

Provoking the Transition:

Non-Institutional Actants in Socio-Political Transitions in the Framework of Social Dynamism



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Introduction

Provocation solves no problem, but it does force issues out in the open so that they can be avoided no longer.¹

These words by the Dutch historian Rudolf de Jong were directed to the Provo movement of the Dutch 1960s. Traversing the domains of activism and participatory art, the Provos served as an inspiration for this study. Their *happenings*, enjoying attention both from the broad public and the Dutch police, breaking up with the perceived autonomy of art and the direct intentionality of political action, hardly fitting the ideals of a consensual deliberation between fully-informed and rational agents, raised the question of the real mechanisms underlying socio-political transitions.

What is the role of artists, activists, designers in politics? How to account for the political influence of these exclusive interest groups? To answer these questions, it is first necessary to conceptualize society in a way that recognizes the role of these non-institutional actors in political processes. In place of our conventional understanding of society – marked by a harmonious accord of interests of its rational and sufficiently-informed members – I will introduce the theory broadly referred to as *social dynamism*, the view on social order as a dynamic complex system of heterogeneous interacting units. While not explicitly developed as a theory, this view on social order can be tracked down in the works of Deleuze & Guattari, Manuel DeLanda, and other philosophers. It will be used as a framework to analyze non-institutional actants in the course of socio-political transitions and structural transformations.

Having revealed the social order as a complex system of interacting and overlapping units, social dynamism opens up a question of the democratic forms of political participation. By granting institutions and professional politicians a prerogative to drive political changes we systematically discredit and discriminate against non-institutional actants that strive to lead our society for the better. Simultaneously, we remain negligent of all the non-institutional actors that prevent positive transitions while acting in shadow. To evade these omissions, we

¹ Rudolf de Jong, "Anarchism Post-1945," in *Delta A Review of Arts Life and Thought in the Netherlands*, ed. Dick Elffers et al. (Amsterdam: Delta International Publication Foundation, 1967), 36.

need to reveal the complexity of the interacting factors that overdetermine socio-political transformations, which gives this study its practical relevance.

The strategic aspiration of my thesis is to argue that clashes between implicit discourses underlie the trajectories of political transitions rather than explicit parliamentary deliberations of representative democracies. Specifically, I will focus on the three categories of actants – artists, designers, and activists – that bear transformative potential due to their involvement in *discursive practices*. While other categories of non-institutional actants can be similarly highlighted, these chosen groups are most clearly illustrative of non-institutional political participation.

First, I will demonstrate that these actants are effective in terms of their impact on politics, specifically in their power to enable the occurrence of transitions. For this, I will describe their actions from the standpoint of social dynamism and showcase their influence empirically. After confirming their *effectiveness*, a necessary follow-up is to assess their *legitimacy*. Without this next step, all non-state actors from activists to terrorists will lay equally away from the representative system of institutional policy-making. However, it is not our goal to establish the primacy of the ends over the means and to conclude that any action is desired as long as it facilitates positive transitions. Since the regulative ideals of representation and deliberation fade away within the framework of social dynamism, the question to answer is what (if any) political action is democratic and legitimate in a dynamic social order.

In the next chapter, I will conceptualize politics as running transitions. Defining socio-political transitions is a complex issue, and I will draw upon the insights of the Dutch Research Institute for Transitions (DRIFT) for this purpose. Providing examples of such transitions, I will thereby define the scope of this study and outline the domains of action in which the role of artists, activists, and designers will be studied. After that, I will present the framework of social dynamism that gives an accurate overview of the milieu in which these actors operate. This will be made by working with the insights of Deleuze and Guattari, DeLanda, Latour, and other philosophers that share this understanding of society. Finally, I will consult these authors to sketch a way towards a normative evaluation of different forms of political action, to see which actions, if any, are legitimate in view of social dynamism.

Chapter 1

Politics is running transitions

This article constrains the analyzed political processes to specifically socio-political transitions. This refinement of the scope is necessary for a number of reasons that become visible after the concept of such transitions is introduced. According to the Dutch Research Institute for Transitions (DRIFT),

In order to resolve persistent societal problems, structural transformations or transitions are necessary. In general terms, a transition can be portrayed as a long-term process of change during which a society or a subsystem of society fundamentally changes. Transitions require system innovations: organization-exceeding, qualitative innovations, which are realized by a variety of participants within the system and which fundamentally change both the structure of the system and the relation between the participants.²

Thus, a socio-political transition is conceptualized as a structural transformation of established societal practices that involves *system-innovations* launched and realized by a variety of actors. According to DRIFT, goal-oriented transitions must overcome the fundamental societal problems, which necessitates a drastic reformation of society and thereby grants them a political connotation. Examples of such transitions include the energy transition, the movement to a circular economy, and carbon-neutrality. Notably, transitions are not necessarily a product of intentional effort: evolutionary transitions such as the demographic transition are rather a by-product of system-innovations, e. g. technological progress.³

This narrowing of the analyzed political processes is performed because representative political systems may be well-equipped to manage less transformative administrative tasks, e. g. policy-making, without the direct involvement of the actors selected for this research. The role of artists, activists, and designers in mundane political procedures may therefore be limited, while fully revealing itself through their participation in socio-political transitions

² Derk Loorbach and Jan Rotmans, "Managing Transitions for Sustainable Development," in *Understanding Industrial Transformation. Views From Different Disciplines*, ed. Xander Olsthoorn and Anna J. Wiczorek (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 3.

beyond political institutions. Even the architects of the social dynamism theory admit the advantages of an institutionalized authority in cutting lags in decision-making.⁴ Systemic change, however, implies *system-innovations* of the established practices – including the practices of policy-making itself – which can hardly be expected to come from within the institutions with fixed procedural conventions. Following DRIFT,

Acting the micro-level (niche-level) are individual actors, technologies and local practices. At this level, variations to and deviations from the status quo can occur as a result of new ideas and new initiatives such as new techniques, alternative technologies and different social practices.⁵

Thus, socio-political transitions proceed through system-innovations that imply some qualitative change in society and involve novel ideas and practices. Yet, as philosopher Vincent Blok argues, up to now the concept of innovation is primarily explored within the philosophy of technology, and insufficient attention is directed to the political connotation of system-innovation:

If we for instance understand innovation as technological innovation which is primarily executed by engineers in private R&D departments and laboratories, then we miss the whole potential of contemporary phenomena that can be associated with system innovation (for instance, agro-ecological innovations), social innovations (for instance, political innovations like online petition websites) or attitudinal innovations (for instance, prevention or lifestyle interventions), as well as the part of the innovation process that can be associated with the diffusion of innovations.⁶

Blok continues, following the research of Godin on the history of innovation:

While in current society, disruptive innovations like the Internet destruct the established economic order, in the ancient notion of innovation, it is primarily the political order which is destructed.⁷

⁴ Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society* (London: Continuum, 2006), 77.

⁵ Loorbach and Rotmans, "Managing Transitions for Sustainable Development," 4.

⁶ Vincent Blok, "Towards an Ontology of Innovation: On the New, the Political-Economic Dimension and the Intrinsic Risks involved in Innovation Processes," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Engineering*, ed. Diane Michelfelder, Neelke Doorn (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2022), 274.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

The research can therefore be scoped down to discerning the potential of artists, activists, and designers to launch system-innovations using the framework of social dynamism. Applying this framework might be insightful because it is precisely the theorists of social dynamism that touched upon the theme of innovation from a socio-political perspective, as shown next.

Innovation in social dynamism

First, Gabriel Tarde makes a distinction between practical inventions driven by will and theoretical inventions driven by the intellect. The latter type of invention resembles technological invention in its contemporary understanding, while practical invention is rather a case of a micro-level initiative through which “great, constant forces (that is to say, forces that are periodic in their action) are given a direction by small, accidental, new force.”⁸

Deleuze and Guattari further enveloped Tarde’s position into invention as connection and conjugation of different flows.⁹ Such flows of beliefs and desire constitute the molecular level of activity on which this connection and conjugation happens. Notably, minority groups in any society are rich sources of creativity, which preliminary hints at the position of the selected actants in driving system-innovations:

a complacently harmonious homogeneity would mean the end of cultural creativity and positive social transformation. A minority borrows Majority ways only at the risk of stifling Minority creativity, ‘drying up a spring or stopping a flow’.¹⁰

Bruno Latour similarly describes the realization of innovation as a clash of the assemblages of actants – programs against anti-programs – without a linear trajectory.¹¹ Moreover, a dynamic and political nature of system-innovation is not only revealed in this clash of different forces, but also in that there are obstacles for regulating, proceduralizing, coding the flow of innovation. Specifically, Marshall McLuhan uses the term ‘the rear-view mirror’ to describe the major obstacle for coding, or institutionalizing, the flow of innovation:

⁸ Adrien Taymans, “Tarde and Schumpeter: A Similar Vision,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 64, no. 4 (1950): 617.

⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 240.

¹⁰ Janel Watson, “Theorising European Ethnic Politics,” in *Deleuze and Politics*, ed. Jan Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 212.

¹¹ Bruno Latour, “Technology is Society Made Durable,” *The Sociological Review* 38, no. S1 (1990): 109.

Because of the invisibility of any environment during the period of its innovation, man is only consciously aware of the environment that has preceded it. In other words, an environment becomes fully visible only when it has been superseded by a new environment; thus we are always one step behind in our view of the world.¹²

While McLuhan went so far as to idolize artists as uniquely capable of escaping such backwardness of perception, the ‘rear-view mirror’ problem explains why specifically socio-political transitions might reveal the socio-political role of artists, activists, and designers. Representative political systems built on the premises of rational agents, consensus-based explicit deliberation, and no interference by non-institutional factors, is not an all-encompassing platform for addressing this and other challenges of socio-political transitions, in which the flows of non-consensual decoded forces drive system-innovations. Political acts beyond deliberation and representation must not be overlooked.

This incapability to account for non-institutional action is explicitly stated by some proponents of deliberation, social contract theorists, e. g. the distaste of Rousseau for exclusive interest groups taking part in the formation of a consensual *volonté générale*. Representative systems are of course able to react to non-institutional action, the most recent example being the sudden rise of BoerBurgerBeweging (Dutch pro-farmers party) after the Dutch farmers’ protests. This thesis is however interested in studying the molecular level of activity, while transformations that appear on the molar level of party politics and political institutions are taken as a passive signaling of significant non-institutional action happening on the molecular level.

Before proceeding with an outline of the social dynamism theory, we must note that the DRIFT Institute, a starting point of this thesis, might also be limited to the framework of deliberation and/or representation. While descriptively accurate in its theory of socio-political transitions, its practical inferences often neglect the social dynamism framework, its ‘key elements of transition management’ being ‘systems-thinking’, ‘long-term thinking’, ‘back- and for-casting’, and ‘focus on learning’ – in short, all the recommendations that imply rational decision-making and hence rely on the assumption of informed and rational transition-managers.¹³

¹² Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone, eds., *Essential McLuhan* (London: Routledge, 1997), 227.

¹³ Loorbach and Rotmans, “Managing Transitions for Sustainable Development,” 9.

Nonetheless, the recent web-publication of DRIFT dated 3 April 2023 admits the omnipresence of ‘poldering’ – the Dutch term for consensus-based decision-making – as an obstacle to the efficient reaction to systemic crises.¹⁴ While the proponents of deliberation such as Habermas present consensually regulated conflict and communicative rationality (e. g. the mentioned Dutch polder-model) as a regulative ideal to strive towards, this essay tries to analyze how societal transitions occur instead of how they should hypothetically be managed.

Thus, this chapter claimed that socio-political transitions proceeding through the incidental flows of system-innovation are particularly interesting cases of political processes that might be influenced by non-institutional actors such as artists, activists, and designers. Hence, it might be beneficial to use the framework of social dynamism to accurately evaluate the weight of non-institutional actors and to reveal specific channels of their transformative impact. For this purpose, the next chapter will present social dynamism as the view on social order. After that, this article will raise the question of the legitimacy of non-institutional action within the social dynamism framework. Both sections will lean on the specific cases of artists, activists, and designers participating in socio-political transitions to concretize the discourse and make their role in such political processes more graspable.

¹⁴ “Radically Different Collaboration on Transitions,” DRIFT for Transition, last modified April 3, 2023, <https://drift.eur.nl/publications/radicaal-anders-samenwerken-aan-transities/>

Chapter 2

Dynamic social order

A defining element of social dynamism is the emphasis on the role of discourses, social differences, power relations, and social dynamics as opposed to rational deliberation, social cohesion, collective action, and structural functionalism (consensus theory). While not rejecting concepts such as solidarity, sociability, or common good, social dynamism highlights other ways through which social units constitute and continuously transform society. Introducing the units and relevant interactions between them in a dynamic social order is the goal of this chapter.

Deleuze and Guattari

An essential contribution to the framework of social dynamism is the assemblage theory by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, concretized and articulated by Manuel DeLanda. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari offer constitutive bits of this theory under the titles of flow philosophy, rhizomatic model, and nomad thought. The rhizomatic model of thinking enables one to see the non-hierarchical connections between the multiplicity of heterogeneous, disparate elements (haecceities aka rhizomes, becomings, nomadic essences) that assemble into a consolidation on the plane of consistency. This model is opposed to the ubiquitously prevalent arborescent thinking that operates in terms of hierarchical structures and stratified organs composing the totality.

Haecceities are the basic units of Deleuze and Guattari's socio-political framework:

Inscribed on the plane of consistency are haecceities, events, incorporeal transformations that are apprehended in themselves; nomadic essences, vague yet rigorous; continuums of intensities or continuous variations, which go beyond constants and variables; becomings, which have neither culmination nor subject, but draw one another into zones of proximity or undecidability; smooth spaces, composed from within striated space.¹⁵

¹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 252.

These units – haecceities – signify individuation ‘different from that of a person, subject, thing, or substance’.¹⁶ Haecceities, or nomadic essences, are less stratified and do not possess a fixed and rigid identity. Rather, these units are characterized by the assemblages they are continuously forming and are in turn also assemblages of ultimately nothing but “longitude and latitude, a set of speeds and slownesses between unformed particles, a set of nonsubjectified affects.”¹⁷

Dissecting the assemblages in this way, Deleuze and Guattari arrive at the notion of flows. While manifestations of power are obvious for Deleuze and Guattari, it is the flows of desire that underlie power and form the basic stock of political processes.¹⁸ Hence on the molecular level, assemblages are formed as flows of desire. All such machinic assemblages of desire are capable of expression – a sign production that is not merely representing the content of an assemblage but is a form of intervention, e. g. a speech act.¹⁹ Whenever this expressive element of machinic assemblages comes to the fore and needs to be emphasized, e. g. in the case of social entities, Deleuze and Guattari refer to them as collective assemblages of enunciation.²⁰

By rejecting the idea of fixed identities bearing constitutive essences, assemblage theory highlights and prioritizes a creative endeavor for constant reterritorialization possessed by social units – a potential for producing meaning, generating new lines of flight, and challenging rigid stratifications and hierarchic structures. This endeavor also summarizes the nature of interactions between nomadic essences: the creation of new connections, spontaneous associations, and hybridizations. It is not an endeavor for irreversibly deconstructing all identities – stratification still occurs, assemblages are being formed – but for flexifying them, enabling an ongoing reidentification. This dynamic form of social organization is named a ‘war machine’ and is opposed to the State apparatus – an apparatus of capture and stratification.

Recognizing the centrality of creativity in Deleuze and Guattari, we can deduce the way they situate the actors of our interest – artists, activists, and designers – within the realm of politics

¹⁶ Ibid., 261.

¹⁷ Ibid., 262.

¹⁸ Ian Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn, eds., *Deleuze and Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 7.

¹⁹ Ralf Krause and Marc Rölli, “Micropolitical Associations,” in *Deleuze and Politics*, ed. Jan Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 248.

²⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 7.

and social transformations. Highlighting the creative potential of expression and the transformative potential of creativity, assemblage theory infers a highly-impactful nature of these expressive activities. For example, art for Deleuze is employed with the production of novel sensations, of the untimely. Hence, art bears the power to affect in the dynamic social order of the war machine, as demonstrated by the following artistic collective.

Claire Fontaine

Claire Fontaine is a specific case of an artistic movement that explicitly embodied the attitude of Deleuze and Guattari to creative acts. In *Human Strike Has Already Begun*, they quote the passage from Foucault:

art itself, be it literature, painting or music, has to establish a relationship with the real that is no longer a matter of ornament, of imitation, but a matter of laying bare, unmasking, scraping, digging, of violent reduction to the basic aspects of existence. [...] Art becomes a place of eruption from below, of what has no right or possibility of expression in a culture. [...] The courage of art in its barbarous truth should go against the consensus of the culture.²¹

By engaging in art, Claire Fontaine strive to disqualify representation as a political and existential practice. In a chapter *Human Strike's Plane of Consistency*, Claire Fontaine identifies capitalistic production of lack-based desire (e. g. through advertisement) as the main enemy of the human strike, their artistic undertaking.²² One definitive hint at Claire Fontaine's inspiration by nomadic thought is their focus on the flows of desire instead of power manifestations and on voluntary subservience instead of the oppressive system itself:

Each struggle has become a struggle against a part of ourselves because we are always partly complicit with the things that oppress us. [...] What is at stake is a transformation of subjectivity. This transformation – and that is the interesting point – is at the same

²¹ Michel Foucault, "Ten: 29 February 1984, Second Hour," in *The Courage of Truth: The Government of the Self and Others II, Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-4*, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 177-190.

²² Claire Fontaine, *The Human Strike Has Already Begun & Other Writings* (Lüneburg: Leuphana University, 2013), 43 – 47.

time the cause and the consequence of the strike. The subjective, the social and the political changes are tightly entangled.²³

Thus, Claire Fontaine proclaims that the deterritorializing potential of art is most visible on the level of persons as assemblages, and its power is to reterritorialize one's life as revolutionary practice. While art is to transform subjectivity, Claire Fontaine recognizes the importance of non-institutional action and the role of special interest groups in running larger-scale socio-political transformations, especially in the Western capitalist regime:

I think forming gangs, mafias, collectives, networks, bands of people is a way to survive in the hostile capitalist system and then eventually a way to become a pressure group, in order to transform these particular conditions.²⁴

A conflict-laden notion of pressure as the driver of transformation is in line with the Deleuzian understanding of politics. For Deleuze, participatory political practice is not raised on the premises of civil society and inclusive participatory politics, which on the contrary enable the sectorization of society.²⁵ As Svirsky writes, a conceptualized collaboration between the 'ideal circles' of the state, economy, and civil society (e. g. in a triple-helix model of innovation) stands in direct opposition to the co-affects of the vague nomadic essences that form the dynamic social order.²⁶ Within assemblage theory, an activist instead actualizes *ruptures* through ongoing experimentation, which is canceled as too radical by the classical participatory theory.

Design activism

In this manner, the position of artists and activists as collective assemblages of enunciation that steer intersubjective and social transformations through their expressive and creative capacities is revealed. These actors are yet to be assessed against other aspects of social dynamism such as discourse formation. Meanwhile, less clear is the case of designers, which for Deleuze and Guattari were perpetuating the capitalist mode of production, not being employed with the creation of the new but participating in the elimination of difference. For

²³ Ibid, 45.

²⁴ Isobel Harbison and Ilaria Gianni, "The Glue and the Wedge: The Cases of Claire Fontaine and Canell and Watkins," *Circa Art Magazine*, no. 124 (Summer 2008): 50.

²⁵ Marcelo Svirsky, ed., *Deleuze and Political Activism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 2.

²⁶ Ibid.

them, designers like advertisers are marketing agents packaging the product, the commodity to be sold.²⁷

However, Hroch addresses this allegation by highlighting the cases of design activism, not design as the production of commodities. Indeed, designers, being materially productive, are often perceived as ‘the production of more stuff’.²⁸ Yet,

Design in a ‘minor’ or activist mode enacts creative practices that are not simply part of a marketing machine churning out ‘concepts’, and instead challenge the underlying structures that territorialise creativity onto a plateau of profit at-all-costs.²⁹

Alastair Fuad-Luke interprets design activism as an action of creating a counter-narrative through design thinking and practice aimed at encouraging a social, cultural, and/or political transformation necessary for solving ‘wicked problems’ such as the one of sustainability.³⁰ Ezio Manzini brings about the reformulation of design principles in view of the revealed system complexity and the transition to sustainability.³¹ According to him, design for social innovation includes initiatives such as

cohousing, collaborative housing, couch surfing, circles of care, elderly mutual help, social incubators, micronurseries, time banks, local currencies, carpooling, car-sharing, food coops, farmers’ markets, zero miles food, CSA, street festivals, [and] community gardens.³²

After discussing how design activism, conceptualized by Fuad-Luke and Manzini, aligns with Deleuze’s favoritism of the creative activities that generate difference, Hroch presents the case of the Not Far From the Tree initiative. Having launched a platform that enables volunteers to reap abundant harvests that would otherwise be spoiled, this organization actualizes the discourse of commons opposed to private property. By fostering an experience of breaking social and physical barriers, re-imagining private fruit yards as common areas open for entry and harvesting, Not Far From the Tree exemplifies the reterritorializing power of designers.

²⁷ Petra Hroch, “Sustainable Design Activism,” in *Deleuze and Design*, ed. Betti Marenko and Jamie Brassett (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 222.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 233.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 239.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 237.

³² *Ibid.*

Such actualization of the idea of the commons is an example of a non-institutional action agitating socio-political transitions through system-innovation, showing that design practice is well-fit to re-territorialize and re-materialize through open experimentation.

However, Deleuze and Guattari's warning on design's compliance and involvement in difference-elimination is still relevant to consider. Yet, this suspicion should be equally applied to the domain of art, e. g. as addressed by Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of culture industry.³³ Resulting from this consideration, what gains significance is *activism* as a mode of operation, covering not only activists working with slogans, marches, strikes, and sit-ins, but also artists as activists and design activists. Producing newness through rupture by creative expression is their contribution to socio-political transitions, and individual artists or designers are either able to assume this role, or incapable of a genuine rupture if they are merely molar representatives of the connections and conjunctions of desire.

Manuel DeLanda

This ambivalence forces us to question whether *agency* is possible within social dynamism. Who is this rupture-producing activist in a society run by the flows of desire? So far, Deleuze and Guattari were insightful in their abstract sketch of the dynamic social order, but did not explicitly impose the notion of nomadic entities upon assemblages of individuals, interpersonal networks, social movements as *acting* bodies. DeLanda's concretization, a more applied and materialistic interpretation of the assemblage theory, brings further clarity to the role of persons, special interest groups, and other non-institutional actants in societal developments. According to DeLanda,

the ontology of assemblages is flat since it contains nothing but differently scaled individual singularities (or haecceities). As far as social ontology is concerned, this implies that persons are not the only individual entities involved in social processes, but also individual communities, individual organizations, individual cities, and individual nation-states.³⁴

³³ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94 – 137.

³⁴ DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 28.

Persons in their turn are assemblages of subpersonal components, as opposed to reified generalities such as 'the rational individual' that treat persons as having consistent and rigid identities. All these assemblages are DeLanda's societal units, and their interactions are relations of exteriority. In other words, interactions between these units are not constructive to their identity. Rather, what such interaction does produce is another assemblage – a new acting social unit *emerging* from the interaction between units.

Emergentism plays a significant role in DeLanda because an assemblage is characterized by emergent qualities that are not a mere aggregation of the qualities of the interacting units. The result of such emergence is another individual singularity, another acting body. The components that form an assemblage fulfill a material role, and the emergent qualities of an assemblage stem from components playing an expressive role in the process of assemblage codification. While technically being a higher-order entity, a common status of being an individual singularity makes this assemblage and the units that form it stand on an equal foot in their participation in societal processes. This allows DeLanda to flatten out the societal landscape and level off these multiscale assemblages as individual singularities, or haecceities.

After describing the societal units of his theory, DeLanda distinguishes different types of interaction that facilitate the stabilization of an emerging assemblage. Iterative and routine interaction (habitual repetition) leads to the formation of social institutions, the process DeLanda refers to as codification. Codification stabilizes the identity of an assemblage by producing solidarity between the assemblage's members, a coherence of group beliefs, and agreed terms of interaction, codified for example in a genetic code, a movement manifesto, or a written constitution. In cases of less consistent interaction that DeLanda calls social encounters, an emerging assemblage is less codified and has a spontaneous and often short-lived character, a quick round of territorialization and deterritorialization. An example of a social encounter is a conversation between persons.

According to DeLanda, transformations in assemblages are a matter of the mobilization of internal resources, and in larger social assemblages larger amounts of resources need to be mobilized. For the goals of resource mobilization, the network property of a concerned entity matters more than its formal authority. To distinguish such relevant network properties, DeLanda refers to Granovetter's notion of the strength of weak links, noting that dispersed

networks weaved of occasional connections are efficient in spreading information. Meanwhile, strong-link connections enable solidarity and trust, which are essential for the speed of transformative mobilizations.³⁵

Thus, societal transformations for DeLanda resemble a chain reaction of heterogeneous interconnected entities restructuring their relations of exteriority and thereby entering into a new, reterritorialized social assemblage. In this process, the network properties of the assemblage play an enabling role. Now, to clearly demonstrate the way DeLanda grants agency to social assemblages other than persons, a case of the Black bloc protest tactics will be discussed.

Black bloc

Black bloc is a form of group protest in which the activists appear as a large unified mass by wearing black clothing and face covering. Its practical reason is to complicate the identification and later prosecution of its individual members. Simultaneously, Black bloc serves as a demonstrative example of an interpersonal network as an acting subject, neatly symbolizing how non-person social assemblages acquire agency in the dynamic social order. As will be seen, Black bloc is an agency-bearing entity as it expresses and acts upon its passions and its identity is unaffected by replacements of its individual components.

For DeLanda, a subject emerges as an association of ideas that directly express sense impressions, an association that ‘turns a loose collection of individual ideas into a whole with emergent properties’.³⁶ In this process of association emerges a ‘pragmatic subject’, a public persona that exhibits and is capable of acting upon its passions: habitually pursuing positively valued passions and avoiding negatively valued ones. This approach DeLanda borrows from the empiricism of Deleuze, which consecutively stems from Hume’s account of a subject as an association of ideas.

For Hume, a subject is characterized by the stability of this association of ideas, for which memory plays a crucial enabling role. Hume’s conceptualization of a subject is analogical to the processes of codification of social assemblages described above. Like personal memory, codification brings temporal stability to the assemblage’s identity, and its expressive elements

³⁵ Ibid., 35.

³⁶ Ibid., 48.

are parallel to Hume's ideas (that *express* sense impressions). In the case of the Black bloc, codification is achieved through its linguistic components – e. g. slogans, manifestos, and written signs that express Black bloc's claims, aims, and values – but also through non-linguistic expressions such as its consistent involvement in property destruction and space occupation.

These non-linguistic components are miniature expressions of independently-existing impressions, similar in nature but of higher intensity. For example, an act of property destruction is a lower-scale expression of an antagonism to the very notion of private property. Not Far From the Tree assemblage, discussed above, does the same by revitalizing the discourse of the commons, bearing a similar expression, igniting a similarly oriented rupture, albeit with different expressive actions. Another example is Black bloc's forming principle of adhococracy – a decentralized, informal, transient, spontaneous form of organization – which expresses its favoritism of horizontal networks and its distaste for rigid, hierarchical, stratificatory authority structures.

Yet, what Black bloc is most capable of showcasing is DeLanda's principle of redundant causality. This principle defends the pragmatic subject against a counter-argument that behind its every action and expression there is a certain acting person, hence agency can be exclusively possessed by individuals. Addressing how social movements can act as subjects in alliance-formation, redundant causality proclaims that

we may be justified in explaining the emerging coalition as the result of the interaction between entire communities if an explanation of the micro-details is unnecessary because several such micro-causes would have led to a similar outcome. In the same way, a large organization may be said to be the relevant actor in the explanation of an interorganizational process if a substitution of the people occupying roles in its authority structure leaves the organizational policies and its daily routines intact.³⁷

In other words, an assemblage as a whole bears agency because particular individuals acting on its behalf could be replaced without changing to assemblage's expressive acts. The Black bloc's principle of covering individual identities is a stark claim for agency – it demands being treated as a single whole, it turns each of its individual participants into an indistinguishable material element of an assemblage. Importantly, this principle does not strip persons acting

³⁷ Ibid., 37.

within an assemblage of their freedom, agency, and, consecutively, responsibility. Rather, it realizes itself as a pragmatic subject bearing agency *equal* to that of a person.

Yet, how is this principle of replaceability not contradictory to the transformative potential of societal actors such as artists? An arising concern is that if the society-wide assemblage is a pragmatic subject and its micro-details are replaceable, redundant causality could imply that individual actors (artists, activists, and designers) cannot interfere with the assemblage's identity. To overcome this contradiction, we have to look at an assemblage transformation in Latour's terms, as a certain program overwhelming an anti-program. In this perspective, redundant causality holds while an assemblage transformation is *overdetermined* by a contingent formation of interacting actants.

This detour is necessary because DeLanda focuses primarily on a spatial dimension, being geographically minded and focusing on regionalized locales. While it allows DeLanda to present the formation of the social assemblages as nested circles, traversing from persons through social movements to nation-states, it also limited his capability to develop a general theory of intertemporal assemblage transformations. While neatly listing the material and expressive constitutive elements of these assemblages as stable entities, DeLanda's framework does not equally elaborate on *processes* such as assemblage transformation and innovation. Restricting the explanation to the process of mobilizing internal resources, DeLanda does not address how specifically this process starts and advances.

Program of action and overdetermination

This essay views DeLanda's mobilization of internal resources as the process of the emergence of a *transformative assemblage*. Thus, the transformative power of designers, artists, and activists belongs not to their activity per se, but to the more complex transformative assemblages they can form or enter. While every such actor is a replaceable element of a societal assemblage (redundant causality holds), their activity enables the formation of transformative assemblages by efficiently utilizing the network properties of the societal assemblage. Thus, these actants are replaceable in the sense that their position can be occupied by another similar actant, and their transformative potential is attributed not to their *personal* characteristics but to their *occupational* quality – mobilizing power and creative rupture as the defining ambitions of art, design, and activism.

Such a misattribution is long-revealed by Bruno Latour in his study of the history of innovation. Latour noticed how technological breakthroughs and other historical turns are often retrospectively assigned to a particular actant and are described as a linear and manageable sequence of events, neglecting their contingent nature and the context, circumstances, other affecting factors that *jointly* actualized this contingency:

We still have the diffusionist's bad habit of considering that one particular element of a program of action is the essence of an innovation, and that the others are merely context, packaging, history, or development.³⁸

Rather, Latour described innovation as a complex and uncertain process of a societal adoption of a certain 'program of action' which is always challenged by reactive 'anti-programs'. Interpreting innovation in this way shows that the transformative power is not the essence of a designer-assemblage or an artist-assemblage per se. Rather, a transformation – a program of action – is itself a 'syntagmatic' assemblage "containing just as many humans and non-humans as were recruited to counter the anti-programs."³⁹ Artists, activists, and designers only support its formation in a contingent event of entering such an assemblage with other units, often neglected as a mere background of the innovation.

Prescribing the transformative power to programs of action in which artists, activists, and designers play material or expressive roles, rather than claiming it as an essential characteristic of these actors, satisfies the principle of redundant causality while leaving the significance of their socio-political role intact. A transformation of a social assemblage is now overdetermined by a complex transformative assemblage that is contingently formed within it, not simply acted out by specific individuals.

Althusser's concept of the overdetermination of contradictions is helpful in describing the emergence and the working of such a transformative assemblage. While most Marxist thinkers focus mainly on a struggle between capital and labor and limit themselves to economism, Althusser recognizes the complexity of contradictions that exist in society. These heterogeneous contradictions layer upon each other, leading to an objectively revolutionary situation:

³⁸ Latour, "Technology is Society Made Durable," 115.

³⁹ Ibid.

there must be an accumulation of circumstances and currents so that whatever their origin and sense (and many of them will necessarily be strangely foreign to the revolution, or even its 'direct opponents' in origin and sense), they fuse into a ruptural unity. [...] a vast accumulation of 'contradictions' come into play in the same court, some of which are radically heterogeneous—of different origins, different sense, different levels and points of application—but which nevertheless 'group themselves' into a ruptural unity...⁴⁰

This produces a non-conventional reading of Marxism, claiming that all the societal contradictions are not simply instances, the observable phenomena of the general contradiction between labor and capital. On the contrary, multiple forces unintentionally make up a transformative assemblage and thereby overdetermine the societal adoption of a new program of action, overwhelming reactive anti-programs. Overdetermination quite literally echoes and reenacts the principle of redundant causality, enabling the actors of our interest to become part of the complex transformative assemblages while not privileging individuals as the only agency-bearing entities.

So far, we have seen that the socio-political significance of artists, activists, and designers lies in their capability for supporting the formation of transformative assemblages, programs of action that unite multiple contradictions overdetermining the transition. To do so, they efficiently use the network properties of the societal assemblage – spreading information through its weak links and building solidarity through its strong links. Their core activity – creative rupture, expression, meaning production – turns a transformative assemblage from a mere machinic assemblage of desire into a collective assemblage of enunciation. Thus, these actors and their output play an expressive role in transformative assemblages.

The remaining question is what exactly is the channel through which their expression, creative rupture translates into the mobilization of internal resources and a consequent formation of transformative assemblages. Spreading information and building solidarity, processes mentioned above, require more elaboration.

⁴⁰ Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: The Penguin Press, 1969), 99.

Clash of discourses

The actors of our interest are efficient in mobilizing internal resources by using the network properties of the societal assemblage. As argued next, this mobilizing power lies in the ability of their expression to shape (erupt) the social discourse. However, involving the concepts of a discourse and a discursive practice first necessitates their content to be made explicit and unequivocal.

DeLanda writes that “a discursive practice is one that, as its name implies, produces a discourse.”⁴¹ Such discourse production is attributed to activities that are not simply goal-oriented but also expressive, statement-making, declarative, attempting to set up a norm and claim its right of entrée into social conventions. In doing so, the major project of discursive practice is to reorient the social discourse: to inform the agenda, to set a theme of conversations and news reports, and ultimately to shape the constitution of social relations built upon the affected system of knowledge. DeLanda equates such a discursive practice with codification – the second articulation of an assemblage – which stabilizes the identity of an assemblage in a linguistic or a differently expressed code.⁴²

In DeLanda’s view, discursive practices of formal authority are primarily exemplified by a coded prescription of a certain punishment to a certain ‘wrong-doing’. This attitude is borrowed from Foucault, who uses the notion of discourse to attack the system of institutional control and discipline, which in his opinion dominates discourse formation.⁴³ However, the expressive nature of the acts of artists, activists, and designers might reveal their potential for a *non-institutional* shaping of the social discourse, rendering them counteragents to the stratificatory power of the state. Precisely by recognizing this potential in art, Deleuze and Guattari characterize it as the production of the untimely – hinting at art’s creative capability to shape and counter, not reinforce, the dominant social discourse.

A possible counterargument is that these actors themselves operate within the dominant discourse of capitalism and state oppression, which strips them of a genuine creativity of the sensation-production. However, Foucault leaves open a possibility of *discourse analysis* to

⁴¹ Manuel DeLanda, “Deleuze, Materialism and Politics,” in *Deleuze and Politics*, ed. Jan Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 161.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴³ Foucault went as far as to proclaim that discourses exist independently to the extent that subjects are decentered and appear as mere objects – a position that resounds DeLanda’s principle of redundant causality.

“seek to unfix and destabilise the accepted meanings, and to reveal the ways in which dominant discourses excludes, marginalises and oppresses realities that constitute, at least, equally valid claims to the question of how power could and should be exercised.”⁴⁴ If we reveal that artists, activists, and designers do in fact unfix and destabilize accepted meanings, we can credibly assign a mobilizing potential to their discursive practices.

Before proceeding to the examination of a non-institutional discursive practice based on the case of the Provo movement, we have to notice a departure from DeLanda’s account. His analysis of political movements comes down to mass movements forcing recognition of their rights by expressing that they are respectable, unified, numerous, and committed. From this perspective, actions such as protests and petitions are seen merely as tools to credibly symbolize, represent these four properties of a coalition, not as intrinsically-valued abstract expressions that shape the social discourse. Indeed, this latter attitude is disregarded by DeLanda as inefficient for not having and not achieving concrete goals:

While social justice movements tend to be very concrete in their goals, extracting specific rights from government organisations, protest movements can lose sight of the concrete. [...] But when the target of their protests is some vague generality, such as ‘the global capitalist system’, they do not have a chance at being effective in their interventions, even if they use the same means as those created by social justice movements.⁴⁵

Therefore, the only sign that these acts seek to produce for DeLanda is that they must be noticed and their claims (whatever these are) must be fulfilled. Thus, an enunciation resembles an outcry, bearing no content other than a pure claim to power. The sensation-production aspect of design, art, and activism, can be neglected by this perspective. Moreover, it may elude creative rupture as a discursive practice. To restore it, we have to re-envisage expressive action: a discursive practice that aligns with the artistic production of the untimely.

⁴⁴ Rachel Adams, “Michel Foucault: Discourse,” *Critical Legal Thinking*, November 17, 2017, <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2017/11/17/michel-foucault-discourse/>

⁴⁵ DeLanda, “Deleuze, Materialism and Politics,” 176.

Provo

The public reception of the recent series of protests by Just Stop Oil and Extinction Rebellion was not univocal. As research by the Social Change Lab shows, actions such as road blockages or museum occupations do not always gain public support and recognition. Often viewed as annoying, they are nonetheless efficient in increasing public awareness of issues such as climate change.⁴⁶ The spikes in the negative perception of these actions correlate with an increasing number of responses placing climate change among the most pressing societal problems. While this can be a hint of efficient discursive practice, the Provo movement is particularly illustrative of a non-institutional action that destabilized accepted meanings and employed creative rupture for building a new social discourse.

Provo was a counterculture movement in the Netherlands active in 1965 – 1967. Their activities intersected all the three domains of our interest: art (e. g. participatory *happenings*), activism (e. g. pamphlets and demonstrations), and design (e. g. white plans). The guiding principle from which its name stems was to creatively and non-violently expose the latent societal issues and delegitimize the authority by provoking its excessive use of violence and repression. As one of the illustrative delegitimizing results,

De Utrechtse hoofdcommissaris H.W. Offers legt, in een lezing over de openbare orde, uit dat gezag niet meer vanzelfsprekend is. Men heeft volgens hem ontdekt dat gezagsdragers ook maar gewone mensen zijn, die zelfs in kritieke situaties ernstige fouten kunnen maken. Het proces van ontmythologisering van het gezag is ingezet en zal voortduren.⁴⁷

Thuswise de-coding the normality of police violence, destabilizing the discursive practice of the state, Provos affected the formation of the societal discourse. The actions of Provo were posited as the activity of Homo Ludens rethinking the environment, e. g. street occupations turning a road (a dominant discourse favoring economic value and the capitalist mode of

⁴⁶ James Ozden, Cathy Rogers, and Ruud Wouters, “Social Change and Protests,” *Apollo Academic Surveys*, July 03, 2023, <https://www.apollosurveys.org/social-change-and-protests/>

⁴⁷ Roel van Duyn, *Provo. De geschiedenis van de provotarische beweging 1965-1967* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1985), 238.

production) into a stage for performance – participatory *happenings* (an alternative discourse).⁴⁸

These actions unsurprisingly invoked a violent response from the police, perceived as excessive by the public. This is where the principle of provocation comes forward – social innovation had to be coordinated with an act of ‘exnovation’ – the demolition of the obsolete, the delegitimization of the conventional discourse and social order.⁴⁹ As an example, the Provo’s ‘white bicycle plan’ entailed placing unlocked bicycles painted in white around Amsterdam – allowing their free use for everyone. In addition to expressing the impression of communality and introducing the commons into the social discourse, the white bicycle plan triggered an unpopular self-undermining reaction from the police. Informed by the dominant oppressive discourse, the confiscation of the bicycles was grounded in the idea that the unlocked and free-to-use bicycles were ‘encouraging theft’.⁵⁰

Unlike DeLanda’s social justice movements – concrete in goals and appealing to the authority for the recognition of their rights – Provo’s guiding principle was to “provoke for the sake of provoking.”⁵¹ Despite ‘too abstract’ goals, their actions were appealing to the public – they mobilized the societal resources not to convince the government to reconsider its oppressive practices or satisfy specific demands, but to reimagine the way of the collective being, to ignite a socio-political transition in the realm of the societal lifestyle, not just policy-making.⁵² In the same emancipatory appeal, each Provo was “someone who won’t let himself be trapped into any name, someone who is capricious and elusive and against everything.”⁵³

Due to its creative, expressive nature, Provo was not simply an act of resistance. For Foucault, resistance exists in a symbiotic relationship with state oppression – an oppressive system

⁴⁸ Dick Elffers et al., ed. *Delta A Review of Arts Life and Thought in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Delta International Publication Foundation, 1967), 53.

⁴⁹ Jean Hartley and Laurence Knell, “Innovation, exnovation and intelligent failure,” *Public Money & Management* 42, no. 1 (2022): 40-48.

⁵⁰ Richard Kempton, *Provo: Amsterdam’s Anarchist Revolt* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2007), 49.

⁵¹ Aad Nuis, “Amsterdam Provoked,” in *Delta A Review of Arts Life and Thought in the Netherlands*, ed. Dick Elffers et al. (Amsterdam: Delta International Publication Foundation, 1967), 21.

⁵² Next to affecting the social discourse, these movements can of course win the compliance of representative political institutions. In its lifetime, Provo managed to win a seat in Amsterdam’s city council; parties like Partij voor de Dieren (Party for the Animals) secure the parliamentary representation of the animal welfare ideology; and challenges of sustainability and climate change become institutionally recognized.

⁵³ A. L. Constandse and Harry Mulisch, “Interview with Roel van Duyn,” in *Delta A Review of Arts Life and Thought in the Netherlands*, ed. Dick Elffers et al. (Amsterdam: Delta International Publication Foundation, 1967), 30.

needs resistance in order to inflict punishment.⁵⁴ Provo went further in its disobedience, it focused on the acts of provocation and delegitimization of an authority structure not through an open confrontation but direct action – launching an alternative lifestyle. While incompatible with the dominant discourse, it could not be simply labeled as a crime performed by certain *individuals* and thereby written off by the oppressive system. It turned into a transformative assemblage that bore the agency of its own, a program of action composed of many human and non-human elements.

Provos expressed their utopian vision of the future under the title “New Babylon”, an imaginary socialist-anarchist society of Homo Ludens to emerge from and in opposition to “the welfare state [which], having wrapped the people in cotton-wool, is rocking them to sleep, making them unconscious accomplices in their own destruction.”⁵⁵ Recognizing how utopian their endeavors are and how abstract their enemy is, Provo proclaimed: “PROVO realizes that it will lose in the end, but it cannot pass up the chance to make at least one more heartfelt attempt to provoke society.”⁵⁶ Despite this fatalism, Provo’s ‘white plans’ remain surprisingly relevant for the present societal discourse. Their ‘white bike plan’ is said to stand at the origin of the contemporary bike-sharing platforms, and the ‘white house plan’ informed the ongoing squatting movements.^{57, 58}

Concluding the description, it must be noted that the non-institutional discursive practice was not exclusively exercised by Provos. Examples such as the Occupy movement, having no alternative economic system in mind but igniting a sharp discursive critique of the existing capitalist system require no introduction. The Claire Fontaine collective discussed earlier – encouraging a personal resubjectification – is explicit in adopting Foucault’s principle of turning life into a revolutionary practice opposed to the dominant discourse.

Because of the complexity of the transition process, the mobilizing potential of these discursive practices implies the capacity to facilitate the formation of a transformative

⁵⁴ Gibson Burrell, “Modernism, Post Modernism and Organizational Analysis 2: The Contribution of Michel Foucault,” *Organization Studies* 9, no. 2 (1988): 228.

⁵⁵ Nuis, “Amsterdam Provoked,” 17.

⁵⁶ Elffers et al., *Delta A Review of Arts Life and Thought in the Netherlands*, 42.

⁵⁷ Feargus O’Sullivan, “The Radical Roots of Bikes sharing,” *Bloomberg*, February 26, 2022.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-02-26/the-dutch-anarchists-who-launched-a-bikes-sharing-revolution>

⁵⁸ Experimental Jetset, “The Constructivist City, The Situationist City, The Provotarian City, The Post-Punk City,” in *Notes on Experimental Jetset/Volume 2* (Amsterdam: Roma Publications, 2021) 75.

assemblage – to be adopted by other actants as a social discourse, an alternative lifestyle; to inform the agenda, spread information, and build solidarity between the elements of the assemblage. In these goals, more abstract and creative actions take priority over political pressure for specific demands (which is only a part of the transformative assemblage). Only then a sufficiently heterogeneous and saturated program of action can overdetermine the transition.

It remains necessary to see why in the dynamic social order, even ‘good-willing’ institutions are unable to command the socio-political transition and take charge in the formation of transformative assemblages. Why is the focus on non-institutional action, and why cannot institutions be efficient in launching, managing, or facilitating a socio-political transition under the framework of social dynamism?

Verdict on institutions

As already seen, in Foucault institutions play a suppressive rather than enabling role: the institutional formation of the dominant discourse aims to regiment and discipline its subordinates. The state apparatus holds a similar stratificatory power in Deleuze and Guattari, a power for and a primary focus on the difference-elimination that is opposed to the nomadic organization of the war machine. For DeLanda, institutions and the institutional discourse-formation are expressive elements facilitating the codification (stabilization) of an assemblage.

What can be preliminary noted from these observations is that institutions are not dismissed as merely a molar representation of the occurrences on the level of molecular flows. Institutions *ossify* the discourse, *codify* social assemblages, ‘*make* social life patterned, regularized, habitualized’.⁵⁹ Revealing their active power rejects the view of institutions as inclusive representative organs, as mere platforms for participatory deliberation. Thus, according to social dynamism, not only the societal units are unfit for such deliberation as they are not rational, consensus-oriented individuals, but the ‘platform for deliberation’ itself is not a viable description of the active, stratificatory political institutions.

⁵⁹ John Brocklesby and Stephen Cummings, “Foucault Plays Habermas: An Alternative Philosophical Underpinning for Critical Systems Thinking,” *Journal of the Operational Research Society* 47, no. 6 (June 1996): 751.

This remark is necessary because the proponents of the addressed view do not downgrade the actors such as artists, activists, and designers to the socio-political status of mere citizens or voters. For example, similarly to the outlined discussion, Habermas grants these actors their place in the public sphere where they can influence the public agenda. However, the discourse formation of the public sphere goes through the mass-media filter and into the internal discussion by political parties and governmental agents. Ultimately, this deliberation ends up in parliaments and courts which realize political change as a ‘collective self-actualization’. In contrast to this view, as was extensively argued, political institutions cannot be perceived as perfectly sensitive and representative of the non-institutional discourse formation.

The remaining concern to address is that institutions, despite or even by virtue of their codifying role, are necessary for the very functioning of society. For example, from DeLanda it may follow that institutions are necessary for the second articulation of the societal assemblage, for its emergence and stability. This view is developed by Anthony Giddens, whom DeLanda references frequently, in his theory of structuration. In the structuration theory, social order emerges through the process of routinization of social actions, which turns them into the institutionalized features of a society. Thus, institutions are ‘the skilled accomplishments of knowledgeable agents’ for Giddens.⁶⁰ Moreover, Giddens explicitly criticizes Foucault for extrapolating one extreme example of an oppressive institution (a prison) on the whole societal structure, thus hyperbolizing the perception of the social conditions.⁶¹

However, Burrell responds to Giddens by noting that even if the example of a prison seems extreme, we are nonetheless entrapped in the ‘organizational world’.⁶² We cannot simply enter or exit the disciplinary organization – we are only switching between different organizational contexts which are all shaped by the dominant stratificatory discourse. Thus, a routinization/codification of social interactions holds a profound potential for difference-elimination and the prevention of its positive transformation. Moreover, this routinization is rarely a product of an open and inclusive social contract but is rooted in power relations, in

⁶⁰ Rob Stones, *Structuration Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 26.

⁶¹ Burrell, “Modernism, Post Modernism and Organizational Analysis 2: The Contribution of Michel Foucault,” 228.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 232.

the micropolitics of social life. Thus, the prescription of Foucault is the emancipation from the whole 'juridic consciousness'.⁶³

The view that a certain degree of routinization/codification is necessary for a functional society is also upheld by Honneth and Durkheim. Their view presented as a social contract, the people who agreed on a *fixed* set of foundational principles and institutions: "Society and its patterned forms of mutual interaction can only function if there first exists a shared framework of meanings and moralities."⁶⁴ However, it was shown extensively that the non-institutional actors such as artists, activists, and designers are primarily capable of creating *new* meanings and sensations, ongoingly affecting the societal discourse, and thereby mobilizing resources for assemblage transformation. Being sensitive to the existing social contradictions and the changes in the environmental circumstances, these actors creatively facilitate the formation of a complex transformative assemblage but face resistance from a reactive anti-program informed by the dominant system of meanings ossified in political institutions.

Therefore, the main implication of the social dynamism theory is not the necessity of fully deconstructing institutions. As mentioned before, it is impossible to avoid the process of assemblage codification and identity formation. After all, *if complex social assemblages are granted agency, it is not clear on which ground can social dynamism deprive them of their right of self-preservation through codification*. What the selected authors agree on, however, is the *vital, healthy, emancipatory* role of an ongoing reterritorialization and resubjectification, of the non-institutional counteraction that alone is capable of giving an injection to the timely transformations of complex social assemblages.

The remaining part of this essay will attempt to sketch a rough outline of a normative take on the non-institutional action from the social dynamism perspective. The question to address is whether there is any notion of legitimacy compatible with this view or whether any non-institutional action from design activism to terrorist acts bears equal reterritorializing, transformative value.

⁶³ Ibid., 228.

⁶⁴ David Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society. A Study in Social Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 23.

Chapter 3

Legitimacy in social dynamism

From a critical standpoint of the proponents of deliberation, direct disruptive interventions discussed above can be perceived as violent acts since they are not consensus-based and go against the interests of certain social units. The straightforward dismissal of this criticism by conflict theories proclaims that *any* social act is violent and any social interaction is grounded in power-relations. Therefore, violent acts of resistance can be favored in contrast to violent acts of oppression, exploitation, and stratification. However, this guiding principle of tolerating self-defensive violence is not exhaustive as it can be seized by the oppressive institutions in their discourse of ‘punishing crime’ or ‘achieving state security’. In general, such arguments can justify oppression as a self-preservation mechanism of social assemblages like nation-states.

To target this concern, it is potentially helpful to compare the nomadic war machine against the war machine of the State. The notion of the war machine accurately highlights the violent nature of a non-institutional act while still serving as a regulative ideal in Deleuze and Guattari. However, the State, which in Deleuze and Guattari stands in direct opposition to the war machine, is also commonly perceived as the mechanism of war, as an assemblage that is built around and builds up on war. Among others, Charles Tilly described war-making as an essential activity of the State, its *raison d’être*.⁶⁵ Thus, a normative dissociation between violent oppression and emancipatory rupture might be found in the distinction between the nomadic war machine and the war machine of the State.

Within assemblage theory, DeLanda adopted the idea of the enmity-related formation of states. For him, war ossifies communities, sharpens the boundaries, and accelerates the territorialization and codification of assemblages. Solidarity, which is essential for the stability of an assemblage, is achieved at the expense of a strict and highly exclusive selection. Thereby a distinct line is drawn between the members of the assemblage and its enemies, the latter group declared as destined for annihilation.

⁶⁵ Charles Tilly, *Stories, Identities, and Political Change* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 171-187.

This reveals the first distinction between the two forms of the war machine. Whereas the stratificatory war mechanism of the State isolates and codifies an exclusive group, the deterritorializing rupture of the nomadic war machine is open-ended and the transformative assemblage that it forms is more inclusive and heterogeneous. The heterogeneous nature of the nomadic war machine is stressed by Deleuze and Guattari. Transcribing it to the formation of the program of actions, Latour prescribes social actants to assemble around the matter of concern, without any necessary agreement or consensus but by clashing their diverse attitudes to a common issue at hand.⁶⁶ Thus, the transformative assemblage is an agent of chaos that builds on difference and not homogeneity, it erodes the borders delineated by the dominant discourse.

Secondly, as State violence aims at eliminating difference, wars run by the State seek to eliminate its enemies. This way the State builds its dominance, which for Latour occurs when the program of action is universally adopted and no longer faces any antiprogram. In contrast, the nomadic war machine is the *source* of difference and newness, of new connections and yet other contradictions. In this way, a counteraction to any dominant discourse is welcomed by the theorists of social dynamism, as exemplified by the appeal of Deleuze and Guattari to minoritarian-becoming(s) and their alternative discursive practices: “becoming-revolutionary where this encompasses the myriad forms of minoritarian-becoming open to individuals and groups”.⁶⁷

In comparison to becoming-revolutionary, the ‘lawful violence’ of state policing for Deleuze consists in capturing while simultaneously constituting a right to capture. It is an incorporated, structural violence distinct from every kind of direct violence. The State has often been defined by a “monopoly of violence,” but this definition leads back to another definition that describes the State as a “state of Law” (Rechts-staat). State overcoding is precisely this structural violence that defines the law, “police” violence and not the violence of war.⁶⁸

The State defines the boundaries of illegitimate violence in order to impose upon it lawful state violence. Such an approach makes the State apparatus avoid accountability for violent acts

⁶⁶ Bruno Latour, “An Attempt at a “Compositionist Manifesto”,” *New Literary History* 41, no. 3 (2010): 478.

⁶⁷ Paul Patton, “Utopian Political Philosophy: Deleuze and Rawls,” *Deleuze Studies* 1, no. 1 (2007): 43.

⁶⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 448.

while making violence an inalienable characteristic of its existence: “Mutilation is a consequence of war, but it is a necessary condition, a presupposition of the State apparatus and the organization of work.”⁶⁹ *Rechts-staat* is achieved only when the State realizes its power – ‘the ability of oppressing without blunt violence’ – hinting at the emergent state of terror.⁷⁰

In this manner, it is possible to juxtapose the presented acts of artists, activists, and designers not only to State oppression but also terrorist attacks and other controversial endeavors of the non-state political actors. As Kroker notes: “In this society of the (ISIS) spectacle, we are intended to understand intimately and immediately that this is Guantanamo Bay in reverse.”⁷¹ The crucial resemblance is that they both are aligned in their terror. Unlike the actors in our focus, oppressive states and terrorists do not merely seek the recognition of their agency but strive to, first, exercise exclusive control over their subordinates, and second, eliminate all external social assemblages, thereby gaining a monopoly right on discursive practices.

Meanwhile, the minoritarian action does not principally rise against the agency of other actants but craves to affirm its life with its desire-production. Minoritarian action is inclusive, deterritorializing, and inherently creative. This gets us close to the understanding of the Deleuzian ethical point, which summarizes the discussed normative evaluation of legitimacy in social dynamism. Legitimacy in social dynamism stems from the ethics of immanence: a proliferation of life, deterritorialized experimental life as absolute immanence.⁷²

By launching a non-institutional discourse, the analyzed actors specify a milieu for the assemblage of heterogeneous units, whatever form this composition will take, whichever interactions between units will this milieu experience. The assemblage does not arise out of aligned interests and intentions, but of any interactions that facilitate a ‘tentative and precautionary progression’⁷³ – a contingent and uncertain system-innovation. Emancipatory action opens up the space for life and becoming instead of holding on to the incumbent forms of coding.

⁶⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 425.

⁷⁰ Flor Avelino, “Theories of Power and Social Change. Power Contestations and their Implications for Research on Social Change and Innovation,” *Journal of Political Power* 14, no. 3 (2021): 431.

⁷¹ Arthur Kroker, “Islands of Sorrow, Ships of Despair,” in *Deleuze and Guattari and Terror*, ed. Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha and Saswat Samay Das (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 209.

⁷² Gilles Deleuze, “What Is a Dispositif?,” in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, ed. T. J. Armstrong (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 159–168.

⁷³ Latour, “An Attempt at a “Compositionist Manifesto,”” 473.

As far as violence is concerned, its only plausible realization for Foucault is the war upon oneself. As Henk Oosterling notes,

One must be prepared to self-critically wage war upon oneself. This is the core of an 'art of living' that, Foucault concludes, 'counter to all forms of fascism', and the first essential principle of which is 'free political action from all unitary and totalizing paranoia'. DeleuzoGuattarian discourse forces us to track the slightest traces of fascism in our corporations, both micropolitically – our bodies – and macropolitically – corporate global players.⁷⁴

As various cases have shown, emancipatory acts of artists, activists, and designers, fit well into this 'immanent evaluation'. An emancipatory movement starts with its own resubjectification, a liberation from the dominant discourse. In this liberating process, not only the lifestyle of a specific actor is transformed, but an alternative non-institutional social discourse gets expressed/enunciated, facilitating the formation of a transformative assemblage around this expressive element and other connected human and non-human elements. The elements of this assemblage are not exclusively drafted based on unified interests but compose incidentally around a common matter of concern. A henceforth activated program of action – an emergent transformative assemblage – challenges the dominance of the stratificatory power of the State.

Thus, individual non-adherence to the dominant discourse launches a chain reaction that can undermine authority and enable transformation. Acts of disobedience distort the State authority that resides solely in a ritualized, ceremonial expression of loyalty by its subordinates.⁷⁵ Because of this risk, state actors are inherently aimed at eliminating difference, punishing disobedience, repressing alternative discourses.

The case of Provo showcased how a minoritarian transformative assemblage is able to counteract the violent acts of the State and turn them further to its own advantage. Employing non-violent alternative discursive practices to provoke a violent response from the police, Provo gained a significant number of sympathetic supporters across many social groups. The

⁷⁴ Henk Oosterling, "Mesopolitical Interests: Rotterdam Skillcity as Rhizomatic, Ecosophical, Reflective Event," in *This Deleuzian Century: Art, Activism, Life*, eds. Rosi Braidotti and Rick Dolphijn (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2014), 275.

⁷⁵ DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 70-71.

dominant discourse that aimed to stigmatize the counteraction as a crime to be punished lost its ground and ceased to resonate with public opinion. Instead, an alternative discourse was taken up, proliferated, and imitated.

Conclusion

This essay has shown the attitude of the social dynamism theorists to the question of socio-political transitions and the role of non-institutional actors in them. First, we have seen that such structural transformations stem from system-innovations, where innovation bears a political connotation unlike in its mainstream technocratic understanding. Namely, innovation presupposes exnovation – the process of breaking down the ossified regimes of the past. We have seen that the theorists of social dynamism recognize this political dimension of innovation and are consequently able to provide an insight on the socio-political role of actors that facilitate such system-innovations.

Proceeding to the outline of the dynamic social order, we got a glimpse at social units and different forms of their interactions. In social dynamism, the units populating the society are heterogeneous assemblages of the molecular flows of desire, which includes persons but also sub-personal components and networks that each possess an agency of its own. These assemblages are not as stable as the conventional notions of a subject or an individual imply, but are ongoingly reterritorialized nomadic essences, haecceities.

The formation and transformation of these assemblages are based on their expressive elements. Thus, in a social assemblage, the creative activities of non-institutional actors such as artists, activists, and designers have the potential to fulfill this expressive role. As long as their activity aligns with the deterritorializing principles of creative rupture, open experimentation, difference-production, and resubjectification they can efficiently use network properties to mobilize internal resources and facilitate the formation of complex transformative assemblages.

Transformative assemblages consist of diverse human and non-human elements. Certain aspects of innovation, conventionally underscored as its mere context and accompanying contingencies, gain equal importance in a transformative assemblage which overdetermines the existing codes and strata. The channel through which this overdetermination proceeds was claimed to be the social discourse formation. Through various examples, it was shown how individual and collective assemblages of artists, activists, and designers employ *discursive practices* to disrupt the existing system of power and domination, to come up with the

expressions of alternative lifestyles, enabling transformative assemblages to express the minoritarian discourse.

In outlining the idea of transformative assemblages, institutional formations were revealed as their anti-programs – the established dominant discursive practices rooted in power-relations that stratify, codify, and thus eliminate difference, suppress the opportunities of forming an alternative discourse. This runs contrary to the view on institutions as neutral platforms for a collective realization of a consensus-based discourse. Thus, the formation of a non-institutional discourse in an effort to facilitate the emergence of a complex transformative assemblage was the main insight into the role of artists, activists, and designers in the present thesis.

Finally, the notion of legitimacy in the dynamic social order was explored. Deleuzian ethics of immanent evaluation was presented as a viable instrument for a normative assessment of different discursive practices. While difficult to use for general prescriptions, the attitude of life affirmation was compatible with the non-institutional actions under our focus. However, a more profound attempt to apply the immanent evaluation upon specific social actants is needed. While showing how this evaluation can be used in certain cases of designers, activists, and artists, this thesis was not aimed at analyzing all the actors involved with discursive practices.

Moreover, a further elaboration on how discourses shape the material conditions of the socio-political realm is wanting. While indirectly referencing the role of public opinion and social imitation, explicitly covering these concepts as analysed by, for example, Gabriel Tarde was beyond the current scope. Moreover, the theories of direct action, political participation and disobedience might be insightful in this regard.

Lastly, the difference in expression of transformative assemblages and other social assemblages remains vague. As it was mentioned, codification is the second articulation of any assemblage, and hence none of these social units are free from a certain degree of stratification. Addressing this complication might involve an in-depth study of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the body-without-organs, becoming-imperceptible, and other approaches to assemblage identification. For now, it was demonstrated that in the dynamic social order, a transformative assemblage forms only as a situational association, an order out

of chaos, a collectively formed alternative discourse as a directing monad of the assemblage, a layered stack of diverse contradictions that come to overdetermine the stratificatory discourse. Thus, everything that the actants are aligned in is a sudden liberation from oppression, a sudden urge for experimentation, resubjectification, reinterpretation of themselves and the surrounding environment. While standing at the origin of such transformative assemblages, neither artists, activists, or designers, nor any other individual actants are in a position for integral transition management.

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