be produced by a separate agent, such as language or the state, but these are always produced as an extra *part* of the assemblage, rather than actually ontologically unifying it. While this unity does not actually encompass the assemblage in question, it does have real effects such as creating a hierarchy or homogenizing the various components. "The Whole itself is a product, produced as nothing more than a part alongside other parts, which it neither unifies nor totalizes; though it has an effect on these other parts simply because it establishes aberrant paths of communication between noncommunicating vessels, transverse unities between elements that retain all their differences within their own particular boundaries." (Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus*, 43.)

system.[141] The production of a symbiotic system entails our second type of emergence – what Protevi refers to as 'transversal emergence' – whereby liaisons are established across heterogeneous domains, although the degree of heterogeneity can vary. In their most heterogeneous form ('consistencies'), assemblages take on the features we earlier ascribed to intensive systems. By contrast, their more homogeneous form ('strata') is characterized by the aspects of actualized systems. Neither appears concretely in its pure form though, and so there are always movements between each pole. In a political ontology, the heterogeneous elements of an assemblage will often be individuals which give rise to emergent social wholes such as families, institutions, corporations, movements, and communities. Note, however, that individuals are themselves assemblages composed of a variety of different elements including, but not limited to, their biological base and their specific social milieu (including the constraints posed by emergent assemblages). In the opposite direction, the emergent, meso-level assemblages are themselves capable of acting as the components for larger assemblages – most notably states, but also the global networks of modern day corporations and financial institutions, along with the emerging global civil society network.[142]

The first dimension, therefore, is that of the material/expression distinction and all the variants that lie in between.[143] In a political ontology, the material aspects include

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[141] "The assemblage's only unity is that of co-functioning: it is a symbiosis." (Deleuze, Gilles, and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 69.) Moreover, since each assemblage is itself intertwined with all other assemblages, the scope of the assemblage is determined by the theorist and the factors that are significant to the study. The selection of a relevant spatiotemporal scale becomes fundamental to any analysis.

[142] We will have much more to say later on about this notion of 'synchronic emergence' and its proposed resolution of social sciences' micro-macro problem, particularly how assemblages avoid the reification typically associated with holistic thinking.

[143] In Deleuze and Guattari's own writing, this distinction is named content/expression instead. We follow DeLanda in rephrasing it partly because the term 'material' seems more suited to the political ontology to be developed here, and partly to simplify the original formulation. 'Content', however, arguably functions better when applied to the organic and physical assemblages that Deleuze and Guattari also analyze.

elements such as the human bodies and brains which permit social interaction. They can also include the various technological tools (such as those which constitute military power), physical resources (such as oil or water), and spatial settings (such as the architecture of a building or city,[144] or the geographical location of a particular place). Communication infrastructures are also material aspects of assemblages. On the other hand, expression can also take a wide variety of forms: most obviously in spoken and written language, but also cultural signs, or laws. In social movements, they can also include expressions of solidarity, among other elements as we will see. Nations rely upon various symbols, rites, traditions and practices to constitute an expression of the 'imagined community'. On an individual level, they can include things like minor gestures and inflections of local dialects. While – as with every distinction in Deleuze – these two extremes can be abstractly separated, in concrete situations we are faced with assemblages which can blur the distinction. For instance, while military power may consist of specific physical and technological objects (and therefore be material), it is also the case that these objects act as an expression of a nation's strength (as noted by a number of international relations theorists).[145] The role which a component plays is therefore dependent upon which capacity it is exerting. This example also reveals an important point about the nature of expression: *it is not reducible to either linguistics or to representation*. On the one hand, expression includes a vast array of components which cannot meaningfully be reduced to a matter of texts (such as facial expressions in face-to-face contact, or acts of contestation in social movements). On the other hand, it can not be

[144] Interestingly enough, the Israeli Defence Force – one of the most sophisticated urban warfare groups in the world – employs Deleuzian concepts in order to create tactics for handling the unique combat dynamics faced within city spaces. See: Weizman, Eyal. *Hollow Land*.

[145] See, most notably, Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* for an examination of how the same military material can be expressed differentially dependent upon which country it enters into relations with.

said that expression simply represents an underlying state of affairs. It is not solely a question of understanding the meaning of various expressions, but of understanding how they function within a larger assemblage.[146] This is the key point to note about expression: it is itself *within* the world having real effects on its surroundings; it is not distinct from the world, abstractly representing it, nor is it simply a matter of transmitting information. Expression is a real force within the world and as such, has the same ontological status as material. At the same time, expression and material must be seen as having a disjunctive non-relation "for two reasons: the statement [i.e. expression] has its own correlative object and is not a proposition designating a state of things or a visible object, as logic would have it; but neither is the visible [i.e. the material] a mute meaning, a signified of power to be realized in language, as phenomenology would have it."[147] This is the case because the material of an assemblage is not simply a chaotic matter waiting for form-ation by a signifier; rather it contains its own form, along with its own substance.[148] In other words, there is a substance of material and a form of material. Likewise, expression too contains both a substance of expression and a form of expression. This militates against any reduction to a signifier/signified model, or to a hylomorphic model which would rely upon a transcendent ordering. As a result, there is a

[146] Ernesto Laclau gives the example of the seemingly empty rhetoric and slogans employed by populist movements. While their *meaning* may be relatively vapid and empty, they can *function* within a particular context to produce a novel collective identity. See: Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*, 14.
[147] Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*, 64.
[148] Technically, the material in a particular assemblage is taken from the substance of matter in another assemblage (the 'substratum'). So for example, the familial assemblage (assembled from a milieu consisting of elements like cultural habits, socioeconomic pressures, and local network interactions) produces formed bodies that then function as the material for various institutions (school, work, military, etc.). Prior to the family, we might imagine the genetic/evolutionary assemblage that produced the biological substratum for the family, and so on. In each case, the assemblage and its substratum is an entirely relative relation.

fourfold division within the first dimension of assemblages.[149] The "non-relation" between expression and material does not, however, deny that they enter into interactions. Rather, the idea of the non-relation "says that there is no isomorphism or homology, nor any common form to seeing and speaking, to the visible and the articulable. [Instead] the two forms spill over into one another, as in a battle. The image of a battle signifies precisely that there is no isomorphism."[150]

We can see this clearly in the disjunction posed by Foucault between the discursive and the non-discursive.[151] The concrete disciplinary assemblage contains, in one actualization, the prison and penal law. On the one hand, in the prison there is both a certain 'substance of material' (the bodies of singular prisoners with their own properties and capacities, along with the physical material required for the prison) and a particular 'form of material' (the architecture of the prison, the distribution of light and darkness in the Panopticon principle, the practices of regimentation). On the other hand, the penal law system has its own 'form of expression' (the set of statements pertaining to delinquency, the history of legal precedents, the organization of legal arguments, etc.) which creates its own 'substance of expression' (the discursive objects produced by the various definitions of 'delinquency').

Significant also to this distinction between material and expression is that each is produced through its own historical processes ('articulations' in Deleuze's terms). The emergence of the content of the disciplinary assemblage was independent of the emergence of the expressive aspects: "we must not forget that the prison, that

[149] Deleuze and Guattari are careful to note that whereas the expression/material distinction is *real* (but does not preexist the concrete relation between them), the substance/form distinction is a mental product.
[150] Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*, 66.
[151] Deleuze explicitly aligns the two (non-discursive/material and discursive/expressive) in his book on Foucault.

concentrated and austere figure of all the disciplines, is not an endogenous element in the penal system as defined at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."[152] While material and expression can interact and establish positive feedback loops (prison produces prisoners suitable for penal reform, penal law produces delinquents suitable for prison, and so on), they nevertheless never establish a common form that would overcome the disjunction between the material and the expressive.[153] What is important to note is that in each case in which this typology is applied, new concepts and new relations must be developed. This results from the fact that while at a certain point in time they can come to form liaisons between each other, this process is contingent and self-generated, making it irreducible to the intentions of individual actors or homeostatic social functions. As Brian Massumi concisely puts it:

> "You will find that you cannot use the concepts without changing them or the way they interrelate. Every situation is unique and requires a specially tailored repertory of concepts. The concepts were formulated to help meet the challenge of thinking the unique. That is, to meet the challenge of thinking – for there is nothing in this world *but* uniqueness."[154]

Our analysis of assemblages, however, is still too static. We have examined the various elements which go into composing assemblages, but given our earlier focus on individuation, how do assemblages come to cohere? It is here that two types of processes

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[152] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline & Punish*, 255.

[153] As Deleuze and Guattari note, "it is even more complex than that because the prison as a form of content has a relative expression all its own; there are all kinds of statements specific to it that do not necessarily coincide with the statements of delinquency. Conversely, delinquency as a form of expression has an autonomous content all its own, since delinquency expresses not only a new way of evaluating crimes but a new way of committing them." (Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 67.) As a result, each assemblage is in fact composed of two types of assemblages: "In an indissoluble way an assemblage is both machine assemblage of effectuation and collective assemblage of enunciation." (Deleuze, Gilles, and Claire Parnet. *Dialogues II*, 71.) For simplicity's sake, we will stick with our original formulation, but any concrete study of assemblages should take this complexity into account.

[154] Massumi, Brian. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 24. As Deleuze and Guattari also state: "content [i.e. material] and expression are not distinguished from each other in the same fashion on each stratum." (Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 503.)

come into play, each embodied in any given assemblage. On the one hand, is territorialization, which is any process whereby an assemblage's *material* identity is solidified to some degree, "by increasing [either] its degree of internal homogeneity or the degree of sharpness of its boundaries".[155] Since a minimum degree of territorialization must be established in order for an assemblage to emerge, any assemblage will necessarily contain some form of territorialization. While the territorialization process most clearly takes shape through spatial boundaries (such as national borders), it is not limited to these alone. It can also include segregation processes which seek to homogenize a specific area, for example, through raising the price of rent in a neighbourhood; or sorting processes which function to distribute a categorical structure.[156] Territorialization can also include the homogenization of the basis for certain classifications (e.g. the neuro-social mechanisms which generate recurrent psychological disorders, later ordered within the DSM[157]) or hierarchies (e.g. the emergence of a particular class structure due to the material changes associated with primitive accumulation). The abstractness of the notion of territorialization means it can encompass any number of vastly differing phenomena, such as an individual's acquiescence in a new job, a community's production of a political organization, a group's establishment of a common name, language's transformation into written forms, or a state's use of propaganda to create fear of outsiders. Its abstractness also entails that processes of

[155] DeLanda, Manuel. *A New Philosophy of Science*, 12.
[156] The practices of testing and examination that Foucault speaks of in *Discipline & Punish* would be prime examples of this. The effect of their instantiation was specifically to sort large masses of people into individualizing, homogeneous categories. See, for example: Foucault, Michel. *Discipline & Punish*, 184-192.
[157] DSM stands for the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, which is the primary resource employed by psychologists to diagnose patients. It functions by creating categories of symptoms related to a particular disorder, with the diagnosis of an individual being made on the basis of how closely they resemble an ideal type.

territorialization can occupy a wide variety of spatiotemporal scales: processes of territorialization occur over millions of years at the geological level, and can occur over hundreds of years in the political world (the emergence of nation-states, for example); they can also be miniature in size as in the genetic homogenization produced by natural selection mechanisms, or vast in scale as in the claim that globalization is producing a homogeneous world culture. In our earlier terms, we can therefore see that territorialization is the process whereby material systems come to be organized around a particular attractor. Depending on the nature of the relations between the heterogeneous elements, this assemblage will be more or less stable and homogeneous, that is to say, more or less territorialized. Territorialization is a significant concept, therefore, because it directs the theorist's attention towards the historical conditions for stable, *predictive* structures to emerge, and concomitantly for *unpredictable* events to occur.

On the other hand, there is deterritorialization, which we earlier characterized as being carried out by lines of flight. In contrast to territorialization, deterritorialization denotes the processes by which an assemblage's material identity is destabilized and/or made more heterogeneous. By contrast to our general theme, deterritorialization can be considered a mode of 'de-individuation'. Now as we mentioned earlier, there are two forms of deterritorialization: both a relative one which transitions to a new stable state, and an absolute one which returns to the virtual in order to create entirely new patterns of systemic behavior. There is more to it than this, however.[158] In the shift from *Anti-Oedipus* to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari's unrestrained enthusiasm for the liberating power of deterritorialization is tempered. While still a powerful force, by the

[158] For a more in-depth analysis, see: Holland, Eugene. "Deterritorializing 'Deterritorialization': From the *Anti-Oedipus* to *A Thousand Plateaus*."

time of *A Thousand Plateaus* the concept has also developed the capacity to produce a "suicidal movement" via a too quick deterritorialization. In addition to the two previous types of deterritorialization, we must therefore add a third, carried out by a 'line of death'. Whereas the other movements are careful to retain a minimum of identity with which to function, the line of death refuses to take enough care in the deterritorialization process. Rather than retaining a functioning assemblage, it results in a suicidal movement that destroys the assemblage. In some sense, the Nazi regime could be considered a line of abolition insofar as their project sought to radically restructure the world even if it would cost the German people everything.[159] On an individual level, Deleuze and Guattari also offer up the image of a junkie who, while experimenting with drugs, went too far, too quickly and ended up an addict. There are dangers, then, to deterritorialization, and Deleuze and Guattari are quick to note that not every line that escapes an assemblage is necessarily positive.

In uncovering the processes whereby material elements are organized into a more or less homogeneous assemblage, we have overlooked the similar processes through which expressive elements are employed to establish an individual. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, this is known as the process of coding – a process which, while operating on the expressive dimension, can have indirect effects on the organization of the material too. In the socio-political sphere we are concerned with, coding functions primarily through language (although, again, it is not limited to it. Language remains one piece of an assemblage and not the sole medium through which we experience it). Institutions are one of the most obvious examples where coding occurs. In the

[159] This suicidal movement is epitomized by Hitler's "Telegram 71, in which, in April 1945, Hitler gave the order to destroy the German people's own living conditions." (Foucault, Michel. *Society Must be Defended*, 260.)

contemporary Western world, this is often achieved through the rational-legal justification of bureaucracy, whereas in other societies and in less institutionalized groupings it can tend towards charismatic forms of authority premised upon traditional expressions of power. In advanced democracies, social movements are highly coded through the legal system: there is a well-established set of rules for voicing disagreement, and a highly regimented institutional assemblage – the police (and military, if need be) – in place to enforce conformity. On another scale of assemblages, families are less explicitly coded, but it would be hard to deny that the family structure lends itself to a culturally constructed hetero-normativity.

Processes of decoding, as the name suggests, are movements that destabilize an established code. This occurs most clearly in "informal conversations between friends",[160] but can also include challenges to established laws, particularly in their interpretation. Through these processes, various expressive elements become less rigid and are opened up to refashioning through political movements. Decoding is particularly important to identity politics, which focuses on destabilizing traditional social categories (whether legal, ideological, personal, or scientific) in order to make them more open and inclusive.[161] Such procedures can, in turn, de/reterritorialize the material ordering of bodies and objects by altering the way various practices are carried out (for example, the inclusion of 'women' as people in the Canadian legal system permitted a new set of bodies and their potentials to enter into the political assemblage of Canada).

Finally, we reach our last major distinction to add to assemblages – that between the molecular and the molar organization of assemblages. In one sense, this distinction

[160] DeLanda, Manuel. *A New Philosophy of Society*, 16.
[161] Of course, as with territorialization, every process of decoding entails a subsequent recoding – in this case upon a new particular identity.

encompasses the previous two since molar organization arises from processes of territorialization and coding which stabilize the identity of assemblages. Similarly, molecular organization stems from the deterritorialization and decoding of established patterns of behaviour. The importance of this distinction, however, is that whereas traditional Anglo-American social science has been concerned with molar entities such as classes and sexes, in concrete situations, these molar entities are in fact emergent properties of molecular organizations that refuse the homogenization of a single definition. For example, in the case of an institutional assemblage, there will be an entire molar organization defined in terms of a chain of command, internal corporate rules, and state regulations. As anyone who has worked in an institution knows, though, the actual functioning of the organization is much more flexible and dependent upon the intensive relations between individuals.[162] The role of affective relations, networking, and the "little ideas of little men, the little inventions and interferences between imitative currents"[163] all

[162] As Žižek notes, in a slightly different context, what is most alien to our modern ideologies and systems of rules is people who take the rules literally. This is debatable in reference to various fundamentalisms, but it seems as though the point holds for any number of molar organized social groupings. See: Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 27-33.

[163] Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference & Repetition*, 314. The reference Deleuze makes here is to Gabriel Tarde, a once famous sociologist from the early nineteenth century. Against Durkheim's focus on the great collective representations of society, Tarde argued that he was illegitimately presupposing what needed to be explained – "namely, 'the similarity of thousands of men [sic]'" (ibid. 314). Tarde argued instead that the preindividual relation of imitation was primary. In understanding how large-scale similarities emerge, we must move to an ever more detailed analysis to the point where we reach the most infinitesimal social relation possible – (conscious or unconscious, intended or not) imitation between two individuals (or between an individual and an abstract model). In understanding imitation, we understand the foundation of sociology and the emergence of collective similarities, according to Tarde. All our social actions are premised upon our copying of how others act (e.g. deference to a particular authority, use of language, following social traditions, etc.), and so our very sense of individuality is born out of the various flows of imitation within which we find ourselves embedded. Innovation, in Tarde's view, is a matter of connecting two or more imitative flows into a unique act; but since Tarde was a sociologist, these acts must be repeated by others in order to be deemed true social innovations. Otherwise they pass unnoticed and remain at the level of psychology (a point often overlooked by Tarde's critics). Tarde's work, therefore, was focused upon infinitesimal (molecular) flows of imitation, innovation, and opposition, which provided the basis for molar representations of society. For more on Tarde, see: Latour, Bruno. "Gabriel Tarde and the End of the Social.", Toews, David. "The New Tarde: Sociology after the End of the Social.", and Tarde, Gabriel. *Social Laws: An Outline of Sociology*.

take on more importance here as the molar organization is de-individuated from its codified form into a new more or less stable molecular state. What must be made clear though is that the distinction between the molecular and the molar is *not* that between the individual and the group, although Deleuze and Guattari's association of a micropolitics and a macropolitics with them can suggest that conclusion. Rather, the molecular and the molar are both "coextensive with the entire social field."[164] On the one hand, even large political structures like the state require micropolitical mechanisms such as Foucault's disciplinary mechanisms. On the other hand, while "it is indeed a question of miniaturized mechanisms, or molecular forces operating in detail or in the infinitely small",[165] through their virtual capacities to be integrated into novel assemblages, micropolitical innovations can be abstracted and spread throughout a society (this is why "prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons").[166] There is no opposition of scale between the micropolitical and the macropolitical since each is immanent in the other. Therefore, it is not the case that the molecular and the molar are simply two *independent* ways of looking at a social situation. Rather, they both operate in any given assemblage, and interpenetrate each other.[167] Indeed, molecular deviations are "nothing if they [do] not return to the molar organizations to reshuffle their segments, their binary distribution of sexes, classes and parties."[168] Due to its ubiquitous nature, the micropolitical fabric of a society functions much like random genetic mutation does in biological evolution. Both operate as an exploration of what we will later call 'phase space', and are subject to a variety of selection mechanisms. (Selection, of course,

[164] Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 215.
[165] Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 537n16.
[166] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*, 228.
[167] "Classes are indeed fashioned from masses; they crystallize them. And masses are constantly flowing or leaking from classes." (Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 213.)
[168] Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 216-7.

is not simply repressive, but also facilitating in some cases.) It is because of these selection mechanisms that while molecular escapes can produce local disturbances, it still requires a certain threshold and a particularly primed social milieu in order for social change to become systemic and widespread.

For our purposes, therefore, the molecular is particularly significant because it is the space in which social change arises, through various lines of flight. While some lines of flight will remain local and largely ephemeral, others will resonate with the contextual social assemblages and produce large-scale social movements, as we will later analyze. The movement of a society, in this view, is not defined at all by the great molar contradictions (bourgeoisie/proletariat, East/West, developed/undeveloped, etc.).

> "That is true only on the larger scale of things. From the viewpoint of micropolitics, a society is defined by its lines of flight, which are molecular. There is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organizations, the resonance apparatus, and the overcoding machine [i.e. the State]: things that are attributed to a 'change in values', the youth, women, the mad, etc. […] As Gabriel Tarde said, what one needs to know is which peasants, in which areas of the south of France, stopped greeting the local landowners."[169]

It must not be thought that the molecular is simply utopian, however. As likely as it is to progressively resist power, the molecular can also be a breeding ground for less desirable elements. Nazi fascism, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, was not simply an imposition by the state, but rather was already virulent throughout the various assemblages which composed the society.[170] The reason why state fascism succeeded so well in Germany at the time was that it had already been prepared for in the molecular fabric of the society. If our analysis of deterritorialization did not already make it clear, it should be obvious from

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[169] Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 216.

[170] "Rural fascism and city or neighbourhood fascism, youth fascism and war veteran's fascism, fascism of the Left and fascism of the Right, fascism of the couple, family, school, and office." (Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 214.)

this example that lines of flight and de-individuations are not simply ethical in and of themselves. Rather, the concepts developed here are to be envisaged as tools, dependent for their validity on whether they work or not, and devoid of any intrinsic ethical worth.[171] Their ethical value only emerges from the assemblages they enter into.

Before moving onto an analysis of social movements from an assemblage theory perspective, our final task of this chapter will be to place assemblages in the context of traditional social science problems – specifically, the whole/part relation of individuals to societies, the micro/macro problem of accounting for large-scale social systems, and the ontological basis of social change. In all three cases, as we will see, assemblage theory has a unique solution to offer. We will begin by analyzing the whole/part relation since it will set the foundation for the notion of emergent structures in the sections following it.

Insofar as they refuse a transcendent unity (such as in a single-function system), assemblages must be against the "organismic metaphor". As DeLanda has noted, this pervasive metaphor is not limited to simply explicit analogies between society and organisms. Instead, it is defined by its general mereological theory that "component parts are constituted by the very relations they have to other parts in the whole. A part detached from such a whole ceases to be what it is, since being this particular part is one of its constitutive properties."[172] In the organismic metaphor, therefore, the parts of a system are defined by their *internal* relations to the whole. Seemingly disparate theoretical positions such as Hegelian notions of the state, Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory, Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory, and the social constructivists (insofar as language is a totalized system), are exemplars of this position. For all of them, what is

[171] Deleuze, Gilles and Michel Foucault. "Intellectuals and Power." 208.
[172] DeLanda, Manuel. *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, 8.

ontologically privileged is a holistic system within which particular entities gain their entire meaning. On the other hand, positivism takes the opposite path by privileging simple, independent entities as the ontological base, and denigrating the relations between them as inessential. This view is typified by Margaret Thatcher's famous quip that "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families." (The exception granted to families presumably implies that children are not considered fully constituted individuals.) The mereological theory assumed here is that the whole is simply the aggregate of its parts, or, what amounts to the same thing, that no whole exists. Whereas organismic ideas of society see it constituted through relations internal to a whole, positivism denies the ontological existence of relations and posits independent atoms. By contrast to both of these approaches – as we saw earlier with intensive systems – assemblages are defined in terms of their elements' *external* relations. Unlike the organismic vision, the properties of assemblage components can be retained from assemblage to assemblage. Unlike in atomistic thought, the capacities of an assemblage component will always change depending on the relations the entity enters into. Inasmuch as capacities refer to another entity, they can neither be derived from the existing properties, nor entirely predicted in advance.

In this regard, Saskia Sassen's *Territory – Authority – Rights*, is exemplary in mapping out how certain capacities developed within a particular period are vitally important in the constitution of new historical assemblages. For example, in the medieval period, particular capacities emerged on the basis of the largely informal claims to universal authority made by both the church and empire. While at the time, neither was restrained to a particular territory, their implementation of a final authority proved to be a

critical component in the emergence of territorial nation-states.[173] The properties of universal authority, exercising particular capacities within the medieval assemblage, were refashioned in the national assemblage, actualizing novel capacities in the process. It was, therefore, not the case that the new period of nation-states relied upon the negation of the classical medieval period; rather, there was a complex reorganization of various existing capabilities. We will detail this movement in more depth later, but it should be noted that this is an example of 'individualization' whereby existing assemblage components provide the (non-teleological) evolutionary basis for further individuations. The virtual potentials within a situation are not entirely open and abstract, but rather dependent upon the particular historical situation.

With the notion of external relations in hand, we can now analyze how assemblage theory leads to a radical rethinking of the nature of levels, or the difference between the micro and the macro,[174] one that is exemplified in the idea of a "flat ontology".[175] Put briefly, this idea conceives of ontology as composed solely of individuals occupying different spatiotemporal scales. Larger assemblages (communities, organizations, movements, nations, global civil society, etc.) emerge from the recurrent patterns of interaction between populations of smaller assemblages (with 'larger' and 'smaller' being relative terms – large assemblages can be the micro components of an

[173] "The Capetian kings implemented key elements of this history-making state project, but they did so in good part by mobilizing medieval capabilities. They in fact needed the pope to gain legitimacy and resources, and when they contested the pope they invoked their own divine origins as a source of legitimacy." Sassen, Saskia. *Territory – Authority – Rights: Medieval to Global Assemblages*, 46.

[174] To avoid confusion, the idea of micro here is separate from the earlier contrast between the molecular/micropolitical and the molar/macropolitical. The distinction put forth here, between the micro and the macro, is the distinction between the emergent assemblages and their constituent assemblages. The molecular/molar distinction, on the other hand, is between two types of social organization – either the immanent, affective relations or the stratified, transcendent systems. In any case where it is possibly unclear, we will be sure to note which type of micro we are referring to.

[175] DeLanda, Manuel. *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, 153.

even larger assemblage). Just as assemblages are composed of individuated components and their external relations entering into a symbiotic relationship, so too are larger scale assemblages composed of these smaller assemblages and their relations. Moreover, the singular nature of each individual, despite its scale, is retained; notions such as a 'democracy in general' or a 'state in general' are abstractions without a referent. Each emergent social system is therefore as individual as its unique smaller components. Given its multiple uses in scholarly literature and consequent vagueness, the concept of emergence deserves some clarification. Earlier we saw two other types of emergence: diachronic emergence in the production of the new and the novel, and transversal emergence in the establishment of connections across heterogeneous domains. Our third type is synchronic emergence (although each type of emergence can combine and interact), which we will follow Protevi in defining "as the (diachronic) construction of functional structures in complex systems that achieve a (synchronic) focus of systematic behaviour as they constrain the behaviour of individual components."[176] The notion of constraint is central to this definition, and Protevi gives an innovative argument for what this entails. What must be avoided is seeing "top-down" constraint as being solely the product of efficient causality (through mechanisms) emanating from a reified, overarching totality – the so called problem of downward causation. Instead, constraint on component parts stems from the attractors of the emergent system. Take, for example, the assemblage composed of a number of individual people – considered abstractly apart from larger social structures, each person is its own assemblage (body-brain-environment-etc.) with its own particular attractors. Their interaction together, however, produces a larger community-assemblage that develops its own attractors (e.g. embodied

[176] Protevi, John. "Deleuze, Guattari and Emergence." 19.

by the explicit and implicit rules and regulations that structure a community). These emergent attractors constrain the ways individuals act (although, of course, there will always be deviancies and lines of flight). Attractors that are irreducible to any single component can therefore constrain the entire system to function in a certain behaviour pattern, thus effectively acting as ontologically emergent structures that have real causal efficacy on their components. Moreover, what is important to recognize here is that since the causal reality stems from the ontological existence of non-actualized attractors, the emergent structure is incapable of being reified into an objective given. Social structures, to put it simply, are never fully developed and always dynamic and open to change beyond crucial thresholds.

We can see now how assemblages can be situated within the larger context of global notions like 'society' or the 'political world'. We can immediately perceive that the socio-political in its totality is not a unitary concept, being definable neither by a set number of functions (as in functionalist sociology from Parsons to Luhmann to Bourdieu) nor by a set number of power centers (as in Marxist or state-centered or individualist accounts), nor by some form of homogeneity (as in rationalist and production-centered theories). Rather, "the modern political system is a global whole, unified and unifying, *but it is so because* it implies a constellation of juxtaposed, imbricated, ordered subsystems; the analysis of decision making brings to light all kinds of compartmentalizations and partial processes that interconnect, but not without gaps and displacements."[177] In other words, the contemporary, globalized world is a multiplicity of

[177] Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 210, emphasis added. This quote also suggests that DeLanda is mistaken in arguing that Deleuze subscribes to a holistic social view (see DeLanda, Manuel. *A New Philosophy of Society*, 126n7); or rather, Deleuze's holistic view does not preclude a

heterogeneous assemblages (subsystems), at some points connecting disparate elements into a synthetic and emergent whole, while at other points fostering divergence and ultimately conflict. Or, more precisely, the entire non-unified system is a multi-layered, complex interaction of *emergent* systems. Against those who wish to distinguish set functional divisions within society (Luhmann's distinctions between legal, political, and economic sectors, for example), assemblages note the networks of connections between heterogeneous domains that produce emergent and often unintended consequences.[178] Against those who aim to make the state the centre of all power, assemblage theory notes the variety of power relations that are necessary to uphold the state's power in the first place.[179] These power relations need not be centralized (as in "primitive" societies, or in some forms of social movements as we will see), although they are most obvious in that form. Society is comprised of a multiplicity of assemblages, interacting in various ways, and with their own intensive processes carrying them, quickly or slowly, into novel formations. There are, on the other hand, various forces which seek to stop the intensive processes, either to force them into a state of equilibrium (e.g. American plans to "secure the borders"), or to organize them and make them resonate with a collective goal (e.g. through Weber's charismatic leadership). It is not simply political opportunists, however, that seek to block the flow of becoming; representational thought, particularly in its

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multiplicity of subsystems. Indeed, it would be odd for Deleuze, who so often rallied against conceptions of a unified whole, to suddenly reintroduce such an idea in the notion of a single, unified society.

[178] To be clear, Luhmann does allow that different functional systems can interconnect via 'coupling', but he also asserts that each system can only perceive other systems in their own terms. "On the level of this self-referential organization, self-referential systems are *closed* systems, for they allow no other forms of processing in their self-determination." (Luhmann, Niklas. *Social Systems*, 34.) There is no capacity for real connection or emergence here, since each system remains stuck within its own system/environment distinction. For a good overview, see: Moeller, Hans-Georg. *Luhmann Explained*, 24-41.

[179] "If the State-form, in our historical formations, has captured so many power relations, this is not because they are derived from it; on the contrary, it is because an operation of 'continual state control', which depending on the case in point can vary greatly, was produced in the pedagogical, juridical, economic, familial and sexual domains which encouraged global integration. At all events, far from being the source of power relations, the State already implies them." (Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*, 76.)

collective form (e.g. ideology, social classifications, laws, even social science), is also a matter of constructing a transcendent identity from a differential field. In every case, political ontology is constituted between the two poles of the molar and the molecular, the rigid and the line of flight.

There is one final aspect we must add to assemblages in order to align them with our earlier characterization of Deleuze's general ontology – we must afford them the properly ontological capacity to change and become. In some sense we have already come across this, "since [because the assemblage's] variations and dimensions are immanent to it, *it amounts to the same thing to say that each multiplicity is already composed of heterogeneous terms in symbiosis, and that a multiplicity is continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities, according to its thresholds and doors.*"[180] The connection of heterogeneous elements that defines an assemblage entails that multiple tendencies occupy a system, which in turn produce a set of equilibrium and far-from-equilibrium attractors that drive the system to fluctuate within the vicinity of an attractor. Similarly, the unactualized attractors continue to act as real potentials that can be actualized given the right circumstances (caused by a flux of migrants, a new technology, the viral spread of a particular meme, etc.). It must always be remembered though that particular assemblages are the result of historical processes of production. Their potentials, therefore, are also historically constructed and contingent. This historical development is, of course, not a matter of increasing progress, nor is it a matter of linear development in any sense. There is no transcendent determinant of history's movements: no Absolute Spirit embodying and returning to itself, no development and superseding of economic contradictions, no end of history established by the dominance of neoliberal

[180] Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 249.

capitalism, and no universal laws determining outcomes. Rather, history is entirely contingent; a shifting field of interacting forces. Jay Lampert, in his excellent study on the philosophy of history in Deleuze and Guattari, gives a number of reasons for this contingency. It stems from the fact

> "(a) that events are the intersections of independent series (encounters); (b) that events could have happened differently, previously, or not at all; (c) events occur in flux, or chaotically, catastrophically, or without determinate conditions at all; (d) different events occur in incommensurable rhythms or temporal streams, and so do not have measurable causal efficacy on each other; (e) events depend on milieu-conditions, which themselves depend on conditions, ad infinitum (contra (c)); (f) events depend on minority effects, not on the large-scale conditions that historical causality depends on; (g) events are irreducibly indeterminate or ambiguous, making it impossible to isolate their defining factors."[181]

This set of factors describes an ontological system which avoids any strict determinism by being constituted through multiple, interacting forces. The attractors which determine the long-term tendencies of a social system are not only constructed through these historical interactions, but are also subject to fluctuations that, when reaching a particular threshold, carry the system into a radically new organization. In order to conceptualize these shifts, the immanent potential of a situation, and the molecular lines of flight that carry a system away, Deleuze and Guattari develop the concept of a 'diagram'.[182]

In complexity theory, a particular type of mathematical modeling called 'phase space' has been developed to map the ability of a complex system to change and fluctuate over time. There are a number of important caveats in relating diagrams to phase space,

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[181] Lampert, Jay. *Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy of History*, 120.

[182] While unrelated to our own work, John Mullarkey's *Post-Continental Philosophy* offers an interesting discussion on the significance of diagrams and pictures for philosophy. See: Mullarkey, John. *Post-Continental Philosophy*, 157-193.

however. First, unlike phase space, Deleuzian diagrams eschew any quantitative basis.[183] Similarly, our second qualification states that while diagrams provide a productive way to visualize and represent the ontological nature of dynamic systems, their visual or representational embodiment is always to be distinguished from the real ontological diagram. In the representation, there is always a necessary element of individuation, whereas ontologically, the virtual which the diagram ostensibly "represents" is in fact entirely non-individuated. In part, this points to the necessarily immanent and individuated nature of theory – theory cannot be conceived as independent of the theorist and the historical, material situation that provides the relational context. In other words, there is always an individuation of theory and the theorist, parallel to the individuation of the situation which is being observed. The first step in constructing the phase space/diagram of a system is to determine the number of significant ways in which the system can change. In social systems, the number of relevant changes is vast and so the theorist must make explicit their choices/limitations.[184] Each relevant factor is then mathematically described as a dimension of the constructed space (visually, this quickly becomes impossible to imagine, but mathematically it can be worked out). Each point within the space defined by these dimensions therefore represents a particular possible state of the system. Empirical observations are then taken to map out the various trajectories within the system, and these then occupy a certain path within the phase space. The combination of these trajectories, as we noted earlier, entails reciprocal interactions between them that generate attractors and their basins of attraction. What are

[183] Deleuze and Guattari will often characterize them in terms of affects, relations between forces, and unformed matters and unformed functions – all of which suggest a pre-quantitative, pre-individual form of phase space.

[184] In each case, the relevant elements of the assemblage will depend upon the theorist's interests; ontologically, though, each theoretically delineated assemblage must be conceived as continually affecting other assemblages – whether smaller components, similar systems, or larger structures.

largely hidden in the empirical trajectories of a system, however, are the alternative attractors and the bifurcation points at which a system qualitatively changes. The real virtual nature of an assemblage and the intensive processes through which it developed are never given in the individuated system. Our diagrams, as a result, will never be completed, since different organizations of the various assemblages can result in different virtual potentials. In order to grasp these hidden potentials, the system must be pushed into an intensive, far-from-equilibrium state – in socio-political systems, these are exemplified in the moments of contentious politics in which pressures for a new form of social organization begin to exert a real force. As a methodological principle, therefore, it will be the aim of social theory to examine the moments of real social change in order to discern the real diagrams that provide the unactualized, yet real conditions of a particular system. Diagrams can thus be conceived as an abstract space of potential defined by the dimensions, trajectories, immanent singularities, attractors and bifurcation points of a situation.

We come here to a key distinction, and one that further illuminates the difference between intensive and actualized systems. In intensive systems, local micro-fluctuations can have a drastic influence on the global structure, because the system is "unsure" about its direction. Against the idea that small causes produce small effects, intensive systems are characterized in part by the notion that small causes can produce large effects. Actualized, stable assemblages, on the other hand, are dominated by powerful attractors that tend to have mechanisms to dampen the effects of internal and external disturbances. In these cases, there must be extremely large, repeated, and/or widely disseminated disturbances in order for the system to be altered beyond the basin of attraction. Between these two poles lies a wide range of potential means for effecting change:

> "A large part of Deleuze and Guattari's point is that transformation from organized territories to state leaderships to chaotic systems can occur as a singular breakthrough event at a certain time (the first arrival of a despot), or as a small-scale transformation at a micro-level (the occasional expulsion of a scapegoat from a town), or as a repeated occurrence at very different times and places (the acts of traitors no matter when)."[185]

While it is not always the case that social change will rely upon small events (consider how 9/11 affected globalization's seemingly inevitable disintegration of borders), in many cases these larger events will themselves be the product of many smaller social deviations. In each case, it takes empirical observations to discern how an assemblage was or could be affected by its molecular flows, and how these effectively propelled a system to an alternative attractor.[186]

Given that diagrams are real, and their potentials are in some sense constrained by the concrete assemblages which they presuppose, social change must be partly dependent upon (though not reducible to) actual historical conditions.[187] Indeed, it is precisely this idea that Deleuze alludes to when he states it is "not that anything can be linked up with anything else. Instead it is more like a series of draws in a lottery, each one operating at random under extrinsic conditions laid down by the previous draw. The diagram or diagram state is always a mixture of the aleatory and the dependent, like a Markov chain."[188] Markov chains, as the translator notes, are a "sequence of events [where] the

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[185] Lampert, Jay. *Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy of History*, 116.
[186] This empirical study will be further fleshed out in the following chapter.
[187] Deleuze, following his principle of immanence, in fact argues for the "mutual presupposition" of the concrete assemblages and their diagram: "the diagram acts as a non-unifying immanent cause that is coextensive with the whole social field: the abstract machine [i.e. diagram] is like the cause of the concrete assemblages that execute its relations; and these relations between forces take place 'not above' but within the very tissue of the assemblages they produce. […] What do we mean here by immanent cause? It is a cause which is realized, integrated and distinguished in its effect. Or rather the immanent cause is realized, integrated and distinguished by its effect. In this way there is a correlation or mutual presupposition between cause and effect, between abstract machine and concrete assemblage." (Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*, 37.) (Acute Deleuzian readers will note that we have made a distinction here between abstract machines and diagrams – this will be fleshed out in chapter 4.)
[188] Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*, 86.

probability of each is dependent only on the event immediately preceding."[189] In this way, the process of individuation is continually being renewed. While at one level, stable, individual assemblages are produced, there is always an undercurrent of unactualized, preindividual potential that carries away established individuals. The actualized system supplies a large share of the resources for further development, but the continued individualization is also premised upon the hidden potentials and capacities of the assemblage. The novel combination and synergies that an assemblage can compose with existing elements can not only produce a change in the set of attractors governing the tendencies of a system, but can fundamentally alter these tendencies to produce entirely new modes of behaviour. To put it in other words, an identity is never complete – there is always an excess of being over and above identity. When we turn to analyze concrete social movements, we will see how this process functions in more detail; not only in the constitution of collective identities, but also in the repertoires of contention, the political opportunity structures, and the networks responsible for movement mobilization.

With our overview of assemblages' characteristic aspects, and the formal outline of our dynamic political ontology, we are now in a position to end this chapter with a brief discussion of methodology. It should be clear from what has been said that the sort of theory illustrated in this thesis cannot simply be a matter of re-presenting an objectively individuated structure as a conceptual model. To do so would be to remain in the 'image of thought'[190] that Deleuze critiques throughout his work, and particularly in

[189] Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*, 86.

[190] This is a term borrowed from Deleuze's *Difference & Repetition* to signify a particular, common sense idea of what thought can and should do. As he says, "It is *in terms of* this image that everybody knows and is presumed to know what it means to think." (Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference & Repetition*, 131.) An image of thought therefore, always operates by restraining the potential of thought to encounter and grapple with novel problems. Instead it functions by recognition – which of course presupposes an already established conceptual system within which to integrate experiences.

chapter 3 of *Difference & Repetition* – a chapter he refers to as "the most necessary and the most concrete".[191] Instead of operating within this image, and restricting thought to a matter of recognition, Deleuze argues that thought must be taken to its "superior or transcendent exercise".[192] It is this use of thought that moves beyond the empirical world of recognized, individuated objects and instead grapples with the intensive level from which the new emerges. It is here that thought connects with its own conditions and becomes truly creative. Given our principle of immanence and univocity though, thought and being are not ontologically distinct. Therefore,

> "it is no longer a question of the philosophical concept adequately representing the real (materiality-in-itself or the unrepresentable); it is rather a question of the concept becoming a material segment of the real – material in the transcendental as opposed to empirical sense; a segment which is fully commensurate and entirely coterminous with materiality as *intensively* rather than extensively defined."[193]

Theorizing, therefore, is a matter of opening ourselves up to difference in order to parallel/continue the individuating movement of being in the movement of thought. In this non-representational view, theory has a necessarily immanent and critical role to play. It is immanent in the sense that it seeks the conditions of real assemblages, and that each theory/theorist is produced from a particular historical condition. It is critical and self-reflexive in that it examines these virtual conditions to reveal untapped potentials for change. This type of theory foregoes the quest to extrapolate universal laws and correlations, instead focusing on developing the potential for novelty *within* an immanent situation. As such, it is an utterly pragmatic and political form of theorizing.

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[191] Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference & Repetition*, xvii.
[192] Ibid., 143.
[193] Brassier, Ray. "Alien Theory: The Decline of Materialism in the Name of Matter", 59.

The aim of theory in this perspective, is to create concepts that "designate not just possibilities, and thus not the form of a thing, but virtualities, and by that we need to understand the real tendencies or individuating factors of the actual thing, expressed and enveloped in the thing, but in no way resembling the thing."[194] It is this idea of concepts – the virtual diagrammatic multiplicity – and the idea of theory being their creation[195] that can allow Deleuze to (seemingly) oddly assert that empiricism "undertakes the most insane creation of concepts ever seen or heard. Empiricism is a mysticism and a mathematicism of concepts, but precisely one which treats the concept as the object of an encounter, as a here-and-now, or rather as an *Erewhon* from which emerge inexhaustibly ever new, differently distributed 'heres' and 'nows'."[196] These concepts are not aimed solely at understanding a situation, but also at affecting real change through their materiality. Theory is therefore not a question of finding some self-identical essence behind the phenomenon, but rather of finding the immanent, variable multiplicity (the diagram or abstract machine) which accounts for the conditions of a given assemblage. While the exact procedure must be determined by the singular context,[197] as a guideline for creating these concepts, thought can begin by employing the 'serial method': choose a single event/assemblage to be explained, and then work backwards, seeking out the causal lines and forces which have contingently come together to form it. "On the one hand it encourages historians to carve history up into large periods of time, while on the other it leads epistemologists to multiply the divisions, some of which have an extremely brief

[194] De Beistegui, Miguel. "Response to David Morris", 194.
[195] For more on this idea, see Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy* which is an in-depth and extended discussion of philosophy as the creation of concepts.
[196] Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference & Repetition*, xx.
[197] In this regard, while the concepts developed so far may be considered fairly abstract, they do aim to be 'rigorously anexact' by allowing for the full variability of the empirical here and now to shine through.

duration."[198] At the same time, no identifiable socio-political assemblage emerges as a completed structure all at once. There are always gaps and disturbances, alternative pathways not taken, and divergent points of history that all make any linear conception of history ultimately untenable. Moreover, there is the problem we earlier noted concerning the tendency of the actualized systems to efface their intensive and virtual conditions. As we will see in the next chapter, there is one way for political theorists and scientists to avoid this hindrance.

[198] Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*, 21.

Chapter 4
Contentious Politics and Mechanisms

As Deleuze points out, the task of the philosopher is to create concepts based upon the virtual multiplicities that underlie any actual situation. The difficulty in this project is that, as we have seen earlier, individuals tend to efface their virtual and intensive conditions. It is only in moments of change and becoming – when, for example, multiple visions of society are competing for dominance – that the virtual potentials become expressed and that we can encounter the underlying processes.[199] This is the first reason why contentious politics take such precedence in this paper – because they are the privileged moments of social unrest and social contestation when unactualized potentials are expressed, giving the theorist an opportunity to examine how the structures of society became sedimented in the first place and how they might be changed in the future. The second reason concerns the fact that the study of contentious politics, by its very definition,[200] is among the most interdisciplinary work being done today: contentious episodes have been analyzed from the standpoint of sociology,[201] anthropology,[202] ontology,[203] political theory,[204] complexity theory[205] along with traditional political

[199] As DeLanda notes, "one of the tasks of a philosopher attempting to create a theory of virtuality is to locate those areas of the world where the virtual is still expressed, and use the unactualized tendencies and capacities one discovers there as sources of insight into the nature of virtual multiplicities." (DeLanda, Manuel. *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, 76.)

[200] As defined by Doug McAdam et al., contentious politics encompasses a vast array of disparate events, such as "revolutions, social movements, industrial conflict, war, interest group politics, nationalism [and] democratization." (McAdam, Doug, et al. *Dynamics of Contention*, 6.)

[201] This is perhaps the most dominant perspective in contemporary political science, epitomized by scholars like Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam.

[202] See, for example: Tsing, Anna. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, and Nash, June (ed.) *Social Movements: An Anthropological Reader*.

[203] Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason* presents itself explicitly as an attempt to re-fashion a new political ontology.

science frameworks such as rational choice[206] and many others.[207] As is apparent from our discussion of assemblages, as a concept they too eschew any rigid academic compartmentalization. Assemblage theory can be applied to the constitution of individual identities, informal social networks, institutions, states and global political bodies (not to mention natural phenomena). Our definition of politics therefore effaces any rigid boundary between conventional, accepted forms of politics (with a focus on government), and the informal, unconventional means of political action. This opens up new potentials for understanding how regimented systems of governance became sedimented, how they interact with external pressures, and how there is an inherent potential for change embodied within political ontology. Moreover, by not assuming that the outcome of an intensive process is necessarily a stable government, nor by assuming that once obtained, a stable state will indefinitely continue barring any external shock, our perspective can provide more focus on the ways in which socio-political systems are individuated continuously. This final chapter, therefore, will be concerned with examining contemporary contentious politics (with an emphasis on social movement studies) as a key example of the disregard for boundaries – whether institutional, political or

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[204] An extremely productive concept for contemporary movement studies has been Spinoza's concept of the 'multitude' which eschewed the general trend in the history of political theory to situate movements as chaotic, unorganized, and irrational masses.

[205] See, for example: Chesters, Graeme and Ian Welsh. *Complexity and Social Movements: Multitudes at the Edge of Chaos*.

[206] See, for example: Weinstein, Jeremy. *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*.

[207] It is also our contention in this essay that any thorough study of political phenomena must be rigorously interdisciplinary. This comprises part of the allure of assemblages, since they can be employed to develop concrete relations between academically separated phenomena, without subsuming them under a single all-determining logic or field of study (sociobiology, and its reduction of the social to evolution, is perhaps the most extreme case of this recently). This means that part of the difficulty of interdisciplinary work is in establishing 'bridge concepts' that can connect disparate fields while retaining their heterogeneity. In other words, *theory itself must become an assemblage*.

academic.[208] By framing them within the ontological system established earlier, we will see how our understanding of emergent social change can be enriched with the tools of Deleuzian ontology.

It is worth noting, before we begin, the importance and difficulty of studying contentious politics not only in the academic discipline of political science, but also in the concrete world more generally. As numerous ethnic, nationalist, religious and (arguably) imperialist conflicts arise throughout the contemporary world, understanding the causes of a particular conflict and understanding how to achieve a non-violent resolution becomes central to institutional politics. The difficulty for academic political science and policymakers, of course, is that conflicts are very rarely suitable for the traditional forms of theorizing. By definition, contentious politics looks to upset stable social systems (to a greater or lesser degree), therefore leaving static analyses deficient. Often times, movements appear as irrational to outside observers, defying standard political logic.[209] Moreover, even an analysis that does focus on the dynamic, historical processes leading to a particular state of conflict can be lacking in an understanding of its specific future potentials. We may have a perfectly clear historical overview of the Israel/Palestine conflict,[210] but still lack any understanding of where to go from there. As Graeme Chesters and Ian Welsh have noted:

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[208] One of the most important recent works on social movements also sets itself this goal of overcoming the divide between institutional and non-institutional politics: "We insist that the study of politics has too long reified the boundary between official, prescribed politics and politics by other means." (McAdam, Doug, et al. *Dynamics of Contention*, 6.)

[209] While claiming a movement is 'irrational' may have some rhetorical effect on the situation, it very rarely, if ever, resolves the underlying issues. See Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason* for an analysis of how traditional academic politics has constituted populist movements as the irrational outside of 'real' politics.

[210] 'Perfectly clear' is used here as a hypothetically ideal statement. As the recent movement by revisionist historians in Israel has made obvious, history never reaches a conclusive or perfected state. The work of Tom Segev and Idith Zertal (among others) has shown that many of the foundational stories employed during and after Israel's formative wars can (and perhaps should) be put under scrutiny. This is an

> "Sociology and the social sciences more generally have a remarkably poor record in terms of understanding the dynamics of, let alone predicting significant social change. Social movement and historical scholarship frequently demonstrate that significant shifts in habits of mind originate in the liminal spaces on the social, cultural or geographic margins. The problem has been, and remains, identifying the marginal vectors with transformatory potential within the prevailing set of material circumstances and conflicts."[211]

It is the hypothesis of this thesis that greater understanding of social change can be achieved if we analyze moments of contentious politics as dynamic and continually recurring interactions between elements of assemblages. In this way, our theorizing can incorporate not only the historically situated circumstances of the conflict, but also the immanent future potentials that participants can work with.[212] At the same time, assemblage analysis avoids the reductionist trap of trying to ground all political activity in a particular level of being (e.g. as the result of economic contradictions, or genetic tendencies towards aggression, or cultural constructions). We will begin the elaboration of this hypothesis by briefly aligning social movements with assemblages, before turning towards contemporary social movements theory to flesh out the details.

Given our earlier analysis of assemblage theory's solution to the micro/macro problem, we can see that social movements (and collective contentious politics more generally) must be an emergent assemblage. Immediately below the level of social movements lie the interpersonal networks of individuals constituted through iterated processes of interaction (such as repeated conversations or recurring transactions,

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important point, and one which we unfortunately cannot develop in any detail here – history and notions of the past are themselves open and continually being constructed. Especially in the formation of collective identities, interpreting the past is a significant force in politics.

[211] Chesters, Graeme and Ian Welsh. *Complexity and Social Movements: Multitudes at the Edge of Chaos*, 129.

[212] For now we will leave aside the important issue of *how* these potentials can be worked with. For example, given the complexity of the situation, how precise can a prediction be? Are far-from-equilibrium systems necessarily unpredictable and chaotic at certain points? How can we discern thresholds, tipping points and triggers for productive change?

economic or otherwise) – what social movements theory has traditionally placed under the rubric of 'mobilizing structures' (we will see later how this can be broken down into 'social appropriation mechanisms'). Put briefly, when one or more of these interpersonal networks coalesces to challenge an opponent (usually, but not necessarily, a government), a social movement has emerged, with its own unique individuality.[213] In examining how a movement synchronically emerged therefore, we must also focus on the individuating processes that produced it. This entails not limiting ourselves to studying movements that are deemed explicitly political because they make claims upon governments.[214] For one thing, to limit our analysis to this would be to overlook the non-institutional effects that they generate within the social and the cultural context in which they are embedded.[215] But more significantly, it also neglects the important formative work that is accomplished prior to the more public emergence of contentious actions.[216] This work can be 'hidden' from a perspective focusing on demands posed to governments, but these "underground" movements can also burst into significant events when the conditions are sufficient. The micro level of collective contentious action is significant, therefore, because prior to the emergence of a 'political' movement, the informal networks of individuals throughout society play an essential role in establishing the conditions for a movement's

[213] This definition of a social movement, based on the idea of 'coalescing' may seem vague, but in part that is the point. The moment at which an informal network of people is seen as transforming itself into an identifiable movement is always rather arbitrary; instead, we should see the movement as being formed *by degrees* through a process of individuation that homogenizes the various individual disruptions into a relatively unified movement in the eyes of both the participants and external observers.

[214] This is the tendency in much of the political science work done on social movements.

[215] "For [Alberto] Melucci, a pre-occupation with the impact of movements upon prevailing political systems and policies [as in mainstream social movements theory] diverts attention away from their role in the 'production of cultural codes' which 'is the principle activity of the hidden networks of contemporary movements'." (Chesters, Graeme and Ian Welsh. *Complexity and Social Movements: Multitudes at the Edge of Chaos*, 18.)

[216] The Seattle anti-globalization protests, for example, were being planned for years in advance, but emerged as a relative surprise to most people. For a first-hand account of this planning process, see: Chesters, Graeme and Ian Welsh. *Complexity and Social Movements: Multitudes at the Edge of Chaos*, 69-73.

individuation.[217] These networks also establish the links between actors that carry out important requirements such as formulating strategies, or constructing networks.[218]

On the other hand, social movement theorists argue that *after* a social movement has declined, there are residual processes that have important effects. The de-individuation of the movement, as it returns to its micro-level in the more heterogeneous state of informal networks, inevitably shifts the connections and relations that had been sustaining and sustained by it. As Sidney Tarrow briefly explains, "three kinds of long-term and indirect effects of movements are important: their effect on the political socialization of the people and groups who have participated in them [actively or through passive observation]; the effects of their struggles on political institutions and practices; and their contribution to changes in political culture."[219] In other words, before, during and after a strictly "political" movement has arisen, significant work is accomplished through networks that make no explicit claims on governments. The point here is that a focus on social movements as individuating processes can assist in explaining these indirect effects, and establish how they emerge from a specific contextual network. Recent contentious politics scholars have recognized this limitation of their classical analyses and have begun to speak of 'episodes' of contentious politics, which are defined as a large grouping of contentious moments. Moreover, the very act of theoretically delimiting an episode is explicitly cited as a significant step, capable of radically altering

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[217] "The notion that prior social ties operate as the basis for movement recruitment and that established social settings are the locus of movement emergence are among the most established findings in social movement research." (Diani, Mario. "Introduction: Social Movements, Contentious Actions, and Social Networks: 'From Metaphor to Substance'?", 8.)

[218] For example, prior to the popular emergence of the anti-globalization movement, there had already been a large amount of work completed via the then innovative use of the internet to globally network local networks – what Chesters and Welsh call a 'network of networks'. (Chesters, Graeme, and Ian Welsh. *Complexity and Social Movements*, 29.)

[219] Tarrow, Sidney. *Power in Movement*, 164.

the findings of the analysis. In other words, there is a regard for the importance of naming an event.

With the dynamic and individuating nature of social movements clear, we can now examine the components that routinely compose a movement's assemblage. To begin with, since an integral component of the social movement is the opposed group (real or imagined) that it is challenging, the assemblage of a social movement contains both challengers and their opponents. Typically, in the modern world (although this is a historically contingent outcome, and is certainly not always the case) these opponents constitute a government organization, from whom the challengers are seeking recognition. In addition to the opponent, no social movement is ontologically distinct from a variety of other actors: the media, various organizations, the public, and other third parties. Particularly in the contemporary world, the success of a movement can be vastly dependent upon how its contentious actions are framed within the media (mainstream or otherwise), making it a significant force in the assemblage of a contentious episode. As our earlier analysis showed, assemblages are also composed of a variety of material and expressive components. While no completely denumerable list could ever be compiled, it is useful to briefly note some of the most significant and recurrent elements that have historically gone into the assembling of a social movement. In a general sense, since challengers and opponents are always situated within a specific socio-political milieu, this forms a significant part of the social movement assemblage. The economic situation, the political system, and the geographical distribution of resources (to name only a few) all play important roles in shaping the development and eventual disintegration of a contentious episode.

Again, without making any attempt at a definitive list, the material role of contentious politics assemblages can be seen as being played first of all by the various physical bodies that compose an aggrieved group. This group, however, must first be territorialized into a relatively homogenous category, and this is carried out by the communication infrastructure that facilitates the diffusion of the movement's ideas and the building of alliances. While this often means face-to-face conversations, in our modern day world the internet and the media have also become hugely influential on the success of any movement. The civil rights movement of the 60's, for example, was in part assisted by the ability of television to project images of southern brutality into the homes of the northern US states.[220] Similarly, the success and spread of the Zapatista movement benefits greatly from their innovative uses of the internet to mobilize support from around the world.[221] The array of tools available for any given movement's 'repertoire of contention' is also an important material element.[222] In the past, for instance, tools were used to break machines that threatened the livelihood of workers, while in the modern age computer attacks and viruses have become a significant and novel instrument used by various activist groups.[223] As Iraq makes clear too, car bombs have become a frighteningly routine tool of contentious politics.[224] Not all tools are necessarily violent, however; the repertoire available to citizens of Western democracies, for example,

[220] Tarrow, Sidney. *Power in Movement*, 115.
[221] See, for example: Cleaver, Harry. "The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle."
[222] 'Repertoires of contention' is a concept developed by social movements theorists to group together the various ways in which people make their demands heard. Predominantly, these rely upon culturally-specific conventions, although repeated interaction between groups is a breeding ground for innovative responses. It is important to note that in this section we are referring to the *material* basis of these repertoires – the actual concrete technology required for such tools to exist. In the next section, we will analyze the *expressive* capacities of these tools.
[223] Chesters, Graeme, and Ian Welsh. *Complexity and Social Movements*, 19-20.
[224] While I have not yet read it, Mike Davis has recently released a book outlining a history of the car bomb, including its inaugural use by anarchists on Wall Street in 1920. See: Davis, Mike. *Buda's Wagon*.

includes routine procedures like petitions and non-violent protests. Of course, tools developed in a past time can also be recycled or updated as the historical context changes – while their properties remain relatively stable, their capacities vary according to the relations in which they are set. Barricades are a useful example of this: first constructed by local community members to battle thieves in cities,[225] they quickly found use as a material instrument for battling with repressive governments.[226] The development of new cannons by the military, however, quickly made the barricades ineffective, as did city planners' widening of roads to facilitate cannon mobility.[227] They have, however, made a comeback in recent times, as a number of native groups in Canada have employed them with varying degrees of success. Besides the role of history and changing assemblages, this example also brings up another aspect of the material nature of social movements: the opponents' *own* communicative and technological infrastructure. The tools, communication networks and physical bodies employed by the police and the army in various regimes to repress and react to contentious movements are all central components of a contentious politics assemblage. Finally, we must note the role of material changes in the social world, such as economic decline, resource depletion, migration, or even natural disasters which all form a sometimes significant material element in the assemblages of contentious politics. It may seem odd to group these phenomena into part of a contentious assemblage, but what they contribute to contentious politics is the change in material circumstances that can sometimes radically alter what social movement theorists call

[225] Tarrow, Sidney. *Power in Movement*, 40. As Tarrow notes, it is often the case that repertoires of contention in conflictual politics are developed in the everyday practices of normal people. Mass petitions, for example, were developed from a common business practice. This is another central example of how elements of assemblages are uprooted from a particular setting in order to be employed for different capacities in alternative assemblages.
[226] Ibid., 41.
[227] Ibid., 65.

'political opportunity structures'. Briefly, this concept refers to the various ways in which a political situation is structured so as to either encourage or repress contentious action. It is not that this structure provides a simple opening or closing of opportunities though; rather, "we might think of [political opportunity structures] as institutional avenues that channel protest in certain ways rather than others."[228] In this case, a change such as economic decline may shift the acceptable avenues to a more violent and transgressive state. It is important to note, though, that it is not the case that material changes automatically produce changes in the political opportunity structure. As we will see further on, there is an expressive aspect to these changes that does not necessarily align with the material aspect (most obviously, in those cases where the material tightening of opportunities spawns *increased* collective action).

On the expressive side, this role in collective movements is predominantly played by collective action frames, repertoires of contention and political opportunity structures – three key aspects of classical social movements theory. While the physical state of technological development is a material component of contentious assemblages, the actual use of these tools exerts their expressive capacities. In some cases, these tools are used to signal that the aggrieved group is legitimate and worthy of recognition. In other cases, repertoires of contention are employed to signal that a movement is willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of its beliefs. The use of repertoires of contention always expresses some aspect of the collective moment, whether intentional or not. Similarly, 'collective action frames' are expressive tools used to garner support for the movement by its participants, or to discredit the movement by its opponents. The concept of

[228] Goodwin, Jeff and James Jasper. "Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory", 12. We would de-emphasize their use of "institutional" avenues, however, instead expanding the notion of avenues to include a variety of environmental pathways.

'collective action frames', in typical social movements studies, refers to any given movement's construction of narratives and meanings that justify its contentious actions. Unlike this classical paradigm, however, we will not limit the creation of collective action frames to either the elites who purportedly construct them for their followers, nor even to the group as a whole. Rather, collective action framing must be thought of as a dynamic, interactive process involving movement intellectuals, everyday individual interpretations, government interpretations, and media framing. Each of these actors develops an expressive form with which to frame the movement. While framing does tend to code the assemblage, the sheer number of frames being constructed at multiple levels means that there is always conflict over this framing. For example, any given actor is itself composed of multiple tendencies and multiple, overlapping and discordant interpretations. In fact, one of the most important dynamics in any given movement is the tension between those who wish to become more moderate and those who wish to become more radical.[229] In this sense, every movement contains lines of flight which carry it through various becomings. The effects of media framing are also increasingly central to movements in the contemporary age. This includes not only the movement's presentation in mainstream media forms, but also in alternative media, particularly through rapidly proliferating websites. Finally, there are the shifts in political opportunity structures. While material changes often initiate these shifts in opportunities, there is no necessary correspondence between the material changes and their expressive aspects. As Jeff Goodwin and James

[229] This dynamic is apparent in any number of contentious episodes. The Italian experience with contention in the 1960s and 70s was heavily influenced by the divergence between moderate reformers and those who eventually moved onto terrorist tactics. Similarly, the contemporary Palestine situation is characterized by a number of ideologically divergent political groups – the moderate Fatah movement lost the 2006 parliamentary elections in part because of corruption and patronage, but also because of their inability to make headway on the settlement problem. This led many Palestinians to support Hamas, and perhaps some to even support radical groups like Islamic Jihad.

Jasper have noted, "the precise effect of elections – or any other political opportunity – on movement mobilization is not invariant, but historically and situationally contingent. Their effects depend on structural factors such as electoral systems, strategic ones such as shifting alliances, and cultural ones such as resonant slogans and images."[230] In addition, the expressive capacity of a political opportunity structure is in part dependent upon its interpretation by individuals and collectivities. All these contextual factors highlight that the expressive role of an opportunity structure is irreducible to any material base, instead being constituted by its own particular logic.

In traditional social movements studies, these material and expressive aspects have been subsumed under what we have seen as the general categories of mobilizing structures, political opportunity structures, collective framing, and repertoires of contention. Employing these concepts, typical analyses of social movements have sought to progressively specify the nature of these large-scale categories and to draw out generalized patterns of relations between them – e.g. how does political opportunity structure affect the possible repertoires of contention? Or, how does the mobilizing structure affect collective framing? The aim of this theoretical perspective has been to subsume all forms of contention under this general, abstract model and its possible permutations. In other words, this type of theorizing has been a case of the Humean 'covering law' type of explanation we saw in chapter 1, where empirical generalizations are established and used to make further and more abstract generalizations. As McAdam et al. note though, such a mode of theorizing has a number of significant problems. For our purposes here, two in particular stick out. On one hand, their analyses remain too

[230] Goodwin, Jeff and James Jasper. "Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory", 13.

static. They are capable of relating elements to each other when they remain stable for a significant period of time, but are unable to account for the dynamic genesis of contentious episodes or any of the aspects which constitute them. "To be more exact, analysts of contentious politics have long described dynamic processes and changes in social relations. But they have done so largely in asides and descriptive narratives rather than in their major explanatory schemes."[231] On the other hand, this classical form of social movement study tends to overlook the precise *small-scale* causal mechanisms which generate the large-scale structural patterns. They analyze the relations between molar categories, but tend to overlook the real processes through which these correlations are generated.[232]

In order to correct these limitations, our analysis will, in the first place, seek to more precisely discern how movements emerge through processes of individuation, and in the second place, follow Deleuze's emphasis on micropolitics and microsociology by aiming to examine the complex interaction of small-scale mechanisms and social relations that produces contentious politics. In this, our work is facilitated by the recent theoretical shift called for by some of the principal social movement theorists: Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow. While each of these authors has worked extensively within the bounds of the traditional social movements theory outlined above, in the past few years they have been shifting the focus of their analysis from general structures to dynamic and recurrent causal mechanisms. Mechanisms, in their most abstract sense, are "delimited sorts of events that change relations among specified sets of

[231] McAdam, Doug, et al. *Dynamics of Contention*, 307.

[232] It should be made clear that this is not to denigrate previous social movement analyses. Much of the work is excellent and can be re-fashioned into the perspective posed here. The criticisms put forth here are over *how* these contentious events are explained, not the content of the analyses. Oftentimes, in fact, previous analyses can be mined for various implicit mechanisms.

elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations."[233] For example, the mechanism of 'brokerage' entails the linking together of two previously separate social groups. The mechanism of 'attribution of opportunity or threat' refers to the ways in which a group or individual characterizes a situation as either facilitating action or hindering action (or more precisely, facilitating and hindering *particular types* of action – for example, democratic societies facilitate institutional forms of contention, but simultaneously hinder violent contention). In each case, the mechanism designates a small-scale and dynamic event. It is important to recognize that these mechanisms are similar, but distinct from the mechanisms we saw earlier in critical realism. Whereas Bhaskar's mechanisms relied upon the essential causal powers of objects, these mechanisms are relational and not dependent upon any particular essence. Both, however, are argued to be the causal reason for changes in the empirical world, and as such avoid the empirical realist problems we perceived in Humean causality. There are a number of reasons why mechanisms provide a useful tool both for analyzing contentious politics and for being embedded within Deleuzian ontology. The first reason is that the types of causal mechanisms that McAdam et al. develop are both abstract enough to apply to a wide-variety of cases, and concrete enough to permit contextual and empirical detail. Brokerage, for example, can be carried out in a number of ways, while retaining its general shape. Moreover, a specific mechanism is not limited to specific categories of contentious action. The mechanisms which operate in a revolutionary episode can just as easily be found in democratization movements and rights movements, as in any other form of contentious politics. The second benefit of mechanisms is that in contrast to the

[233] McAdam, Doug, et al. *Dynamics of Contention*, 25. It has been mentioned before, but it is worth recalling that the 'elements' referred to here are subject to their own unique processes of individuation.

classical social movements agenda, mechanisms deny the explanatory power of large-scale generalizations in society and account for the differences between episodes with similar mechanisms. This latter capacity stems from the fact that while the focus of mechanisms is upon small-scale causal relations, these micro-mechanisms can resonate with each other producing a non-deterministic movement of larger-scale social structures. This suggests the third advantage – the power of this type of analysis is that it can, in principle,[234] encompass the complexity of the microsociological level, while also theorizing the emergence of large-scale social trends. Finally, there are in principle an infinite set of mechanisms. While most theorists of mechanisms tend to focus upon common and recurrent mechanisms, the reliance upon 'recurrence' means that such a perspective overlooks the innovative and novel mechanisms contained in any given situation. As Deleuze notes throughout *Difference & Repetition*, the repetition of the same (upon which recurrent, identifiable mechanisms rely), is always supported by a repetition of the different. This implies that novelty and innovation are key aspects of any situation, and that a thorough (if not complete) explanation should account for these novelties. Mechanisms, in other words, can be created – not *ex nihilo* of course, but through specific processes which generate innovative mechanisms. In every case, mechanisms will tend to eschew 'why?' questions and instead focus upon the 'how?' questions pertaining to social episodes.[235]

In terms of our earlier assemblage analysis, mechanisms function as concrete embodiments for the processes of de/coding and de/territorialization. To use our earlier

[234] In practice, this type of complexity theorizing may be more difficult to carry out, and in certain cases, may not be particularly useful or fruitful for analysis. Nevertheless, part of the power of this form of theorizing is that it does, if necessary, have this ability.

[235] "The question posed by desire [which forms the immanent impetus of assemblages] is not "What does it mean?", but rather "*How does it work?*" (Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus*, 109.)

example, the mechanism of brokerage functions by connecting two disparate social groups into a relatively unified entity. In Kenya's Mau Mau revolt,[236] for example, this was carried out by two distinct groups: the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) activists and militants from Olenguruone. These two groups actively created connections amongst surrounding areas by travelling to these regions and inviting individuals to take an oath pledging their allegiance against the colonial powers.[237] A second mechanism of diffusion[238] also played a large role in constructing a widespread, identifiable movement. This was carried out by itinerant traders who, unlike the brokers, already had established connections between communities via trading. Their daily travels from community to community further spread the oath, simultaneously uniting groups against the colonial authorities *and* making the movement more heterogeneous by spreading the oath to areas where centralized control was impossible. By discerning these mechanisms of brokerage and diffusion, theory becomes capable of modeling the real processes through which a network of actors is mobilized. This is in contrast to the classical analyses which would examine how an already mobilized network affected other already constructed structural elements. In McAdam et al., mechanisms are categorized into three separate types: environmental, cognitive, and relational. Brokerage and diffusion are examples of relational mechanisms, which alter intersubjective relations between individuals and social groups. Cognitive mechanisms, on the other hand, are those which alter the (individual and collective) framing of an episode. Commitment, for example, is a mechanism which strongly ties individuals to a movement, while the attribution of

[236] For more on the following example, see: McAdam, Doug, et al. *Dynamics of Contention*, 92-107.
[237] Oaths were a long standing and important tradition amongst these groups, but it was radicalized and innovatively developed as activists made it available to non-Kikuyu people.
[238] As a small matter of disagreement with McAdam et al., we would take Tarde's notion of imitation to be the fundamental mechanism of diffusion.

opportunities to a situation is another cognitive mechanism. Lastly, environmental mechanisms are those which operate "externally" to an episode. Our earlier analysis of individuation, however, should have made it clear that individuated phenomena are always inseparable from the environment, so the name is, strictly speaking, a misnomer. Nevertheless, these three types of mechanisms provide a useful typology, so long as it is remembered that there is no ontological division between them, meaning they can operate concurrently and interactively.[239] In terms of assemblages, environmental mechanisms are particularly significant since they highlight the embedded nature of any given phenomenon. We earlier noted that a focus on the individual as reified product makes the analysis more apt to overlook significant dynamic processes that created the individual, but were nevertheless not *in* the individual. In the concept of environmental mechanisms, we see the recognition of these important individuating processes. The Civil Rights movement, for example, emerged from the dynamic force posed by two environmental mechanisms: economic decline in the southern cotton industry, and the subsequent migration of blacks to the north and to urban areas.[240] These two processes created the capacity for blacks to more heavily influence the voting in northern states, and to more readily organize in the confines of the cities. A perspective which simply took the black population as an already constituted individual, with pre-established interests and

[239] McAdam et al. themselves suggest this conclusion by noting that, in certain circumstances, "it is not clear in principle whether we are observing two or three distinct mechanisms that frequently conjoin, or have discovered a sufficiently invariant combination of cognitive, relational, and environmental changes to justify treating the complex as a single robust process [processes themselves being larger-scale mechanisms (for more on this, see later on)]." (McAdam, Doug, et al. *Dynamics of Contention*, 310.)

[240] McAdam, Doug, et al. *Dynamics of Contention*, 42. This migration is also an example of de/reterritorialization, with the ensuing effects being the result of exerting capacities formed by the new assemblage (these assemblages loosely comprising, in the northern movement, the increased size of the black population, the electoral system of the United States, and the Kennedy administration's need for minority voter support; and in the urban movement, the more intensely concentrated distribution of the black population and the network of local churches).

demands, would completely miss the real processes which functioned to generate these collective identities. All this is to say that mechanisms are the concrete processes that empirically embody our earlier, more abstract formulations concerning de/territorialization and de/coding, i.e. the processes through which assemblages are constructed and individuated. Likewise, mechanisms ultimately avoid any rigid ontological distinction between mind and body, culture and nature, or ideas and power. While classifying mechanisms into relational, cognitive, and environmental may suggest otherwise, it should be taken as a heuristic tool that establishes formal distinctions, not real distinctions. All mechanisms operate on the same, immanent ontological plane and interact with each other to establish truly heterogeneous assemblages.

There are two remaining issues that must be sorted out. While we have examined some of the micropolitical mechanisms which recur throughout a variety of contentious episodes, we have not yet explained how they concatenate together to produce vastly different outcomes (such as revolutions, peaceful transitions, social movements, and violent conflicts), and we have not yet explained how the virtual potentials are affected by this concatenation. Since understanding the answer to the first problem will assist in making progress on the second problem, we will turn to it first. Most of the literature on mechanisms emphasizes their small-scale nature, rather than their combination into large-scale events. Mechanisms are considered to be recurrent events that produce similar outcomes when analyzed independently of their context. In part, this emphasis on small-scale relations appears to be a reaction to the over-generalized theorizing of past analyses. Against the idea that general laws could be discovered that would map out the paths of all contentious episodes, mechanisms theorists begin with a bottom-up approach that sees large-scale patterns as emergent from combinations of small-scale mechanisms. However,

when it comes to explaining large-scale social outcomes (how the same set of mechanisms can produce a different outcome in different situations), mechanism theories tend to falter and rely upon relatively vague assertions that "they differ because the sequence, combination, interaction, and context of these mechanisms' activation profoundly influences their joint consequences." In part, this is admirable since it refers theory to the empirical world; but at the same time, it seems to leave theory short of being able to explain (and critique) systemic shifts in, for example, economic structures (as in Marx) or power structures (as in Foucault).[241] The strength of the mechanistic approach (its ability to more thoroughly account for the complexity of a situation) is therefore mirrored by its weakness (its inability to account for emergent phenomena). In McAdam et al., this weakness is mitigated to some degree by the search for what they refer to as 'processes'. These are sequences of events that regularly contain the same set of mechanisms. Polarization, for example, is the process whereby actors in a contentious episode tend towards extremist positions. In cases where this occurs, a similar set of mechanisms is frequently found: 'opportunity/threat spirals' where interactions between actors repeatedly raise the salience of opportunities and threats, 'competition' which territorializes the boundaries between opposed groups, 'category formation' which codifies these boundaries, and 'brokerage' which establishes linkages across separated groups. The recurrent appearance of these mechanisms in processes of polarization leads McAdam et al. to argue that processes can justifiably be considered larger-scale mechanisms.[242] Yet, on the issue of society-wide mechanisms, these theories have so far

[241] Granted, this is not the aim of contentious politics research, but it is our own intention to provide mechanisms and theories that can explain any type of social change, including systemic shifts.
[242] "Mechanisms and processes form a continuum. It is arbitrary, for example, whether we call brokerage a mechanism, a family of mechanisms, or a process." (McAdam, Doug, et al. *Dynamics of Contention*, 27.)

been silent. It is here that we contend that Deleuze's conception of 'abstract machines' can be usefully integrated into mechanism theory in order to provide the absent large-scale mechanisms.

In their most basic formulation, abstract machines are comparable to the definition of mechanisms: they are "always concerned with unformed and unorganized matter and unformalized, unfinalized functions, the two variables being indissolubly linked",[243] similar to how mechanisms are definable in terms of generic relations and elements. This formulation is rather vague at the moment though, and so we will illuminate it through Deleuze's perhaps most famous example – his reading of Foucault's power functions. As Foucault showed, beginning in the 18th century prisons, schools, barracks, and factories all tended to take on common means of applying power, i.e. the Panopticon. This common function, abstracted from its concrete manifestations, was definable as a way of imposing a conduct on a multiplicity with a certain architectural and optical structure. Note that in this abstract definition of the Panopticon, there is no concern for the matter that this function applies to (it is only defined as a multiplicity) and there is no concern for the form that structures its concrete realization (it applies equally well to any type of conduct that might be imposed). In other words, abstract machines operate as diagrams coordinating the relations between the pure potential of an unformed material, and the pure potential of an unformalized expression. As Foucault says,

[243] Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*, 34. Abstract machines are in many ways similar to what we earlier referred to as diagrams, and Deleuze himself often equates the two. For our purposes, we will separate them. On the one hand, diagrams will refer to the construction of cartographies that delineate the potentials immanent to a situation. Abstract machines, on the other hand, will designate the mechanisms, "detached from any specific use" (Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*, 205.), that are embodied in a variety of concrete mechanisms. Roughly, this distinction between diagrams and abstract machines follows Protevi and Bonta's distinction between the second and first, respectively, of the three types of abstract machines that Deleuze and Guattari speak of. See: Protevi, John, and Mark Bonta. *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, 48.

> "It is polyvalent in its applications; it serves to reform prisoners, but also to treat patients, to instruct schoolchildren, to confine the insane, to supervise workers, to put beggars and idlers to work. It is a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power, of definition of the instruments and modes of intervention of power, which can be implemented in hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons. Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behaviour must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used."[244]

The Panopticon, therefore, is a type of abstract machine, capable of being applied in a multitude of different circumstances, but definable nevertheless in terms of 'unformed matter' and 'unformalized functions'. In contrast to mechanisms, abstract machines are not causal; they are abstract diagrams of relations between pure potentials, which take on causal force only in their embodiment in concrete assemblages.[245] Neither, however, are they limited to small-scale events. While abstract machines must always be instantiated within the micropolitical fabric of society, they still retain an abstractness that makes them capable of characterizing entire sections of society.[246] Thus, we have the idea that we have moved into a disciplinary society, or even further, into a control society.[247,248] Through employing the notion of abstract machines, we can identify large-scale social changes, while at the same time avoiding the false pretense of having subsumed all

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[244] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*, 205.

[245] Moreover, this process of embodiment is divergent. Being defined in its abstract terms, abstract machines are capable of being actualized through a variety of different mechanisms, with an assortment of different materials and an array of expressive aspects.

[246] The types of abstract machines (not only disciplinary, but also a Church diagram, a Roman diagram, a feudal diagram – the list is endless) are not simply transcendent universals because "*within the overall categories, […] we can still find those microrelations which, far from destroying these larger unities, actually compose them*" (Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*, 36, emphasis added.)

[247] For more on the idea of control societies, see Deleuze's short and suggestive essay, "Postscript on Control Societies."

[248] We should make clear that there is never a clear-cut break between these types of societies. In some fashion or another, previous forms of power still function in contemporary society (sovereignty, for example, certainly has not diminished as a form of power; although it may be moving to a dispersed, global level as Hardt and Negri argue), and germinal hints of future forms will inevitably be retrospectively discerned in the present. As always, it is a matter of degree – with one form of power becoming predominant without, however, abolishing others.

possible phenomena under a general category. Since, as with mechanisms, the list of abstract machines is in principle infinite, there is always the potential for novel machines to emerge from the changing nature of the assemblages that populate our world.

With both the small-scale mechanisms and the large-scale abstract machines outlined, we can move onto our final problem – that of determining how these concepts can assist in delineating the immanent potentials that contentious politics encounters and, in some circumstances, generates. At this point, however, we can only make some (hopefully) productive suggestions for future research. The issue of diagramming socio-political change is immensely complex and worthy of an independent study in its own right. That being said, some of our earlier propositions can be useful here in sketching out a possible theory. In what follows, we will briefly examine three distinct topics: (1) how are political assemblages stabilized, (2) when and how do their immanent potentials appear, and (3) how can activists and theorists interact with these complex systems? Providing some answers to these questions will give us the beginnings of a more thorough theory of social change.

We argued earlier that the nature of ontology is such that it is always in a state of becoming, and that in order for the stable structures and objects that populate our world to appear, there must be virtual attractors that really exist without being actualized. In times devoid of contentious politics, a set of particular attractors has become dominant (some at lower levels – individuals, families, neighbourhoods, etc. – and some at higher levels – states, global institutions, etc.). There will always be a degree of molecular flight from these molar organizations, although in general such lines of flight remain minute and below the threshold levels of major change. The small acts of rebellion and resistance that emerge in peasant villages or in workplaces are often too ephemeral and dispersed to

produce any significant shifts. Moreover, the dominant attractors are often further reinforced by the installation of specific mechanisms designed to dampen the effects of various disruptive lines of flight. The channeling of contentious politics into legitimately designated repertoires of contention is a prime example of such a process. Further study could (and should) be done to examine the specific mechanisms that function to channel this discontent in particular ways. Another instance would be those analyses that have examined how various modes of production reproduce their own conditions of reproduction. Such studies provide a wealth of material that can be reconstructed in terms of assemblages, mechanisms and abstract machines. In each of these cases, it is a matter of a social system both producing the elements it requires to continue (Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses,[249] for example) and repressing the components that threaten its way of being (for example, the nationalist movements against all the forms of globalization – cultural, political, economic, etc.). Again, under our generic mechanisms of de/territorialization and de/coding, we must specify the concrete mechanisms which go into the stabilization of an assemblage.

It is obvious from human history, however, that these stabilization mechanisms do not always succeed. The episodes of contentious politics that we have looked at in this chapter are precisely the moments where a single attractor ceases to be entirely dominant, and instead a variety of alternative potentials make their presence felt. The study of contentious politics is, therefore, indirectly the study of far-from-equilibrium systems. In these moments, the trajectory of the assemblage in question bifurcates into two (or more)

[249] Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation." The basic, relevant idea here is that in order to continually reproduce labour power, the capitalist mode of production requires wages that sustain life, the production of certain skill sets (through an educational sorting process) and submission to society's rules. The latter is produced through the Ideological State Apparatuses such as schools, churches and the military.

distinguishable paths. While there are always lines of flight pulling the trajectory of an assemblage in every direction, it is only in these significant moments of contentious politics that a particular line of flight becomes powerful enough to upset the usual dynamic of the social system. These moments make themselves felt affectively through a general, collective sense of uncertainty.[250] What occurs is that an alternative attractor, previously inefficacious within the general functioning of the assemblage, becomes a causal force through its embodiment in the collective movement.[251] For theorists of assemblages, these contentious episodes are significant precisely because they reveal the alternative trajectories that are too often hidden underneath the relatively smooth functioning of everyday Westernized life. By examining the mechanisms involved in a particular contentious episode, we can use our earlier tools to diagram the immanent trajectories of the contention (where they are headed), in order to determine the nature of the attractors that drive them. Through detailed examinations of actually occurring (and not just historical) contention, theory can achieve an understanding of these underlying virtual and intensive processes that produce/d our present state. Moreover, in determining the underlying attractors of a system, theory can then begin to conceptualize how these multiple attractors might function *together* to produce a novel and hitherto unnoticed stable state of their own. In other words, this approach offers a unique way of analyzing and managing conflicts, by examining the demands and trajectories of groups, which are conceptualized as dynamic and interactive processes, rather than static and entrenched entities.

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[250] Throughout McAdam et al., uncertainty is cited not only as being widespread in contentious episodes, but also as a significant factor in the trajectories of these episodes. Uncertainty, for example, can contribute to polarization, as each opposed side attributes an excessive degree of threat to the other.

[251] Technically, it is not the attractor that is embodied, but rather a set of trajectories towards the attractor. The attractor itself always remains virtual, while nevertheless capable of exerting real force.

Our final concern, therefore, is with two forms of agency: as an activist, how to stimulate change, and as an academic, how to experiment with various assemblages of contention. In large part, these are in fact the same questions. Both are seeking to understand how to interact with complex systems, and both are looking to change the structures in a particular way: one for "progress", however defined, and one for testing and understanding the operations of the system. It should be clear from what has been said though, that the activist's idea of progress ought not to entail developing an abstract utopia, independent of real, existing situations. Such a theoretical construction remains entirely abstract, fanciful and inefficacious in relation to concrete circumstances. Rather, as we have seen, an idea of progress must work with the real potentials already immanent in a situation. In other words, the desire for change on the part of an activist must be supplemented with the academic's understanding of a real situation and how it works.

To begin such an analysis, we would first seek to discern the various attractors that propel the dynamics of a given social system. This dynamic nature is not only multiple within a level, but also layered, in the sense of including emergent and component assemblages with their own attractors. There are distinct tendencies within the individuals, groups, and states that compose a social system, all of which interact to produce the system's immanent dynamics. The attractors guiding these dynamics can be observed through, for example, a study of the various collective movements in a society – through their actions, their proclamations, their material components, and the dynamics of their natural and social environment. As Chesters and Welsh earlier noted, the trajectories determining major social change are often liminal in nature too, meaning that analysis must not be limited to major social groupings either. The important ontological caveat to make is that any 'group' of movements is always decomposable into its own multiplicity

of trajectories. Often, we will be concerned with discerning the average, molar tendency of a particular group, but this should not blind us either to minor trajectories that can drastically deterritorialize this group along unexpected pathways. Moreover, the attractors determining various groups, liminal or otherwise, are never independent of each other. They must be considered not only dynamic, but also interactive. The analysis of predetermined interests that undergirds rationalist theories is therefore unsuitable for a perspective concerned with real ontological dynamics. With the placing of social attractors into an interactive situation, the theorist can establish a rough diagrammatic field of the real social potentials.

The second major step is to experiment with these forces, not only to determine the various thresholds and still-hidden potentials that occupy the situation, but also to discover 'catalysts' where well-focused local intervention can disproportionately affect the global system in question. The aim of all this is to take seriously Deleuze's frequently repeated pronouncement that "we know nothing about a body until we know what it can do."[252] It is only through experimentation and interaction with the system in question that we can come to know what it is capable of.[253] However, for a number of reasons this experimentation is limited in its ability to make fully testable predictions about the results. The most obvious reason is one common to all of political science – namely that

[252] Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 257.

[253] Moreover, this interaction also changes the experimenter – there is no such thing as an independent observer, ontologically separated from the experiment. As Foucault argues, "After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. People will say, perhaps, that these games with oneself would better be left backstage; or, at best, that they might properly form part of those preliminary exercises that are forgotten once they have served their purpose. But, then, what is philosophy today – philosophical activity, I mean – if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consists, if not in the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?" (Foucault, Michel. *The Use of Pleasure*, 8-9.)

the experimental design employed by the natural sciences is simply inapplicable to the political world. There is no practical way to establish control and test groups, nor to even quantify and statistically measure the significance of many of the most important variables. Similarly, even the highly developed actuarial tools used to predict the complexity involved in risk have been criticized recently for being unable to meaningfully predict the possibility of an individual committing a particular action.[254] Even computer modeling of complex social systems, while undoubtedly interesting and useful in some cases, faces the fundamental problem that it relies upon programmed assumptions about the nature of the social world. Prediction, in particular of far-from-equilibrium systems as in contentious episodes, is also hindered by the inevitability of unintended consequences. Foucault's historical analyses are exemplars of this; rather than examine the intentions and statements of individuals, Foucault looked at how new assemblage components meshed together and formed unique symbiotic systems without any overarching, guiding intention. Unintentional consequences also stem from the fact that intensive systems are highly sensitive to their initial conditions – at these moments, slight deviations of a variable can have disproportionate effects on the resulting trajectories. Moreover, as we have endeavored to show, ontology is creative and always capable of moments of absolute deterritorialization where entirely new patterns of systemic behaviour and attractors can emerge. At best, therefore, those seeking to experiment with assemblages can derive plausible predictions about thresholds, patterns, and catalysts to determine likely 'zones of sensitivity'. Given the limitations of

[254] Hart, Stephen, et al. "Precision of Actuarial Assessment Instruments." This study looked at the possibility of individuals and groups committing a violent act. Using two established measures for this type of risk, the researchers found the mean 95% confidence interval for groups was a large 20%, while for individuals it skyrocketed to 85%, making it "virtually meaningless" for prediction. While actuarial science may be useful in some fields, its inability to predict an individual's action (in this case, violence) certainly suggests that it faces major obstacles to being an accurate predictor of political or social life.

prediction, experimentation must proceed with caution, careful to not generate excessively quick movements of deterritorialization (the plunge into social anarchy) or to unwittingly provoke a 'cancerous tissue' to rapidly spread in the pursuit of rigidly territorializing everything (as in fascist regimes).[255] With that in mind, the oft-cited advice given by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* should be heeded:

> "This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce [molecular] flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times."[256]

This sort of careful experimentation applies not only to the academic wishing to study intensive systems, but also to the activist who must be careful not to spark unintended repercussions for his/her actions. The end result of such studies (as much as there can be an end result) is to develop a concrete model of the real potentials inhabiting a situation and thereby coming to an understanding of the ontological dynamics driving the changes in the world. In this way, perhaps, we can fully respond to Marx's famous complaint that "philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it."[257]

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[255] For more on the notion of 'cancerous tissue', see: Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 162-3.
[256] Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 161.
[257] Marx, Karl. "Theses on Feuerbach.", 145.

Conclusion

Despite the brief hopefulness of the immediate post-USSR era, our modern world has not seen any major decline in the amount of conflict.[258] As Charles Tilly recounts:

> "For a moment in 1989 it looked as though the aging century might be contemplating retirement from the business of mass destruction. Genocide and politicide seemed to be diminishing. […] The downward trend did not last long. In 1990-91, the splintering of Yugoslavia and the Persian Gulf War reversed it, Somalia broke into even more intense factional violence, and civil wars began to sunder Georgia and Azerbaijan. New or renewed conflicts in India, Kuwait, Liberia, Somalia, South Africa and Tibet all thrust above the thousand-death threshold in 1990."

Since then, new popular binaries have arisen between Islam and the West, and smaller battles have continued to erupt around the world (though they are no less violent and destructive for being spatially smaller). The grand, imperial inter-state wars that dominated the twentieth century are giving way to large-scale conflicts between citizens and their governments and even more difficult to manage non-state-based conflicts between "paramilitary forces, guerrilleros, death squads, secret police, and other irregulars."[259] These new forms of conflict have become more complex (often involving relatively amorphous and heterogeneous sets of actors), more intractable (in part, as a result of decentralization from state control) and much less easy to manage. All of this is to point out that violent conflict remains an omnipresent phenomenon in our era of globalization. Moreover, if politics is taken (presumably uncontroversially) to be the

[258] Tilly, Charles. *The Politics of Collective Violence*, 55-8. More recently, of course, non-state based terrorism has become a serious concern, not only to the Western world, but also to the Middle East in general (e.g. Iraq, Pakistan, Israel, Lebanon, Iran and Palestine). The Darfur conflict also continues unabated, while nuclear proliferation has become a significant and real concern for South East Asia and the Middle East.

[259] Tilly, Charles. *The Politics of Collective Violence*, 58.

resolution or management of the different tensions between individuals, groups and states, then difference becomes the defining feature of political reality. The absence of conflict (which is the extreme form of difference) and the absence of differences would entail the end of politics. With that in mind, the ontology we have developed here is precisely a political ontology designed to account for this ingrained nature of conflict in political reality.[260] The notions of difference that undergirds our ontology of the intensive and the virtual is precisely one which functions by tensions, reciprocal interactions, and mutual feedback loops among elements in varying states of individuation.[261] It is a notion of difference that refuses the representational choice between identities (and contradictions) and an unnamable chaotic flux, instead seeking to outline how real differences emerge into the identifiable phenomena of the world. It is an ontology which takes contentious actions to be at the heart of politics, rather than to be an aberration to be quickly eliminated. In this way, our ontology has no illusions about utopian ideals of eventual harmony, instead focusing its attention on how best to accommodate and manage irreducibly different differences, and how to compose these differences together in a productive way that increases the potential for new connections.

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[260] Deleuze, for his part, will rally against the idea of a 'beautiful soul' – "The greatest danger is that of lapsing into the representations of a beautiful soul: there are only reconcilable and federative differences, far removed from bloody struggles. The beautiful soul says: we are different, but not opposed." (Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference & Repetition*, xx.) Likewise, during a questioning, one of Deleuze's interlocutors notes that "Your [Deleuze's] allusion to Artaud and his theatre of cruelty sufficiently demonstrates that you are not an optimistic philosopher, or if you are, it's in the way Leibniz is, whose vision of the world is, all things considered, one of the most cruel imaginable." (Deleuze, Gilles. "The Method of Dramatization", 107.) Both of these quotes should make clear that despite denying the centrality of contradiction, Deleuze does not subscribe to a world without political conflict, as Laclau has suggested with reference to Hardt and Negri's Deleuzian-inspired ontology. See: Laclau, Ernesto. "Can Immanence Explain Social Struggles?" Our brief response to Laclau would be that the mediating representations and the 'articulations' that he sees as necessary for political movements are only secondary results of the processes of individuation we outlined earlier. Collective political action, while often assisted by representation, does not require it.

[261] This, however, is distinct from the thesis put forth by philosophers like Žižek and Laclau, who argue that society is riven by a central, insurmountable contradiction. Contradiction, for Deleuze, is still too ingrained within the representational tradition to be able to fully articulate real differences.

On the other hand, while most knowledgeable commentators are increasingly aware that modern contention entails complex conflicts requiring contextually-nuanced and systemic responses, contemporary political science has largely moved in the opposite direction, tending instead towards specialization and abstract models of hypothetical, rational actors. The era of grand narratives has been declared over, but this end of an era has also seen the loss of many real (and valuable) attempts at systemic theorizing. Certainly it is difficult even to imagine a new, viable teleology that could singlehandedly explain the evolutionary dynamics of the world, yet too often this difficulty has been taken as license to ignore the real systemic dynamics that nevertheless occur. The alternative we have posed here is a non-teleological movement based on the contingent and unpredictable interactions involved in assemblages.[262] On the other hand, academics in political science have often remained within the confines of a project seeking to derive generalizable correlations between large-scale events and thereby missing minute, yet significant, details. In many other instances, they seek to do case studies while eschewing the embedded, global context of the cases, and thereby missing the systemic nature of political reality. In part, this avoidance of systemic theorizing is a methodological problem concerning how to analyze large-scale phenomena without doing violence to their inherent complexity. More profoundly though, it is the contention of this thesis that the problems stem in large part from the traditional ontologies that support much of political science and political theory. If our ontologies are themselves limited to characterizing the general "furniture of the world" that are considered relevant to a particular field (as so much of international relations is wont to do), we remain unable to

[262] Here we should recall that the original French word for assemblages – '*agencement*' – stems from the root for agency and includes a sense of (assembled) movement and purpose.

move beyond a type of theorizing that begins by establishing immutable building blocks and then fits them together in various ways in a futile attempt to capture real dynamics. As Deleuze says,

> "One begins with concepts that, like baggy clothes, are much too big. In such cases the real is recomposed with abstracts. [But] the concrete will never be attained by combining the inadequacy of one concept with the inadequacy of [another]. The singular will never be attained by correcting a generality with another generality."[263]

Deleuze's point is that our very concepts of what constitutes an ontology are, at present, woefully inadequate to even map out the complex situations that arise in the modern world, let alone begin to manage them in an intelligent way. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, has been to contribute towards a re-thinking of the ontological basis of contemporary political science in the belief that such self-reflection on our theoretical foundations can open new avenues for thought, practice and policy based upon a theoretical framework capable of articulating complex singular individuals, their relational contexts, and the immanent potentials of a situation.

We have attempted to do this by focusing on a number of concepts designed to account for the complexity and systematicity of the political world. The theme of individuation which we presented in this paper not only has strong ties to the history of philosophy and the philosophical problems which various ontologies have had to deal with, but also – through our reconstruction of the concept – allows ontology and theory an entirely unique way of conceptualizing the real ontological individuals which populate political reality. On the basis of individuation, traditional schemas for social science have been shown to be lacking since they never achieve the concrete, instead always remaining

[263] Deleuze, Gilles. *Bergsonism*, 44. The statement here is made in relation to dialectics, but the point holds for political science too.

at a level of generality that misses precisely the complexity of the singular. Furthermore, past ontologies have neglected to construct a truly realist and materialist concept of ontological dynamics, thereby overlooking the real processes involved in socio-political change. The model presented in this thesis, by contrast, takes change, becoming and evolution as inevitable aspects of reality that must be accounted for explicitly. Individuals are merely temporary coagulations of the ontological processes of individualization that continue unabated beneath the constructed identities. This means that political science must give greater attention to those processes which *sustain* important organizations of the social. At the same time, it means that activists can take hope from the fact that seemingly immutable givens of the present world will inevitably be altered through time, thereby allowing progressive action to latch onto key catalysts.

As is inevitable in any project, there are a number of issues we have unfortunately had to neglect. Foremost among these is a full-fledged analysis of subjectivity. While we briefly pointed towards insights that suggest a possibility of emergent agency, and we recognized the potential to analyze subjects as their own assemblages, the important dynamics involved in the creation of political subjects have largely been left to one side. Similarly, while giving an analysis of ontological dynamics, we have neglected to provide a fully developed philosophy of history capable of accounting for how various regimes constitute their own ideas of the past, present, and future. Jay Lampert's study[264] is an excellent work on this, however, and so we feel justified in largely avoiding this topic. Finally, we have largely avoided the issue of language. This stems from the vast amount of academic work that has been done on the role of language, and our inability to do it any real justice in this paper. This absence is also the result of our own reaction to the

[264] Lampert, Jay. *Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy of History*.

dominance of semiotics-influenced political theory. While recognizing the importance of it, we wish to remove it from any position which would give it an all-encompassing status. In this regard, we see recent research on neurology (as in Connolly), affects (as in Massumi), and materialism more generally, as exemplary in battling the reduction of politics to culture, language, and semiotics. That being said, throughout this thesis we have made comments suggestive of what a Deleuzian analysis of language would entail, but we are well aware that for theorists focused on language, our comments will be insufficient.

Nevertheless, we believe that what has been presented is not only capable of suggesting potential solutions to these deficiencies, but also of making clear the significance and power of the ontology we have offered. Our ontology's attention to complexity, emergence, individuation, molecular change, the unique, the new, difference, potentials, conflict, and heterogeneity, makes it a rigorous philosophical and political ontology vastly different from what is presently available to political science. With our era characterized by a multiplication of local, regional, state, and global initiatives, combined with a proliferation of conflicts and the increasingly dense relational networks within which such events are embedded, we believe that it is only through a re-thinking of our ontological presuppositions that political science and policymakers can keep pace with the complexity and dynamism characteristic of the modern world.

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