

“DDR, 1989: A Deleuze-inspired account”

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Abstract

This paper is an effort to explore how Gilles Deleuze's ideas can be applied in the field of political theory, using it to account for the emergence of totalitarianism and revolution. The first part of the paper introduces Deleuze's and Manuel DeLanda's social ontology, tracing its origins in complexity theory. The second part uses this framework in the description of DDR and the events of 1989. The text is concluded with a brief note on the space for political agency in this body of theory.

Introduction: Deleuze, DeLanda and political theory

During the past decade, the field of social theory has increasingly moved away from the discourse- and text-based approaches that became popular from the 1960s and onwards. In this turn away from 'language-obsessed' theory (DeLanda, 2006: 16), observers speak of the emergence of a 'new materialism' or 'new realism' within the humanities and social sciences.

Nigel Thrift describes these developments within social theory as three theoretical currents that often overlap:

One current consists of a reconsideration and reworking of *vitalism*. Another is a growing interest in the *intermingling of human and material* [...] Still another is a revival of *systems thinking* (Thrift, 2006: 301, italics added)

Thus, vitalistic accounts of how life and order emerges have become more commonplace (Fraser, Kember & Lury, 2005; Lash, 2006), and so have theories that posit a 'flat ontology' in which humans and non-human are described and analysed in a symmetrical manner. The interest in the intermingling of the human and the material is not least generated by science (and technology) studies (cf. Latour, 1999), as well as by theorists related to 'post-humanism' (Hayles, 1999; Gane, 2006). Lastly, the 'revival of systems thinking' mentioned by Thrift involves a re-examination of Luhmannian theories of systems and 'autopoiesis' (Arnoldi, 2006), along with an engagement with the more recent research into complexity (Urry, 2006) and chaos theory (Gleick, 1987; Gribbin, 2004).

The recent surge in interest in the thought of Gilles Deleuze fits well with this picture, as his work to a great extent incorporates the very themes sketched above. Deleuzian thought is strongly related to vitalism: Henri Bergson was a key source of influence for Deleuze (Massumi, 1992: 2), who in turn reconstructed the Bergsonian notion of the *élan vital* (Deleuze, 1988). Deleuze can also be said to represent a posthumanist ontology, inasmuch as human subjects are not construed as 'primary' actors, but rather as merely 'an intermediate level of structure' (Bonta & Protevi, 2004: 155) – an emergent result of machinic subsystems (human organs, memes, etc.), itself acting as a subsystem to larger-scale emergent wholes (such as organisations, cities etc.).

Moreover, the worldview posited by Deleuze is profoundly influenced by the emerging field of complexity theory. This link has subsequently been explicated by contemporary theorists such as Brian Massumi (1992; 2002) and – perhaps most successfully – by Manuel DeLanda (1991; 1997; 2002; 2006). Interestingly, the close ties to complexity theory (ie. natural sciences) makes

Deleuzian thought more than simply a move from one “pomo” trend to another. Rather, this “neo-realist” approach – especially as developed by DeLanda – may well constitute a route upon which scholars can move on from the “science wars” that have divided the natural sciences and the humanities.

While contemporary social theorists and Marxist ('radical') political philosophers have been thoroughly infected by the Deleuze bug, mainstream political theory has so far remained relatively unscathed.¹ This is probably due to the fact that, as Paul Patton writes,

Deleuze does not conform to the standard image of a political philosopher. He has not written about Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke or Rousseau and [...] he does not address issues such as the nature of justice, freedom or democracy, much less the principles of procedural justification. His work shows an almost complete lack of engagement with the central problems and normative commitments of Anglo-American political thought. (Patton, 2000: 1)

Moreover, Patton argues that Deleuze's collaborative works with Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* (which are arguably his most political ones) introduce a new

ideosyncratic terminology [which] makes it difficult for many to read this work as political philosophy.

However, it is *these very concepts* that make Deleuze a 'profoundly political philosopher', providing us with 'a new way of thinking philosophically about the political'. (Later in this text, some of this terminology will be brought to bear on two phenomena of interest to political scientists – the authoritarian state, and revolution.)

While Deleuze's name is often mentioned in passing, featuring as a staple in lists of several great French thinkers, DeLanda is even less cited in political theory journals. Possibly, this is not purely a result of DeLanda being contemporary: DeLanda's complexity theory-infused, natural science-inspired writings arguably constitute a radical break with incumbent theories – a break that arguably is more radical than the rupture of Deleuze's original writing. (Not least as Deleuze is often interpreted as 'just another' French 'postmodernist'.)

Nevertheless, there *are* examples of DeLandian thoughts having been introduced in the academic discussion on political theory. For instance, Jane Bennett (2004) has written about the political theory implications of DeLanda's ideas on self-organisation, all in line with a 'picture of nature as

¹ Political theory is, however, not the only discipline that has been slow to embrace Deleuze. Julian Reid notes that 'there is very little research on Deleuze in connection to IR', even though he has 'a lot to say' on issues that are central to the International Relations discipline. (Reid, 2003: 58)

matter-flow, [as] developed in the thought of Gilles Deleuze'. (349) Bennett's text is a good introduction to the 'thing materialism' of Deleuze and DeLanda, outlining how it differs from the 'historical materialism' of Marx and the 'body materialism' of Foucault- and cultural studies-inspired authors such as Judith Butler and Wendy Brown. It also – much in the same way as this text will do – traces the origins of this body of thought, back to thinkers such Lucretius and Spinoza.

This text does however claim to make another point about the theoretical import of Deleuze and DeLanda for political theory. While Bennett focuses on how these theories 'might mobilise the will to move consumption practices in a more ecologically sustainable direction' (367), this paper will use Deleuzian concepts ('immanence', 'the virtual', 'abstract machine', 'the war machine', 'striated and smooth space' etc.) to explore the ontology of two empirical phenomena that are central to political science: *Authoritarianism* and *revolution*. In order to (hopefully) make these concepts easier to grasp, the text will locate them at a particular point in time and space – the DDR, leading up to the 1989 revolution.

In order to grasp Deleuze's and DeLanda's, it is useful to trace their intellectual origins – not least the ones that come from the natural sciences. Therefore, the next section will explore some key ideas from complexity theory, focusing on the ability of matter to 'self-organise' and acquire 'emergent' properties. This is followed by a section on how Deleuze operationalised these ideas in his social ontology, following DeLanda's reconstruction of Deleuzian thought. The text then moves on to explore notions of authoritarianism in Deleuze, more specifically his ideas on the ontology of the totalitarian State, and fascism, respectively. The last section deals with 'the revolutionary moment'. These sections (on authoritarianism and revolution) explore how this approach differs from other political theory traditions – be they structuralist, constructivist or methodologically individualist/rational choice-based.

I: Deleuze's ontology

The swerve, emergence, morphogenesis and self-organisation

Brian Massumi explains Deleuze's philosophical project as one of tracing a line of 'forgotten' theorists:

He discovered an orphan line of thinkers who were tied by no direct descentance but were united in their opposition to the State philosophy that would nevertheless accord them minor positions in its canon. Between Lucretius, Hume, Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Bergson there exists a "secret link constituted by the critique of negativity, the cultivation of joy, the hatred of interiority, the exteriority of forces and relations, the denunciation of power. (Massumi, 1992: 2)

The first philosopher in this orphan line, Lucretius, is key to Deleuze's understanding of how structures – be they human or non-human – form. In *On the Nature of Things*, Lucretius puts forward the theory of the *clinamen*, the 'swerve':

when atoms are travelling straight down through empty space by their own weight, at quite indeterminate times and places, the swerve ever so little from their course, just so much that you would call it a change in direction. If it were not for this swerve, everything would fall downwards through the abyss of space. No collision would take place and no impact of atom on atom would be created. Thus nature would never have created anything.

In other words, as Lucretius saw it, form – as well as life – emerges as a result of turbulences created by swerving atoms bumping into each other. Order emerges from, and is sustained by, dynamic and unpredictable flows of matter and energy. However, the burgeoning natural sciences rejected this perspective of the world, and chose to see Lucretius' idea of the *clinamen* as a literary metaphor. The scientific discipline of physics developed in a different direction – inspired by Plato and Kant, accelerated by Newton – focusing on ideal states of static equilibrium that could easily be mathematised. The natural sciences developed a worldview based on simple linear equations that depicted a frictionless world where equilibrium is the norm. The emerging consensus stated that turbulence meant disorder and death, order and life was contingent upon stasis – in fact, the very opposite of Lucretius' view of life.

Hence, *On the Nature of Things* has largely been read as a literary text, as poetry. Indeed, as Stephen Muecke writes,

the humanities scholar will tend to read Lucretius only in order to locate him in his Roman context, while the scientist, to be properly scientific, is likely to be unable to discern any contemporary relevance in Lucretius (Muecke, 2006: 280)

Nevertheless, during the latter half of the 20th century, this worldview based upon Newtonian physics started to buckle. Observers noted that

we are at a crossroad between [Newtonian physics], whose laws describe the movement of bodies in efficient systems tending toward equilibrium (unless acted upon by an external force), and the more chaos-oriented thinkers, such as Poincaré, Einstein, Bergson, Schrödinger, Rene Thom, and Ilya Prigogine, who found new laws for the behavior of systems that are *far from equilibrium*.

One such observer was French philosopher Michel Serres (1982; 2001), who argued that the idea of 'the swerve' ought to be seen as scientific theory, as 'physics proper', rather than poetry.

Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* is a treatise on physics. In general, the subsequent commentary of both critics and translators has refused to consider as such, avoiding the nature of things as they really are, relating the knowledge given in the text to some unknowing prehistoric era, and discoursing instead about morality and religion, about politics and liberty. [...] Western science has consistently *not* chosen Lucretius. (Serres, 1982: 98-99)

In his claim that Lucretius idea of the swerve was actual physics and not metaphorical poetry, Serres was standing on the shoulders of physicist giants: It was only through advances in physics that he could make such a claim.

The fact that [...] that we have remained blind to such a simple phenomenon is really quite normal [...] Until the beginning of this century, no one could bring himself to describe flow in all its concrete complexity. (102-103)

Thus, the science of fluid dynamics, and subsequently chaos and complexity theory, were armed with a new set of descriptive tools – the differential geometry of mathematicians Gauss and Riemann (as described by DeLanda, 2002), as well as computers. These new tools allowed scientists to describe the world, and – unlike in Newtonian physics – *not* take frictions and other 'nonlinearities' out of the equation. Hence, they started to accept the idea that no physical system is ever in equilibrium. Moreover, some natural scientists showed that in far-from-equilibrium states, life and order seemed to emerge spontaneously – indeed, life could only exist in far-from-equilibrium states.

This perspective can be described in the following terms: The laws of thermodynamics state that the universe (as a whole) is becoming more and more disordered. But, as John Gribbin notes:

Life, of course, seems to defy this process, by creating order and structure out of disordered (or at least, less ordered) materials. A plant builds its structure, and may make beautiful flowers, out of carbon dioxide, water, and a few traces of other materials. But it only does this with the aid of sunlight, energy from an outside source. The Earth, and in particular life on Earth, is not a closed system. It is possible to show [...] that anywhere in the Universe that a pocket of order appears, it always does so at the cost of more disorder being produced somewhere else. (Gribbin, 2004: 2627)

In other words, as all physical systems tend to strive towards maximum disorder (maximum 'entropy'), order and life can only be sustained if energy flows through the system, sustaining turbulence, maintaining and recreating life. Only dead matter is truly in equilibrium and truly nonturbulent. The contribution by complexity theorists is that they started to explore how processes of self-organisation emerge spontaneously in far-from-equilibrium situations, as energy flows through the system. One such theorist was Alan Turing (also known as a computer theorist), who wrote a paper on 'The chemical basis for morphogenesis' in 1952, stipulating that order could emerge out of chaos. A few decades later, Ilya Prigogine showed that '[a]way from equilibrium, a flow of energy can, under the right circumstances, create order spontaneously' (30). Complexity theorists also found that *the same processes* of self-organisation were often found *in different settings* – in weather phenomena, in populations of animals and so forth. (Gleick, 1987)

Complexity theorists also developed a way of mapping these processes. In 'phase space', the properties of a system can be analysed with respect to general 'states' that a system can enter. Phase spaces are often used to show that a system might be 'attracted' to a number of coexisting possible states, and the system may fluctuate between one semistable state to another, due to 'bifurcations' in the system.

So, to sum up, the field of complexity theory has shown (at least) four things:

First, the world is composed of structures and systems that are complex, in the sense that they are dependent on a large variety of inputs, and that the impact of the input is *nonlinear*. A small change in one input may have great impact in the general development of the system – imagine the turbulent flows of air and heat differentials in a weather system.

Secondly, coherent structures can only form if a steady flow of matter-energy is pushed through the

system, keeping it in a far-from-equilibrium state. This flow taps the *morphogenetic* potential of matter, thus 'cheating' the second law of thermodynamics, which acts as a force that causes forms to dissolve, increasing the system's entropy. Imagine a human body – without energy, the bodily apparatus (an highly ordered, coherent structure) will eventually die and fade away.²

Thirdly, often seem to be able to reach states where they have certain stable properties – even though there is no general 'overall design' that cause them to act in such ways. A structure can thus have *emergent* properties, which seem to be attained in a *spontaneous* manner, simply due to the intensity of the flow of matter/energy. Also, due to the nonlinearity, it is impossible to reduce the system to its constituent parts – the emergent property is more than the sum of its parts. Here, it may be useful to imagine how a stream of water might – as the speed of the water flow increases – 'break' into turbulence. One can also think of how a certain vortex in a turbulent flow might be 'locked' in a certain place, even though the water around it flows in a haphazard manner.

Fourthly, while some of these emergent properties may seem completely chaotic – in the sense that they completely lack order – complexity theorists have shown that there are *underlying logics* to such structures. Thus, when mapped in an abstract, mathematical 'phase space', 'chaotic' systems such as weather systems and turbulent water display a high degree of order. Moreover, these abstract logics may also reveal a number of characteristics of the system, such as 'attractor' states, or a propensity to alternate between different states etc.

Immanence, the actual and the virtual

One way of reading Deleuze is to consider the above-mentioned concepts – the swerve, morphogenesis, emergence, self-organisation, attractors etc. – as tools with which to construct a new ontology. Deleuze's aim was to displace the tradition of 'State philosophy' that starts with Plato, especially the idea of *transcendent essences*:

For Deleuze, [the desire of transcendence] is the 'poisoned gift' that Plato first introduces into thought with his notion that all things are only imitations of pure Forms. This then infects Western philosophy in the guises of transcendental, dialectical, and symbolic logics [...]
(Morris, 2004)

Thus, the legacy of Plato was the worldview that construes the world as consisting of *beings* – humans, plants, nations, organisations, chemical compounds etc. – whose identities/properties were defined by essences (pure Forms), fixed and static, predefined by God or some other transcendent

² From there, its matter-energy may reoccur in the form of other structures, but the body as such no longer exists.

force. Deleuze, on the other hand, posits a world without such transcendent essences:

- First, structures (human or non-human) are *becomings*, rather than beings: They are outcomes of dynamic and perpetual flows of matter-energy. As mentioned above in relation to complexity theory, life and ordered structures can only be sustained through maintenance of such flows.
- Second, these becomings acquire their identities/properties through *immanent* processes, rather than through transcendent essences. It is the morphogenetic potential of matter *itself* – charted by complexity theorists – that gives rise to form.

The 'ideosyncratic terminology' – mentioned in the introduction as an obstacle that prevents readers from making sense out of Deleuze – is an attempt to provide the reader with concepts to describe this ontology. Given the abstract and sometimes counterintuitive nature of the subjects covered (complexity theory, differential geometry, morphogenetics etc.), it is hardly surprising that this attempt yields 'almost impossibly dense and allusive works' (Johnson, 2005: 204). Nor is it surprising that DeLanda's reconstruction of such works, explicating the link to the natural sciences, is a truly 'mind-bending read' (205).

However, in digesting this heterogeneous body of theory, it does not help that Deleuze expects his readers to exceptionally well-read. With regards to the natural scientific influences mentioned above, DeLanda writes that Deleuze's use of concepts from advanced mathematics is

completely adequate [...], but his discussion of technical details is so compressed, and assumes so much on the part of the reader, that it is bound to be misinterpreted. (DeLanda, 2002: 5)

One such misinterpretation of Deleuze's work was that his use of concepts – be they derived from natural science or not – is simply yet another manifestation of post-modern 'fashionable nonsense' (Sokal & Bricmont, 1998). Indeed, Deleuze's style of writing is easily confused with other French 'pomo' greats, which obfuscates his 'adequate' use of natural scientific ideas, such as complexity theory. Thus, DeLanda has stated that

the main obstacle to engaging with Deleuze directly is the style. He writes as if he deliberately wanted to be misunderstood [...] He changes terminology in every book [...] and never ever gives explicit definitions (or hides them well). I suppose that was an attempt on his part of preventing a given terminology to solidify too soon, to keep things fluid and heterogenous. Fine. But I cannot deal with that and hardly expect complexity theorists to put up with it

either. (DeLanda, Protevi & Thanem, 2005: 19-20)

The style of writing has caused many readers to see Deleuze's use of natural scientific concepts as purely metaphorical. However, unlike many of his contemporaries, Deleuze does not write in metaphors. (Patton, 2004: 1) Rather, as we shall see, the two words 'without metaphor', strongly emphasised, reoccur in both Deleuze's and Delanda's works (cf. Deleuze & Guattari, 1977: 251; DeLanda, 1997: 62). Here, this body of thought deviates from a substantial part of contemporary philosophy and social theory – it represents a *realist* ontology, granting 'reality full autonomy from the human mind, disregarding the difference between the observable and the unobservable, and the anthropocentrism this distinction implies' (DeLanda, 2002: 4).

This is where the link between complexity theory and Deleuze's philosophical project – displacing the reliance on Platonic transcendent essences, while retaining a realist ontology – become crucial. The natural scientific concepts of morphogenesis allow Deleuze to highlight that the emergence of form can be derived from immanent processes in matter itself – irrespective of the human mind. DeLanda argues that

when it comes to defend the autonomy of non-human entities (atoms, molecules, cells, species) the crucial manoeuvre is to account for their mind-independent identity without bringing essences into the picture. [...] The identity of any real entity must be accounted for by a process, the process that produced that entity, in [the case of hydrogen atoms], the 'manufacturing' processes within stars where hydrogen and other atoms are produced. When it comes to social science the idea is the same: families, institutional organizations, cities, nation states are all real entities that are the product of specific historical processes and whatever degree of identity they have it must be accounted for via the processes which created them and those that maintain them. (DeLanda, Protevi & Thanem, 2006: 2)

Thus, as mentioned above, the Deleuzian approach focuses on the processes of *assembling* certain entities. It is the *mode* of assembly that determines what identity/property is granted to the entity. In this way, Deleuze posits that there are two realms of reality:

- The *actual* realm, consisting entities such of atoms, cells, humans, organisations, nation states etc.
- The *virtual* realm, consisting of the 'manufacturing' processes that assembles and arranges 'raw matter' into entities with more or less consistent identities/properties.

The virtual, DeLanda explains,

does not refer, of course, to the virtual reality which digital simulations have made so familiar, but to a real virtuality forming a vital component of the objective world. (DeLanda, 2002: 30)

In his collaboration with Guattari, Deleuze uses the term 'abstract machines' to describe the 'manufacturing processes' that are to be found in the virtual realm. Dividing reality into these two realms allows them to describe the matter's 'inherent morphogenetic potential without sneaking transcendental essences through the back door'. Hence, abstract machines defines

the structure-generating processes that give rise to more or less permanent forms but [...] they do not represent (as an essence does) that which defines the identity of those forms.

(DeLanda, 1997: 263)

In relation to complexity theory, one should see 'the virtual' and 'abstract machine' in relation to notions of 'phase space' and 'attractors'. A system, stabilised by virtue of being within the 'basin' of a certain attractor, can also be seen as a system being assembled according to the processes of a certain abstract machine. As in the case of attractors, there is not only one, but several abstract machines. In other words, just as a complex system can 'bifurcate' – switch from one attractor to another – matter can be assembled in ways that switch between different abstract machines. When such switches occur, the identity and properties of the entity changes. Thus, identities and properties can never be completely fixed, just like a physical system cannot be stable (in equilibrium) and at the same time retain order.

Stratification and meshworks

This framework, Deleuze posits, can be used to explain the emergence of *all* entities. For instance, in *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (1997), DeLanda applies it to account for the historical development of three different kinds of entities – modern economies and cities, species and ecosystems, and languages. Specifically, he discusses the impact of two abstract machines – the processes that yield 'hierarchies' (or stratified systems), and the processes that yield 'meshworks' (or self-consistent aggregates).

With regards to hierarchies, DeLanda – following Deleuze – argues that it is *the same* process, the same abstract machine, existing in the virtual realm, that yields *several different* hierarchies in the actual realm. Thus, there are 'definite structure-generating processes' which operate in different settings, generating a

general class of structures, stratified systems, to which not only human bureaucracies and

biological species belong, but also sedimentary rocks [sandstone]. (And all of this *without metaphor*.) (DeLanda, 1997: 62, italics in original.)

The specifics of this abstract machine will be discussed later in this text, but at this juncture, it is worth noting that Deleuze describes the State – including the *totalitarian* State – as such a stratified system.

The other kind of abstract machine – the one that yields meshworks – also produces several different kinds of structures. Thus, granite rocks are formed through this abstract machine, but also chemical systems and (street) markets. In discussing markets, DeLanda touches upon the argument of Friedrich von Hayek, who has described the 'perfect' market along the lines of a catalytic process, using concepts from natural science.³ (Hayek, 1978) In this paper, we will return to this abstract machine – primarily in the guise of the Deleuzian 'war machine' – in the discussion of totalitarianism, fascism, and revolution.

In order to illustrate the point that a system can move between attractors – that matter is never completely locked into one type of abstract machine – it is useful to consider DeLanda's (1997) discussion on the emergence of the modern economy. Following on from the description of hierarchies and meshworks, he describes economic history as a perpetual 'battle' between these two abstract machines, with matter being drawn into either of the two processes of becoming. Thus, the economy is seen as a constant 'give and take' process between hierarchies and ideal, decentralised market structures. However, during the past couple of centuries, hierarchical, 'stratified' structures – i.e. corporations and other large organisations – have expanded, at the expense of decentralised, selforganising market structures. Here, DeLanda follows a long line of thinkers (Fernand Braudel, Alfred Chandler, J.K. Galbraith) who construe the modern economy as dominated by intensified hierarchisation, rather than intensified 'marketisation'.

Similarly, in relation to political science, the emergence of the modern nation state can be described as a hierarchy-building, 'stratification' process – a process that unifies, totalises and compartmentalises citizens into a larger entity (the State). Again, like in the case of the economy, this stratification process runs in conjunction with processes that yield decentralised meshwork structures: History can be conceived as a stratification processes, swinging back and forth, turning

3 Indeed, Hayek's idea of the catalaxy process that coordinates the perfect market – and his ways of defending this idea – actually fits quite nicely with the sentiments expressed by several posthumanists today: "It would be no exaggeration to say that social theory begins with – and has an object only because of – the discovery that there exist orderly structures which [...] are not the result of human design. [...] If indignant reformers still complain [...], this is partly because they cannot conceive of an order which is not deliberately made." (Hayek, 1978)

strata into meshworks and vice versa. So, for instance, the stratified structures of feudalism were dismantled – 'destratified' – only to be replaced by a new form of stratification (through the modern State).

Thus, the juxtaposition between stratified and meshwork structures is not to be seen as a dualism, but as an integral process. In the opening chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari state:

The important point is that the root-tree [of stratified structures] and canal-rhizome [of meshwork structures] are not two opposed models [...] It is a question of a model that is perpetually in construction or collapsing, and of a process that is perpetually prolonging itself, breaking off and starting up again. No, this is not a new or different dualism. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988: 20)

This perpetual process of 'construction' and 'collapsing' is what is referred to as 'stratification' and 'destratification' – key concepts in the social ontology developed by Deleuze. In the coming section, we will return to these concepts, describing 1) the totalitarian State as a structure that is constantly kept in check by processes of stratification, and 2) the revolution of 1989 as a process of destratification.

However, before we move on to the application of these ideas, let's consider how this Deleuzian-cum-DeLandian approach differs from traditional versions of political theory: Through the depiction of the reality as consisting of two realms – the actual and the virtual – we can account for the emergence of a totalitarian State, and the onset of revolution, without having to rely on the transcendent essences that otherwise dominate social science. It is thus a way to steer clear of crude structural approaches (that claim to have captured the essence of society-as-a-whole), and equally crude methodologically individualist approaches (that claim to explain the world through essentialist notions of a rational *homo oeconomicus*).

This, however, forces us to accept a 'posthumanist', flat ontology, where human structures are conceived as no different from other structures – and where concepts from the natural sciences are used to understand phenomena studied by political scientists. Of course, concepts from physics are readily used in everyday political parlour. For instance, consider how Richard Armitage, US Deputy Secretary of State between 2001 and 2005, describes the current state of affairs in Iraq: The US administration, he hints, had a poor understanding of

the competing tensions and the ethnic strife, sectarian strife that did exist and was *kept from*

boiling because of the lid of Saddam Hussein. (PBS, 2007, italics added.)

The approach outline above would allow theorists to make such statements in a *non-metaphorical* manner. Thus, the shift from non-boiling fluid to boiling fluid (what physicists refer to as a 'phase transition'), and the shift from totalitarian rule to civil war, can be seen as following *the same virtual logic*, acting on different actual systems (water in a pot, citizens in a state).

Unfortunately, in the case of Armitage's account of Iraq, the physics-related link between boiling water and sectarian violence is a poor one. (Not least because water cannot be kept from boiling through keeping a lid on the pot.) However, in the sections that follow, similar neo-realist accounts of political events and will be explored.

II: Deleuze for political scientists

The totalitarian State as a stratified structure: DDR

In *The File*, Timothy Garton Ash writes about his post-reunification visit to eastern Germany, recounting his memories from doing doctoral research in the DDR. In this quest to grasp the nature of the totalitarian DDR system, he is struck by the absence of evil among the Stasi officials and informers that spied upon him during his youth:

If only I had met, on this search, a single clearly evil person. But they were all just weak, shaped by circumstance, self-deceiving; human, all too human. Yet *the sum of all their actions* was a great evil. (Garton Ash, 1997: 223-224. Italics added.)

How does one account for the emergence of 'a great evil', given the lack of an individual evil 'mastermind'? Garton Ash's account suggests that large enough number of 'weak' and 'self-deceiving' individuals, added together, can yield totalitarian structures.

The framework sketched above leads us to a similar conclusion, inasmuch as we can explain how totalitarian States can emerge through a *systemic* process – not necessarily through the rise of an evil, despotic psychopath. However, the Deleuze-inspired framework takes this analysis even further: The totalitarian State is an emergent structure, assembled along the lines of an underlying logic ('abstract machine'). As we know from complexity theory, emergent wholes cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts. So, from this perspective, Garton Ash's Nietzschean characterisation of the Stasi collaborators – 'human, all too human' – is a misnomer. The consistency and semi-stability of the DDR is *not* to be described as the sum of weak humans, but rather as the outcome of an abstract machine acting upon the citizens of the DDR. Thus, the agency that keeps the structure in check is not solely human, but exists as an abstract machine in the virtual realm. However, this does not preclude the possibility that citizens may enact this abstract machine, and rulers may try to tap into it.

Indeed, the idea that structures cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts is crucial to Deleuze's understanding of the process of stratification. As mentioned in the section on complexity theory, Deleuze wanted to explain the world in terms of 'relations of exteriority', which

imply that the properties of the component parts can never explain the relations which constitute a whole. (DeLanda, 2006: 11)

The 'component parts' that go into the stratification process are of two types: Material (visible) and

expressive (sayable). In his reading of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, Deleuze (1999) discusses these two types of components: Modern 'disciplinary' institutions – the prison, the factory, the hospital, the school – can be described in terms of stratification. So, for instance, the disciplinary prison consists of material components (the prison building, its architecture, the prisoners inhabiting it etc.) and expressive components (penal law, the very concept of delinquency, criminology etc.).

In Deleuze's reading, these two types of constituent components of the disciplinary prison are 'heterogeneous' (28), but nevertheless form a stable whole when they are joined. The disciplinary prison was a 'happy coincident' of *both* panoptic architectures, *and* the discourses of delinquency and penal law emerging at the same time, at the same place. These two are in relations of exteriority with each other, as one would not be very effective without the other. As Foucault writes,

any mechanism of objectification [such as panoptic architectures, surveillance, inspection] could be used in them as an instrument of subjection, and any growth of power could give rise in them to possible branches of knowledge [such as studies of certain traits of delinquents] (Foucault, 1977: 224)

For Deleuze and Guattari, the modern State can be described through this kind of 'double articulation': First, the State is put together through a machinic, material structure which 'imposes a statistical order' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988: 40) on its citizens; secondly, it is kept together through a expressive/discursive formation, superimposed on the machinic structure, constructing 'the molar compounds' (41) which signify a unified State. The first articulation is thus generated by geographical delineations, borders, and the like; the second articulation is generated by common languages, notions of national identity etc.

The second articulation is crucial in this respect, as it totalises and unifies the State structure on the basis of transcendent ideals – say notions of 'Swedishness', or historical inevitability. Thus, the second articulation is also dubbed 'overcoding', and the stronger that this overcoding element is, the more effective it becomes, the closer the State moves towards totalitarianism:

This is where the notion of the totalitarian State becomes meaningful: a State becomes totalitarian when, instead of effectuating, within its own limits, the worldwide overcoding machine, it *identifies* with it, creating the conditions for 'autarky' (223, italics added)

Here, Deleuze and Guattari are close to other political theorists who see in transcendent essences (and final Truths) the germ of totalitarianism. All States are based on some notion of a common cause, or common history – the issue is how strong these national ideals are, and how much citizens

are willing to sacrifice for this Good.

In Garton-Ash's account of DDR, there are several clues as to how the totalitarian state was held together – how the flows of humans, money, ideas etc. was kept into one orderly structure. First, in terms of *material components*, there was of course the geographical enclosure of citizens, not least represented by the Berlin Wall. This geographical ordering could also be maintained at a more micro-level, through no-go-areas. This material, architectural mode of ordering features prominently in many fictional renderings of totalitarian states – Orwell's *1984*, Boye's *Kallocain* etc.

Referring back to the work of Foucault, the material ordering of the DDR can also be described as an elaborate panopticon. Garton-Ash main contribution is to outline the intricate structure of the Stasi surveillance: A huge mass of officers and informers (*inoffizielle mitarbeiter*) yielded a veritable network of spies, surveying the citizens on the very capillar level of the DDR society.

In terms of *expressive components*, there were features of the State that served to overcode the structure and its citizens. As in all States, notions of national pride and belief in the social system chosen plays a role in totalising the structure. However, in totalitarian states such as the DDR, propaganda plays a crucial role, not least the State's involvement in the arts. Another unifying method is the control over the information circulating in the DDR.

The result of these properties was to create a gridded structure, preventing citizens from floating in too free a manner. One of the key features of the State is this very task – to turn 'smooth space' into 'striated space', to turn free-floating, nomadic human subjects into citizens in a 'gridded' State structure.⁴ Therefore, as Bonta and Protevi argue,

the State, though it did not originate in one place, is a universal and unavoidable feature of human existence, and indeed has formed everywhere in relationship to nomads as well as 'primitives' (Bonta & Protevi, 2004: 148)

However, just as the process of stratification is counteracted by the abstract machine that yields meshworks, the 'striating' process of the State is counteracted by a process that 'smoothens' space. This structure-demolishing logic is what Deleuze and Guattari call the 'war machine'.

4 Thus, as mentioned above by DeLanda, there are often several Deleuzoguattarian concepts that mean more or less the same thing – a stratum (generated by stratification processes) is a striated space, a meshwork is a smooth(er) space.

The State and the war machine: Nazi-Germany

The interrelation between the State and the war machine is crucial to the understanding of how Deleuze and Guattari conceive of totalitarianism, fascism and war. As Julian Reid (2003) writes, Deleuze's view of war and the State differs significantly from many of his contemporaries. So, as opposed to his friend Foucault, Deleuze did not see war as the continuation of the State. War, he posited, can be seen as a process separate from the ordering, striating efforts of the State.

Thus, Deleuze did believe in the existence of what Carl von Clausewitz philosophical construct 'absolute war' – a war bent on pure destruction, completely devoid of moral or political interests.⁵ While Clausewitz argued that the absolute war is a purely thought construct, practically impossible to imagine, Deleuze argued that such war machines have indeed existed. For Deleuze and Guattari, the nomads warring nascent States was an historical case of an absolute war:

The historical war machine of the nomads was brought near 'perfection' by the almost entirely anti-State, countersignifying destruction of the Mongol hordes, burning, raping, and looting their way across striated spaces. (165-166)

The war machine, just like the process that yields a consistent State, is to be seen as a abstract machine, existing in the virtual realm. In the opening chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe it as a self-organising structure, without centralised control:

the problem of the war machine, or the firing squad: is a general necessary for n individuals to manage to fire in unison? The solution without a General is to be found in an *acentred multiplicity* possessing a finite number of states with signals to indicate corresponding speeds, from a war rhizome or guerilla point of view, without any tracing, *without any copying of a central order*. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988: 17)

So, in many ways, the war machine is the decentralised, self-organising opposite of the top-down, overcoded State. As such, it is completely devoid of any overarching ideals – collective action emerges as 'communication runs from any neighbour to any other ... such that the local operations are coordinated and the final, global result synchronised without a central agency'.

Interestingly, the authors are here talking about modes of organisation enabled by new communication technologies – the sentence above reads like a technical description of the Internet protocol. We can imagine several examples today of the abstract war machine in action – the file

⁵ The notion of 'absolute war' is often confused with 'total war', a war in which virtually all part of society in the warring nation is enrolled in the war effort. Thus, Franklin D Roosevelt's call for the American citizens and industry – 'the arsenal of democracy' – to join the WWII war effort can be construed as a plea for total war.

sharing movement smoothing out the striated space created by record companies, or decentralised terrorist networks doing the same against the striated spaces of Western states.

While the war machine is separate from the stratification process that keeps a State structure in place, states have always tried to control the war machine, appropriating it for its own uses:

There are many reasons to believe that the war machine is of a different origin, is a different assemblage, than the State apparatus. It is of nomadic origin and is directed against the State apparatus. One of the fundamental problems of the State is to appropriate this war machine that is foreign to it and make it a piece in its apparatus, in the form of a stable military institution; and the State has always encountered major difficulties in this. (230)

Thus, since the advent of the modern State, there has always been a tension between it and the war machine. However, the State has generally had the upper hand:

The nomadic war machines were captured by States and one way or another many settled down. In the case of the Vikings [...], they became Normans, and [...] fell under the control of sedentary [State] forces [...] on the conquest of territory, as in the Crusades (Bonta & Protevi, 2004: 166)

However, there have been instances when the State has tried to appropriate the war machine, and in so doing has become overcome by it. Thus, there have been instances when the table has turned – when the war machine 'has constructed itself a State apparatus capable only of destruction' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988: 230). In such instances, the (totalitarian) State morphs into a fascist structure.

In this way, totalitarianism and fascism are assembled in a different manner: While the totalitarian State serves to retain stasis and control through overcoding, the fascist society emerges through and intensification, involving both the state and its citizens. Totalitarianism striates space, creates structure; fascism smoothens out space, demolishes structure. Thus,

fascism differs from totalitarianism. For totalitarianism is a State affair: it essentially concerns the relation between the State as a localised assemblage and the abstract machine of overcoding that it effectuates. Even in the case of the military dictatorship, it is a State army, not a war machine that takes power and elevates the State to the totalitarian stage. Totalitarianism is essentially conservative. Fascism, on the other hand, involves a war machine. When fascism builds itself a totalitarian State, it is not in the sense of a State army taking power, but of a war machine taking over the State. [...] Unlike the totalitarian State, which does its utmost to seal all possible lines of flight, fascism is constructed on an intense line of flight, which it

transforms into pure destruction and abolition.

Here, it is worth noting that Deleuze and Guattari wrote at a time when intellectuals were still grappling with the Holocaust enigma. Just like Adorno and Horkheimer, they were trying to explain how Nazi-Germany could happen. With more water under the bridge, we can safely say that the 'fascist' logic has been present in many places, at many times – not just in the token fascist regimes of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco. In other words, while the two logics – the striating of stratification, the smoothing of the war machine – are useful, the connotation with actual regimes bearing the same label is somewhat problematic.

As should be clear by now, the ontology described by Deleuze are not to be seen as normative. Meshworks are not necessarily 'better' than strata, the State is not necessarily more 'evil' than the war machine. In the concluding section, the revolution of 1989 will be described in relation to the destructive powers of the war machine.

Spontaneous combustion: 1989

Many journalists and scholars will look for the correlation of that *chain of spectacular transformations* that changed, as if at one blow, the fates of tens of millions of individuals [...] Today, many people are talking and writing about the role of the intellectuals, students, and the theatre, or the influence of the Soviets' perestroika, and economic difficulties. They're right. I myself as a playwright would also add the influence of humour and honesty, and perhaps even *something beyond us, something maybe even unearthly*. (Vaclav Havel, italics added)

Vaclav Havel describes the revolutions of 1989 as a chain of transformations. Again, this can be read in a physics-inspired way, just as Armitage's statement about the boiling state of Iraq (mentioned above). Interestingly, Havel claims that there was 'something beyond us' that sparked the revolution. For Havel, one would suspect that this something was transcendent – spiritual, God-like. Nevertheless, from a Deleuzian perspective, it can also be described as something related to the virtual realm. The revolution could be described as a process close to a chemical reaction, acting on the citizens of the DDR.

There are chiefly two ways of describing the revolution of 1989. The first way is to provide structural explanations – be they based on Marxist notions of exploitation, or 'checklists' for structural prerequisites for revolution. As the Deleuzian approach can be seen as an effort to shed some of the essentialist and functionalist claims that they rely on, there are good reasons for looking

for other explanations.

In *Origins of a Spontaneous Revolution*, Karl-Dieter Opp, Peter Voss and Christiane Gern make the following statement:

We believe that the GDR revolution was a revolution without revolutionaries. The people, then anonymous masses, were on the streets. There were no charismatic leaders, no analytical thinkers, not even real fanatics. (Opp, Voss & Gern, 1995: 155)

Thus, they describe the revolution much like the self-organised war machine outlined by Deleuze and Guattari. Indeed, the Leipzig demonstrations (the focal interest of Opp, Voss and Gern) and the Berlin demonstrations were a great example of a very literal 'smoothing out' of space. The result was the demolishing of the DDR State, and the flattening of the symbol of its striation – the Berlin Wall.

In their account, the revolution scholars mentioned use a 'rational choice' model for explaining the spontaneous revolution of 1989. This leads them to the theory that it was changes in the incentives that led to the revolution:

In order to explain the increase in general protests and demonstrations in 1989, we must first show how the *incentives*, which were relevant for the developments of these protests, changed over time. Second, we need to know *why* the incentives changed. (183)

Thus, the scholars apply a methodological individualist, *homo oeconomicus* approach to human agency. They posit a number of type actors, and chart the changed incentives for each of these idealised actors. A Deleuzian approach (which wants to replace such 'type' thinking with 'population' thinking) would try to explain the revolution by other means. It would keep the account of a self-reinforcing, self-organising, spontaneously emergent process, but remove the anthropocentric search for incentives that would explain the process along the lines of rational actor/*homo oeconomicus*. Thus, the revolution would be explained as a bifurcation/phase transition that relies on processes that are both on a lower and higher level of scale – both above and below the level of the individual actor.

Thus, on a sub-human-level this approach would study 'memes' spreading like viruses in the minds of DDR citizens, leading them to think that a confrontation would not be knocked down by their the Stasi or the Soviet Union:

Because protests in Poland and Hungary contributed decisively to the political changes there,

GDR citizens may have come to three conclusions [...] Communist dictatorships can be changed. [...] It is possible to make political changes by means of protest. [...] If protests leads to political changes, 'sister states' troops will not intervene to reverse them. (191)

On a supra-human-level, the cityscape of Leipzig played a crucial role in the spontaneous combustion of the revolution.

Leipzig had a clearly defined city center consisting of Karl-Marx-Platz and its adjacent streets. If one wanted to meet someone without an appointment, one would just go there. At what time would people go? Leipzig citizens knew that peace prayers took place every Monday from 5 to 6 p.m. in the Nikolai Kirche, which is close to the Karl-Marx-Platz. The citizens knew about the peace prayers through word-of-mouth communication and the Western media. It was also well known that at least some of those individuals attending the peace prayers would go to Karl-Marx-Platz after the prayer service. Citizens of Leipzig also knew that those attending the peace prayers were critical citizens. Thus, if people who were critical of the SED regime wanted to meet up with like-minded individual, they would either attend the peace prayers on Mondays or go near the Nikolai Kirche at about 6 p.m. (198)

Thus, just like in the self-organised, acentric war machine described by Deleuze and Guattari, the 'coordination problem' was solved through the 'neighbour to neighbour' protocol.

The city architecture of Leipzig – 'not present in other cities or areas within the GDR' (206) – lent itself to this form of self-organisation. In a short amount of time, a convention emerged – just like the convention of a self-organising street market: People know that that the market is the place to go to sell and buy goods – and the structure re-assembles itself every week, at the same time, even if the actual space is being shut down.⁶

Through this feed-back process, the Monday demonstrations snowballed, reaching a critical mass, pushing through a 'threshold', eventually sparking a bifurcation that went all the way to Berlin.

A number of our interviewees mentioned that the demonstrations in the GDR were not organised prior to October 9, 1989, or described the events as 'spontaneous' or 'as if they happened on their own accord' [...] You did not need to put an announcement in the paper or distribute flyers... it was a kind of self-functioning. A sort of ceremony or ritual emerged in Leipzig which always recharged itself until October 9th, by which time we did not know what

⁶ Spitalfields Market, London, is a nice example of this process – the actual space is shut down, but the market continues to re-occur every Sunday, spreading like an amoeba to adjacent streets, as if the structure had a life of its own.

was coming. (222)

Unfortunately, Opp, Voss and Gern ignore the impact of this abstract machine, searching instead for incentives and motives on the level of the individual humans – for instance, the 'peace prayers can be termed an *institutional incentive*' (198). Thus, in their effort to assign incentives at the individual level, they miss the emergent system properties (which are based on relations of exteriority, where the whole is more than the sum of its parts).

Thus, for future research on the onset of revolutions, political scientists should maybe start taking a cue from natural scientists, studying other 'phase transitions' – such as the onset of turbulence in a laminar flow of water, or bifurcations in complex systems.

III: Epilogue: On political agency

So, in conclusion, what does this approach add to political theory? First, on a technical level, it represents a new way to tackle the structure-agency debate. The theory of morphogenesis explains how wholes emerge spontaneously, though the immanent potentials of matter itself, in a bottom-up manner.

Second, on a more practical level, we can learn how structures emerge, see the underlying logics of totalitarianism as well as fascism. This also implies that researchers and activists alike can spot spaces for change – the windows of opportunity for prying up closed regimes.

However, how can this happen, if all structure is generated through abstract machines, existing in a virtual realm? What space does this leave for individual's political agency? Bonta and Protevi state the following:

Deleuze and Guattari do not deny that human subjects can initiate novel and creative action in the world. However, they refuse to mystify this creativity as something essentially human and therefore non-natural. (Bonta & Protevi, 2004: 5)

Moreover, they specify this claim by stating that humans can indeed alter social systems,

but they can do so only under far-from-equilibrium, 'crisis' situations. This is precisely why functionalist accounts of structure, when based on a hidden assumption that social systems are 'equilibrium' systems, cannot see individual agency. [...] it is precisely in the crisis situations into which some complex systems enter that individual, non-average, rare trajectories can trigger either a shift in the system from one attractor to another or even the creation of a new set of attractors and bifurcators. (193, n.6)

Thus, by learning to understand the underlying logics of social structures – though assuming this neo-realist perspective – we can hopefully learn to 'hack reality itself', or at least learn how to control the war machine for good purposes⁷.

⁷ This, by the way, is the project that Hardt and Negri (2000; 2004) have embarked upon. Nevertheless, this is by no means the only way to join this path.

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