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Surfing the Revolutionary Wave 2010-12: A Social Theory of Agency, Resistance, and Orders of Dissent in Contemporary Social Movements

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Abstract

The theorisation and understanding of contemporary social movements, socio-technological phenomena, and the intersection of the two are limited by an incommensurability between the conceptualisations of individual agency and the disciplining powers of social structures. We introduce a theory of sociotechnological agency that bridges the individual and the social through a reconceptualization of the conventional notion of intentionality. Drawing from recent theories of affect and embodiment, posthuman-influenced materialisms and realisms, postmodern critical theory, and critiques of network theory, we introduce a model for understanding sociopolitical action and dissent that accounts for individual human agency as a nexus of overlapping and often competing subjectivities, as well as both nonhuman technological agencies and assemblages of the two. The theoretical framework presented avoids the tendency of much critical theory, new materialist theory and speculative realisms to discount or dismiss human agency altogether, and the predilection of situationist technosocial research to ignore the constraints of technological systems of production and reproduction. This theory of agents (as actants) and agencies (as force vectors of action) is situated within an ecological model of competing systemic social logics dominated by the global-hegemonic capitalist code, in order to conceptualise the intertwined possibility spaces of individual and social resistance. The article introduces a conceptual framework to theorise resistances against the present global order and national suborders based on the type of agency, the order of dissent, the mode of labor, the logic of action and the level against which resistance is directed at.

Keywords: Social movements, protest, networks, agency, digital activism, resistance

Introduction: The Problem with Networks

The highly contingent contemporary global order and its hierarchical social logic expressed in state and capital has been unable to negotiate and productively harness the energies unleashed by technologically enabled networks for the equitable betterment of global society. Systemic problems have manifested in

the global financial crisis, permanent conflicts (e.g. 'the war on terror'), and constant pressure for reform and revolution by radical media movements and ad hoc mobilized networks. This pressure has achieved some partial success, in regime change in the Arab world for example, but has failed to intervene meaningfully at most levels of governance to reform or radically replace aggressive capitalisms of profit accumulation and uneven development or to respond effectively to demands for equal rights, struggles against censorship and electoral authoritarianism, social marginalization or forced migration, displacement and poverty (Morozov, 2010; Fuchs 2011; Shirky 2011; Castells 2012; Harvey 2012; Lovink 2012). 'The question remains why does this network logic fail to transform the global system for the better?' (Karatzogianni and Robinson, 2010: 26), whether through the fluid channels of power available to networked capital, or through the possibilities for networked resistances afforded by social media and other digital communications technologies. The answer would seem to lie at the intersection of individual agency (as the power and capacity to take effective and significant action) and social structure. This was the idea behind the critical problem of agent versus structure Giddens sought to resolve with his structuration theory – the focus on social practices across space and time (The Constitution of Society, 1984), that Latour (1987) proposed to solve with his actor-network theory to accommodate agency for non-humans, and which Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plataeus* (1987) theorized as rhizomatic versus arborescent mappings of the world in material-semiotic terms. However, while network theory focusing on the microlevel of sociotechnological mediation and interaction tends to overlook the importance of technology production and the power of collective and corporate socioeconomic structures, macro-level scholarship privileging the analysis of political and economic power has a tendency to neglect the agency of individuals (Mansell, 2011).

As suggested by Giddens, Latour, and the Deleuzo-Guattarian contributions, the effective analysis of political action in the contemporary highly mediated world must address the intersection of the micro- and macro-levels of agency, action, and resistance. This article presents a theorisation of individual and collective agency, bridging the technosocial individual and the disciplinary order of social structures, as a means to better investigate, contextualize, and understand processes of political action, resistance, and dissent in the contemporary world. Our theoretical position is that we cannot continue with a conception of agency that is not embodied, or which views affect as immaterial or even spiritual. Such a view of agency does not take into account the technosocial transformations that must be addressed when we produce theory and analysis of resistances, movements, and especially digital activism. In developing another view of agency, we argue that different types of agency reflect different orders of dissent in ideological terms and different possibilities for resistance to the established order, however contingent this order may be.

The Capitalist Code and Orders of Dissent

During 2011, various resistances arose against the current workings of society by social movements and protest organizations across physical, digital, and affective spaces of everyday life. The 'Arab Spring' movements across the Middle East and the Occupy movement in the US, for example, were organized, and their demands reached the global public, through ICTs, particularly social media. Such movements render a theorization of the various modes and forms capitalism a critical undertaking because protesters and social movement activists communicate and organize their dissent in countries with vastly different modes of production, levels of development, and political systems. At the same time, the agencies and ideologies driving protests challenging the capitalist system in its global,

regional, and national manifestations operate and communicate at diverse and distinct orders of dissent.

The logical order at which political dissent is communicated is a critical issue for theorizing resistance. The schematic proposed here is that at the first order of dissent, primary concerns revolve around basic human liberties and rights of a universal kind, such as the rights to education and health, justice, and human rights abuses. At the second order of dissent, demands are more overtly political encompassing demands for democracy and equality of political participation, equal distribution of power and resources, freedom of speech and movement, and demands against censorship. At the third order of dissent concern for the global predominates, a critique which points to the failing of the capitalist order as a whole, and a recognition of postnational or transnational issues and demands for a reform or radical change of capitalism to address issues of global inequality and poverty, as well as national financial and economic realities, such as unemployment, exploitation, corruption, unequal distribution of wealth, and so on.

Table 1. Orders of Dissent

Order of Dissent			Loci of Concern	Examples
Third: Transnational/Global			The failing of the capitalist order as a whole and a recognition of postnational or transnational issues and demands for a reform or radical change of capitalism to address issues of global inequality and poverty, as well as national financial and economic realities, such as unemployment, exploitation, corruption, unequal distribution of wealth, and so on	Occupy Movement 2011 Global Justice, antiglobalization movement (Seattle 1999 and onwards) Peace movement, Anti-Iraq war mobilizations 2003 Environmental movements Freedom of Information and anti-censorship Anonymous
	Second: National		Democracy and equality of political participation, equal distribution of power and resources, freedom of speech and movement, and demands against censorship	EU crisis: Greece, Spain, Italy, Ireland Arab Spring: Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Mauritania
		First: Local	Basic human liberties and rights of a universal kind, such as the rights to education, health, justice, and human rights, civil rights, minority struggles, group recognition, statehood, succession	From demands for recognition, sovereignty, autonomy or statehood (South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transistria, Palestine others) to indigenous struggles, to demands for equal rights by women (MENA region and elsewhere), gay rights (equal marriage for instance UK), ethnic minority group rights, digital rights, environmental rights, etc.

For the purposes of this analysis, these orders of dissent derive from Baudrillard's view of capitalism as

an 'indeterminate random machine,' something comparable to a genetic social code (Poster, 2001: 141). The thesis here is that contemporary dissent against this capitalist code, in any of its manifestations, such as protest, uprising, or revolution fails, when the dissent is not of a higher logical order than that to which it is opposed. The 'Arab Spring' regime changes, for example, were (and are) motivated by and activated concerns of a specific order of dissent, an order that can change throughout the life of a protest movement. The initial Egyptian protests, for example, aimed the removal of President Hosni Mubarak and were dominated by concerns of the first order over those of the second order. The failure and consequent struggle to reform and disentangle the military control of government in Egypt is linked to the fact that the original protests promoted first order concerns over second order concerns, while third order concerns were not even in the picture. The regional impact of the 'Arab Spring' as a whole was more about second order – democracy, power, participation – and did not address the capitalist order as such. During the protests in Greece, dissent was of the second order against political corruption and the national elites, but also of the third order against global capital in the face of the IMF and regional capitalism in the face of the EU. The Occupy movement, as an abstract assemblage, communicates an ideological amalgam of the third order; however, local concrete assemblages make demands of the second order as well. Regardless, dissent at these orders has generally failed to affect material change, because they are of a lower logical order than the overarching capitalist code to which they are opposed.

In the logic of the current capitalist order, according to Baudrillard (Poster 2001), capital and the state collide to reproduce a systemic neutralization of dissent, eliminate the opportunity for a determinate reversal, and as a result render 'revolutions' meaningless at the present level of random processes of control:

> You cannot beat randomness with finality; you cannot beat programmed dispersion with *prises de conscience* or dialectical transcendence; you cannot defend against the code with political economy or "revolution." All these political weapons (including those of the first order, the ethics and metaphysics of man and nature, use value, and other liberatory referentials) have been progressively neutralized by the general system, which is of a higher order. Everything that gets inserted into the definalized space-time of the code, or tries to interfere with it, is disconnected from its own finalities, disintegrated and absorbed – this is the well-known effect of recuperation, or manipulation: cycling and recycling at each level. (p.122)

The hegemonic capitalist code simply absorbs social action and dissent of lower logical types. In this way the system itself has come to operate as or serve the function formerly attributed to the unconscious: an unreality that forms the basis of reality. Recall Margaret Thatcher's infamous, 'There is no alternative'. The capitalist code operates, according to Baudrillard, by putting an end to its own myth of origin and the reference values from which it developed. The industrial machine

> corresponds [to] the rational, referential, functional, historical consciousness. But it is the unconscious – nonreferential, transreferential, indeterminate, floating – that corresponds to the aleatory machinations of the code. Yet even the unconscious has been reinserted into the game: it long ago relinquished its own reality principle in order to become an operational simulacrum. At the exact point where its psychic principle of reality is confused with its psychoanalytic reality principle, the unconscious becomes like political economy, another simulation model. (p.121)

Baudrillard argues that current revolutions arm themselves with 'a nostalgic resurrection of the real in all its forms; in other words, with simulacra of the second order: dialectics, use value, the transparency

and the finality of production, the "liberation" of the unconscious, or of repressed meaning (of the signifier, or of the signified called desire), and so on'. For Baudrillard, all of these liberations offer, as ideal content, 'the phantoms which the system has devoured in successive revolutions and which it subtly resuscitates as revolutionary fantasies. All these liberations are just transitions toward a generalized manipulation. The revolution itself is meaningless at the present level of random processes of control' (p.121).

The technologies that enable current protest movements, for example, are themselves produced under the social logic of capitalism and its random processes of control. It is for this reason that Žižek and others are critical of the 'Netocracy' concept introduced by Alexander Bard and Jan Soderqvist: it makes the same mistake as the 'post-industrial society' and the 'information society'; 'all too many of the features of the netocratic class are sustainable only within a capitalist regime' (Žižek, 2004:192, cites Bard and Soderqvist 2002). This is because, according to Terranova (2003), the internet is rather 'a mutation that is totally immanent to late capitalism, not so much a break as an intensification, and therefore a mutation, of a widespread cultural and economic logic'. She explains that cultural flows are originating within a field that is always already capitalism, which is channeling collective labor into monetary flows and its structuration within capitalist business practices. For Terranova, Lazzarato's description of the knowledge worker as 'immaterial labor' is, therefore, a useful way to conceptualise this contemporary form of labor power, which 'is not limited to highly skilled workers but is a form of activity of every productive subject within post-industrial societies. … [I]mmaterial labor is a virtuality (an undetermined capacity) that belongs to the postindustrial productive subjectivity as a whole' (ibid.). Nevertheless, even if one calls this labor 'immaterial' in order to point to its under-determined capacity and virtuality, such labor is inevitably operating in a very material capitalist order.

Hardt and Negri (2000) enumerate three types of immaterial labor that drive the postmodernization of the global economy: 'The first is involved in an industrial production that has been informationalized and has incorporated communication technologies in a way that transforms the production process itself…Second is immaterial labor of analytical and symbolic tasks, which itself breaks down into creative and intelligent manipulations on the one hand and routine symbolic tasks on the other. Finally, a third type of immaterial labor involves the production and manipulation of affect and requires (virtual or actual) human contact, labor in the bodily mode' (2000: 293). Hardt and Negri, therefore, view affective labor as 'immaterial' and argue that the manipulation of affect is essential to its function: '[E]ven if it is corporeal... its products are intangible, a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passions… Such affective production, exchange, and communication are generally associated with human contact, but that contact can be either actual or virtual, as it is in the entertainment industry…' (p. 292). Affective labor instantiates (potentially and actually) one of the core points of potential resistance against the capitalist code. Affective labor is where individual action and agency meet collective and corporate action and behavior in the reproduction of ideologies and disciplines that both reproduce the capitalist code itself and present a vital point of potential resistance: affective labor is the nexus of the ideologically reproductive act.

Therefore, understanding notions of individual and collective agency in an intensely multimodal, hybrid-mediated contemporary world, notions that both complicate and underlie our understandings of digitality and virtuality at both theoretical and ontological levels, can enable a more effective theorisation of resistance to the capitalist code, and political action more broadly. We are now in a position to connect political resistance to 'immaterial' and affective labor, as a point of both potential ideological reproduction and what Terranova calls 'recomposition of resistance' (Athens Lecture for MIG@NET, February 2012) through an examination of the logics shared by orders of dissent and the forms of agent and agency theorized in the following sections. Table 2 presents a schematic rendering

of our argument.

Table 2: Agency, Action & Order of Dissent

Order of Dissent	Dominant 'Immaterial' Labor Process	Dominant Agency	Dominant Agent	Logic of Action
Third: Global – Post/Trans-National	**Affective**	**Distributed**	**Subject**: Assemblage, collective, technosocial ensemble	Technosocial, rhizomatic: programmatic manipulation and extension of affect through networks of motivated and intentional agents
Second: National – Political Representation	**Informational**	**Intentional**	**Agent**: Technological, programmed, determined	Serial, linear, hierarchical
First: Tribal – Social Rights & Obligations	**Symbolic**	**Motivated**	**Person**: Embodied, self-conscious, emotional (human) being	Embodied, affective, parallel, distributed

Agents and Agency

Conventionally, the concept of agency has been inextricably bound to the idea of the volitional agent, ideally defined as a rational human being characterised by willful intentionality. Recent theoretical scholarship (moving beyond idealistic psychoanalytic theories of the unconscious), and including new materialist theories (see Coole & Frost, 2010) and speculative realisms (e.g., Harman, 2011), rely on Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Latour's actor-network theory (2005), as well as others in the process philosophy tradition. Such scholarship has questioned conventional assumptions about human intentionality and sought to separate the agent, as thing which acts – the 'actant', a concept not limited to the rational human actor – from agency, as force vector of action. Agency in this sense is understood as 'the ability to make a difference, to produce effects, or even to initiate action distributed across an ontologically diverse range of actors', which are themselves understood variously as entities or forces,

as well as assemblages of those entities and forces (Bennett, 2005: 446). Jane Bennett's (2005, 2010) 'vital materialism', for example, relies in part on an emergent causality that 'places the focus on the process itself as an actant, as itself in possession of degrees of agentic capacity' (2005: 459). This position is taken as a way to counteract and correct for anthropomorphism and human exceptionalism, or 'the tendency to understate the degree to which people, animals, artifacts, technologies, and elemental forces share powers and operate in dissonant conjunction with each other' (ibid. p. 461). Where such scholars focus on the possibilities and capabilities, the emergent affects and effects, of primarily nonhuman agency, we wish to adapt some of their theoretical distinctions to the understanding of human political action in the contemporary milieu, which sees human action and agency spreading through a variety of technological instrumentalities, on the one hand, and combining in broader forces of collective agency, on the other.

More pointedly, political action remains, for the time being and despite continuing posthuman hopes, *human* action, though not all political actors are individual human agents: a wide variety of agents, or 'actants' in Latour's terminology, have political effects while not being political subjects in any conventional sense. Computer viruses and automated calling systems, political organizations and corporations, are agents that perform political actions in that their acts and behaviors address and/or affect the system of sociopolitical relations in which they exist. However, the agencies, or active forces—the ability to affect and be affected—available to such agents differ greatly. We situate the difference between human agency, on the one hand, and technological and collective agencies, on the other, in the inescapably embodied and material character of human affect and a theoretical separation of human affect and emotion from intentionality, broadly defined. This distinction owes a debt to Kenneth Burke's (2003) distinction between action and motion. For Burke, 'action' is psychologically motivated, performed by a human agent reflexively socially positioned through symbolic identification. Or in his own words,

> The dialectical relationship between Self and Culture centers in a nonsymbolic principle of individuation or rudimentary physiological identity, which becomes matched (or countered, or extended) in the full (social) sense by symbolic identifications with both personal and impersonal aspects of the Non-Self. (ibid. p.164).

The rational self, in other words, is the product of affective social identifications: consciousness, like identity, is a social (and technological) product. The social is the inherently affective and emotional foundation of (i.e., motivation for) individual action, operating through a process Burke names 'identification' and understands as the fundamental rhetorical aspect of human communication. Burke's distinction between intentional action and mechanical motion arose in response to behaviorist psychology, and he defines 'motion' in the senses of both purely physical phenomena (e.g., gravity, tides, chemotaxis) and reflexive behavioral responses. Unlike 'mere' motion, however, the capacity for 'action' is distinguished by and relies upon a symbolic system: 'A dog can bark, but he can't bark a tract on barking' (2003:141). Burke's connection of affective human agency to symbolic systems (specifically, language) is a forerunner of later sociolinguistic scholarship that solidifies the relationship between access to symbolic codes and access to sociopolitical power (e.g. Halliday, 2007).

Nevertheless, Burke's distinction between action and motion, as well as his now antiquated and limited understanding of a symbolic system, is no longer adequate in the heavily digitized and networked contemporary world—a globalized, technologized world whose motions and tides of power, actualized through both human and nonhuman agents, have drastic implications and evident effects on even the 20% of the human population living without electricity. The power of nonhuman and collective

agencies to affect the human is inescapable, and the motions of discernible nonhuman agents/actants—at times entirely composed of and effecting agency through symbolic systems—in and through the networks of our communications technologies and infrastructures do not fit neatly into Burke's simple action/motion binary. On the one hand, human beings 'have always been cyborgs' (Clark, 2003), in the sense that

> human agency [is] always already distributed in tools, microbes, minerals, and sounds, it only emerges as agentic *by way of* a distribution into the 'foreign' materialities its bearers are eager to exclude... There was never a time when human agency was anything other than an interfolding network of humanity and nonhumanity. (Bennett, 2005:463)

On the other hand, the capacities and affordances of digital communications technologies have enabled flows of power and influence, and agencies, both individual and collective, human and nonhuman, in ways and to extents that have no real historical equivalent. While the disciplinary force of ideological systems is strengthened by the massive interconnection of media and communications systems reinforcing normative expectations—Baudrillard's 'operational simulacrum'—those same technological systems are heralding the development of what Rotman (2008) describes as a 'distributed' human being (Rotman's contribution to our argument is examined in detail in the following section).

New materialist theorists and philosophers, among others, interpret and theorize these systemic technological developments by emphasizing the commonalities and problematising the differences between material human being and the agentic other of both technologies and the material world more broadly. In contrast, in understanding these agentic forces (i.e. agencies) specifically in terms of sociopolitical relations, resistance, and dissent, we focus on what continues to distinguish human agency from other forms, while retaining new materialist rejections of idealistic notions of the Cartesian *cogito* or other 'immaterial' ontological grounds. The key to this position is *affect*. Scholars and theorists of the Deleuzo-Guattarian and related schools of thought have colonized this psychological term to speak of nonhuman affect, on the one hand, and precognitive and prelinguistic human motivating forces, on the other: the general process of and ability to 'affect and be affected'.[i] While such theories are valuable and have considerable influence herein, we rely more firmly on Wetherell (2012) to understand affect in the more conventional sense of culturally conditioned emotional practices of embodied human beings. Affect, in this more conventionally psychological sense, is intimately related to human motivations, as differentiated from philosophically conventional notions of intentionality, through the inherently affective character of social identification.

Here we are relying on Burke's connection of 'action' (as opposed to motion) with motivations and intentions. But where Burke relied on a conventional notion of intentionality as a property limited to the conscious, rational human agent, we make a sharp distinction between motivation and intention. Where motivation is inherently rhetorical and affective, an inevitably embodied, emotional force grounded in symbolic social identifications, intentionality is a programmatic, goal-oriented force characterizing any agent, human or otherwise, pursuing a set of outcomes and having an influence on other agents in its world. If intentionality is a pull toward a goal or set/range of goals to be *e*ffected, motivation is an *a*ffective push, which may or may not be specifically or directly related to reasoned or intended outcomes beyond the immediate re/action.[ii] Motivation can be an impetus to action apart from consciously reasoned and understood goals, while intentionality is defined in relation to a set of goals that may be innate and/or programmed apart from any affective identification with or within a social system. This distinction effectively removes the conventional notion of consciousness from intentionality, restricting self-consciousness to motivated agents as an effect of affective social

identification. From this perspective, a virus (whether biological or technological) has intent but no motivation, whereas an affective, emotional being (human or otherwise) is motivated to the extent that it is relationally (socially) self-conscious within a symbolically mediated social system, broadly defined. In relation to specifically political action, the StuxNet virus, an AI-controlled drone, or a robo-calling system may be considered an intentional political agent, while a protestor or political representative is a motivated agent whose conscious actions are grounded in sociopolitical identifications *as well as* goals inherent to the social collectives with which the motivated agent identifies.

This distinction between motivation and intention allows a more subtle distinction between agent as actant, and agency as active force available to agents. An intentional agent (e.g., an insect, a protein, a computer program, a mediological device, an ICT) has available to it—is defined to some extent as an 'agent' by—an intentional agency: a programmatic, serial, linear, hierarchical logic of action operating directionally toward a set or range of predefined and/or nonconscious outcomes. A motivated agent (an embodied/emotional, socially identified and conscious [typically human] being) has available to it motivated agency: an affective, parallel, distributed logic of social action that can generate as well as pursue goals (can articulate and manipulate intentionality) but is rooted in rhetorical identifications discursively enabled by symbolic systems. However, intentional and motivated agents cannot be the end of the story, for the political action of any individual agent is therefore and obviously meaningless (let alone powerless) outside a collective social context in which motivations and intentions are generated, shaped, and resisted – collectives which can be classified or placed according to Baudrillard's logical orders. The distinction between intentional and motivational agency must also be applied to collective agents (as coherent groups of motivated actants) and assemblage agents (as ensembles of motivated and intentional agents) which materialize in or are effected by reterritorializing, deterritorializing, and territorializing acts of ideological reproduction (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Brighenti, 2011).

Collective, Assemblage and Distributed Agents

The single act, like the single agent, is an abstraction that can be fully accounted for (rationalized by motivated human understanding) only within an encompassing spatiotemporal context of interaction, which is always 'a crucial element in *how* humans think' (Rotman, 2008: 91). And the generation of, the carving out of context—as with the perception and conception of any object or whole, the setting of any boundary—is itself a motivated, rhetorical act. However, the effective reach (the agency) of the motivated agent is, more than ever before, extended by the instrumentalities and intentional agencies that partly define it for the very reason that individual cognition is itself a social phenomenon. Human technology, made possible by social cognition, has always been a generative constraint on human subjectivity (e.g., Leroi-Gourhan, 1964). Our networked digital tools, by expanding the possibilities of connection and interaction among both intentional and motivated agents, expand the range of influence of motivated agency (deterritorialization and reterritorialization, see Bringhetti, 2011), while also expanding the possibilities for, and strengthening the constraints (territorialization, see De Landa, 2011) of the affective, social identifications of motivated agents with intentional assemblages: both fundamentalist or 'tribal' and progressive or revolutionary causes are able to foster deeper commitments through more active and affective engagement while simultaneously broadening their reach by casting wider nets and through the 'relentless co-presencing and distribution of the psyche' (Rotman, 2008: 104).
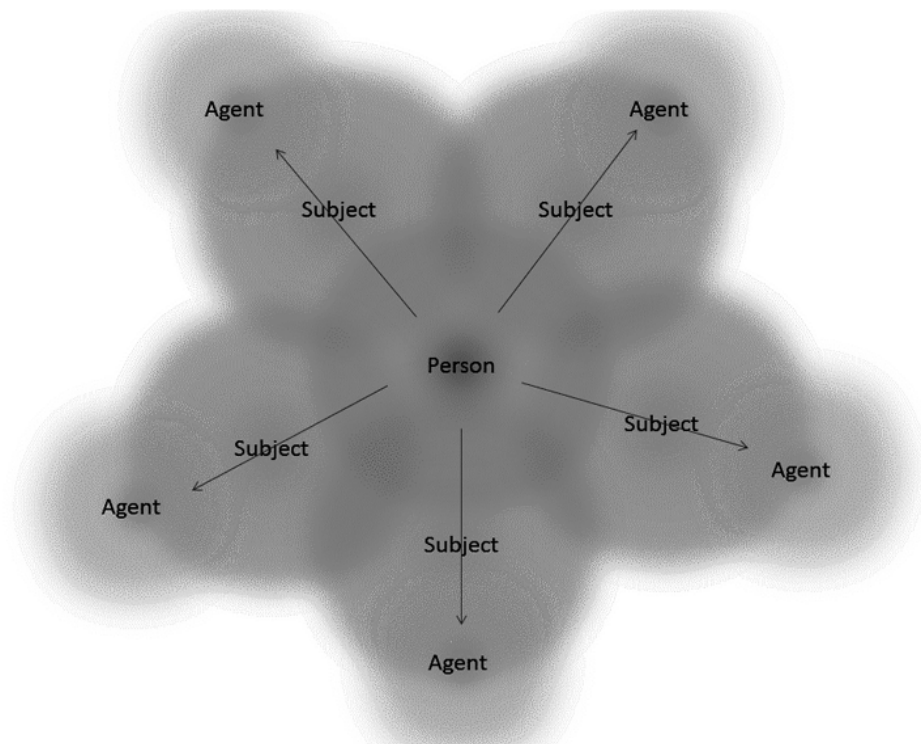
As an example, recent research regarding conflict in digital migrant networks (MIG@NET, 2012) shows that new forms of agency enabled by digital networks and social media unsettle closed and fixed 'tribal' identities that rely on religion or ethnicity. However, migrants are more inclined to 'stick' to such 'thick' identities of religion, nationality, ethnicity, and culture than agents engaged in sociopolitical networks of resistance, a finding consistent with previous research on resistance in digital networks (Karatzogianni and Robinson 2010). More specifically, broader study of resistance networks finds that active-affective structures characterise sociopolitical affinity networks, while reactive-affective structures characterise ethnoreligious groups and reactive collectives, generally (Karatzogianni and Robinson 2010). Earlier studies on the politics of cyberconflict show that enthnoreligious groups adhere to hierarchical notions of ethnicity, nationality and religion to form and transfer 'real' communities to digitally networked spaces (Karatzogianni, 2006). The reliance on nationality, ethnicity and religion to repress (or utilize) emotions such as fear, suspicion, and hatred demonstrates the operation of the politics of emotion and affect in digital cultures (Karatzogianni and Kuntsman, 2012).[iii] The migrant, meanwhile, mixes and matches her loyalties and tests the primacy of one identity, identification and subjectivity (home country, ethnicity) against others (host country(s), new social affiliations), depending on the immediate social context and the fear and uncertainty that needs to be exorcised at any given time in the diverse, hybrid media environments in which she lives. Research into religious practices in digital networks (MIG@NET 2012) reinforces the idea that agency, and especially communicative agency, is extremely contingent and volatile and is used by migrants to defend older loyalties or new religious revivals, old and new friends and enemies, in a constant negotiation of many different—often dissonant—worlds (home country, host country, online and offline) at the same time, and to be loved, appreciated, and safe in each of them.

The evolving forms of agency available to individual actors negotiating such identities are directly afforded by networked communications technologies and social media (e.g., Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2012; Leurs, 2012; Madianou & Miller, 2012), but they are not (and cannot be) solely technological: these novel agentic forces are highly political/intentional and affective/motivated. Emotions, affect, and technologies get negotiated in rapid rhythms against the old constants of religion, nationality, ethnicity, generation and public life, all of which digital networks make somewhat ephemeral and far more contingent than in the past.

Given the discursive character of social identification, to which we alluded above in relation to Burke, and the subjectivities (Smith, 1988) such symbolic and affective identifications make possible, we are now in a position to better understand the individual, motivated agent's process of negotiation among the various collectives and assemblages with which she identifies. Rotman (2008) has provided a useful threefold model of what we are referring to as the motivated agent. At the center is a physical Person[iv] – a body/brain, an affective and affected mind, an emotional body – that physically inter/acts in and with the world. But this Person is both enabled and constrained by discursively instantiated social and cultural formations that generate specific Subjects through which the Person interacts with the world and others in it. As all inter/action is necessarily constrained by such social formations (e.g. Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblages and machines), generated by and evolved in symbol systems (e.g., language), all interaction between Persons, all representation and interpretation, all affective-discursive practice (see Wetherell, 2012) must take place through the mediation of a discursively generated Subject. Each Person may be constituted by a multitude of such Subjects, some compatible and overlapping, some inconsistent and conflicting, with the contingent of available Subjects determined by access to various discourses (or ideologies, rhetorics, cultures, disciplines, paradigms, frames, etc.). Further, each Subject actively constitutes an Agent that is able to act—and only able to act—within the bounds of the specific symbolic/discursive subjectivity. The Person's agency in any given situation is both enabled and constrained by the affective-discursive (social and cultural) practices that constitute the Person as

subject. In other words, a P̲erson can only act as an A̲gent (only *has agency*) through a socially and discursively constituted S̲ubject. This anti-essentialist P̲erson-S̲ubject-A̲gent model allows us to differentiate (without requiring the analytical separation of) the 'embodied' individual from the discursively generated subjectivities that constitute her multifarious (social) identities, as well as from the agencies (options for and constraints on action) that each of those identities or subject positions carries by virtue of its specific, relational, social positioning. P̲ersons are affective, S̲ubjects are constrained by affective-discursive practices, and A̲gents are bound to and within the constraints of discursive subjectivities.
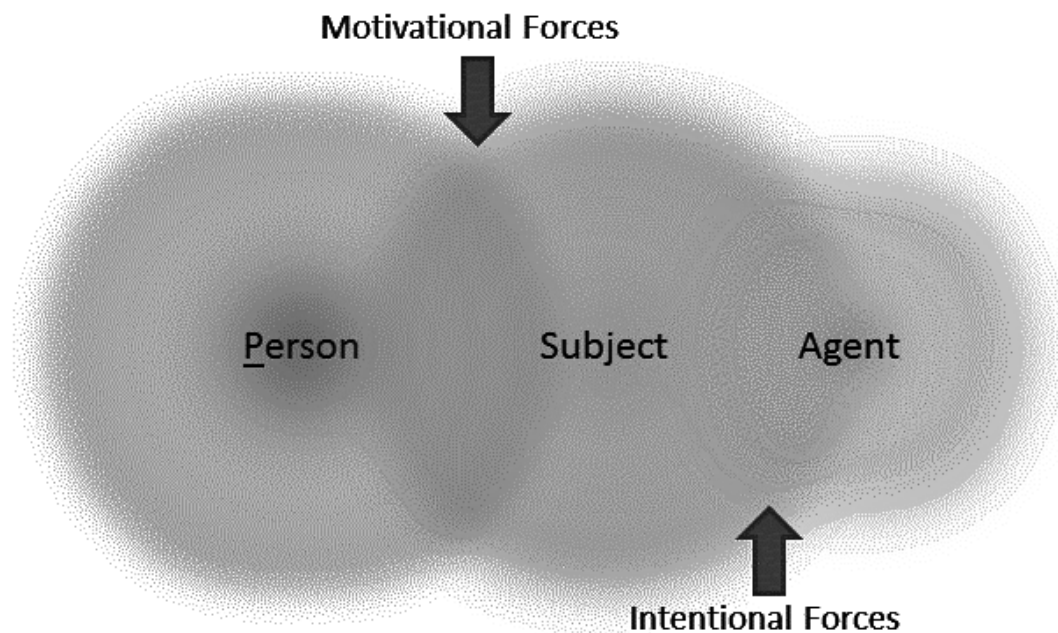
Figure 1. The Motivated Agent/Actant: P̲erson-S̲ubject-A̲gent

Rotman's model (2008), therefore, directly binds individual agency, as the capacity for action, to affective-discursive ideological practices. But subjectivity does not arise solely or directly from a formal matrix of ideology(s). The real target of the P̲erson-S̲ubject-A̲gent model for Rotman is the theorization of novel forms of technologically mediated agency. He argues that 'any act of self-enunciation is medium-specific' (p. xxxiii). From this perspective, the technological instrumentalities through which we effect the affective-discursive practices motivating and shaping our actions in the world are themselves S̲ubject-forming assemblages. Rotman's notion of 'distributed' agency examines the potentialities of the dense web of shifting S̲ubject-A̲gent forces available to an individual P̲erson as an evolving mediological extension of the technosocial self. Technologies, especially communication technologies, are, from this perspective, subject-forming agentic forces, no single one of which is or

can be wholly constitutive of the individual (motivated or intentional) agent's power to act, just as no single social identification can ever be (except in the most extreme circumstances) fully representative of the self, which is constituted, precisely, by the nexus of discursive and technological <u>S</u>ubjects available to the embodied <u>P</u>erson.[v] The theorization of agent, agency, and action in the contemporary world, therefore, involves the examination of the points of contact between <u>P</u>erson and <u>S</u>ubject, on the one hand, and the actional territories instantiated at the intersection of <u>S</u>ubject and <u>A</u>gent, on the other. When combined with the distinction between intention and motivation, motivational forces can be seen as those that bind <u>P</u>erson to <u>S</u>ubject, while intentional forces can be understood as those binding <u>A</u>gent to <u>S</u>ubject. The motivated agent is anchored in an embodied, affective <u>P</u>erson; the intentional agent may or may not have a consistent physical form beyond a material pattern of energy (e.g., a computer program). Both, however, are subject to the generative constraints of discursive (i.e., symbolic) subjectivities instantiated in ideological and technological (technosocial) assemblages. Returning explicitly to the main thrust of the current argument, the theorization of political action must address the relationship between the motivated agent (as <u>P</u>erson-<u>S</u>ubject) and the assemblage and/or collective agent (as <u>S</u>ubject-<u>A</u>gent).

Figure 2: Motivational and Intentional Forces

Rotman's model, therefore, provides us with a point of intersection between the individual and the social, the micro and the macro, by reminding us that just as we can understand a collective as a singular whole, we can recognize an individual—even a human individual—to be an assemblage of agents and forces: *all* wholes are ultimately collective, just as all action is ultimately interaction. An examination of this commonplace in the terms of the current argument allows us to understand agents as collectives enabled (*act*ualized by) agencies, which are in turn understood as interacting forces of motivations and intentions inherent in the given situation. As pointed out above, we can, for example, make a distinction between collective and assemblage agents wherein collectives are understood to be predominantly aggregations of motivated agents, and therefore more tightly bound to and by motivated

agencies. The notion of collective agents, therefore, points to the 'thick identities' and affective/motivational bonds of religion, nationality, ethnicity, and culture, while the concept of an assemblage agent—encompassing the category of the collective—reflects the programmatic intentionality of an ensemble of motivated and intentional agents, such as a corporation, a sports team, or less coherent rhizomatic assemblages of the Deleuzo-Guattarian variety. The cohesion of collective agents is more tightly bound to affective motivations, while assemblage agents are more intentional in being ontologically driven toward (constituted by) particular goals or outcomes. As ensembles of motivated and intentional agents, assemblage and collective agents are inherently distributed in Rotman's sense, being themselves intentional subject-constituting agents programmatically generating, extending, and manipulating affective motivations through a variety of technological instrumentalities while, by definition, having no inherent motivations of their own because no individual embodied Person anchors such ensembles as 'wholes', 'singularities', or individual agents. Assemblage agents are, in function and effect, subjectivities.

Deleuze and Guattari similarly view the subject as a collective assemblage of enunciation, with subjectification being one such assemblage, which 'designates a formalization of expression or regime of signs rather than a condition internal to language' (1987: 30). In their understanding (using, of course, somewhat different technical definitions of these terms, particularly in the sense that for Deleuze and Guattari, 'assemblage' is a *process*, more verb than noun) assemblages are only machinic assemblages of desire and collective assemblages of enunciation (ibid. 22). Resonating with Burke, Baudrillard, Foucault, and others, they understand subjectification as a regime of signs, 'an organization of power that is already fully functioning in the economy, rather than superposing itself upon contents or relations between contents determined as real in the last instance. *Capital is a point of subjectification* par excellence' (ibid., italics added). Assemblages, according to Deleuze and Guattari, are passional compositions of desire. An assemblage cannot exist without the desires that constitute it as much as it constitutes them, while passions are effectuations of desire that differ according to assemblage. Assemblages mobilize passions of different orders. Deleuze and Guattari put it this way:

> This is the passional regime of feeling and its resistances, a direction (*sens*, also 'meaning') to form and its developments, an economy of force and its displacements, an entire gravity. But the regime of the war machine is on the contrary that of *affects*, which relate only to the moving body in itself, to speeds and compositions of speed among elements. Affect is the active discharge of emotion... Affects are projectiles just like weapons... (ibid. 399-400)

The Deleuzo-Guattarian reliance on desire is seen by Hansen (2000) as problematic, because it discounts 'technical autonomy in all forms, and, ultimately, [perpetuates] technesis through a global subordination of technology to a mathematically and technically embodied semiotics of the social' (p. 186). Nevertheless, Hansen appreciates the Deleuzo-Guattarian take as a deployment of

> the notion of machinic internalization as the foundation for a model of molecular agency that would appear to be capable (on initial glance at least) of addressing technology's impact on human experience in a nonreductive fashion… [As] the transformational movement of subjective desire, becomings [i.e., assemblage processes] forge machinic connections between molecular singularities that entirely bypass the molar threshold of perception/representation… [B]y forging rhythmic connections between those assemblages of singularities we call human beings and the material real, becomings hold out the promise for a robust account of technology's experiential impact (ibid. 187).

Hansen looks at this work as tracing the practical connections immediately generated by the human

incorporation of technology's inhuman rhythms.

In a continuation of this tradition, DeLanda (2011) offers certain qualifications on assemblage. First, the identity of an assemblage is not only embodied in its materiality but also expressed by it (p.200). Assemblage reflects an individual singularity as the product of a historical process: 'the process that brought its components together for the first time as well as the process that maintains that the identity of an assemblage is always contingent and it is not guaranteed by the existence of a necessary set of properties constituting an unchanging essence' (p.185). Secondly, DeLanda argues that an ontological commitment must be built into the definition of the term 'assemblage' because these emergent wholes are defined, not only by their properties, but also by their tendencies and capacities—or in our terms, their intentional agency. He explains that tendencies make the properties of a whole vary, sometimes even changing its identity, while capacities make wholes exhibit aspects of their identity that were previously hidden. The term he introduces, 'structure of possibility of space', resonating with Kenneth Burke's idiosyncratic concept of 'entelechy', explains how tendencies and capacities can be real even when they are not actual. In relation to the digital, this is quite similar to the 'revolutionary virtual' devised to denote the plane of consistency where the affective potentiality for change is materialized: 'When the affective structures, residing at the interface between the actual and the digital virtual, enable revolutionary moments, this is an actualization of the Deleuzian virtual – the virtual full of potentialities' (Karatzogianni 2012). Thus, in terms of the current argument, Rotman's distributed agency is understood here as the tangible materialization of the rhizomatic self, with intense technological extensions in the interfaces between human and computer, human and society, society(s) and culture(s).

The problematic aspect of DeLanda's theory of assemblage is that he seems to distinguish between the material and the expressive (between matter-energy and information) since he finds it relevant to discuss 'simulations as emergent wholes composed of information existing above the computer hardware that provides their material and energetic substratum' (p.201). DeLanda hopes to avoid the danger of making universal singularities into transcendent entities, entities existing independently of the material world, by adopting the concept of the 'diagram' to denote different processes sharing some of the same singularities: 'In these terms, the isomorphism between models and what they model can be explained as co-actualization of the same diagram, or of different but overlapping diagrams… by always treating diagrams as immanent to matter, energy, and information: while the objective existence of diagrams may not depend on any particular material, energetic, or informational mechanism, it does depend on the actual existence of some sort of mechanism or another' (ibid.202). This is nevertheless deeply problematic; this stubborn distinction between the material and the expressive does not avoid the danger of making universal singularities into transcendent entities, entities existing independently of the material world, but reifies conceptualised fractal patterns.

Conclusion

A distinction between material and immaterial becomes unnecessary when the distinction between motivation and intention is applied to the different orders of agents and agencies. We can understand assemblage processes as intentional agents that programmatically generate and manipulate 'desire', understood as the affective (inherently embodied and material) motivational forces binding Person to

Subject, while also generating and manipulating instrumentalities (intentional agents) binding Subject to Agent. The distinction between motivation and intention would also seem to mitigate Hansen's concerns about Deleuze and Guattari's over-reliance on 'desire' in the theorization of technology since assemblage agents are understood not to have affect of their own (in the sense of motivating human emotion) but to be parasitic upon motivational agencies which they intentionally manipulate. To understand a specific technology as an intentional agent, on the other hand, is understand it as an Agent (in Rotman's sense) generatively constrained by the Subject-constituting assemblage, both of which are intentional but, by definition, have no motivations of their own. To take a relevant example, corporations are not people; they are made of people, among many other things. They are intentional, but not motivated, agents.[vi]

In terms of political action and resistance, then, the distinction between motivation and intention in relation to human, technological, and collective/assemblage agents points towards the examination of affective-discursive identifications as agencies that push political agents into virtual 'possibility spaces' of action toward particular sets of goals. Assemblages can be understood as agents in their own right, without giving up (as with Foucault) or undermining (as with the new materialists) the categorical difference of the self-conscious and self-determining motivated human agent. We can understand the motivated agent as self-determining because, as a Person defined by a nexus of overlapping and interacting Subjects, the motivated agent has the capacity to choose from among the range of assemblages available to her. Self-conscious human beings, in other words, can choose not only their actions, but the guiding (motivating) discourses that shape those actions. This claim does not require downplaying or ignoring the disciplinary power of social structures. The ability and willingness to choose one's guiding discourses, as opposed to the capacity, are themselves socially and politically constrained. Access to discourses is access to power (Halliday 2007). Constraints of access are political; constraints of willingness are social. Social, fundamentally emotional and affective identifications are discursive, symbolic constraints upon identity (Burke 1989). While emotion is itself socially and culturally (discursively) constrained to a significant degree (Wierzbicka 1999, Kövecses 2003, Levinson 2003), the capacity to choose our guiding discourses in response to affective social reactions is the inherent qualitative difference of the motivated human agent in contrast to the technological and/or assemblage intentional agent. A motivated agent has (goal-directed) intentionality, but those intentions are *motivated* by largely pre-conscious and often pre-rational, embodied, affective social identifications and constraints that can be potentially acknowledged and accepted or resisted.
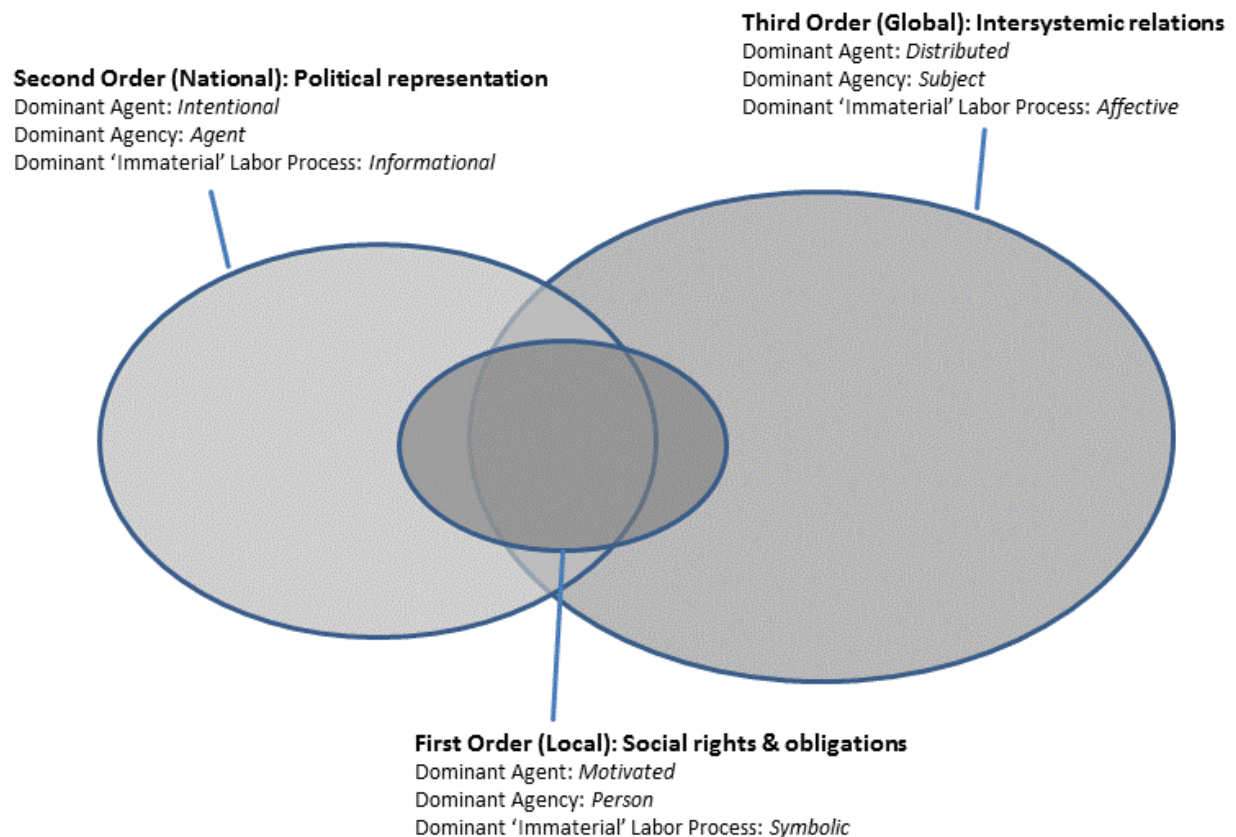
The view of agency, intentionality, and materiality described thus far, is particularly close to the Sartre of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1976). Although the nano-detail of Sartre's philosophy is not our concern here and his Cartesian assumptions notwithstanding, he does have an important contribution to make to our analysis. Materiality, praxis, and the Sartrean notion of the practico-inert, point to a subject that cannot be collapsed into an inert totality or identity. His realist materialism is 'the thought of an individual who is situated in the world, penetrated by every cosmic force, and treating the material universe as something which gradually reveals itself through a "situated" *praxis*' (ibid.29, italics in the original). The Sartrean quest is about comprehending the materiality of *praxis* and its relation to other forms of materiality (ibid. 79). Relations between man and matter produce the domination of man by matter, through the praxis of Others, and through his own praxis as Other (ibid. 153). But contrary to Hegel, Sartre sees matter as a mediation between individuals (ibid. 113).

Sartre's concept of seriality can be employed to show how individuals – albeit as series of Subjects/subjectivities (centered on the nexus of a Person) serially extending through Agent-capacities – relate to classes and modes of production, and by extension how they resist these relationships. In fact, Iris Marion Young (1994) in *Gender as Seriality* uses Sartrean seriality to solve the problem of

how to conceptualise women not as an essential category. Matching this understanding with a schematic typology of agency – the dominant agent and agency, process and logical type – to the order of dissent as shown in Table 2 above allows these to be viewed as series of fused groups in agency and resistance. Ahrne (1990) argues that in Sartre's social philosophy there is a dialectical movement between seriality in the practico-inert field and the 'fused group': 'In this version, the constitution of a fused group is a dramatic event which happens when people in series suddenly face a common threat that abolishes their being before and after each other… However, after some time the fused group will be dissolved into a new seriality, often in the form of an organization' (ibid. 82).[vii] This is where the seriality/parallelism could be a future direction for research, especially in relation to Rotman's 'Going Parallel' (2000) and Bringhetti's (2011) views on territoriality.

We can, therefore, describe agency not only in individuals but also in groups in which overlaps occur between series or serial collectives going though fused-group transformations as in the figure below:

Figure 3. Orders of Political Dissent

Second Order (National): Political representation
Dominant Agent: *Intentional*
Dominant Agency: *Agent*
Dominant 'Immaterial' Labor Process: *Informational*

Third Order (Global): Intersystemic relations
Dominant Agent: *Distributed*
Dominant Agency: *Subject*
Dominant 'Immaterial' Labor Process: *Affective*

First Order (Local): Social rights & obligations
Dominant Agent: *Motivated*
Dominant Agency: *Person*
Dominant 'Immaterial' Labor Process: *Symbolic*

It is in this way that affective labor, not as 'immaterial' but as distinctly *material* technosocial practice, constitutes the point of potentiality for both ideological reproduction and resistance. Motivated action is constantly negotiated among often dissonant and competing assemblage and collective agents and agencies, some inescapably visceral (e.g., the necessity of and available options for keeping oneself and

one's family fed, clothed, and sheltered) and intensely disciplining (e.g., normative social pressures of 'thick', 'tribal' identities), others more ephemeral (e.g., generalized desire of consumerist society; ethical and moral inclinations). Affective labor materializes at the nexus of P̲erson and S̲ubject, a point of potentiality where S̲ubject-forming assemblages and motivational and intentional forces converge to instantiate choices of action (or inertia) actualized by the A̲gent. Ideological reproduction and resistance, therefore, can be understood as motivated choice within a 'possibility space' of constantly shifting generative constraints on affective labor actualized through the distributed agency of intentional instrumentalities including, importantly, the communications technologies that afford the generation, extension, and reproduction of those spaces within the overarching, globally systemic, capitalist code.

To conclude, such a conceptualization explains how the capitalist code subjectivizes, at a certain order (Local, National, Global), a certain type of agent (Motivated, Intentional, Distributed) enabled by particular form of agency (Human, Technological, Assemblage) that mobilizes a dominant labor process (Symbolic, Informational, Affective) with a specific logic (Affective, Hierarchical, Rhizomatic). This theorization can help specify what occurs when we witness resistance movements, dissident individuals, organizations, and agencies communicating their opposition and alternative conceptions and practices of modes of production to those of capitalism. The modes of being in the world and the solidarities projected when these circles overlap – in spite of and despite how these are currently repressed and fought under the state or neoliberal democratic society signifiers and their sociopolitical logics. The overlapping fields where new zones and new forms of agency can be activated or reactivated are the critical interfaces where the remoulding of the material order through revolutionary virtual spaces might be indeed possible.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

[i]   See Wetherell (2012) for a critique of this school of thought and a thorough, multidisciplinary examination and explication of contemporary theories of affect and emotion.

[ii]   This position shares some similarities with Cooren's (2010) metaphor of ventriloquism, in which discursive ideological assemblages are described as speaking through individual persons and generating pre-locutionary forces specifically described as motivational. Cooren's work is a valuable exposition on discourse and agency, but we disagree with his ontological arguments concerning the possible manifestations of the actant and the character and function of reification processes.

[iii]   These affective rhetorical processes are prefigured in Burke's theories of identification and scapegoating.

[iv] The Person-Subject-Agent terminology is effective and useful thanks to its simplicity and recognizability. However, these terms are being used in very specific ways that should be differentiated from their conventional usages. Therefore, throughout the remainder of this paper, Rotman's technical terms (Person, Subject, and Agent) will be distinguished from the more general and conventional terms (person, subject, and agent) which they allude to but do not coincide with.

[v] Rotman's (2008) argument is more specific than ours in the sense that his understanding of the Subject focuses on forms of technological agency delimited by 1) physical, gestural communication, 2) oral language, 3) written/alphabetic language, and 4) the speculative theorization of an evolving post-linguistic technologically mediated (networked, parallel, distributed) communication in which the fundamental capacities of gestural and oral communication are gradually being reasserted over the dominance of linear text. The implications of his argument concerning the concept of the technosocial self, however, (the distributed agency afforded by communications technologies) are an important component of the current argument.

[vi] The moral and ethical implications of this distinction (as well as the political and legal implications that follow) would seem to be both relatively obvious and rich and remain to be explored in detail in subsequent work.

[vii] The distinction between serial and parallel is also a fundamental component of Rotman's (2008) argument informing the theorization of subjectivity and distributed agency.