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**From the Selected Works of Athina Karatzogianni**

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

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

*Michael Schandorf & Athina Karatzogianni*

### **Rethinking Agency in International Relations**

In the summer of 2013, a special issue of *Millennium* on the ‘New Materialist Turn in International Relations’ brought together contributions drawing from actor-network theory, sociology, and historical materialism, among others (Srincek, Fotou, Arghand, 2013). Therein, William Connolly describes ‘new materialism’ as

the most common name given to a series of movements in several fields that criticize anthropocentrism, rethink subjectivity by playing up the role of inhuman forces within the human, emphasize the self-organizing powers of several nonhuman processes, explore dissonant relations between those processes and cultural practice, rethink the sources of ethics, and comment on the need to fold a planetary dimension more actively and regularly into studies of global, interstate and state politics. (Connolly, 2013: 399)

Central to this project is grappling with a conceptualization of agency, particularly, as Diana Coole argues, to better understand and account for ‘how agentic capacities are ... distributed across animate, and perhaps inanimate, entities’ (Coole, 2013: 451). New materialist perspectives force us to think far more broadly about the ontological underpinnings of, and the impact of technosocial transformations on agency, as well as human control in complex adaptive systems in the diverse field of International Relations (Cudworth and Hobden, 2013: 430-450). Indicative subjects include: the role of actor-network theory in challenging and expanding the realm of politics and political expertise and practice (Barry, 2013: 413-421); the configuration of the body into an identifiable assemblage of information (Marlin-Bennett, 2013: 601-622); the agentic capacities of material objects, such as military drones, and the need to re-centre related ontological and ethico-political concerns (Holmqvist, 2013: 535-552); and the call for a critical assemblage in the midst of large material and ideological assemblages. The latter is marked by what Connolly describes as the ‘sharp, disjointed edges and loose joints between the heterogeneous human and nonhuman processes composing them’ (Connolly, 2013: 412).

The impact of the technosocial is such that this ‘New Materialist Turn’ inevitably engages in contemporary political contentions and resistance movements by producing a new idiom with which to understand the globally distributed and locally

diverse calls for democracy, reform, or radical alternatives to globalized neoliberal capitalism. Key issues with regard to the technosocial include

- 1) the decentralization of the political accompanied by increased demands from the margins and periphery of the world system, as well as those excluded from its benefits;
- 2) the proliferation of state and corporate networks permeating the private and the public spheres indiscriminately and posing serious ethical questions about individual privacy and ubiquitous surveillance; and
- 3) the conflict and deliberations occurring in a global digital public sphere, where ethico-political values and ideologies are debated in relation to global events in millions of posts, links, and likes, the fragmented discourses of the hybrid-mediated public sphere.

The traditional International Relations paradigm and its closely related political sociologies are considerably challenged by these developments, a situation which Chris Brown has recognized as the a critical tension between the modern practice 'wisdom' turn and the putative normative Aristotelian moment in International Relations theory (Brown, 2013: 439-456). Nevertheless, and as *Millennium's* new materialist contributors emphasize, modernist demands for power, participation, and democracy continue to shape the realities of the contemporary world despite its 'posthuman' and digital-networked character (Karatzogianni, 2006).

Concomitantly, in media and communication studies, the highly conventional instrumentalization of these technosocial assemblages—an instrumentalization myopically defended as a bulwark against 'technological determinism'—obscures the recognition of the nonhuman and the technological as active sociopolitical agents in their own right. On the other hand, while posthumanist and new materialist approaches share our desire to understand and account for nonhuman or suprahuman agents and agencies, they can err on the side of over-generalization by flattening all kinds of action and actors into a single, broad form of agency as the power to affect and be affected, 'the ability to make a difference, to produce effects, or even to initiate action distributed across an ontologically diverse range of actors' (Bennett, 2005: 446).

Despite Coole's contention that new materialist perspectives resist 'ontologizing agency as such, that is, fixing it in or as a distinctive type of being, especially in as much as this is defined as human or synonymous with (self-)consciousness or rationality' (2013: 453), in practice what many seem to do is simply attribute agency to a higher-order actor: the system or the assemblage. This is certainly a broader conceptualization of actor and agency than the traditional locating of the power to act meaningfully in the rational individual or its proxy, the 'state', but it can also be seen as simply another form of structuration that may only make the problem of analyzing

political landscapes and interactions more complicated without providing tools for dealing with that ensuing complexity. Where traditional theories of International Relations draw a firm border around the complex system that is the state, thereby reducing out complexity to an idealistic simplicity in an unrealistic realism, posthuman and new materialist approaches rethink the idea of how such borders are drawn and how actors and agents are defined.

The emphasis in much of the present volume that any given actor (even the individual human being) is a nexus of interacting and nested systems—or, in other posthumanist approaches, a multifarious assemblage of heterogeneous components—is a step forward for understanding the complexities of the sociopolitical world. But without a clear means for drawing at least contingent borders around even ‘open’ systems and subsystems, the problems of analysis and interpretation can become impossibly vague with little hope of resolution.

Drawing from process philosophies and affect theory, as well as new materialist perspectives, however, we would approach this problem as one of relations among process and form: nothing is ever truly ‘immaterial’, and thought itself is a very material process, whether understood in terms of ‘computation’ or of ‘affect’. While ICTs provide a material substrate for the transmission of affect, such technologies are not simply inert and passive mediators of ‘immaterial’ interactions among active agents at various levels of abstraction. The sociotechnological systems through which collective action is enacted can themselves be understood to act in and on—to affect—the situations to which they contribute. Sociotechnological apparatus are agentic systems, active assemblages that affect and are affected by political relations and the exercise and redistributions of power. Therefore, accounting for the agentic capacity of technology, particularly ICTs in social and political activity, becomes a vital task.

Our encounter between new materialist theory and assemblage theory, however, draws novel distinctions among forms of agency and types of agents rather than along conventional binaries such as matter and information, human and non-human, organic and inorganic, or even hierarchical and rhizomatic. Using this nuanced approach to agency, we will discuss how this framework can be employed to understand political agency in contemporary resistance movements, enabled, on the one hand, by an array of conventionally recognized affective, ideological, and discursive forces, and on the other, by access to novel and dynamic networked digital technologies that enable the glocalization of local conflicts, as well as associations and identifications unencumbered by geopolitical settings.

We develop our argument by reorienting the discussion from a focus on the agent—at whatever level of abstraction—to the forces that bind systems of agency together and move them to act. We offer an approach to these issues in three parts. The first relies on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), DeLanda (2006, 2011) and Kenneth Burke (1969a,

1969b, 2003) to discuss the interrelated concepts of actors, agency, and assemblage. In doing so, we wish to demarcate what continues to distinguish human agency from other forms while rejecting ‘immaterial’ ontological grounds and conventional idealistic and dualistic notions of intentionality. This requires an emphasis on DeLanda’s contention that the assemblage as an actor is not only embodied in the interaction of its material components, but also expressed by the material configuration of those components. In the second part, we differentiate between intentionality and desire. This distinction enables a further elucidation of agency in processes of assemblage, or Deleuzian affective structures of desire, in order to better conceptualize posthuman agency in the distributed assemblages of the contemporary technosocial realm. A critical distinction between motivation and intention drawn from Kenneth Burke’s (1969a, 1969b, 2003) theory of symbolic action, then enables the examination of affective-discursive identifications as agencies that push motivated political agents toward particular sets of goals understood as virtual possibility spaces of action. In the final section, we adapt Brian Rotman’s (2008) Person-Subject-Agent model to further support a theorization of contemporary political action, which is able to address the relationships among the motivated actor (as Person-Subject) and the intentional actor (as Subject-Agent). The technosocially distributed actor is thereby understood as a materially embodied Agent, generatively constrained by Subject-constituting assemblages. Lastly, we provide examples of how this new theorization of agency can be applied to contemporary orders dissent.

### **Assemblage Agency: More Human than Human**

Deleuze and Guattari, central figures in the new materialist turn, view the subject as *a collective assemblage of enunciation*. Capitalist subjectification names as an example one such assemblage, which, like all others, ‘designates a formalization of expression or regime of signs rather than a condition internal to language’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:30). In their formulation, an assemblage is a subjectivizing whole whose properties emerge from interactions among its components, bound together by desire, as well as in interaction (hence, ‘enunciation’) with other assemblages. Resonating with Jean Baudrillard, Kenneth Burke, Michel Foucault, and others, Deleuze and Guattari understand subjectification as a largely symbolic or discursive ‘organization of power that is already fully functioning in the economy [for example], 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.: 30, italics added). Assemblages, then, 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 with each assemblage. Assemblages mobilize passions of different orders. Thus the assemblage ‘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’ (ibid.: 399-400).

Even for some posthumanist thinkers, the Deleuzo-Guattarian reliance on desire is seen as problematic, because it discounts ‘technical autonomy in all forms’, subordinating nonhuman (or not solely human) technological agency to a ‘mathematically and technically embodied semiotics of the social’ (Hansen, 2000: 186). In contrast, Hansen argues for the explicit attribution of agentic power to the processes and interactions of assemblages. Nevertheless, Hansen appreciates the Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage as a model of agency ‘that would appear to be capable (on initial glance at least) of addressing technology’s impact on human experience in a nonreductive fashion’ (ibid.: 187). The positing of forces of desire that embody and bind together the assemblage, while also providing its vector of action, provides a theoretical workaround that Hansen recognizes as capable of bypassing the conventional model of human intentionality, based as it is upon individual phenomenological perception and representation: ‘[B]y forging rhythmic connections between those assemblages of singularities we call human beings and the material real, becomings [i.e., *passional compositions of desire*] hold out the promise for a robust account of technology’s experiential impact’ (ibid.).

This idea of freedom within constraint is analogous to complexity theorist Edgar Morin’s (1992) discussion of the restrictions complex adaptive systems place on their elements as emergent properties of the systems themselves. Hence, according to Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden, ‘systems, as well as being more than the sum of the parts, are also “less” in the sense that they remove some of the freedom of action of the component parts in the way of constraints’ (Cudworth and Hobden, 2013: 435). If we can understand assemblages as complex adaptive systems (and *vice versa*) in which the emergent properties of the system define and enable the potential actions of the system within the constraints inherent in and on those properties, we can begin to see a topological structure in what DeLanda (2006, 2011) refers to as a *possibility space* – a space of potential action. This space is temporally dynamic, constrained by a set of agentic forces (i.e., agencies) understood by DeLanda as tendencies and capacities of the assemblage. For DeLanda, assemblage theory provides a powerful tool to address the shortcomings of conventional sociological theories of social action trapped in conventional binaries: ‘to give a complete explanation of a social process taking place at a given scale, we need to elucidate not only the micro-macro mechanisms, those behind the emergence of the whole, but also the macro-micro mechanisms through which the whole provides its component parts with *constraints* and *resources*, placing limitations on what they can do while enabling novel performance’ (2006: 34).

While new materialist perspectives, following actor-network theory, tend to emphasize nonhuman technological and material agents and agencies, making the affinity with complexity and systems theory relatively easy to understand, the Deleuzo-Guattarian tradition’s understanding of assemblages as complexes of desire is more commonly related to the discursive, ideological, and subjectivizing formations of critical and cultural theory. DeLanda’s account of assemblage theory is an attempt to integrate these different orientations. For DeLanda, the assemblage’s ‘space of possibilities’ is a *virtual* space, understood in the Deleuzian tradition through a variety of terms including *diagram*, *multiplicity* and *manifold* (the latter two

being equivalent in French). Hence, the Deleuzean virtual is shown to have affinities not only with the potentialities of mathematical *phase spaces* of complexity theory, but also with the digital-technological virtual of information spaces. However, new and digital media theorists, network theorists, posthuman theorists, and even many new materialist theorists, in drawing on these affinities, have had the disturbing (not to say infuriating) tendency to equate the ‘virtual’ with the ‘immaterial’—as if digital technologies could somehow be separated from their physical substrates or the equivalence of matter and energy did not make such a position a ridiculous Cartesian anachronism.

Marlin-Bennett urges us ‘to resist this temptation and to consider the body as simultaneously material and informational: all the material is also information; information maybe also be material’ (2013: 610-611). We argue, more pointedly, that information *cannot but be material*. Geneologically, this evokes a variety of earlier theoretical positions, including that of Sartre in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1976). Sartre’s 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, original italics). Importantly, inescapably material human praxis is inescapably material precisely because it is bound to material relations, which already pre-encompass the technosocial.

### **Assembling the Assemblage: Intention and Motivation**

In order to better understand contemporary political action and resistance in a hybrid-mediated and networked world, we recognize a need to differentiate agentic structures in novel terms that disrupt the conventional theoretical binaries in which theories of action and agency seem to be trapped, such as material/immaterial. But novel terminologies, to be most effective, must be cultivated from familiar ground. We begin, therefore, with Kenneth Burke’s Aristotelian distinction between action and motion: where the ‘act’ requires a conventionally intentional agent (an actor who consciously acts), ‘motion’ is the natural play of purely material (or, for Burke, nonconscious, animalistic) forces (2003: 141). But where Burke tends to rely on a conventional notion of intentionality and its implied im/material distinction as a property limited to the conscious, rational human agent, we make a sharp distinction between intention and motivation that allows us to also address nonhuman agents and agencies. However, as we will see, this distinction does not (re)constitute a binary opposition.

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

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

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

This distinction between affective motivation and goal-oriented or entelechial intention effectively removes the conventional notion of consciousness from intentionality, restricting self-consciousness to motivated agents as an effect of affective social identification. From this perspective, a virus (whether biological or technological) has intent but no motivation, whereas an affective, emotional being (human or otherwise) is understood as motivated to the extent that it is relationally (socially) self-conscious within a symbolically mediated social system, broadly defined. In relation to specifically political action, the StuxNet virus, an AI-controlled drone, a robo-calling system, or an automated network surveillance system can be considered an intentional political agent, while a protestor, a political representative, or even a police officer is a motivated agent whose conscious actions are grounded in sociopolitical identifications *as well as* goals inherent to the social collectives with which the motivated agent identifies or is identified (viz. Burke's, 1969b, theory of rhetorical identification).

The affective, social, and symbolic identification that is central to Burke's rhetorical theory we take to be analogous to the central place of 'desire' and 'passion' for Deleuze and Guattari as forces binding assemblages together. Recall the description of assemblages as *passional compositions of desire*: according to Deleuze and Guattari, desires constitute the assemblage as much as it constitutes them, while



passions are effectuations of desire. Thus, the assemblage ‘is the passionate regime of feeling... and its resistances’ (1987: 400). In our account, however, this represents a confusion based on a conventional notion of intentionality. When intention is distinguished from motivation, *desire* is understood as intention and *passion* as motivation. In this sense, then, *desires* (as intentional forces) are effectuations of *passions* (as motivational forces). This theoretical reversal of Deleuze and Guattari’s desire and passion, as applied to the technosocial, would seem to directly address Hansen’s limited critique of assemblage theory as discounting technological agency. As a corrective, we can understand intentional forces as a form of ‘machinic desire’ categorically lacking the motivation of ‘passion’ except as it is mediated and instrumentalized by motivated agents within a common assemblage.

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

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

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

assemblage theory departs from methodological individualism in that it conceives of this emergent subjectivity as an assemblage that may become complexified as persons become parts of larger assemblages: in conversations (and other social encounters) they project an image or persona; in networks they play informal roles; and in organizations they acquire formal roles; and they may become identified with these roles and personas making them part of their identity. In other words, as larger assemblages emerge from the interactions of their component parts, the identity of the parts may acquire new layers as the emergent whole reacts back and affects them. (DeLanda, 2006: 33)

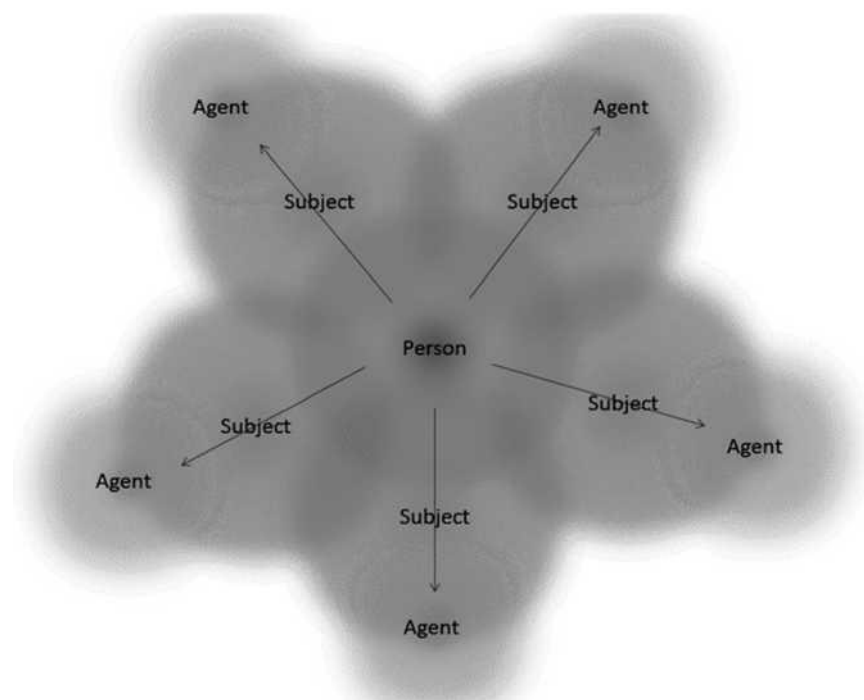
Human technology, made possible by social cognition, has always been a generative constraint on human subjectivity. Our contemporary networked digital tools, by expanding the possibilities of connection and interaction among both intentional and motivated agents, expand the range of influence of motivated agency in the generation, territorialization, and interaction of spaces of possibilities of action, while also strengthening the constraints of the affective social identifications of motivated agents with and within intentional assemblages. Both reactive-affective (or conservative/fundamentalist) and active-affective (or progressive) causes are able to foster deeper commitments through more active and affective engagement while simultaneously broadening their reach by casting wider nets of interaction and through the 'relentless co-presencing and distribution of the psyche' (Rotman, 2008: 104). This distinction of motivated and intentional agents can be further elucidated in a model that distinguishes the actor from the forces of assemblage in which she is bound and the very different entailing tendencies and capacities for action those forces enable. This allows us to understand what makes the human (or motivated) agent different from the technological instrumentalities she mobilizes, as well as from the technosocial and other assemblages of which she is inevitably a part, without denying the active capacities of nonhuman and technological actors to affect and be affected by the worlds they help to constitute.

### **Of Actants and Assemblages: Motivational and Intentional Forces in Rotman's Person-Subject-Agent Model of the Actor**

Given the discursive character of social identification, and the subject positions such symbolic and affective identifications engender, the individual motivated actor can be understood as continually negotiating among various possibilities and constraints on action inherent in the numerous social collectives and assemblages with which she identifies. Brian Rotman (2008) has provided a useful threefold model of what we are

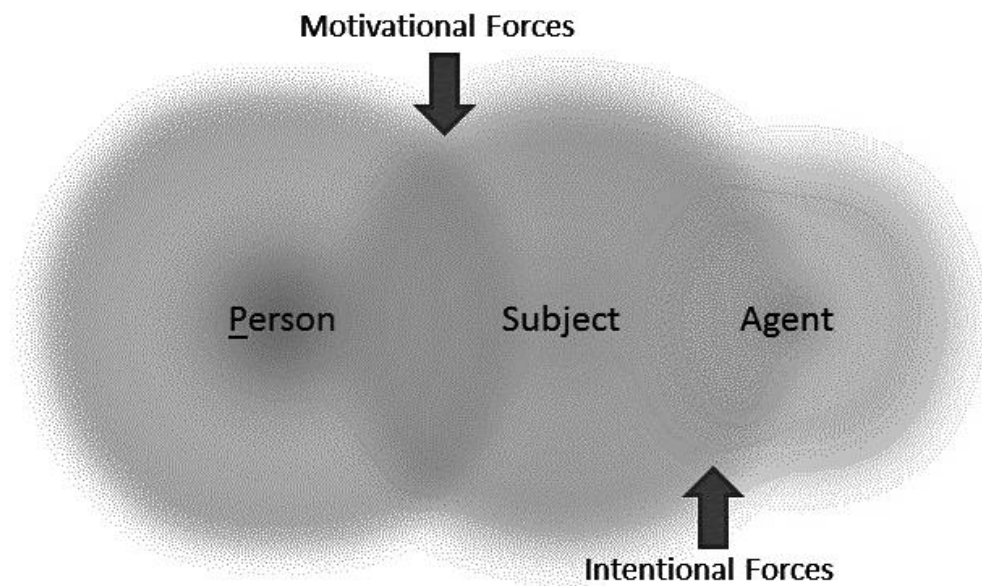
calling the motivated actor. At the center is a physical Person – an emotional body/brain, an affective and affected mind – who physically inter/acts in and with the world. But this Person is both enabled and constrained by discursively instantiated social and cultural formations—i.e., *passional assemblages* as possibility spaces limited by subjectivizing constraints: Subjects through which the Person is required to interact with the world and others in it. For centuries philosophers and theorists have piled up mountains of terms that address the sort of ideological subjectivizing formations that we here, following Rotman, are calling Subjects. Familiar terms include Foucault's 'discourse formations', 'disciplines', and 'epistemes'; Kuhn's 'paradigms'; Burke's 'terministic screens'; Gadamer's 'traditions' and 'hermeneutical horizons'; Wittgenstein's 'forms of life'; Bourdieu's 'habitus' and 'fields'; Toulmin's 'fields of argument'; Marx's 'social formations'; Althusser's 'structures of dominance'; Husserl's 'lifeworlds'; Aristotle's (via Vico's and then Gadamer's) '*sensus communis*'; as well as full and rich menagerie of other conceptual constructs operating under a multitude of labels including '*ethnoi*', '*ethoi*', '*eidoi*', 'worldviews', 'realities', 'frames' and 'frameworks', and 'master narratives'. From the present perspective, all of these common theoretical terms point, generally, to the assemblage of actors and agents in ideological formations that generatively constrain the possibilities of action by subjected or subjectivized individuals: spaces of possibility define and delimit not only what can be done, but often what can and cannot be *conceived of as a possibility* by the individual, however that individual is theoretically delineated.

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



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

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



*Figure 2. Motivational and Intentional Forces of Assemblage*

Traditional accounts of the political agent or actor, as well as reactions against ‘technological determinism’, rely on a conventional understanding of intentionality based on a Cartesian model of the rational actor as fundamentally ‘immaterial’ in relation to the ‘material’ instrumentalities of bodies and *technics*. New materialist and posthumanist theorists have been tempted to resist the idealistic underpinnings of traditional accounts by simply allowing the ‘material’ to participate in, for example, a vitalistic (previously ‘immaterial’) order (i.e., Bennett, 2005). This kind of flattening of the im/material distinction, however, results in a similarly flattened notion of agency that, while highlighting the problem of anthropocentrism (with, in Bennett’s case, a consciously ironic anthropomorphism), fails to account for the important differences between typical human and typical technological or other nonhuman agents. We name that difference *motivation* understood as that which serves to bind the embodied Person to the possibility space(s) instantiated in Subject(s). We also see no reason to limit strictly to human beings the category of the motivated agent as a (to some degree or extent) socially aware actor bound by rights and obligations as well as within the limits of possibility spaces instantiated in Subjects.

Furthermore, when the distinction between motivation (binding embodied Person to Subject) and intention (binding Subject to the ‘material’ enactments of the Agent) is applied to different orders of agents and agencies, assemblages can be accounted as intentional actors that programmatically generate and manipulate ‘desires’, i.e. intentions, which serve to bind Subject to Agent. A communication technology, then (whether examined as an ‘individual’ device or a larger ‘network’) can function as an Agent that ‘materializes’ the action potentials embodied in the Subject’s possibility space, defined by the assemblage’s tendencies and capacities. Simultaneously, the

affective and embodied ‘passions’ (e.g., of Burkean identification) serve to actively generate those intentional ‘desires’ through ‘passions’, or motivational forces, which bind Person to Subject. Again, this distinction between motivation and intention would seem to mitigate Hansen’s concerns about Deleuze and Guattari’s over-reliance on ‘desire’ in the theorization of technology since intentional assemblages as actors are understood not to have affects of their own (in the sense of motivating human emotion) but to be parasitic upon motivational agencies which they intentionally and instrumentally manipulate—turning other motivated (‘passional’) assemblages into agents for the attainment of intentional ‘desires’.

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

### **Agentic Structures in Political Assemblages**

The foregoing model of the social agent or actor, in terms of material-information assemblages, provides a perhaps useful way to account for technosocial political assemblages. Political action, despite posthuman hopes (or fears), remains *human* action, though not all political actors are individual human agents: a wide variety of actants have political effects while not being political subjects in any conventional sense. Computer viruses, automated calling systems, political organizations (including military 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. Addressing the intersection of the technological and the political, Karatzogianni (2012) uses the term ‘revolutionary virtual’ to denote the plane of consistency where the affective potentiality for sociopolitical change is materialized in the digital everyday: ‘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’

(ibid.: 53). It is in this space of networked digital communication that the quotidian becomes political.

The binding of human beings into collective technosocial assemblages through the intermediation of digital communication technologies and networks is illustrated by cyberconflict studies showing that ethnoreligious groups transfer ‘real’ communities, along with their hierarchical notions of ethnicity, nationality, and religion—motivational spaces, *par excellence*—into digitally networked spaces (Karatzogianni, 2006). The reliance on ethnicity, nationality, and religion to utilize and manipulate emotions such as fear, suspicion, and hatred demonstrates the operation of the politics of emotion and affect in digital cultures (Karatzogianni, 2012). Research into religious practices in digital networks reinforces the idea that agency, and especially communicative agency, is extremely contingent and volatile. Digitally networked technologies and spaces of interaction enable transnational migrants, for example, to defend older loyalties or new religious revivals, old and new friends and enemies, in a constant negotiation of many different—often dissonant—worlds at the same time (e.g., home country and host country, online and offline), and to be loved, appreciated, and safe in each of them (Karatzogianni et al., 2013). The migrant mixes and matches her loyalties and tests the primacy of one identity and subjectivity against others, depending on the immediate social context and the fear and uncertainty that needs to be exorcised at any given time in the diverse, hybrid-media environments in which she lives. While new forms of agency enacted in, with, and by digital networks and social media unsettle the closed and fixed ‘tribal’ identities that rely on religion, nationality, culture, and ethnicity, the ‘thick’ identities of these ‘reactive-affective structures’ are much more resilient than the ‘thinner’ identifications of ‘active-affective structures’ of sociopolitical affinity or networks of resistance to hierarchical power structures (Karatzogianni & Robinson, 2010). The evolving forms of agency available to individual actors negotiating such identities are directly afforded by networked communications technologies and social media, but they are not (and cannot be) solely technological: these agentic forces are highly political/intentional and affective/motivated. Emotions, affect, and technologies are negotiated in rapid rhythms against the old constants of religion, nationality, ethnicity, generation and public life, all of which digital networks make somewhat ephemeral and far more contingent than in the past.

An illustration of this account can be found in the various political resistance movements that arose between 2010 and 2013, propagated 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, for example, were organized, coordinated, and publicized to the global public through ICTs, particularly social media. The relationship between these movements and ICTs has garnered widespread interest from both the global news and entertainment media and academics alike (Morozov, 2003; Fuchs, 2011; Shirky 2011; Castells, 2012; Harvey, 2012). Much of the argument concerning the role of technology in recent political resistance movements has danced around the question of agency, both in terms of ‘affordances’ of political agency, and in (largely transmission-tool mode) technologically deterministic arguments about the agency of the technologies

themselves. Castells, for example, argues that the 'networked social movements of our time are largely based on the Internet, a necessary though not sufficient component of their collective action' (Castells, 2012: 229). While some partial success has been achieved, in regime change in the Arab world for example, as a social revolution these movements have failed because these new media movements were unable to dominate the discourse or to intervene meaningfully at most levels of governance and to communicate effectively their struggles against censorship, electoral authoritarianism, social marginalization or forced migration, displacement and poverty.

Baudrillard's simulacrum of capitalism as 'indeterminate random machine' (2001:141), something comparable to a genetic social code, might be particularly helpful in explaining these partial failures. Baudrillard's thesis is that contemporary dissent against the 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. According to Baudrillard, 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.

Following Baudrillard, the logical order at which political dissent is communicated is a critical issue for theorizing resistance. Furthermore, the key to understanding the logical order of dissent is agency. According to the schematic proposed below, at the first order of dissent, primary concerns revolve around basic human liberties and rights of a universal kind, such as the rights to equality, education, health, and justice. 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 postnational or transnational demands for a reform or radical change of capitalism to address, for example, issues of global inequality and poverty, as well as national financial and economic realities, such as unemployment, exploitation, corruption, unequal distribution of wealth, environmental and single-issue global concerns.

Let us take some examples to illuminate these orders of dissent. The 'Arab Spring' regime changes, for example, were 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 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 involved second-order – democracy, power, participation – and did not address socio-economic inequality as such. The Egyptian uprising was not a social revolution, and it resulted in urban elites



exchanging secular authorities for fundamentalist authorities and back to secular again. 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 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. (The comparative recent success of ISIS/ISIL might also be at least partially explained as, at least in its own terms, an internally coherent mobilization of first-, second-, and third-order dissent—but that argument must be made and tested elsewhere.)

An additional factor in the outcome of sociopolitical movements is the dominant labor process, which influences at which order of dissent agency is produced. Here, we follow Hardt and Negri (2000: 293), who 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.

Affective labor is here termed ‘immaterial’ and the manipulation of affect is understood to be 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...’ (ibid. 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.

Consequently, a more nuanced conception of agency can differentiate more precisely A) what type of agent, B) within which dominant labor process, is enabled by C) what particular form of technosocial agency. In this way, agent and structure are reconciled by looking at how technosocial differences within agency correspond to the different

stages in digital adoption and how in turn they match a specific order of dissent (Table 1).

*Table 1. Agency, Action & Order of Dissent*

<b>Order of Dissent</b>	<b>Dominant 'Immaterial' Labour Process</b>	<b>Dominant Agency</b>	<b>Dominant Agent</b>	<b>Logic of Action</b>
<b>Third: Global — Post/Trans-National</b>	Affective	Distributed	Subject: Assemblage, collective, technosocial ensemble.	Technosocial, rhizomatic: programmatic manipulation and extension of affect through networks of motivated and
<b>Second: National — Political Representati</b>	Informational	Intentional	Agent: Technological, programmed	Serial, linear, hierarchical.
<b>First: Tribal — Social Rights &amp; Obligations</b>	Symbolic	Motivated	Person: Embodied, self- conscious, emotional	Embodied, affective, parallel, distributed.

## **Conclusion: Recomposing Agent & Structure**

The relationship between motivation and intention allows for a more subtle distinction between *agent* as actant and *agency* as active force available to agents within a given space of possibilities. An intentional agent (e.g., an insect, a protein, a computer program, a mediological device) 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 non-conscious outcomes. A motivated agent (an embodied/emotional, socially identified, and conscious 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. Human beings (defined as embodied, affective persons), therefore, are typically understood as motivated agents. However, since so much human action and activity is relatively nonconscious and psychologically automatic, as well as normative and programmatic within ideological assemblages, human beings are also capable of functioning as intentional agents.

By utilizing a more nuanced conception of agency, this chapter demonstrates how the capitalist code, for example, 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 is mobilized by a dominant labor process (Symbolic, Informational, Affective). This new theorization of agency 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. Such modes of being in the world and their solidarities are projected when these circles overlap—in spite of and despite how such affinities and practices are currently repressed by neoliberal 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—Connolly’s ‘critical assemblage[s]’ (2013: 651)—that can in fact operate at a higher order than the social code under which the capitalist logic currently operates. This is where the remoulding of the material order, through revolutionary virtual spaces, provides an overarching order of dissent.

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

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