Limit, Collectivity, and the Capacity to Act:
Reading Hannah Arendt with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari

by

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ABSTRACT

Limit, Collectivity, and the Capacity to Act: Reading Hannah Arendt with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari

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This work aims to develop a theoretical basis upon which we could begin to give accounts of action in terms of heterogeneous collectives comprised of human and non-human entities. These accounts challenge the tendency to conceive of action solely in terms of humanity and individuality, either human individuals or groups of human individuals (generally conceived as unified by some common trait such as identity or purpose, for instance, a lobby group, a minority group, or a nation state). Although most theories of action acknowledge the fact that actions do not occur in isolation, there is little theory devoted to the development of the non-individualistic aspects of action, taking into account the elements of situations in virtue of which we are able to act and with which we act. The tendency to focus thought about action on its voluntary and intentional aspects is due to the fact that these are considered to be the necessary requirements for an action’s ethical and political relevance. The significance of our capacities to be affected, and the non-voluntary features which contribute to action, remain unaccounted for when we theorize action solely in terms of a sovereign or autonomous individuality which is brought to the fore in discussions of free will and intentionality. This thesis, therefore, attempts to show that ethically and politically significant features of lived situations are overlooked when action is theorized in a humanist and individualist...
manner. In elucidating some of the ways that capacities for action are constituted by capacities for being affected, a place can be made for more than human and other than human elements in philosophies of action. The ontological problem of this work is: How are capacities for action constituted: activated, developed, enhanced, diminished, built, and or created? The ethical and political problem explored in this work concerns how our ways of thinking about action and capacity enable or disable capacities for action.
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Introduction
Conditions and Capacities

Philosophical Context:

This work is situated in the philosophical context where a concept of action is considered to be crucial for ethical and political thought, and where a focus on human exclusivity is considered to hinder a conception of action that is adequate to processes within which individuals are constituted. A theory of action which overlooks these will be unable to address issues such as: the propagation of ways of acting, the intimacy of action and context, the complex inter-relationship between thought and capacities for action, and the possibility that working upon the ways in which we are non-voluntarily constituted as subjects capable of acting is as important to “changing the world” as the ways in which we intentionally act upon the world. The examination of the capacity for action conducted in this thesis is meant to be a supplement to philosophies of action that centre on the intentional actions of individuals in the world. Although it is not meant as a replacement for such ways of viewing action, it does argue that viewing action exclusively in this way is ontologically, as well as ethically and politically, inadequate.

Freedom and Determinism

The problem of freedom and determinism is played out in many different ways throughout the history of philosophy. One of its modern iterations is a kind of deadlock between a position which holds that human freedom understood in terms of free will and intentionality is the basis of action and should be considered in
exclusion of non-human conditions, and the counter position which holds that humans are products of social, biological, and historically determinant systems and thus are not free to act spontaneously, bring about something new, and to change the world. The first position considers human action in its separation from, and exclusion of, the non-human, the other places the human so firmly within determined natural and social processes that there is no meaningful sense of agency; action is always only reaction. Obviously the situation is in actuality much more complex, but these are two generalized images of counter-poised ways of thinking about the possibilities for human action in the world.

In spite of this deadlock, a number of philosophies have emerged in the last century that do not clearly fall into either of these positions in that they place humans within larger processes but do not see these structures and processes as disabling the possibility of spontaneity, creativity and newness (which are widely considered to be significant features of action). A new conception of action that does not rely on the presumption of human exclusivity emerges from these ways of thinking. It is has been under-theorized, however, because much ethical and political commentary on “post-structuralist thought” has focused primarily on its anti-humanist aspects as disabling human action and agency,¹ thus overlooking the resources that post-structuralism provides for rethinking ethical and political action. One of the tasks of this work is to show how a more nuanced and robust conception of agency can emerge by loosening the exclusivity principle of humanist conceptions of agency, and

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reconceiving human agency as embedded within contexts and circumstances that include (rather than exclude) non-human entities and elements. Something similar has occurred within the philosophy of mind and artificial intelligence, whereby some thinkers have sought to foreground the non-individualistic, situational (context-dependent) nature of actions over the planned (context-independent) aspects. In both cases we do not surrender a concept of agency, but get a view of agency as acting-with contextual elements.

There are a host of elements which precede the emergence of particular human individuals and communities, and which play a significant role in their emergence. The non-human is not just “nature” but also language, institutions, moods, gestures, affects, etc. Thus, humans are not only constituted in relations with “others” (both human and non-human), but also constituted by relations between elements that are not easily described as human or as the products of human fabrication. (Whether or not human language can be distinguished in significant ways from something like whale language is not relevant here. The point is that human language cannot be understood as that which is fabricated by human design and intention.) All action can be seen as emerging from constellations wherein humans are assembled with material and incorporeal elements (plant, animal, mineral, technological bodies and statements, utterances, expressions, affects, moods, gestures, etc.) The breakdown of human exclusivity not only places humans within a system of

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nature but also within a variety of symbolic and affective systems that do not map onto a human-nature divide.³

The Human Condition and Capacity for Action

In certain important respects, Hannah Arendt as well as Deleuze and Guattari (together and separately) are interested in philosophical problems related to the human condition, specifically the capacity for action. In their own ways, they are interested in the emergence of change and newness in the natural, social, and political processes through which individuals are constituted. They share an approach to action which shifts the focus from the individual to the contexts that enable action, or which constitute the capacity to act. For Arendt, this context will be the public sphere or the space of appearance where individuality and capacities for action emerge. For Deleuze and Guattari the context consists of the kinds of structures (both in the world and in thought) that increase or diminish capacities for action. In Deleuze’s own writing, the context is explored in terms of processes of individuation wherein individuals are constituted.⁴ For Guattari, the context is made of the processes of subjectification that shape subjects (teaching, nursing, social work, mental health work).⁵

Arendt posits a murky moment in the constitution of the capacity for action, opening it up to the question of the collective production of power. Unlike Deleuze

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and Guattari, however, she does not give an account of non-human elements as contributing to this production. Instead she separates the realm of action, what she calls the space of appearance, from natural processes and non-human entities. So, although the collective production of the power that constitutes the capacity to act is very significant for Arendt, her analysis is built upon a strict divide between humans and non-humans. In this way she remains within the tradition of modern philosophy. Deleuze and Guattari do not maintain this exclusion, and this is one reason why some might claim that there is no significant theory of agency in their work; they are read as philosophers of the machines who exclude human individuals. This, however, is to miss their move which posits assemblages as a genetic condition of the emergence of individuality. Humans are not reduced to mere cogs in the machine; rather, the analysis of action becomes more complex and difficult to think, but arguably a more adequate construal of the real conditions for action.

It is clear that Deleuze and Guattari move their analyses of capacities for action beyond Arendt’s humanist concerns with the traditional political sphere. What is less apparent, however, is the degree to which their works in this area contribute to political philosophy; for what reasons should we take seriously their expanded approach to the fields in which capacities for action are constituted? A major task of their work is to show the gaps, the places for action within the systems and structures (ideal, material and social) with which we are embedded. Their work can be read as pointing to significant ways in which concrete individuals can manifest change and

bring about newness. However, the path to this is not in opposing the processes by which we are constituted as concrete individuals. We act, and thus bring about variation and newness, only in conjunction with the elements of our embedded situations, and by taking into account these processes from which we emerge.

This way of seeing action has implications for how we might understand environmental politics. In addressing the human relationship with nature, many environmental philosophies (and philosophies of technology) diagnose anthropocentrism (in a variety of guises) as at the root of human actions that lead to environmental destruction. These philosophies argue that if environmental problems are going to be addressed, anthropocentrism needs to be overcome. This, however, raises a host of difficulties, one of which concerns the problem of action. In order for environmental problems (ranging from the pollution of lakes, rivers and streams, to the depletion of nutrients in the soil) to be addressed, then it is argued that human actions need to change. If part of the problem, however, stems from anthropocentrism then what does this mean for action? The philosophy of action has traditionally been human centred, focusing on the isolation of what has been believed to be the exclusively human features of action: rationality, intentionality, responsibility, etc. Environmental philosophies that diagnose anthropocentrism as a problem are faced with the task of elucidating an approach to action which both moves beyond human exclusivity and also maintains the sense of agency needed for

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conceptualizing ethical and political action. The analysis of action in this work (which brings the explicitly political dimensions described by Arendt together with the constitutive processes theorized by Deleuze and Guattari) has direct bearing on problems in environmental philosophy that deal with situating action beyond an exclusively human sphere.

**The Problem**

The specific problem this work takes up is the ways in which we can give an account of the constitution of capacities for action. This includes how capacities for action are increased and decreased and how they are individuated. It will be argued that Arendt’s account of action points us to the collective constitution of the capacity for action, but without elucidating how such capacities are constituted. By bringing Deleuze and Guattari into dialogue with Arendt, this work explicates the ways that their thought enables us to see how capacities for action are collectively constituted, and how all action could be conceived as collective action with human and non-human elements. While Deleuze and Guattari do not take up the problem of action explicitly, the significant resonance of their thought with Arendt’s enables us to recognize a nascent theory of action in their work.

Arendt can be read fruitfully with Deleuze and Guattari because, on the one hand, while her work goes some way in theorizing the constitution of the capacity for action, specifically in positing collectivity as its condition, Deleuze and Guattari provide an account of, and concepts for, thinking the constitution of capacities. On the other hand, Deleuze and Guattari’s work, both in *Nomadology: The War Machine*

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and in their other works, lacks a resemblance to traditional political philosophy to such an extent that the political dimensions of their work are easily overlooked. This work will make clear the significant shared features and differences between, as well as the problems addressed by Arendt’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s characterizations of action. This will allow us both to situate Deleuze and Guattari’s work within a political-philosophical dimension and to assess the nature and merit of their contribution to political thought.

Since their thought is in many ways more ontologically oriented than Arendt’s, Deleuze and Guattari can help us to flesh out, and in some instances correct, certain insufficiencies with Arendt’s account of action. Deleuze and Guattari provide us with significant conceptual resources for thinking action in more nuanced ways, but we are confronted with a danger that agency becomes so diffuse that it evaporates, nullifying the agency said to be required for a philosophy of action. When humans are so conjoined with the natural and the artificial, what remains of agency? This is a danger that Arendt diagnoses with her critique of the figure of *animal laborens* (the animal labourer) who she claims cannot act precisely because their activity is caught up in natural processes of production and consumption; their activity is determined by necessity and are thereby not free. This exposes the problem of individuality and individuation for a philosophy of action: To what extent does action require the separation of the actor from the context within and into which actions occur?

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Movements of the Work:

Chapter One elucidates core characteristics of action in Arendt’s Human Condition and Deleuze and Guattari’s Nomadology. a) What we find is that there are some technical similarities in their analyses of action. Both sets of thinkers contrast acting with a certain structural conception of making: the imposition of form on matter, production according to a model, etc. b) We also find three significant shared characteristics of action in their depictions: exteriority, unpredictability and relationality. So what we have is both the development of a structure for action and a set of characteristics. c) Both sets of thinkers critique sovereignty and point to another way of conceiving action. Arendt advances a notion of freedom as non-sovereign, where actions are entwined and dependent on the plurality of other actors. We explicate this notion here and build upon it in the next chapter.

Chapter Two considers what it means to think of action as a capacity and how capacities for action are constituted. a) We explore Arendt’s claim that “acting and suffering are two sides of the same coin” by reading her three figures of human activity (animal labores, homo fabre, and the actor) in relation to Nietzsche’s three figures of Spirit (camel, lion, and child). We find that suffering, insofar as it is understood as being affected by situational constraints, contributes to the creative capacities of the child. In other words, suffering is a core element that informs actions, and constraints do not necessarily impede capacities but may actually contribute to them. b) Both Arendt and Deleuze and Guattari state that the capacities

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10 Arendt, Human Condition, 90.
for action are generated by power. This section analyzes how we can think of capacities as constituted by power and what kind of powers capacities might be. What we find is that both sets of thinkers advocate for similar distinctions in the conceptualization of power. We term this a difference between constitutive and constituted power. Where constituted power can be possessed, constitutive power rises up and disperses depending on the elements of situations. c) This understanding of constitutive power brings to light ways of thinking a productive relation between limit and capacity in a range of different domains.

**Chapter Three** explores the implications of the collective constitution of capacities in terms of collective action and different ways of considering who or what gets included or excluded in an account of action. a) Arendt excludes *animal labores* from the sphere of action on the grounds that her activities are too entwined with natural processes. 12 An aspect of her argument is that the violent opposition of *homo fabre* with nature is a necessary precondition for spaces of action. 13 We explore her logic as well as some critiques of her position with regards to labour and the natural environment. b) We find that on this count Deleuze and Guattari are at the other end of the spectrum in their embrace of process and the breakdown of the distinctions between human, nature, and artifice. 14 c) We explore how this dimension of their thinking enables a view of action as acting with (both human and non-human entities and elements).

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Chapter Four shifts the focus slightly from the capacity for action to the individuation of the actor. What we find is that both Arendt and Deleuze and Guattari have multiple ways of conceiving of spaces of action corresponding to different accounts of the individuation of actors. a) We first look at Arendt’s conceptions of space, the common world and the space of appearance, and explore the different ways that individuals emerge in terms of the two kinds of space. Then we examine some interpretations of the Arendtian actor as a relational being who emerges from a plural, interactive space (the space of appearance). It is in this space that a being is individuated in acting. b) Deleuze and Guattari have concepts of smooth and stritated space that in certain respects parallel Arendt’s. What we see, however, is that the relations between these spaces are different in Deleuze and Guattari’s account (striated space does not seem to be a condition of smooth space, where for Arendt the common world is a condition of the space of appearance). Further, the concept of smooth space, insofar as it has bearing on action, points towards a complex conception of individuation whereby individuals are not considered primarily in terms of their separation from one another or from their environment. c) We explore this novel conception of individuation in terms of the idea of an affirmative limit that we contrast with the other kinds of limit this work explores throughout (negative limit, productive limit, etc.) And, we consider how affirmative limit enables us to conceive
of capacities for action in a way that supports a more nuanced conception of collective action.

Chapter Five is devoted to exploring critiques of the concept of affirmative limit. We focus specifically on the charge that the lack of an appropriate sense of limit in Deleuze’s work (alone and with Guattari) means that his work does not support an adequate theory of agency and can thus make no meaningful contribution to political philosophy. a) Mark Hansen and Katherine Hayles take up this line of criticism by critiquing the lack of limit and constraint in Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of bodily life. They are particularly concerned with Deleuze and Guattari’s apparent disavowal of organic form and environmental constraint.18 b) We expand on this line of criticism by examining Peter Hallward’s detailed argument that there is no individuality in Deleuze’s thought because he does not have a concept of specific difference, advocating instead for singularity.19 c) The result, Hallward argues, of the lack of individuality in Deleuze is that his work has nothing to offer political theory because there are no individual relations and consequently nothing to support concepts of solidarity and resistance.20

Chapter Six takes up the questions of collective responsibility and solidarity in Arendt and in Deleuze and Guattari. a) We explore how Arendt and Deleuze and Guattari identify a responsibility that arises out of a shame of being human. Arendt will conceive this as a collective responsibility for the actions of other humans, while

19 Peter Hallward, Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 5.
20 Peter Hallward, Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation (New York: Verso, 2006), 162.
Deleuze and Guattari conceive responsibility “before” as a becoming. We will develop an understanding of becoming and responsibility in terms of subjective modification with the help of Iris Marion Young and Simone Bignall. b) We then turn to some of the ways in which solidarity is conceived in political philosophy, focusing specifically on the differences between solidarity based on empathy or fellow-feeling and solidarity based on the conceptualization of a common humanity and a common cause. c) Lastly, we assess the extent to which the notion of collective action, with which this thesis has been exploring throughout, contributes to solidarity thinking.
Chapter One
Acting

The works of Arendt and Deleuze and Guattari broaden the space for thinking about action to include those things beyond the actor’s control; they develop a conception of action that is always outside of or prior to sovereignty. This means that action cannot be considered as taking place in isolation from others, and that actors cannot control the outcomes of their actions. Both Arendt and Deleuze and Guattari consider collectivity, suffering and the capacity to be affected to be core elements of the capacity to act. Yet these are features of action that are overlooked when the focus is on the autonomy and freedom of the acting individual. When action theory focuses on autonomous, individual freedom, it tends to produce an idea of the acting subject as unified, isolated, and in control of affecting other beings and things. Agency is then understood to exclude patiency and the acting subject is considered in terms of a sovereign independence, as governor or ruler of their acts.

Although there are several differences between Arendt’s discussion of action and Deleuze and Guattari’s, I will argue that they share important core elements, most importantly their critique of the conflation of action with fabrication, as well as their argument that action does not conform to the form-matter distinction operative within many conceptions of the fabrication process. Arendt conceives of fabrication primarily in terms of a strong form-matter distinction, and this way of thinking will

21 Arendt, Human Condition, 188.
be shown to be problematic in light of Deleuze and Guattari’s claim that there is more than one way to conceive of making. Nonetheless, Arendt’s insight that action cannot be adequately conceived on a model of making that separates the maker from the material (or form from matter) has strong resonances with Deleuze and Guattari’s critical analysis of action.

We find in both Arendt and Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of action a similar critique of sovereignty. Sovereignty embodies the State-form\textsuperscript{23} at the level of the state and the individual. This form rests on a distinction between governors and governed\textsuperscript{24} in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, or the rulers and the ruled\textsuperscript{25} in Arendt's terms. Further, this distinction supports a conceptualization of action that separates the action, or the active force, from the material on which it acts. On this model, action is reserved for the first term (form) that unilaterally imposes an order upon a passive and possibly inert second term (matter). Whenever our conception of action is structured in terms of a separation of a governor from the governed, the material or field of action is conceived as incapable of active force and acting is considered to be a force that comes from outside, from another plane, autonomously ordering and bringing about change in the field of action. This structure is operative whenever we think of a “head” or leader as the locus of action who is solely capable of ordering their field of action without considering how such capacities for action are generated. We see this structure of thinking when the mind is thought to determine the body,


\textsuperscript{24} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{Nomadology}, 13.

\textsuperscript{25} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 222.
consciousness as mastering appetites and desires, the CEO as determining the affairs of the company, and the teacher as controlling the operations of learning.

What Arendt’s thinking shares with that of Deleuze and Guattari is a conceptualization of non-sovereign action that is irreducible to that of the State-form. This entails a favouring of the instability and uncertainty of action over the stabilization of power conceived in terms of central authority (sovereign, autonomous individual), and a critical concern with the homogenization of the field of action induced by sovereignty. Arendt finds that throughout history action has been viewed as if it were a problem requiring solution, and that the solutions proposed have attempted to minimize the unexpectedness and uncertainty that results from the human condition of plurality. These reductions include the implementation of various forms of rule from monarchy, one man rule, tyranny, or “those forms of democracy in which the many form a collective body so that the people “is many in one” and constitute themselves as a “monarch.””26 All these solutions do provide stability and security, Arendt concedes, but they also lead towards a loss of power27 because a people are turned away from political life and into a private realm. Arendt contends that the very condition of action is plurality, and this is troubling to political theorists because its outcomes are unpredictable, its processes irreversible, and its authors are anonymous.28

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Differentiating Acting and Making

Arendt argues that political philosophies, both ancient and modern, have attempted to replace action with fabrication, and that evidence for this can be found both in the equation of freedom with sovereignty and in the centrality of the concept of rule. Arendt sees in the substitution of acting with making (fabrication) an attempt to seek “shelter from action’s calamities in an activity where one man, isolated from all others, remains master of his doings from beginning to end.”

To see acting in terms of making is to see the actor as controlling the causes or effects of his actions through design and will. Political philosophy perpetuates the myth that only the sovereign individual is capable of action when it locates the capacity to act in the ruler as sovereign individual. Alan Keenan argues, following Arendt, that the will of the sovereign “desires control and rule: control over the effects of its action into the future, and ultimately rule over others.”

Sovereignty is considered in terms of control; we are only considered to be actors insofar as we are in control of the consequences of our acts. On this account action is reserved exclusively for the first term in the structured relations: orchestrator-orchestrated, ruler-ruled, command-obedience, and domination-submission. The second term is thought to be passive, suffering and affected, devoid of action and yet capable of receiving it by being acted upon.

29 Arendt, Human Condition, 220.
30 Arendt, Human Condition, 222.
For Arendt, fabrication is in contact with the world, and action is in contact with webs of human actions and relations. She cautions that we should not see action as analogous with fabrication because, unlike fabrication, action is not upon the web of human acts and deeds in the way that fabrication works upon material.³² Humans are not merely material with which to make something.³³ It is with strength that individuals work upon the world,³⁴ but it is power rather than strength that is the motor of action, as power rises up between people when they act.³⁵

Arendt argues that viewing action in terms of making not only eclipses the capacities of non-sovereign others for action, but is also destructive of relationships. In order to illustrate this, she points to Aristotle’s claim in the *Nichomachean Ethics* (Book IX, Chapter 7) that the benefactor loves the recipient of their beneficence more than they are loved by them because “the benefactor has done a work, an *ergon*, while the recipient has only endured his beneficence.”³⁶ The benefactor’s love of his work, the life of the recipient, is akin to the poet’s love of his poem. In her analysis, she finds that Aristotle is indeed thinking of acting as making (as making for Arendt is part of work), and of the relationship between the active benefactor and the strictly passive recipient as structured in terms of work. She claims that this way of conceiving action “actually spoils the action itself and its true result, the relationship

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³⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 140 and 188.
The relationship between the benefactor and the recipient is one wherein the recipient endures, bears or suffers the action of the benefactor. Action, when understood on the model of work and fabrication, is separated from bearing and suffering.

Arendt sees an attitude of sovereignty in the figure of *homo faber* who violently opposes nature by forcing natural materials into the forms that pre-exist the production process as ideas. The main relationship involved is between the maker and their material, which they shape to match their mental designs. In this way, making is structured by a division between knowing and doing. This corresponds with the respective stages of a fabrication process that begins with an image or an idea of an end-product, and is followed by a stage of execution.

The actual work of fabrication is performed under the guidance of a model in accordance with which the object is constructed. This model can be an image beheld by the eye of the mind or a blueprint in which the image has already found tentative materialization through work.

When making is conceived in this way the material is completely subordinated to the idea and the end product is the material expression of the maker’s idea. We see this idea of making also operative in Karl Marx’s analysis of the difference between the activity of a human architect and a bee; the design in the mind of the architect determines their product as a work.

[Man]…acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power. We are not dealing here with those first instinctive forms of

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labour which remain on the animal level…We presuppose labour in a form in which it is an exclusively human characteristic. A spider conducts operations which resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally.⁴⁰

For Arendt, action is only immanent to the sphere of action insofar as the latter is founded on the transcendence from nature achieved by homo faber. In creating a truly human world which transcends nature, homo faber is thus, in her view, able to provide the foundation upon which political action is then possible, something that Arendt thinks that mere labour can never provide. (We will explore Arendt’s analysis of the role of labour in the vita activa in chapter three.)

Deleuze and Guattari, following Gilbert Simondon,⁴¹ describe this model of making as the “hylomorphic model” wherein “incarnated form...marks the end of an operation.”⁴² This model implies “both a form that organizes matter, and a matter prepared for the form…”⁴³ The form or idea is seen to precede the process of making, and is of another plane than that of the material worked upon. The transcendent activity of the maker, in their employment of a form, idea, model, or image, corresponds to a passivity of the material. Deleuze and Guattari see this model as indicative of the State-form, which is characterized by a distinction between

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governors and governed. On their analysis, the governed, like matter in the fabrication process, are homogenized and prepared for governance or rule. When action is modeled on fabrication only the sovereign agent possesses the strength to truly act, since action is conceived in terms of the capacity to control outcomes, in the same way that fabrication is thought of in terms of controlling the production process in order to produce a pre-conceived end product. There is a structural isomorphism between the relation of homo faber to material nature and that of the ruler to the ruled in traditional political thought. When political philosophy operates with the premise of a separation between the ruler and the ruled it reserves the name of actor for the ruler, and it theorizes people (the ruled) as passive recipients of plans, orders, laws or decrees which come from outside their ranks. This sovereign story of action centralizes the capacity to act in a transcendent agent (whether it is a parent, teacher, doctor or architect/engineer); this agent is able to act upon states of affairs, but does not suffer them. This view does not consider the capacities of the recipient subjects (other people or matter) which enable and facilitate the actions of an actor or intervener, nor the capacities of non-sovereign individuals for actions of their own, nor receptivity as a form of action.

44 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 31.
46 Arendt, Human Condition, 225.
Arendt, as well as Deleuze and Guattari, see the entwinement of the hylomorphic model of making and acting as a symptom of a problem in political philosophy, namely the disavowal that action occurs without sovereignty. The corollary political problem for freedom is the issue of domination; if sovereignty is a necessary condition of action, then all actions are domination. Their diagnoses differ, however, in that Arendt accepts the hylomorphic model as exemplary of the fabrication process; she stakes off the immanence of action from nature and artifice. Making, as conceived by Arendt, is the activity whereby *homo faber*, isolated from others, dominates nature by commanding and controlling processes to suit human interests. She thinks that this is an adequate representation of making, but while it is appropriate to the realm of work, it is inappropriate to sphere of action. She proposes that the hylomorphic model should be confined to the realm of work, wherein it serves to raise humans from the sphere of labour where their commonality with animals is expressed by the term *animal laborens*. This form of work enables humans to transcend nature, and provides a condition of possibility for action.

*Material Forces*

Deleuze and Guattari take another route. Rather than accepting the hylomorphic model as exemplary of all making and confining it to a domain separate from the political, they problematize it further by distinguishing making into two kinds of productive knowledge: *nomad science* and *royal science*. Royal science operates according to the hylomorphic model we described above, whereas the

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operations of nomad science are of a different schema.49 The form-matter distinction is exemplary of royal science, whereas the dynamic relation of material-forces (an active materiality capable of informing the productive process) is exemplary of nomad science.

They provide an example from the history of architecture to elucidate the significance of this distinction. They argue that in the Gothic construction process a dynamic relation of material-forces is favoured over a static relation of form-matter.

The ground-level plane of the Gothic journeyman stands in contrast to the metric plane of the architect, which is on paper and offsite. The plane of consistency or composition stands in contrast to another plane, that of organization or formation. Stone-cutting by squaring stands in contrast to stone-cutting using templates, which implies the erection of a model for reproduction.50

The nomad sciences follow matter as they are in search of singularities (active, heterogeneous traits of matter that suggest new directions) and they “engage in a continuous variation of variables”51 rather than ideal reproduction of constant form. The material’s heterogeneity affects the maker (rather than receiving his action) who arguably can be reconceived as a heterogeneous composite in relation with other composites. In other words, the distinction and one-way relation between maker and material breaks down. One way to understand this is to think of the material as suggesting form. For instance, when considering how to approach teaching a particular philosophical concept a teacher will consider such things as student capacities for understanding, knowledge of other concepts, and life experience. These

49 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 30 – 31.
50 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 30.
51 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 36.
aspects of the students will shape how the teacher approaches teaching the concept. The form, then, is actually informed, acted upon, by the material in question.

This distinction, between making in terms of nomad science and that of royal science, connects with different concepts of plan. According to Deleuze, royal science is structured by way of the State-form and thus employs a transcedent plan that comes from above, such as a “design in the mind of god.” Notice the similarity with Arendt and Marx’s conception of the design in fabrication processes. The transcendent plan is like a template that is applied to matter; matter is formed by the plan. By contrast, making as it is understood by way of nomad science connects with a plan of composition, which is not known beforehand but will be “perceived with that which makes it makes perceptible to us, as we proceed.”

Eugene Holland suggests that we might consider nomad science in terms of “rules of thumb” in contrast with theorisation and empirical verification. An example from computer programming reveals the practical import of this distinction. The work of Sherry Turkle and Seymour Papert with children and young adults learning computer programming distinguishes between two approaches to creative action: planning and bricolage. The planning approach is a methodical procedure and the application of a predetermined plan, whereas the bricolage approach consists

53 Deleuze, “Spinoza and Us”, 128.
55 Turkle and Papert employ Claude Levi-Strauss’ term bricolage along with the thought of Piaget because both thinkers propose an alternative conception of knowledge in terms of the concrete. They part ways with these thinkers, however, in that they do not see concrete knowing as an early stage in the development of formal knowledge, but rather as a different style of knowledge.
in the continual experimentation with codes and results. For instance, in order to make a computer image of a bird flap its wings, one individual may plan the coding process in order to produce that result, perhaps even employing pre-made code-packs with determined functions. The other may make a wing and then see what else can be done from there. This is a “develop-as-you-go” approach.

For planners, a program is an instrument for premeditated control; bricoleurs have goals, but set out to realize them in the spirit of a collaborative venture with their machine. For planners, getting a program to work is like “saying one’s piece”; for bricoleurs it is more like a conversation than a monologue. In cooking, this would be the style of those who do not follow recipes and instead make a series of decisions according to taste. While hierarchy and abstraction are valued by the structured programmers’ planner’s aesthetic, bricoleur programmers prefer negotiation and rearrangement of their materials.\(^{56}\)

The *bricoleur* becomes an element in the constitution of the computer program by negotiation and conversation with the emerging entity; elements are considered in terms of their capacity for rearrangement.

The purpose of the preceding analysis of different approaches to activity, whether through planning (the plane of transcendence) or *bricolage* (the plane of composition), is not to suggest that pre-determined plans are always inappropriate. Rather, our ways of thinking creative activity and acting are impoverished if we understand them only in terms of pre-formed plans; to do so would be to miss the ways in which actions result from collaborative processes (something we will explore further in subsequent chapters).

Arendt’s conception of making as the application of a transcendent plan corresponds with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of royal science operating by way of

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a hylomorphic model. Consonant with her view, they argue that the hylomorphic model is a political product of a society that is organized into governors and governed. In contrast with Arendt’s claim, however, that the concept of making has been imported into political philosophy, they propose that the hylomorphic model does not naturally derive from the activity of making (from technology and life), but rather from the perspective of a society which is organized according to the State-form. It is this perspective which frames reflection in the form of political philosophy. Where the governor-governed relation has structured the fabrication process, a sharp division is also effectively maintained between the theoretical and the practical, the intellectual and the manual.

Arendt's thinking gets close to diagnosing this in her critique of sovereignty and the corruption of the concept of action in terms of rulership, but her refusal to see fabrication in any way other than the hylomorphic model marks the significant distinction between her theorization of action and that of Deleuze and Guattari. Her critique of fabrication is directed solely to its conflation with acting, because for her philosophy of action to be maintained fabrication must have this hylomorphic structure. If humans are to achieve freedom from the necessities of nature in a shared common world, the separation which homo faber enacts in the construction of the built world is necessary. Humans must, for Arendt, be able to transcend nature through the construction of the realm of artifice. Acting, although structured differently from making, requires that hylmorphically. From Arendt’s perspective,
Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of making is problematic because it seems to immerse the human within the flux of nature where there is no possibility of standing apart. In other words, the very possibility for action may be imperilled by the failure to hold the domain of action separate from those of work and labour. We will continue to probe these problems in subsequent chapters.

**Action and Exteriority**

Both Arendt and Deleuze and Guattari, in rejecting the hylomorphic model of action which would see the actor as a sovereign agent in control of materials and consequences, advance non-sovereign theories of action. Non-sovereign action for these thinkers is both unpredictable and relational: unpredictable because the effects of action are boundless,\(^6^0\) and relational because actors always act into a web of relationships.\(^6^1\) Actors do not seek to install or maintain stable powers, but instead favour “a web of immanent relations.”\(^6^2\) Actions are open-ended\(^6^3\) as the consequences reverberate endlessly and thus can never be predicted from the beginning.

Because the actor always moves among and in relation to other acting beings, he is never merely a “doer” but always and at the same time a sufferer. To do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin, and the story that an act starts is composed of its consequent deeds and sufferings. These consequences are boundless, because action, though it may proceed from nowhere, so to speak, acts into a medium where every reaction becomes a chain reaction and where every process is the cause of a new process.\(^6^4\)

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\(^{60}\) Arendt, *Human Condition*, 190.


\(^{62}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *Nomadology*, 12.


\(^{64}\) Arendt, *Human Condition*, 190.
By reserving for action openness and unpredictability, Arendt's thought gives us a view of action as highly complex and diffuse. Complex because actions intervene in webs of relations where effects cannot be foreseen, and diffuse because actions are taken up by other actors by way of response or reaction. Therefore the one who acts is never the author of producer of their acts, but rather simultaneously actor and sufferer.\(^{65}\) To act is to begin a process that has no end.

In Arendt’s conception of the political, it is only action (and speech about action) that attains the designation of being proper to politics. As such, the concern of politics is that which is inherently uncertain,\(^{66}\) or that which cannot be decided with certainty. In contradistinction to strength, which is operative whenever there is sovereignty, Arendt conceives of power as inherently unstable and proper to action. Her account of action can be read as an argument against the stabilization of power in institutions, insofar as the latter attempt to mitigate uncertainty and to solve the problem of action through centralization and control.\(^{67}\) George Kateb considers Arendt’s notion of political action to be more eruptive than regular:

> politics is all the more authentic when it is eruptive rather than when it is a regular and already institutionalized practice, no matter how much initiative such a practice accommodates. The reason is that eruptive politics is more clearly a politics of beginning and hence a manifestation of the peculiar human capacity to be free or spontaneous, to start something new and unexpected, to break with seemingly automatic or fated processes or continuities; in a word, to be creative. It is a burst of unfrightened, superabundant energy.\(^{68}\)

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65 Arendt, Human Condition, 184.
66 Arendt, Human Condition, 182.
67 Arendt, Human Condition, 230.
In her discussion of the American Revolution and the subsequent founding of the American republic, Arendt observes that “there was no space reserved, no room left for the exercise of precisely those qualities which had been instrumental in building it.”

These qualities are “the potentialities of action and the proud privilege of being beginners of something altogether new.” The revolution, Arendt says, gave freedom to the people “but failed to provide a space where this freedom could be exercised.”

The constitution of the republic was unable to maintain the spirit of the revolution: action.

Deleuze and Guattari elucidate a non-sovereign sense of action with their concept of the war machine, which they associate with “revolutionary powers capable of challenging the conquering state.” The war machine is a mode of action that does not employ sovereignty, invokes a power distinct from domination, and is inexplicable in terms of the State-form. Unlike the state apparatus (the ultimate expression of the State-form), the war machine does not set out to stabilize power in a central authority; if anything it works to ward off the formation of stable power. The war machine is characterized by an immanent power (puissance) of metamorphosis, whereas the State is characterized by sovereignty or a transcendent power (pouvoir).

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69 Arendt, On Revolution, 234.
70 Arendt, On Revolution, 235.
71 Arendt, On Revolution, 238.
72 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 10.
73 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 2.
74 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 11–13.
of domination. It is this power for metamorphosis which makes the war machine irreducible and exterior to the State.

In contrast to the stabilization of power afforded by the State-form, the war machine, like action as conceived by Arendt, is a dangerous source of instability and unpredictability; it maintains the “possibility of springing up at any point.”

From the standpoint of the State, the originality of the man of war, his eccentricity, necessarily appears in a negative form: stupidity, deformity, madness, illegitimacy, usurpation, sin… The warrior is in the position of betraying everything, including the function of the military, or of understanding nothing.

The war machine, or the actions of the warrior cannot be made sense of in terms of the State-form, because the war machine is “a pure form of exteriority, whereas the State apparatus constitutes the form of interiority we habitually take as a model, or according to which we are in the habit of thinking.” Deleuze and Guattari claim that the “State is sovereignty,” but “sovereignty only reigns over what it is capable of internalizing.” The war machine, by contrast, is characterized by non-sovereignty and exteriority; “it exists only in its metamorphoses” and acts through becoming.

The exteriority of the war machine determines it as non-sovereign because it does not try to appropriate what is outside of it, nor does it attempt to maintain a stable identity; rather, its existence is in change.

75 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 2.
76 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 10.
77 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 4.
78 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 5.
79 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 5.
80 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 15.
81 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 17.
Deleuze and Guattari’s view is that these abstract types of action (State-form and war machine) are operative in group structures as seemingly diverse as classrooms and gangs, and activities such as making, building, and knowing. Where the state-form is a form of organization that enables the undertaking of large-scale projects and creates a distinction between the governors and the governed in which the governor-actor can be seen to transcend the body upon which they act, these organizational divisions do not occur with the war machine. It is excessive rather than interiorizing, and favours a “web of immanent relations” instead of an “installation of stable powers.”

Exteriority and Unpredicatability

Action for Arendt cannot be circumscribed by institutions, as the true capacity for action lies prior to the formal constitution of political spaces; it is itself constitutive of such spaces. This question about the nature of action is a key feature of the debate around the meaning and openness of state constitutions. Arendt argues that there is a political paradox in the founding of the American constitution: action was understood by the founders as only possible for them, because by founding a constitution they were effectively disabling future generations of constitutional subjects from action. Action for Arendt is constitutive of spaces of action and freedom.

82 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 12.
83 Hannah Arendt, On Revolution, 237.
85 Hannah Arendt, On Revolution, 236.
Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the war machine can give us insight into the idea that action occurs outside of already constituted political spaces. They assert that the war machine is exterior to the State, “outside its sovereignty” and “prior to its law.”

They take the State to be a political organization with “distinct organs of power” that is “defined by the perpetuation or conservation of organs of power,” and which functions by binding and organizing. We see this in Arendt’s analysis of the founding of the American state where the maintenance of the constitution stabilizes the distribution of power within society at the expense of action. While Arendt’s theorization of action tends to point towards the creation of political spaces (in that she sees the creation of a constitution as a prime example of political action), Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the war machine tends to point towards actions that maintain exteriority to the State or that seek to ward off the formation of social structures modeled on the State-form.

Community gardening, garage sales, bartering, peer tutoring, skills trading, farmer’s markets, protests, and celebrations are all kinds of action that could be considered exterior to (because not circumscribed by) the State and also not conforming to the State-form. It is important to keep in mind when encountering Deleuze and Guattari’s contraries that concrete entities will never be exclusively one or the other, State-form or war machine; rather these abstractions facilitate an assessment of tendencies of a variety of entities and activities. For instance,

86 Deleuze and Guattari, *Nomadology*, 1.
89 Deleuze and Guattari, *Nomadology*, 41.
community gardens might be local neighbourhood-based initiatives, but will often need to gain permission to garden in a particular space from the municipal government (putting them in closer proximity to the State) or, in many cases, will actually be allocated space by the municipal government. When it is the government that allocates space, they will either then manage the “community garden” from the municipal office, in which case each “individual” applies directly to them for space in the garden. Or, they will require that the community group take on a more State-like structure so that the community organization becomes an extension of the municipal organization with a stable power structure, a head, and officials.

It is not only that some actions occur outside the bounds of the state (such as political protests, which, because they originate from and are maintained outside the authority and physical spaces of state institutions, are arguably “outside the state”), but also that some action (in the political sense) cannot be conceived in terms of the state model in thought. What we have here, then, is an analysis and critique of social and political organizations, but also (and perhaps more importantly) an analysis and critique of structures operative within thought itself, which they argue has often already been formed along State lines,91 so to speak. We will draw out this line of thinking further in chapters four and six, but for now we should keep in mind that Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of the State-form and the war machine is as much a critical analysis of the structures by which we think about the world as it is of the way the world itself works.

91 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 40.
Non-sovereign Freedom

Although the language of “exteriority” and “war machine” might seem foreign to readers of Arendt, what I am contending is that nevertheless, in her desire to elucidate a conception of non-sovereign action that is at once unpredictable and boundless, her theory of action also describes action as exterior to the State-form. On her account, the capacity for action is the capacity to begin something new, and this beginning is an act of freedom. Action is non-sovereign because in acting one begins something new but cannot predict or control the outcomes. Arendt’s argument is that the capacity for action cannot be accounted for in terms of sovereign agency modeled on a political organization which separates the ruler from the ruled because this model disables the plurality and consequent non-sovereignty which, on her account, are conditions of the capacity to act; the ability “to begin something new and of not being able to control or even foretell its consequences.”92

For Arendt, freedom is the essence of action93 and is not to be equated with sovereignty. Sovereignty is a feature of making, not acting; it is the disposition of homo faber “which regards everything given as material and thinks of the whole of nature as of ‘an immense fabric from which we can cut out whatever we want and resew it however we like.’ ”94 Thus the individual as sovereign agent acts on matter in such a way as to bring about the results in it they desire and have preconceived. They are considered free because they are the orchestrator and ruler of their actions. Insofar as they are free, they are not subject to limits and constraints. Non-

92 Arendt, Human Condition, 235
93 Arendt, Human Condition, 234.
94 Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, as quoted in Arendt, Human Condition, 305.
sovereignty, by contrast, is understood by Dana Villa to imply a “limited freedom” whereby the actor does not control the outcomes of her actions.95 He thinks that “Arendt theorizes action not only as essentially nonstrategic and noninstrumental but as essentially nonsovereign: the peculiar freedom of action cannot be captured by philosophies of action that place autonomous agency at their center.”96

Arendt points to the Greek and Latin words for action where, unlike in modern language, there are two interrelated words to describe the verb “to act.” “To the two Greek verbs archein ("to begin," "to lead," finally "to rule") and pratein ("to pass through," "to achieve," "to finish") correspond the two Latin verbs agere ("to set into motion," "to lead") and gerere (whose original meaning is "to bear").”97 She suggests that the concept “to act” encompasses both the action of a leader and the actions of others: action is divided into a beginning (done by one person) and an achievement wherein many have joined. In modern political language only the first part has come to mean to act. To act means “to rule”, and with this reduction of meaning the original interdependence of action, the dependence of the beginner and leader upon others for help and the dependence of his followers upon him for an occasion to act themselves, split into two altogether different functions: the function of giving commands, which became the prerogative of the ruler, and the function of executing them, which became the duty of his subjects. This ruler is alone, isolated against others by his force, just as the beginner was isolated through his initiative at the start, before he found others to join him. Yet the strength of the beginner and leader shows itself only in his initiative and the risk he takes, not in the actual achievement. In the case of the successful ruler, he may claim for himself what actually is the achievement of many… Through this claim, the ruler monopolizes, so to speak, the strength

95 Dana Villa, "Beyond Good and Evil - Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political-Action," Political Theory, 20:2, 277
97 Arendt, Human Condition, 189.
of those without whose help he would never be able to achieve anything. Thus, the delusion of extraordinary strength arises and with it the fallacy of the strong man who is powerful because he is alone."  

A key here is that the capacity of others is an integral component of any action and/or any conception of action; even if this fact may be suppressed, it is always present. Human freedom, for Arendt, is non-sovereign, as our actions are dependent upon the actions of others.

The view that action requires sovereignty disavows the significance of other actors, as sovereignty cancels the conditions of difference, dependence, and plurality that are necessary for action.  

It is Arendt’s contention that philosophies which take the problem of rule to be the central concern of political thought operate on the assumption that a strong ruler-ruled distinction is ontologically necessary to political action and organization. According to Arendt, action conceived in this way confuses strength with power and sovereignty with freedom; it is a perversion of the true meaning of action which extends beyond the ruler or sovereign actor. Freedom is not even possible if conceived on the model of sovereignty because the actual human condition of plurality disrupts the conception of individuals in complete independence from others and in total control of their actions.

If it were true that sovereignty and freedom are the same, then indeed no man could be free, because sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality. No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth...  

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98 Arendt, Human Condition, 189.
99 Arendt, Human Condition, 234.
100 Arendt, Human Condition, 234.
For Arendt, plurality derives from the human condition of natality as the unique beginning of each human life. It is this unique beginning that instils in us the capacity to act (as the capacity to begin), thereby differentiating us from others.\textsuperscript{101} “Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.”\textsuperscript{102} On Arendt’s view, the human condition of plurality means that each individual has a unique identity, derived from their natality and developed through their actions. It is an “ontological category that constitutes human existence” and entails the being together with other humans who are all different and share the sameness of being human.\textsuperscript{103} The consequence of plurality is that we can never fully know what the actions of others will be and so political life is inherently unstable.\textsuperscript{104} We cannot know in advance if and how our actions will be taken up by others.

The main thrust of Arendt’s critique of sovereignty is that it sets the actor apart from others, disavowing the interdependencies which action involves. Following Deleuze, we can understand sovereignty as the installation of an actor on a transcendent plane of organization. On this account, the actor as sovereign \textit{transcends} the milieu or situation \textit{upon} which they act. The \textit{acting upon} is the key to identifying transcendence, as it implies an ontological \textit{separation from} that upon which one acts. The sovereign actor is akin to \textit{homo faber} who \textit{works upon} the world and is not immersed in their field of action but rather separated from it such that they can stand

\textsuperscript{101} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 177.
\textsuperscript{102} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 5.
\textsuperscript{104} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 220.
back and regard their action as a work that is clearly their own. Arendt’s account of action does not afford the actor such luxuries; rather the actor is so fully immersed in the web of relations in which their actions intervene, that they will not even know all the consequences of their actions. To act is to take up the risk involved in initiating a process that one cannot control. It is not as planner or master that one acts, since action, unlike fabrication, does not involve controlling outcomes. “To act in the form of making, to reason in the form of ‘reckoning with consequences,’ means to leave out the unexpected, the event itself.”

105 Arendt, Human Condition, 300.
Arendt's theorization of the human capacity for action moves in a direction that underwrites a richer theory of human activity, life, and action than accounts that focus exclusively on the individualistic elements of action (free will, intentionality, etc.) do. By drawing attention to the capacity to act, she prompts us to consider how capacities are constituted. In non-sovereign action, the core elements that constitute the capacity to act originate outside the actor. In order to think through the capacity for action, we need to think through this collective, non-sovereign power. In the next sections we will explore how to think “constitutive power” in contrast with the “constituted power” of sovereignty. In the following chapters we will explore the problems that a constitutive view of capacities for action pose to our understanding of individual agency. What happens to the individuality of the actor when we look at them as constituted by a processual power which runs through them?

This chapter will analyse some of the ways in which we can rethink the capacity for action as open to constitution beyond the individual. Where much work laments the precariousness of free will and the impossibility of human action, this work attempts to develop a theory of action which actually draws strength from this situation. How does suffering (our capacity to be affected) contribute to our power of acting? Basically, what are often thought to be barriers to action such as suffering, or lack of effective control, or lack of conscious control, can actually be seen as the key features which empower us to act. We are interested in bringing the non-intentional,
non-human and non-individual aspects of subject-formation into view and giving them a role in how we understand the power of action.

This chapter will analyse the capacity for action in terms of *constitutive power* and query the ways in which we can think the structuration, enhancement, and diminishment of capacities. An examination of Arendt's analysis of the capacity for action reveals that the capacity to act is a problem for both political and ontological thought. In order to understand the capacity for action, we need to think capacity adequately, and this requires that we consider that capacities may need to be thought prior to the delimitation of spheres, strata and individuals. In other words, capacities may need to be thought prior to ontological distinctions such as those between humans and non-humans, as these distinctions may occlude our view to a more robust conception of capacity. An inquiry into the ontology of capacity problematizes in turn what we consider to be an individual and thus how we might conceive of an individual's capacity to act (this problem will be taken up in Chapter Three).

Although Arendt's work is useful in problematizing the concept of action, it does not directly address what it means to see action as a *capacity*. We will argue that her tripartite division of the *vita activa* (which maintains action, work and labour in separate spheres) disconnects thought from the ontological resources needed in order to think the concept of capacity (and thereby action) clearly and carefully. For Arendt, action is a capacity which holds the highest place in the *vita activa*, her hierarchization of human capacities for activity. She argues that collective power is a condition of human action, but does not condition the action. In other words collective power constitutes the capacity to act, without conditioning the action itself.
Although keen to broaden our understanding of action beyond the individual, Arendt is wary of going so far as to say that actions are conditioned by collectives.

[Action] may be stimulated by the presence of others whose company we may wish to join, but it is never conditioned by them; its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative.\textsuperscript{106}

It needs to be noted, however, that in the introduction to \textit{The Human Condition}, Arendt explicitly states that humans are “conditioned beings”, that we are conditioned by the environments, artefacts, and actions which form our environment.

Men are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence…Whatever touches or enters into a sustained relationship with human life immediately assumes the character of a condition of human existence. This is why men, no matter what they do, are always conditioned beings. Whatever enters the human world of its own accord or is drawn into it by human effort becomes part of the human condition. The impact of the world’s reality upon human existence is felt and received as a conditioning force.\textsuperscript{107}

Thus, there is an explicit tension in Arendt’s theory of action between conditioned and freedom. This tension and her manner of dealing with it owes a great deal to Kant in that all of Nature is causally determined, and yet human freedom (as freedom from causal determination) is possible; in other words, freedom is considered freedom from natural determination, or, freedom to act spontaneously. When actions are seen as conditioned, action cannot be understood as a spontaneous, new beginning and this is integral to Arendt’s account of both action and freedom, or action as freedom.

\textsuperscript{106} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 177.
\textsuperscript{107} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 9.
Suffering and the Constitution of the Capacity to Act

If we turn our attention to processes wherein capacities for action are constituted, we can begin to see how the capacity to be affected, to suffer, could increase one’s capacity for action. There is a *souffrance* to the constitution of our capacities for action. By developing a more complex understanding of suffering as a power or capacity, which entails a way of thinking activity and passivity in a less dichotomous way, we will be able to see that we are neither entirely passive nor active when it comes to the exercise of power and the constitution and formation of ourselves; rather, the degree of one’s activity and passivity is in perpetual fluctuation.

Arendt tells us that action does not occur without suffering, that acting and suffering are inseparable. Rather than seeing the actor as one who does not suffer, we act because we can suffer. Actions are new beginnings whose outcomes can never be foreseen, thus we suffer from our own actions as much as from the actions of others.

Because the actor always moves among and in relation to other acting beings, he is never merely a "doer" but always and at the same time a sufferer. To do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin, and the story that an act starts is composed of its consequent deeds and sufferings.\(^{108}\)

We endure consequences that we cannot control. Suffering is not only unavoidable, but is a necessary feature of action.

Reading Arendt’s claim regarding the significance of suffering for action in relation to Nietzsche’s parable in “On the Three Metamorphoses”\(^{109}\) can help us to explore this idea more fully. She describes three figures: *animal laborens*, *homo faber*, and the *actor* that mirror Nietzsche’s figures of the camel, the lion, and the


child. *Animal laborens* is compelled by necessity and engages in corporeal mixtures with nature, *homo faber* is sovereign and enjoys a certain separation from necessity and freedom from nature, and the actor is capable of new beginnings and is neither compelled by necessity nor sovereign in their actions. While these figures do parallel Nietzsche’s, we need to carefully probe the relations between each figure in order to understand the proximal relation between acting and suffering.

Although Arendt does not give the *animal laborens* any significant place in relation to the development of creative capacities for action, Nietzsche’s figure of suffering, the camel, can be read in relation to his figure of action (the child). Rather than reading the camel simply as a deplorable state in need of overcoming (like Arendt’s *animal laborens*), our reading will attend to the significance of the suffering (becoming-camel) of Spirit in the constitution of the capacities for action (the child). The camel, as well as the lion, is a necessary element to the becoming-child of Spirit. What is it that the camel, the strong weight-bearing Spirit, contributes to the process? How does suffering or being affected enable the conditions for new beginnings? (Recall that the capacity for new beginnings is synonymous with the capacity for action in Arendt).

Suffering, understood as undergoing situational affects, is often thought to be passive, the moment when the subject is acted upon by things external to it. If, however, limit and constraint can be seen as contributing to capacities for action, then the capacity to suffer will be a key feature which *in-forms* action. In analysing this proximity we will develop one way in which we can understand the constitution of the capacity to act: through limitations and constraints we have a conceptualization of
suffering as weight-bearing, undergoing, and the capacity for being affected. The figures of the camel, the lion, and the child can all be read as having different relations with constraint and necessity.

Nietzsche’s figure of the camel is the “weight-bearing spirit” which wants to be well laden, whose strength longs for the heavy.\textsuperscript{110} The weight-bearing spirit asks the heroes ‘what is heavy?’ Of the heavy things that Nietzsche lists, two are of particular importance for our tasks here. The first is “parting from our cause when it triumphs,” and the second is “being sick and sending home the comforters.”\textsuperscript{111} In both these examples our standard conceptions of action and suffering are overturned. In the first, to desert a cause just at the moment of celebration of victory is to refuse to enjoy the fruit of our labour (frequently understood as suffering). We can read in this a refusal of a means-ends conceptualization of action which is enshrined in the idea that we work in order to enjoy. The camel provides us a glimpse of one who resists the behavioural constraints prescribed by dominant cultural values in the refusal to not separate work and celebration, suffering and joy.

The second example where one turns away comforters when sick, calls into question our common conception of suffering as something from which we need to escape through comfort. Just as we tend to see a separation between work and celebration, we tend also to see a conjunction between suffering and the need for comfort. The idea that one could suffer without desiring alleviation is at odds with many social norms that see suffering as that which should be avoided wherever possible. Loralea Michaelis argues that Nietzsche gives suffering an important place

\textsuperscript{110} Nietzsche, “Of the Three Metamorphoses,” 138.
\textsuperscript{111} Nietzsche, “Of the Three Metamorphoses,” 138.
in human life, and that this poses a problem for ethical and political thought by challenging the tendency of political thinkers (both ancient and modern) to see in suffering the greatest evil confronting human beings.

Current political debate stands in a clear relationship to this tradition. The place that one occupies on the political spectrum today is increasingly defined according to the position that one takes on questions such as how far politics should be used to alleviate suffering, what kinds of suffering should be targeted for public recognition and relief, and what kinds left to the individual to endure in private as best as he or she can. But no matter how great the differences between us on these questions – whether we feel pity for the one who suffers or whether we turn away, disdainful or indifferent – we stand united on what we take to be an unassailable truth. Suffering is an evil. It reveals a defect, a flaw, a disorder, a chaos, either in the organization of society or in the constitution of the individual. It is an experience from which one should be delivered (or from which one should strive to deliver oneself) as quickly as possible.112

The camel can read as a figure of duty and obedience, full of sadness and resignation; that the camel, as a suffering being, is given over to laws and customs and resigned to a fate that comes from elsewhere. It is also possible, however, to see the camel as a being who, while renouncing norms, is nonetheless respectful of the limitations that norms impose. It is this disposition of respectful renunciation which is heavy, the load which the camel bears, the suffering which the strong-spirit desires. Yet, what is heavy about these things? They are heavy because the camel is both respectful of the necessity to act in this or that way (to act towards ends, or to avoid discomfort), and yet does not allow itself to succumb to this necessity. It is this ambiguous attitude of respectful-renunciation that is difficult. Charles Taylor has argued for a similar reassessment of Nietzsche’s camel, arguing that the “beast of burden” expresses “Spirit taking upon itself the most difficult,” and that there is a joy

which accompanies constraint. He argues that “the joy of the camel does not come from the achievement of great tasks,” but that the “camel’s strength…becomes joyous while taking on the greatest of burden, not afterward.” He likens this submission to the gradual conquering of artistic rules which brings about our admiration of constraint, and it is this we find expressed in the figure of the camel who can be seen as “dancing in chains.”

We may see in the camel an ethical disposition that neither affirms nor denies the moral constraint of the situation. In holding itself between affirmation and denial, the camel is laden down with the heavy. It seems useful to me to read in this heaviness a suffering, but a suffering understood broadly as undergoing and being affected. The constraint can only be suffered in the space between denial and affirmation, and without suffering it cannot be transformed. Thus the camel loves and renounces (a renunciation is not as strong as a denial) the “thou shalt”, and in so doing suffers the weight of the necessity to which it does not succumb. And in this way, through the suffering of the camel, the Spirit is constituted or engendered by being affected by the constraint.

Nietzsche tells us that by taking upon itself all these heavy things, the camel goes into the loneliest desert, which is where the second metamorphosis happens. In travelling into the desert, the weight-bearing spirit need not be thought of in terms of the renunciation of life and joy, but rather as an openness to becoming. The weight-bearing spirit sought out heaviness as a preparation for a new beginning. In other

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114 Taylor “A sketch….of the Camel,” 38.

words, the camel prepares the way for the child; the child is a potentiality which is partly constituted through the suffering of the camel. This preparation for a new beginning, however, is not an action with a particular-end-in-view, instead it is an enabling of conditions whereby new beginnings might come to pass. The camel can be read as kind of passive activity, and this kind of action is integral to the creative action of which Nietzsche’s figure of the child becomes capable. In this parable we see suffering as a kind of activity that is a key element of the capacity to act understood as a new beginning. Suffering alters the constitution of the actor, and thus changes the conditions for any future action. This is not to say that the ways in which one is changed through suffering a constraint or limitation will always increase capacities for action. The point is that suffering should not be disavowed as a barrier to action.

Nietzsche describes the child as “a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred ‘Yes.’”116 The capacity of the child to affirm the conditions and constraints of a situation, to have a yes-saying attitude towards life is only possible because of the two prior moments (the camel and the lion). In the figure of child, we find a being who has discovered the hidden possibilities within situations defined by constraints. Affirming a situation of which one has no sensibility is an empty gesture. It is only by having passed through the phases of respectful renunciation (camel) and wilful opposition (lion) that capacities for creativity and affirmation (child) emerge. The creativity and affirmation are constituted and engendered by the suffering. The child is able to create new values

by transforming the constraints and limitations of situations into new beginnings, to produce capacity from within constraints. The constraint that the lion reacts against as hostile to its being is transformed into a capacity. This transformation of circumstance from constraint to capacity is a re-orientation towards a given situation.

In these three metamorphoses we see the movement from renunciation, to will, to affirmation. Although it is possible to read the stage of the camel as simply the one whose reverence is understood as strict obedience to the *Thou Shalt* as the respecting of duty, constraint and limitation, this would be too simplistic. We need to reconcile Nietzsche’s description of the strong weight-bearing spirit as the one who seeks out the heavy with his claim that the camel loves the *thou shalt*. Obedience to law and respect for limitation would not cause the spirit to suffer under any weight, which is precisely what the strong spirit seeks to do: to bear a great weight. Respect for the *thou shalt* is not experienced as heavy if one is simply obedient. Obedience to duty and acceptance of constraint are only heavy when one does not simply accept them as is. It is through simultaneously respecting and refusing the norms, constraints and limitations signified by the *thou shalt* that the strong spirit suffers. It suffers because it loves and respects constraint and limitation, and yet does not accept them. Simple acceptance could not produce suffering and could not thereby constitute a sensibility of the contours of constraints and limitations. Without the work of suffering done by the camel, the play of the child would be vague and empty. We have argued that it is this sensibility of constraints which is required to make them enabling, to produce capacities from within constraints. The child, in affirming the
conditions of life, in saying yes to the constraints and limits posed by situations, is able to ‘play a game’ with them, to transform them into something new.

Rather, it is by way of the attributes and sensibilities engendered by the camel that the nuances and parameters of situations can become apparent. Suffering can be understood as a way of coming to know what a situation is composed of. Without fully undergoing something we cannot really come to know it, nor be the kind of being who could affirm it. The affirmation of the child is meaningless without first having deeply undergone a situation; to suffer a situation is to be constituted by it. Affirmation without constitution is empty. The camel can be seen to neither affirm nor deny the system or situation that it is in, but holds itself in a position of respectful renunciation. The figure of the camel attests to the weight, suffering, discomfort, ill-fittingness, blocks, and discontinuity which not only accompany but constitute all kinds of significant action. For instance, without a capacity to suffer I could not teach well (in a way that is appropriately responsive to the dynamic situations of student learning), since it is through the discomfort caused in me by the alterations in attention and energy within a class that constitutes my teaching capacity. I adjust my teaching (actions) because I am affected by the attitudes and energies of my students. Put this way, however, it sounds as if I first notice, then reflect, and finally adjust my actions. Although this is the case in several situations, I think that a case can be made that several of my adjusted teaching actions are immediately constituted through suffering the affects of the students.
Constitutive Power and Politics

In the previous section we explored how suffering normative constraints (moral, cultural, and aesthetic) can contribute to the constitution of the capacity to act. This section will explore what kind of power capacities are. Arendt introduces a particular conception of power that is related to how she conceives action; it is immanent to the realm of action which is unpredictable, uncontrollable, and as a result, unformalizable. This power can be neither possessed, nor stabilized, nor held in reserve. The capacity to act, for Arendt, has the power of collectivity as a condition. She reserves the term strength for the power of an individual in isolation, but for her the power of an actor is one which only ever arises from a collective. This is because her understanding of action as political is only ever with or in the midst of others.

Collective power enables people to act together and is produced by their acting together.\textsuperscript{117} The capacity to act is constituted by a power that can only be conceived in non-individualistic terms.\textsuperscript{118} In other words, collectivity is both a source of the capacity to act and a product of action. “Action, as distinguished from fabrication, is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act.”\textsuperscript{119}

It is by virtue of our relations with others that we are endowed with the capacity to act, or capacities for action. In beginning something new, the actor enables the actions of others, and in this sense, action is engaged with collectivity. Rather than locating

\textsuperscript{117} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 200.

\textsuperscript{118} The concept “non-individualistic” is here being transported from work in the philosophy of mind: Beth Preston, “Cognition and Tool Use”, \textit{Mind & Language}, 14:1998, and Tyler Burge, “Individualism and Psychology,” \textit{Philosophical Review}, 95:1986. Preston argues for a non-individualistic understanding of tools and artefacts and Burge argues for a non-individualistic individuation of mental content, sometimes understood as wide content or social externalism. In each case, they are interested in the supra-individual elements that bear on individuating the entity under consideration.

\textsuperscript{119} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 188.
power in the actor as sovereign, Arendt locates it in the potentiality for action that is a part of the being together of people. A key feature of Arendt’s argument for the distinction between acting and fabricating stems from her analysis of power as different from strength.

Power is always, as we would say, a power potential and not an unchangeable, measureable, and reliable entity like force or strength. While strength is the natural quality of an individual seen in isolation, power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse.

It is strength that enables the fabrication of an end product, but it is power that enables human actions.

Non-Possessive Power

Deleuze and Guattari also claim that the capacity for action is not the possession of power. Power that can be possessed is the power of rulers and government institutions; it is a centralized, stabilized power that for both Arendt and Deleuze and Guattari impedes, rather than promotes, the capacity for action. If by capacity to act we mean a power or ability, and if this power is not the institutionally legitimized power of public roles and functions, then we are confronted with the deployment of another sense of power in both sets of thinkers.

Drawing from the work of the ethnologist Pierre Clastres, Deleuze and Guattari point us towards alternative social organizations than those that are modeled on the State-form. They ask us to consider the difference between the chief and the man of State in terms of two different conceptions of power. The chief does not

120 Arendt, Human Condition, 202.
121 Arendt, Human Condition, 200.
122 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 11.
possess any sovereign power, but is dependent on the group’s desires for his prestige. “The chief is more like a leader or a star than a man of power, and is always in danger of being disavowed, abandoned by his people.”\textsuperscript{123} This example illustrates the exteriority of the war machine to the State apparatus in that there are forms of social organization that do not operate on a model of sovereignty which aims to conserve organs of power.\textsuperscript{124} However, Deleuze and Guattari, along with Clastres, are interested in a deeper problem: “Is there a way of warding off the formation of a state apparatus (or its equivalents in a group)?”\textsuperscript{125} The social situation of the chief is one wherein his power and persuasion is highly unstable and precarious, and this can be interpreted as a collective mechanism to “keep an apparatus distinct from the social body from crystallizing.”\textsuperscript{126} Seen in this way, sovereignty is a collective problem.

The difference between a sovereign and a chief can be understood in terms of two very different conceptions of power. Deleuze and Guattari differentiate sovereign power, which they term \textit{pouvoir}, from a power that cannot be possessed, which they term \textit{puissance}: “the secret potential…or potency [\textit{vertu}] for solidarity.”\textsuperscript{127} This has strong resonances both with Arendt’s conception of action as constituted by a collective, non-possessive power (distinguished in her terms by strength as a form of sovereign power) and Michel Foucault’s work on power. Foucault distinguishes between a sovereign power or \textit{royal power} (power understood according the juridical

\textsuperscript{123} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{Nomadology}, 11.
\textsuperscript{124} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{Nomadology}, 11.
\textsuperscript{125} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{Nomadology}, 10.
\textsuperscript{126} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{Nomadology}, 11.
\textsuperscript{127} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{Nomadology}, 4, 26 – 27, and 30.
model of the power of sovereign authority), and a non-sovereign power that cannot be possessed and cannot be adequately theorized by way of a juridical model. He states that: “Power…is never localised here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth.” Foucault offers a critique that standard political theory only attends to power in terms of domination according to a juridical model where power is possessed by the sovereign in their authority. He suggests that,

rather than ask ourselves how the sovereign appears to us in his lofty isolation, we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts etc. We should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects.

As an alternative to the juridical model of power, Foucault advances a conception of power as something that circulates, that it is fluid and inherently unstable. Individuals, according to Foucault’s analysis, do not possess power, but rather are both its effects (individuals are themselves constituted by power) and its vehicles (power circulates through them): “it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals.”

Amy Allen, in her article "Power, Subjectivity, and Agency: Between Arendt and Foucault," argues that Arendt's understanding of power is quite similar to Foucault's. Arendt's critique of the "command-obedience model" of power

129 Foucault, “Two Lectures,” 98.
130 Foucault, “Two Lectures,” 97.
131 Foucault, “Two Lectures,” 97.
specifically corresponds to Foucault's juridical model.\textsuperscript{132} They both, Allen states, reject the idea that power can be possessed and see it instead as productive; “power…is a condition for the possibility of both agency and subjectivity.”\textsuperscript{133}

\textit{Constitutive Power}

In addition to considering that capacities for action are constituted by a power that cannot be possessed by individuals, we can also think in terms of a distinction between constitutive power (power which is in the process of constitution) and constituted power (a centralised power which is stabilized by sovereign authority). While the State operates with constituted power (\textit{potestas}), it actually presupposes and arguably covers over another kind of power, that of constitutive power (\textit{potentia}). On both Arendt’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s accounts, the capacity to act is generated by a constitutive power of situations that is dynamic and unstable. One of the ways in which we can see this is in terms of Benedict Spinoza’s conception of sovereignty. Herein the power of the sovereign (\textit{potestas}) is constituted by the power of the people; it is a dynamic affective power (\textit{potentia}). His view of power and the capacity to act undermines traditional theories of sovereignty and opens up a space to theorize mutiny, rebellion, regime change, and revolution. Rather than thinking within the bounds of the State as it is currently constituted, this line of thinking enables us to conceive of changes of State. Spinoza reanalyses the power of the sovereign as being constituted by the people, or the multitude. Further, on Spinoza’s

\textsuperscript{133} Allen. "Power, Subjectivity, and Agency,” 142.
account, power is not possessed by one individual\textsuperscript{134} or group, but rather is distributed throughout nature, and thus when one acts, one acts in virtue of the power of nature constituted and arranged in a certain way by the elements of that situation.

In Spinoza’s political philosophy we find a traditional idea the sovereign as an individual who stands outside the commonwealth, insofar as the law does not apply to him and who is both free and capable of exercising their sovereign will, reconfigured to a species of non-sovereignty. Jose Juniper argues that in “rejecting transcendental concepts of reason, sovereign power and transitive causality in favour of constitutive power and immanent causality Spinoza foreshadowed a mode of political engagement that was brought to fruition by Deleuze and Foucault.”\textsuperscript{135} Spinoza reconfigures sovereign authority and situates it within the commonwealth; it is limited, constituted, and subject to the passions, desires and reason of the people. This reconfigured sovereignty has much in common with Arendt’s conception of the capacity to act and Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the \textit{puissance} of the war machine. In order to show this, we will briefly sketch the moves Spinoza makes in the \textit{Political Treatise} which lead him to advance this arguably rather strange conception of sovereignty.

There are three key components to Spinoza’s reconfiguration of sovereignty. First, he situates the political power within the natural order, explaining it in terms of natural right. Spinoza considers natural right to be:

\begin{quote}
the very laws or rules of nature, in accordance with which everything takes place, in other words the power of nature itself...the natural right of universal
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{134} Aurelia Armstrong. ”Natural and Unnatural Communities: Spinoza Beyond Hobbes,” \textit{British Journal for the History of Philosophy}, 17:2, 282.

\textsuperscript{135} Jose Juniper, ”Foucault and Spinoza: Philosophies of Immanence and the Decentred Political Subject,” \textit{History of the Human Sciences} 21:2, 16.
nature, and consequently of every individual thing, extends as far as its power: and accordingly, whatever any man does after the laws of his nature, he does by the highest natural right, and he has as much right over nature as he has power.\textsuperscript{136}

The “right” of sovereign authority is its power understood like any other power in nature: “the right of the supreme authorities is nothing else than simple natural right.”\textsuperscript{137} The implication of this is that the sovereign only has as much right as he has power, but the power of the sovereign in deriving from natural right rather than juridical authority is dependent on others, and this brings us to the second aspect of his reconfiguration of sovereignty. He advances a theory of sovereign power that is constituted by the people, making sovereign power dynamic with variable degrees of stability and instability. Sovereign power is constituted by the people by way of such affects as hope, fear, and indignation: if the actions of the sovereign cause indignation in the multitude, then the power of the sovereign decreases. He argues that those things are not so much within the commonwealth's right, which cause indignation in the majority. For it is certain, that by the guidance of nature men conspire together, either through common fear, or with the desire to avenge some common hurt; and as the right of the commonwealth is determined by the common power of the multitude, it is certain that the power and right of the commonwealth are so far diminished, as it gives occasion for many to conspire together.\textsuperscript{138}

In other words, insofar as the actions of the sovereign give cause for the people to conspire against him, then he decreases his power as the power of the people to rebel or cause a revolution increases. Thirdly, he is able to articulate the “limits to sovereign authority” not in terms of a juridical theory of right, but in terms of natural

\begin{footnotes}

137 Spinoza, \textit{Political Treatise}, III:2, 301.

\end{footnotes}
power. Thus the sovereign cannot by “right” do that which will decrease his power. Right is “limited not only by the power of the agent, but by the capacity of the object.” So sovereign power for Spinoza is neither absolute, and more importantly, nor is it individually possessed since it is constituted by a collectivity of powers (the affects of the multitude).

The significance of Spinoza’s philosophical account to our inquiry concerning the ontological and political dimensions of the capacity for action are that it provides us with an account of the constitution of the capacity for action as exterior to the actor and dependent on the configuration of concrete situations. In fact, Spinoza gives us one account of the collective constitution of the capacity for action. It is both less and more satisfying than Arendt’s account. It is less satisfying because, unlike Arendt, Spinoza outlines his theory of power (the capacity to act) from the perspective of the sovereign (even though he significantly alters what this means), whereas Arendt’s account of action is explicitly non-juridical. It is more satisfying than Arendt’s account in that he fleshes out in greater detail how capacities for action are constituted. The power to act for Spinoza is produced and limited by a configuration of natural powers that combine to enhance or diminish the capacity to act. Where Arendt points us to the collective constitution of the capacity to act, Spinoza provides us with one way of understanding the mechanics (machinations) of this phenomenon.

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Enabling Constraints and Non-Human Limits

In chapter one we saw that when the capacity to act (freedom) is equated with sovereignty, then limits and constraints are seen simply as obstacles and impediments to action. Conceiving the capacity for action in terms of non-sovereignty alters how we understand limits and constraints. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, a non-sovereign account of action will include suffering as a core feature of the capacity to act. It was argued specifically that suffering constraints can be seen as constitutive of the capacity to act (the capacities of the child are engendered by the camel in Nietzsche’s parable). We then saw how the constitution of the capacity to act can be understood in terms of constitutive power whereby elements of situations enable and constrain the capacities for action. In this section we will explore further how limit can be conceived as productive of capacities for action.

The distinction between these two approaches to the relation between freedom and constraint (capacity and limit) is a way to distinguish the political philosophy of Hobbes from that of Spinoza. Hobbes understands freedom (which for Arendt is equated with the capacity to act) as "absence of opposition," as freedom from "external impediments of motion." Hobbes sees law primarily in terms of limitation; the laws of the State can only constrain freedom by coercing action, and freedom only exists in the spaces not determined by the law. For Spinoza, by contrast, the aim of government is liberty where citizens are free to develop their

140 Etienne Balibar, Spinoza and Politics (New York: Verso, 2008), 103 – 104.
142 Hobbes, Leviathan, XXI, 264.
minds and bodies, and thus the laws of the state are seen to produce capacities for mental and physical growth. For Hobbes, limits impede capacities and for Spinoza, limits produce capacities. The view that limits produce or enable capacity is complex and somewhat counter-intuitive. Yet we can find it developed in a variety of areas: political thinking, ontology, art and education. Such an idea is articulated in terms of suffering and action (in Arendt and Nietzsche), enabling constraints (in complexity theory, organizational capacity and learning theories), obstacles and growth (in John Dewey’s theories of art and experience), and productive obstructions (in Christian Bok and Lars von Trier on writing poetry and film-making).

Negative Limits

In order to think of limit as inhibiting capacity, we simply point out that blocks, constraints, and obstacles (various forms of limit) that disable certain kinds of action. The train blocks the car from crossing the tracks, the straightjacket constrains the bodily movements of the patient, and lack of money can be an obstacle to one’s ability to develop one’s capacities through education. Further examples could include how one’s capacity to think clearly might be impeded by noise in one’s environment or by a headache. Incarceration limits one’s capacity to parent, by imposing limits on the time, place and duration with which one could try to make or be with one’s children. Major illness could decrease one’s capacity for intense physical labour such as chopping wood, building a house, and shovelling snow. In each of these cases, limits are seen to decrease (or even disable) capacity; they limit it.

Productive Limits

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When limit is seen as productive of capacity the view of limit as constraining action is maintained, with constraint being one of the early moments in the eventual development or production of a capacity. First the limit must act as a constraint and then, if the entity in question is strong or clever enough, it is able to use the constraint to increase its capacity. Another example of this kind of capacity-increase is the role of resistance in muscle development: at first the weight lifted is an obstacle which the individual is too weak to overcome with its own force, but gradually, in pushing against (opposing itself to) the weight over time, the individual strengthens its muscles (increases its capacity) and is able to move that which was once an obstacle to it. Thus the initial obstacle to the capacity for action becomes a condition of that capacity. In a similar fashion, enabling constraints are those things which alter the constitution of the individual by acting against them and thereby spurring an increase in capacity (if the individual is strong or clever enough to endure the resistance). In these cases, there is always a limit that constrains the capacity of the individual as a first moment (or necessary condition) in the growth of capacity.

Thinking of capacities as constituted by limits tends to rely upon an implicit separation between individual and environment (or individuals from one another), and it is this separation that then enables the relationship in which capacities emerge. Consider John Dewey’s account, in *Art as Experience*, of the intimate bond between the individual and their environment:

life goes on in an environment; not merely in it but *because of it*, through interaction with it. No creature lives merely under its skin; its subcutaneous organs are means of connection with what lies beyond its bodily frame, and to which, in order to live, it must adjust itself, by accommodation and defense but also by conquest. At every moment, the living creature is exposed to dangers from its surroundings, and at every moment, it must draw upon something in its
surroundings to satisfy its needs. The career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way.\textsuperscript{144}

The environment is the limit of the creature and that with which it is compelled by its needs to enter into relations in order to maintain its capacities. If we take the example of a plant, we can see how the capacities of a plant can be thought to be constituted through its relations with its environment. The environment is the limit of the plant (that which it is not), and at the same time it is the very condition for the plant’s existence. The plant needs water, air, and sunlight in order to survive and to grow. Thus the environment, as limit, constitutes the capacities of the plant by forming its necessary conditions which are simultaneously its capacities for growth and flourishing.

A slightly different way of conceiving limits as generating capacities is in terms of the obstacles and constraints which environments and contexts pose to individuals, and how capacities develop from these constraints. Dewey describes the growth of the organism (which for our purposes I think we should think of as an increase in capacity) as entwined with the resistance that it encounters from its environment.

Every need, say hunger for fresh air or food, is a lack that denotes at least a temporary absence of adequate adjustment with surroundings. But it is also a demand, a reaching out into the environment to make good the lack and to restore adjustment by building at least a temporary equilibrium. Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it - either through effort or by some happy chance. And, in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. If the gap between organism and environment is too wide, the creature dies. If its activity is not enhanced by the temporary alienation, it merely subsists. Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more

extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives.\textsuperscript{145}

On Dewey’s account, passing through states of alienation where there is a lack of adjustment between the individual and its environment is a condition for its enrichment, enhancement and growth. We could say that these sorts of limits constitute capacities by prompting the individual to adjust itself to its environment so that it regains a balance or equilibrium with it, and in this readjustment the capacities of the individual are enhanced. Furthermore, the intimacy of the bond posited between the individual and the environment enables us to consider capacities not as “belonging” to the individual, but rather existing in the relation between the individual and their environment. Dewey’s account of capacity development in relation to limit and resistance is unable to tell us how it is that an organism is able to achieve this growth in relation to limits. This kind of account will require a more complex understanding of individuation which we explore in Deleuze and Guattari’s work in the last section of this chapter.

We see Dewey’s version of the constitution of capacities by way of constraints in several general theories of capacity development. Concepts such as ‘environmental constraints’, ‘productive obstructions’\textsuperscript{147} and ‘enabling constraints’ are operative in theories ranging from artistic practice, psychology, international development to education. These theories focus on the productivity of limits and constraints which enhance or diminish capacities by provoking the adjustment and adaptation of individuals, groups and organizations. In the realm of education, the

\textsuperscript{145} Dewey, \textit{Art and Experience}, 14.
concept of *enabling constraints* is used to draw attention to the productive capacity of constraints in learning activities. These constraints provide the structural conditions that enable a learner to balance identity and purpose with sources of disruption that then subsequently compel the learner to adjust and to adapt.\(^{146}\) In human development, social and institutional conventions are considered as enabling constraints in that they constrain individual values and actions while enabling the capacities of the individual to develop into both a participant and co-creator of social realities.\(^{147}\) In artistic practice constraints are utilized to produce capacities, and are sometimes referred to as “enabling obstructions.”\(^{148}\) An example from literature is a French writers group Oulipo (*l'Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*)\(^{149}\) that experiments with the productive capacity of various literary constraints. It is in this tradition that Georges Perec wrote his 300 page novel, *La Disparation* (1969), without using the letter “e”. More recently, the Canadian poet Christian Bok developed his book *Eunoia* where he was constrained to write each chapter only using one vowel. An example in cinema is Lars von Trier’s “Five Obstructions” where he challenged the film maker Jørgen Leth to remake his film “The Perfect Human” five times under the constraint of a different obstruction each time.

In international development the term capacity development is used to refer to

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"the process whereby people, organizations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time."\(^{150}\) Some theories of capacity development attend to the relationship between capacity and constraint by focusing on rules and structures of power, such as those within institutions, which are termed the "enabling environment". The enabling environment is made up of constraints that influence the behaviour of organizations and individuals, thereby increasing or decreasing capacity. "[O]rganisational and institutional rules influence individuals' capacities by creating incentive structures that either give or deny them opportunities to make good use of their abilities and skills."\(^{151}\) The incentives could foster capacity development or passivity, depending on the kind of action that they seem to stimulate.

In this section we have seen how limits and constraints can be seen as affirmative conditions, as enhancing capacities for action. On the accounts given in this section, the capacities of individuals are constituted by way of that which is external to them and which resist their will to varying degrees. The capacity for action is articulated in a non-sovereign sense, where limits are not seen as impediments but rather resources for growth. The constitution of capacities for action by way of situational ensembles problematizes the status of the individual agent; it is difficult to consider how an individual actor can be considered as unconditioned when their capacities for action are externally constituted. In the following two chapters we will problematize this account by considering whether action, insofar as it is a


\(^{151}\) "The Challenge of Capacity Development," 245.
capacity that is constituted by that which lies outside of the agent, is actually always collective action. In which case individuality is diffused, and the locus of agency is dispersed. First, however, we will consider the significance of non-human limits to capacities for action by looking to Arendt’s argument for the exclusion of labour from the sphere of action.
In the previous chapter it was argued that capacities are a kind of power, specifically a constitutive rather than a constituted power. Let’s take a brief moment and explore this through the example of swimming: what does it mean to think of swimming as a constitutive rather than a constituted power? One important feature we pointed to was that constitutive powers are not possessed by individuals but rather circulate in webs within which, or by virtue of which, individuals are constituted. Normally, we would think that the capacity to swim is possessed by an individual; I have the capacity to swim. What is the significance of thinking the capacity to swim free from possession by an individual? And how is this even possible? Firstly, if we think of capacities as powers which are in processes of constitution, then we look to the elements at play in that constituting process. The capacity to swim is a power which is in an open process of constitution by such elements as: water, a particular kind of body, experience and skill, culture, geography (river or lake) or architecture (swimming pool), physical strength, desire. At the very least, the capacity to swim is constituted by a body of water capable of sustaining a swimmer, and a body with the minimal structure and strength capable of swimming. In other words, the capacity to swim is constituted at the intersection or through the relationship of sets of other capacities; it can be adequately understood as constituted through dynamic processes whereby other capacities are informing or giving rise to the capacity to swim. Although we might say that one has a capacity to swim, focusing on capacity as a power which can be possessed (a property of an individual), we will illuminate a
more complex dynamic if we consider capacities as constituted in virtue of other capacities. Our interest in this work is attending to that in virtue of which capacities are activated and/or constituted, and we would like to make the case that there are significant gains in giving accounts of (political) action if we look to that in virtue of which actions are enabled. In other words, when we think capacity, we should be prompted to consider the elements in virtue of which the capacity is activated and exercised. The question explored in this chapter is to what extent such accounts become accounts of collective rather than individual action, and to what extent we might include non-human elements in such accounts.

Building from the conception of constitutive power that we developed in the previous chapter, this chapter will explore the implications of this notion for conceptualizing collective action. Both Arendt and Deleuze and Guattari provide us with accounts and analyses of collective action, but we will see that they diverge significantly around what qualifies as a species of collective action and the conditions of collectivity; Arendt founds her theory of collective action on the human condition of plurality, while Deleuze and Guattari advocate for heterogeneity as the condition of collectivity. The traditional view of action presents certain obstacles to thinking collective actions because it requires us to isolate a self-as-agent who is the cause, author and owner of her acts. On this model, collective action is thought of as many individuals coming to an agreement (through deliberation) and then acting in concert, or as one.152 The action can then be thought to be the result of the sum total of each individual acts; the actors are each individual agents who form a unified aggregate.

This, however, does not describe how collective actions actually occur; in other words, it is an idealized story which maintains the individual as the key explanatory unit of analysis, thereby covering over the complexity of the non-individualistic affective constitution of action. We need new ways of thinking collective action that enable us to give a more explanatory, albeit incomplete, account of it.

This chapter will argue that Arendt’s position that the capacity for action is collectively constituted cannot be reconciled with her position that *animal laborens* cannot act. In elucidating a conception of non-sovereign action, Arendt invokes the concept of plurality as the necessary condition of the capacity to act. In this move, however, she limits action to an entirely human sphere wherein actors have the human condition of natality in common, and are also distinguished (pluralized) by this condition. What we can see with the aid of Deleuze and Guattari is that although Arendt thinks that the concept of plurality is central to non-sovereign action, it establishes human sovereignty in relation to all non-human elements of the lived world. By invoking the concept of heterogeneity rather than plurality, and by not locating action exclusively in the human domain, Deleuze and Guattari facilitate a conception of collective action that does not rest on a primary and constitutive distinction between human and non-human.

The idea that actions occur in virtue of a heterogeneous host of elements is unacceptable to Arendt because her theorization of action – which relies on distinctions between action, work and labouring – sharply and effectively separates action from all non-human elements. In her theorization of the figure of *animal*...
laborens, the human considered in terms of the activity of labouring, she argues that animal laborens is incapable of true plurality\(^{155}\) and consequently action because his activities are driven by and occur in conjunction with natural processes. In other words, one’s capacities for action are disabled when one’s activities are mixed with nature and the nonhuman. Deleuze and Guattari’s work, by contrast, implies a way of conceiving of action as occurring on the “plane of composition” that consists in mixing with the non-human. They introduce a series of concepts (war machine, assemblage, body without organs) that enable us to conceive of this mixed kind of action as arising from heterogeneous collectives composed of both human and non-human elements. In agreement with Arendt, we affirm that “[a]ction…is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act,” \(^{156}\) and yet we reject her view that action only “goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter.”\(^{157}\) As a capacity, action cannot be stripped of its heterogeneous, collective nature. It is always dependent on much more than just the human realm of affairs, and thoroughly mixed up with other material entities and non-material elements (affects, words, space, etc.). It is for this reason we will argue, contra Arendt, that the “with” carried by the concept of animal laborens helps, rather than hinders, an understanding of collective action.

\(^{155}\) Arendt, *Human Condition*, 212.

\(^{156}\) Arendt, *Human Condition*, 188.

Labour Processes

In chapter one, we explored Arendt’s reasons for separating out the activity of work or making from the activity of action. In this section we will explore her argument that labour also needs to be carefully distinguished from action. In order to see this, we must get a clear view of how it is that she differentiates between labour and work. Of the three activities comprising Arendt’s articulation of the vita activa (labour, work and action), labour is regarded as the lowest because animal laborens is compelled by necessity into corporeal mixtures with the natural world. Labour mimics the processes of nature because its concern is life itself, the maintenance of the biological life of the human being. Just as nature's processes are cyclical and repetitive, so too is the processual activity of labour which produces only objects for consumption that enable further labouring. Unlike work and action, the labour process has no beginning. It also has no end save for the death of the individual biological organism. The distinction between labour, work, and action rests on the kinds of processes they are; where work has a definite beginning and an end and contributes to the objective world of things, labour is a never-ending process which "follows...the metabolic process of biological life." Action, remember, is also a never-ending process, but unlike labour it has a beginning; in fact, for Arendt, action is a new beginning.

158 Arendt, Human Condition, 83-84.
159 Arendt, Human Condition, 100.
160 Arendt, Human Condition, 99.
161 Arendt, Human Condition, 98.
162 Arendt, Human Condition, 98-99.
Animal laborens, the human who shares its activity in common with all other animals, cannot produce a world wherein human action is possible. Arendt suggests that labour and work are not seen as different in kind unless we take into account the nature of the thing produced. She states that when we look to the objects produced from each activity, we can clearly see that there is a significant difference between a loaf of bread and a table, since their life expectancies are radically different.\(^{164}\) A major concern of Arendt’s is the stability and permanence of the world. She thus distinguishes between the products of labour and work in terms of the degree to which they contribute to the permanence and stability of a shared human world. The degree of “worldly character”\(^{165}\) that each thing has is determined by its life expectancy, by how long it stays in the world and thereby contributes to the permanence of the world. Labour, the least worldly of the three activities, is nonetheless still differentiated from animal activities in that it produces objects for consumption. There is a gap between production and consumption that does not exist in the natural world. Yet it is only because of the existence of the human world that the activities of animal laborens mark a gap between production and consumption. Without the human world, the activity of labour, Arendt thinks, would fall into the continuous, cyclical natural process.\(^{166}\) She thinks that artefacts such as buildings and furniture, rather than items for consumption such as food or disposable consumer items, contribute more effectively to the permanence of the world. These items are the necessary conditions for both the sharing of a common space and, as we will see

\(^{164}\) Arendt, Human Condition, 94
\(^{165}\) Arendt, Human Condition, 94
\(^{166}\) Arendt, Human Condition, 96.
below, for action. Although *animal laborens* mixes with nature in a way that *homo faber* does not, in labouring humans still labour upon a matter, wresting it from nature, but only for a short period of time before their consumption releases the matter back into nature. The human metabolism with nature is not then the same as animal activity within nature, because humans are simultaneously part of, and separate from, the natural world.

One of her concerns in maintaining strong distinctions between these three kinds of human activity is to set the realm of human action on a plane separate from the plane of nature. The power that enables human action arises in separation from both artifice and nature (things and matter). It is artifice rather than labour that establishes a realm of permanence, a common world, and thereby makes possible human action. It both provides stability to human life, whereby individuals can develop identities\(^\text{167}\), and separates and relates them (a point that we will explore in greater detail in the following chapter). Arendt’s manner of accounting for these human activities introduces a different ontology into human-to-human relations, since the power which arises between individuals in action does not have its roots in the power of nature, labour, or work. Human action (enabled by the common world of artifice which is constructed by the activities of *homo faber*) no longer has relations or interactions with nature at all. Thus, the realm of human action is transcendent (outside nature) for Arendt. Human freedom is the ability to begin a process strictly within human affairs and separate from, or transcending, nature. On her account

\(^{167}\) Arendt, *Human Condition*, 137
there is nothing within the realm of nature, nor in the realm of human artifice, which can serve to inform human action.

Arendt’s analysis of labour and work can be described as an attempt to disconnect the power of our bodies from the strength of our hands. The strength of our hands, it would seem, comes not so much from the fact that our hands are a part of our bodies, but rather that they are our “primordial tools”\(^\text{168}\) and as such can be used instrumentally. The instrumental use of tools attains its operative force from the design or image\(^\text{169}\) in the mind of the maker of worldly things. By enforcing a strong distinction between the work of homo faber and the activity of labour, Arendt disables any conceptualization of the power of material itself to guide, suggest or enable human productive activities. There is little room for creative intercourse between makers and materials in Arendt’s discourse about homo faber because they are in a relation of domination-submission; the maker dominates the material that is submitted to his design. On her account, it is the model and not the material that guides the work of the craftsman.\(^\text{170}\) The hylomorphic form of relation between makers and their materials is considered by Arendt to be of a higher and more human order than the ambiguous mixing of animal laborens with natural processes because it establishes a durable space that transcends the cyclical processes of nature. In considering homo faber as creating the conditions necessary for action, and in excluding animal laborens from any significant contribution, Arendt privileges activity done in violent opposition to nature: "The end justifies the violence done to nature to win the

\(^{168}\) Arendt, *Human Condition*, 144.


material, as the wood justifies killing the tree and the table justifies destroying the
wood." Recall that this is the same violence that she excludes from human relations
in the sphere of action.

Labour, in contradistinction to work, since it has a less adversarial relation
with the natural world, could be seen as a much more cooperative, collective activity
where humans and nonhumans act together, where materials participate in the
constitution of productive power as guiding and informing productive activity.
Arendt, however, thinks that in labour there is no cooperation, or collective action,
since in labouring humans are biological beings, without distinction, following
automatic natural processes. She states that although “togetherness may permeate
laboring even more intimately than any other activity,” this collective nature of
laboring results in the “loss of all awareness of individuality and identity.” For
Arendt, action is only possible in conditions of plurality, and plurality is not possible
for animal laborens; in her proximity to nature, she is much the same as any other
biological human being. In labouring, humans do not distinguish themselves from
nature and from each other, and therefore fail to achieve the state of plurality from
which they could be considered capable of action on her account. She claims that
labour is an antipolitical

activity in which man is neither together with the world nor with other people,
but alone with his body, facing the naked necessity to keep himself alive. To
be sure, he too lives in the presence of and together with others, but this
togetherness has none of the distinctive markers of true plurality. It does not
consist in the purposeful combination of different skills and callings as in the
case of workmanship (let alone in the relationships between unique persons),
but exists in the multiplication of specimens which are fundamentally all alike

171 Arendt, Human Condition, 153.
172 Arendt, Human Condition, 213.
because they are what they are as mere living organisms.\textsuperscript{173}

Her theory of collective action has plurality as a necessary condition, and the violent relations with nature embodied by \textit{homo faber} are necessary to the establishment of a space where such plurality becomes possible.

It is important to note that Arendt thinks that there is no collective action in work either, neither with materials (as we saw earlier) nor with other workers. The "specifically political forms of being together with others, acting in concert and speaking with each other"\textsuperscript{174} are, she claims, not possible with work; there "can hardly be anything more alien or even more destructive to workmanship than teamwork."\textsuperscript{175} For Arendt, collective action therefore occurs in a domain divorced from things, materials, and nature.

Arendt’s depreciatory attitude towards labour is fuelled by her concern that the modern age has given \textit{animal laborens} the same or greater status as \textit{animale rationale}, and thus affirmed human activity engaged with natural processes as producing the highest values.\textsuperscript{176} As a result, Arendt charges that social management has replaced political action. Because labour is an endless process concerned with the production of the life process itself rather than stable objects, she thinks that politics\textsuperscript{177} has become preoccupied primarily with the maintenance of the life of the constituent members of society. The idea either that political power has entered into the domain of life, or that politics has become the management of life is echoed in the

\textsuperscript{173} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 212.
\textsuperscript{174} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 162.
\textsuperscript{175} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 161.
\textsuperscript{176} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 85.
\textsuperscript{177} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 88-89.
works of Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and Ivan Illich. Arendt’s charge is that when natural and labour processes are valued over the durability produced by work, individual identities are lost, and so too is the plurality required for action.

**Critiques of Arendt’s Account of Labour**

Arendt’s attempt to safeguard action from labour’s material and bodily processes is not without its critics. William Connolly argues, against Arendt, that the body does not exist outside of action, but is a political site with the potential to generate new beginnings, or new forms of political engagement. He thinks that her concept of plurality “becomes bleached and aristocratic” in its separation from the body and social questions that could enrich and diversify it. He also argues that Arendt’s theory of action should be broadened to include the state, not as the only site of politics, but as one alongside her ideal of “small islands of action, such as the Soviet councils, the localities of early America, and syndicalist organizations.” Connolly thinks that the state is indispensable in giving support to the kind of plurality that is such a necessary component of Arendtian action. He is also critical of Arendt’s removal of aspects of everyday life from the domain of politics because it overlooks (and perhaps even covers over) the fact that many of these aspects are already “objects of political action.” His concern is that she treats “an important dimension of ethical life as if it were automatic and then automatically beyond the

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reach of practical action.” The dimensions of life he is speaking of include such things as “diet, gender identity, the organization of sensuality, health, and the cultural organization of dying, and the cultivation of critical responsiveness.” Not only does Arendt fail to account for the politics involved in these domains, but he thinks she is unable to see them as sources from which new ways of being might emerge.184

Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also find Arendt’s exclusion of material conditions and bodily life from the sphere of politics problematic. They claim that she fails to provide a theory of power and politics by which economic injustice and political disenfranchisement could be analysed and critiqued. In separating the public sphere from the sphere of labour, Arendt depoliticizes labour while at the same time making the public depend upon it.185 In her marginalization of labour Arendt seems to silently endorse material conditions that detract from the capacities of certain people to participate in politics, those people who provide the conditions that enable others to act. Spivak goes so far as to say that Arendt’s marginalization of labour restricts “efforts to rethink the terms of concerted action.”186

While Arendt’s work on action provides important elements for a theory of collective action (namely the conceptualization of action in terms of capacity, a non-sovereign theorization of action, and a collective theorization of power), it also comes with some serious problems in that it seems to disavow several significant ethical and political relations and activities. Rei Terada argues that Arendt’s position

“assumes…the continuation of expropriative labour.”\textsuperscript{187} Her analysis is that Arendt’s attitude toward labour is characteristic of modernity’s thinking about bios and society; “it suffers from its inability to incorporate the forgettable register of that experience.”\textsuperscript{188} In assuming that the only significant relations are those that occur between humans,\textsuperscript{189} Terada thinks that Arendt constructs “a meaninglessness of the nonhuman.”\textsuperscript{190}

A further problem which brings together aspects of each of these critiques is that for Arendt, not only is violence towards nature a necessary condition of human political life, but there is nothing political about human-nature relations. Arendt condones the attitude of mastery and the destructive acts by which \textit{homo faber} comports himself as necessary, even though she is concerned when this approach is taken beyond the realm of work and into the sphere of action. Her concept of political action resists being transported into domains such as environmental and economic justice, both in terms of “unjust actions” towards nature (since Arendt is an advocate of violent relations towards nature) but also in terms of concern for the ways that vulnerable people are affected by the destruction of natural environments. For instance, her theorization of action does not make space for attending to how alterations in environmental conditions (such as the levels of mercury in a local water supply) brought about by industry (such as gold mining) constitute, for better and for worse, the capacities of people to act in complex ways. Because she does not

\textsuperscript{188} Terada, “The Life Process and Forgettable Living,” 96.
\textsuperscript{189} Terada, “The Life Process and Forgettable Living,” 106.
\textsuperscript{190} Terada, “The Life Process and Forgettable Living,” 96.
recognize such sites as political, her work needs to be supplemented in order to make a viable contribution to the philosophy of collective action.

**Process, Composition, and the Capacity to be Affected**

Turning our attention now to Deleuze and Guattari’s approach to (human, natural and artificial) processes is to go to the other end of the spectrum from Arendt’s depiction. In *Anti-Oedipus*, they theorize nature as interconnected machines; not machines rationally designed to serve a purpose, but productive processes that encompass both producer and product.

There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together. Producing-machines, desiring machines everywhere, schizophrenic machines, all of species life: the self and the non-self, outside and inside, no longer have any meaning whatsoever.

On their account, nature can be understood “machinically,” as a process of production;\(^1\) as a result, all distinction between humans and nature is broken down. They outline three aspects of their use of the term process. First, production processes include the recording, consumption, and reproduction as aspects of a single process. Second, production as process overcomes any dichotomy between man and nature, cause and effect, subject and object by entwining these terms in one reality as producer-product. Last, processes are not goals or ends.\(^2\) If machines are understood as processes of production, then our standard understanding of humans as tool-maker and machine-designers does not work and technology cannot be used to get humans beyond or outside of nature. Humans do not introduce the technological

\(^{1}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 3.

into nature, as they are already technological themselves. “The ‘human’ is now understood solely and strictly in terms of being a component in a machinic assemblage.” To consider tool-use as the primary feature that sets humans apart from other animals is to use technology to see the human as transcending nature. “Machinic thought,” which places the human within the machine, is able to illustrate that there is no discontinuity between humans and the natural world. Clearly this is in stark contrast to Arendt’s conceptual attempts to establish clear distinctions between humans, artifice, and nature.

Their proposal that we see humans as a part of nature as processes of production dismantles the realm of artifice (the realm constructed by homo faber) which Arendt posits as the necessary condition for action. They suggest that there is a puissance (what we termed constitutive power in chapter two) to the activity of making when it is not done according to a hylomorphic model, while Arendt holds that it is strength and violence that exist in making, and that power arises solely in the realm of human affairs. In refusing to separate the activity of making from the productions of nature, Deleuze and Guattari deny that actions even occur outside and separate from nature, materials, and artifice. Rather than being confined to human-to-human intercourse, Deleuze and Guattari expose human action as occurring with heterogeneous others (books, weather, humans, animals, plants, affects, desires, gestures, moods, etc). In their insistence that action cannot be accounted for in exclusively human terms, we find that it is heterogeneity, rather than plurality, that is given as the condition of action. When action is conceived outside of nature, in a

place *between* human agents, human life is distinguished from the rest of nature in a way that preserves a view of non-human nature (animal, plant, and mineral) as an exploitable resource for human ends.

In putting forth a heterogeneous conception of action and capacity, Deleuze and Guattari’s work can contribute to a collective theory of action that is able to more adequately (yet still only partially) account for ethical and political engagements that arise at the intersection of a complex array of human and non-human elements and entities which include both local and global systems. The core features of their philosophy that facilitate such complexity in political thinking are: an immanent conception of the human condition, a conception of creative activity or making where materials inform the productive process, and a conception of action as heterogeneous assembling. We have already explored how their sense of process contributes to an immanent conception of the human where the human is not considered as transcending nature. Next we will explore how their theory of creative activity makes room for material to inform the process of production. The last section of this chapter will take up their idea of assemblage as a theory of action understood as heterogeneous (affective) assembling.

*Material Composition: Non-individualistic bodies and the capacity to be affected*

As an alternative to the hylomorphic schema (which we saw in Arendt characterizes the violent and adversarial relations between humans and nature), Deleuze and Guattari’s account of processes of material composition can support a theory of collective action that does not exclude non-human entities and elements. Where the hylomorphic schema separates form and matter and prioritizes the
imposition of form as an activity done upon a passive recipient matter, Deleuze and Guattari posit an energetic materiality where form emerges from matter rather than being imposed upon it. They propose that:

to the formed or formable matter we must add an entire energetic materiality in movement, carrying singularities or *haecceities*...that combine with processes of deformation: for example, the variable undulations and torsions of the fibers guiding the operation of splitting wood. On the other hand, to the essential properties of the matter deriving from the formal essence we must add variable intensive affects, now resulting from the operation, now on the contrary making it possible: for example, wood that is more or less porous, more or less elastic and resistant. At any rate, it is a question of surrendering to the wood, then following where it leads by connecting operations to a materiality, instead of imposing a form upon a matter: what one addresses is less a matter submitted to laws than a materiality possessing a *nomos*. One addresses less a form capable of imposing properties upon a matter than material traits of expression constituting affects. ¹⁹⁴

In contrast with Arendt’s depiction of work as the forced submission of nature and material to human violence, Deleuze and Guattari propose that the relation between a maker and their material consists in the maker “surrendering” and “following” the material. The material takes on an active dimension; it has the capacity to *inform* and *guide* the actions of the maker. As a result, we get a view of action as a kind of co-action comprised of humans and materials. This account of productive activity redeems the figure of *animal laborens* who is closely tied to material processes; rather than disparaging the bodily as less than fully human, Deleuze and Guattari celebrate the capacities of bodies for being affected. Capacities for being affected do not render bodies passive and incapable of action, but active and capable.

Material, understood as a composite of bodies that are themselves composites of bodies, is never homogeneous but heterogeneous; technological production can be

¹⁹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Nomadology*, 98.
understood as a process encompassing both producer-product, where the producer is the material itself understood as a conjunction of bodies affecting and being affected. The product is what emerges from this process (or conjunction of processes) of affecting and being affected. Forms are secondary and arise from relations between particles in bodies. The relations are primary and enable any given body’s capacities for affecting and being affected. No simple separations are possible within this framework.

The notion that one could “follow matter” rests on a consideration of bodies in terms of their affects, as complex and heterogeneous entities. In contrast with Arendt’s individualistic view of the body (which she derives from John Locke) as absolutely private, incommunicable, and unshareable, Deleuze and Guattari advance a non-individualistic conception of bodily life. On their account, the body is shot through with elements shared with heterogeneous others; the body is never separable from the milieus and assemblages with which it is connected as part or element.

They derive their conception of the body from Spinoza where bodies are defined by their variable affective capacities through which they enter into different relations. Deleuze states that two propositions define the body, one kinetic the other dynamic. The kinetic “tells us that a body is defined by relations of motion and rest, speed and slowness between particles.” Bodies are not, then, defined by their form and function; form and function are themselves dependent on relations of speed and slowness. Relations of speed and slowness are prior to form, and “it is by speed and

195 Deleuze, Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, 123.
196 Arendt, Human Condition, 111.
slowness that one slips in among things, that one connects with something else.” The dynamic proposition defines bodies by their capacities for affecting and being affected. “You will not define a body (or mind) by its form, nor by its organs or functions, and neither will you define it as a substance or a subject.”  

The principal question, what can a body do?, foregrounds the open nature of the body and calls on us to attend to, and experiment with, bodies in order to discern the affects of which they are capable. Deleuze tells us “you do not know beforehand what a body or a mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination.” The dynamic nature of a body’s affective relations renders it determinable rather than determined; in terms of our discussion of power in the last chapter we could say this account of bodies considers them in processes of constitution rather than as constituted, a point we will explore further in the following chapter.

Let’s flesh out this account of bodily composition and determinability a little more fully with the aid of a plant example. On Deleuze and Guattari’s Spinozist account of bodies we will not look to the form and function of the plant, nor to the principles of plant growth which outline its normal development. Instead we will look to capacities for connection (which are based on relations of speed and slowness among its particles) and its capacities to affect and to be affected, as these determine which relations of composition and decomposition it can enter into with other things. Different plants are capable of engaging in a variety of heterogeneous relations; the orchid is pollinated by the wasp, the dandelion seeds are carried by the wind, etc. The

197 Deleuze, Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, 123.
198 Deleuze, Expressionism in Philosophy, 217.
199 Deleuze, Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, 125.
relations that a given plant is able to enter into are determined by its affects. Depending on the plant, these might include such things as attracting insects in the case of the orchid, or being carried by the wind in the case of the dandelion. Further, we give place to chance encounters (hitching a ride to another continent on the sole of someone’s shoe, for instance) in the story of the plant’s constitution as a being with certain capacities. In order to tell this story we will need to analyse a given body’s relations of composition and decomposition with other bodies, the changing powers of the various composite entities involved in the processes of individuation, and the significance of the affects of which it is capable to its power of activity.

The analysis shifts away from the entity and the principles of its development towards its capacities. And, as we saw in chapter two, when we consider something in terms of capacity we are prompted to acknowledge its collective constitution. Plants have capacities for osmosis and photosynthesis, and these are connected with the ways in which it is able to compose its body with other bodies: sun, water, nutrients in the soil, etc. In a similar vein we can consider that capacities for political action are enabled by complex compositions; it is in composing with others that affects are produced in ways that will either increase or decrease a given body’s capacity to act. Indignation, as we saw in chapter two, may give rise to powerful collective actions capable of overthrowing a given political order. But, militancy and ressentiment, as sad or reactive passions, may lead to a general decrease in capacities for action. Further, the fluctuation in the capacities of bodies for action (human and nonhuman) are dependent upon compositions with heterogeneous others.
Affective Assemblages and Co-Action

In the case of political actions we should be careful not to undermine the role of materials (the metal coltan in the Congo for instance, which is used in the manufacture of mobile technology), constellations of desires (for cheap mobile technology, political power, freedom), global political and economic systems (liberalism and capitalism), regimes of enunciation (speeches and the popular press) and a host of other material and non-material entities. Just as an ecological perspective of plant life would take into consideration the larger processes in which a given plant is immersed, Deleuze and Guattari, in their providing resources for thinking through a non-individualistic conception of any body (from humans to words to insects) could be said to facilitate an ecological conception of action. Guattari, in “Three Ecologies,” argues that mental, social, and environmental ecologies are radically intertwined and that the “erroneous partitioning off of the real into a number of separate fields” contributes to deterioration of “the psyche, the socius, and the environment.”

In addition to a complex and nuanced depiction of bodily composition, Deleuze and Guattari offer the concept of assemblage, a term that points to the heterogeneous multiplicities that generate capacities for action. Assemblages are multiplicities composed of bodies, desires, and enunciations. The concept of assemblage takes the place of the subject and reveals actors as heterogeneous composites and action as co-action or symbiosis, a “being in the middle.” Deleuze declares, with specific reference to speaking and writing, that one write with: “With

the world, with a part of the world, with people...There is no judgement in sympathy, but agreements of convenience between bodies of all kinds. In the larger context of Deleuze’s work with Guattari, it is clear that for them assembling is a kind of acting with; whether the action be teaching or making art it is to be done with the world and with others.

Assemblages are a kind of “interactive relationship” that involve multiplicities, not just more than one individual, but individuals which are themselves multiplicities of different (heterogeneous) elements: desires, habits, capacities. Simone Bignall uses the term "affective assemblages" to describe Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of encounters which she claims can only be understood adequately by taking into account the "complex nature of bodies involved in the meeting.

Bodies, for Deleuze and Guattari, are multiplicities or assemblages; they have neither stable boundaries nor fixed characteristics. Instead, the body, Bignall tells us, is "a collection of relations into which its constituent parts enter."

Like Arendt, Deleuze and Guattari also develop their theory of action from an analysis of technology or productive activity, but where Arendt based her analysis on the life expectancy or duration of the object produced, Deleuze and Guattari focus on the assemblage and the larger context wherein the conditions of production are

204 Bignall, “Affective Assemblages,” 83.
effectuated. They assert that there are two “models of the motor”: work and free action.²⁰⁵

The principle behind all technology is to demonstrate that the technical element remains abstract, entirely undetermined, as long as one does not relate it to an assemblage it presupposes. It is the machine that is primary in relation to the technical element: not the technical machine, itself a collection of elements, but the social or collective machine, the machinic assemblage that determines what is a technical element at a given moment, what is its usage, extension, comprehension, etc.²⁰⁶

The “work machine assemblage” is the formal cause of tools, whereas the “war machine assemblage” is the formal cause of weapons. In other words, tools and weapons presuppose very different kinds of actions: overcoming resistance (in the case of tools) and self-propulsion (in the case of weapons).²⁰⁷ In the following chapter we will see that corresponding to these kinds of action are different spaces: “striated space” where the individual is separated from the object which they effect and upon which they work and wherein resistances need to be overcome; and the “smooth spaces” where actor-action-situation are part of an assemblage which continues.

The concept of assemblage enables us to develop an understanding of the capacities involved in “acting with” others (human and non-human). JD Dewsbury, in his analysis of the "Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage," suggests that assemblage thinking is "attentiveness to the transformative potential in the world, which gives due regard to the fact that change is not just willed by us humans but comes about equally through the materialities of the world in which we are just a part."²⁰⁸ We could say that in terms of the “work assemblage,” we tend to confront matter only in the ways

²⁰⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 79.  
²⁰⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 80.  
²⁰⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 76.  
in which it already conforms to our intentions, designs and desires to use it for a particular purpose; this conforms to Arendt’s depiction of work and the relation between makers and materials that it presupposes. In terms of the “free action assemblage,” however, we allow our desires to be assembled or composed by the material we relate with; we surrender to and follow the material. The “free action assemblage” proposes a view of action as a commingling or constellation of materials that can be human no less than animal, plant and mineral.209

Let’s consider this conception of action as composition and assembling in the case of teaching. In teaching, the capacities of the teacher to teach are constituted by the assemblage of the classroom of which the teacher is one element. Their capacity for action is collectively constituted; it is made up of an open set of material and non-material elements: the students, teacher, subject matter, curriculum and the classroom, as well as the complex of desires and moods which are affected not only by the physical arrangement of the classroom with its rows of individual desks or a circle of tables, but also by the feeling of the room itself produced by the degree and quality of light and air which is entering the room, an entire aura affected by the weather and by the desires, thoughts, and curiosities which the subject matter and curriculum elicit. Much contingency resides in the capacity for action, as well as human and non-human, material and non-material elements. The heterogeneous, collective constitution of the capacity to act is important to recognize if we are to attend to and nurture actions which are situationally appropriate; one may need to adjust one’s

209 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 79-80.
modes of teaching in relation to a sense or understanding of the classroom as a complex, dynamic assemblage.

Although heterogeneous assembling may at first appear to be a rather strange way to articulate a theory of action, political action has always been like this. Take the case of strategies of war, both ancient, modern and contemporary; it is always situational and resourceful in that it utilizes human and non-human elements as part of its interventionist strategies: terrain, the spirit and desires of peoples, text and image, and natural resources are all important features of military interventions. Economic theory is another domain where human and non-human, material and non-material elements are considered when analysing or assessing economic activity. It is in the realm of political theory that the non-human and the non-material constitution of capacities remain largely unaccounted for. In significant ways, Arendt can be seen to continue this tradition.

As we saw in chapter two, where constituted power is the kind of power that can be possessed by an individual through sovereignty, authority and strength, constituting power is dynamic, fleeting, and forged by contingent and collective phenomena. Arendt recognizes the collective nature of the capacity for action, yet she does not herself fully theorize it. Arguably, Deleuze and Guattari provide us with resources for developing a more nuanced view of this situation by formulating concepts for articulating action as a collective rather than individual phenomenon. Part of the goal for inquiring into a given individual’s capacity for action is to develop an understanding of the elements of the situation that enable the individual to act. Yet this is contrary to Arendt’s claim that actions are not conditioned. If elements of a
situation enable or inform action, then can actions be properly understood as new beginnings?

This thesis argues that we need to account for capacities for action contextually, and that there are significant reasons for tending towards a conception of action as co-action. Showing that capacities are in processes of constitution through dynamic assemblages is one way of illustrating the collective nature of action. Further, and we will return to this in chapter six, it gives us a way to consider collective action as more than an aggregate of individuals who come together in agreement. Instead there is a complex co-constitution of individualities by way of capacities that makes action collective in a way that cannot be captured by a political theory that focuses exclusively on constituted human individuals in their relations with one another and with the State.

Arendt fails to account for the constitution of the capacity for action due to her attempt to delimit this capacity exclusively within the realm of human affairs. Capacities cannot be confined to one realm; rather the capacity for action is activated and informed by situational ensembles that are composed of heterogeneous elements (not just the human plurality that Arendt thinks is necessary). Thus, Arendt’s way of conceiving of acting fails to account for how the structures of the world (both natural and artificial) enable or disable certain kinds of actions. Her insistence of the maintenance of the public realm for specifically human-to-human interaction ironically results in the depoliticization of making. As we saw, on her account there is nothing politically interesting about relations with non-human elements of this world (animals, plants, minerals, affects and artifice). One result is that her account
of the political is inadequate to address complex political issues ranging from health, ecology, urban design, education and organizational structure. Several significant political issues are located in grey areas where the boundaries she sets up don’t exist. On this account there is no power (political freedom) that is activated in the coming together of heterogeneous elements. Her view of action strips all non-human elements of any kind of power and activity; even strength on Arendt's account is reserved for the human agent in isolation\(^{210}\) with no mention of the capacity of various elements to do this or that. Deleuze and Guattari, in urging an understanding of matter as active and composed of heterogeneous singularities, alter Arendt's understanding of making and acting. Rather than seeing the activity of making as the imposition of form on matter, we see the possibility that both making and acting are collective activities involving heterogeneous elements, comprised of variable material traits and affects.

*Non-Human Elements of Capacities for Action*

Let us take an example of an individual possessing or expressing a capacity for action. If we look to the Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei, we can see a different set of elements converging and composing to generate capacities for action. Ai Weiwei is a contemporary, Chinese artist who has come to be known outside of China for exposing the injustices of the Chinese government through his art works and political activism. In addition to producing art works, he uses social media programs such as Twitter to get messages out globally and to convene groups of

people locally on short notice. In 2011 he was arrested by Chinese authorities and held at an unknown location in solitary confinement for 81 days.

Ai Weiwei’s exhibit, "Sunflower Seeds," for the Tate Modern in 2010 consisted of 100 million individually sculpted and hand painted porcelain sunflower seeds covering the floorspace of Turnbine Hall; the floor became a sea of seeds. While Ai Weiwei conceives of and oversees his largescale works, he is not individually responsible for each aspect of his work but works with a team of specialists who create the pieces. In the case of the sunflowers, 1600 artisans in the town of Jingdezhen, China were engaged in the process of creating the seeds. Porcelain manufacturing is an ancient tradition in China, and Ai Weiwei worked with the workshop for six years experimenting with the possibilities of the traditional porcelain techniques which in the past were employed in creating bowls and vases for the Emperor’s court. During Mao Zedong’s cultural revolution, a common image depicted him surrounded by sunflowers, thus signifying him as the sun and his followers as sunflowers turning towards him. Sunflower seeds, a common snack in China, are frequently shared with friends. Juliet Bingham, Curator of the Tate Modern exhibit, suggests that this work poses the following questions: “What does it mean to be an individual in today’s society? Are we insignificant or powerless unless we act together? What do our increasing desires, materialism and number mean for society, the environment and the future?”

His work, "Straight," exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2013, consists of the arrangement of 38 tons of steel rebars that he gathered from the wreckage of

schoolhouses which collapsed in the 2008 earthquake in the Sichuan Province. The schoolhouses were poorly and cheaply constructed, and following the earthquake the Chinese government attempted to impose a silence over the event by refusing to acknowledge its occurrence. Ai Weiwei working with a team of collaborators collected the names of the more than 5000 schoolchildren who died in the quake; their names were displayed next to the rebar floor sculpture. He had each bar straightened and arranged in such a way as to suggest a fault line. The sculpture is 20 long, 40 feet wide, and varies between 2 and 15 inches in height. The installation of the piece took two crews more than 70 hours.  

Ai Weiwei is motivated by the ideas of freedom and individuality which were cultivated through experiences with his father, Ai Qing. Ai Qing was a poet and an activist during the Chinese Cultural Revolution and was denounced as an anti-communist and sent by the government to live in Xinjiang, a remote province. Ai Weiwei, born just one year before his father was denounced, spent the first 15 years of his life in a kind of cultural exile with his father and the rest of their family.  

When we think of Ai Weiwei as acting in politically relevant senses we may be inclined to focus on the strength of his courage, the appropriateness of his ideas, the quality of his strategy, and the goodness of his intent to expose injustice in the hope of creating a better, liberal, and democratic China. Looking to these elements: courage, ideas, strategy, and intention we notice that we see these as properties of Ai Weiwei as an actor. In other words, they seem to belong to him as an individual; they are ‘things’ that he possesses which make him an actor. If, however, instead of asking

212 https://artmatters.ca/wp/2013/08/heavy-lifting-how-we-installed-ai-weiweis-straight/
what it is it (what properties he possesses) that make him an actor, we ask \textit{what is his capacity to act}? This prompts us to see that the capacity for courage, capacity for ideas, capacity for strategy, and capacity to form intentions are the features of his capacity to act. We notice that capacity for action is itself made up of a host of other capacities, and if we ask how these capacities are generated or how they are constituted, we are pushed to provide a much more complex account of Ai Weiwei’s capacity for action, one in which Ai Weiwei in his individuality is the result of a composition of capacities themselves generated by way of heterogeneous, collective compositions. What a capacity for action \textit{is} cannot be separated from how this capacity is generated. Courage, as a capacity, is variable; an increase or decrease in recognition or a change of collaborators could significantly alter his courageous capacity thereby affecting his capacity for action more generally. When Ai Weiwei continued his actions even after having been detained by the State for several months and threatened, he did so in virtue of a host of other people, ideas, artworks, affects, desires, technologies, media, etc. In this sense, his actions are collective, insofar as collective action is understood as the collective constitution of the capacities for action.
Chapter Four
Space and Individuation

A great deal of focus in the history of moral and political philosophy has been placed on individuating actions in terms of the isolation, delimitation, and determination of the sphere or space of individual, human action. We have seen that Deleuze and Guattari bring to attention a wider host of elements that contribute to actions than traditional ethical and political philosophy has. This chapter explores the ways in which space and individuation is theorized in both Arendt’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s works, and the function of these concepts in their respective theories of action. Both sets of thinkers advance a view of action as non-sovereign and open to contingency, which they articulate in correlation with conceptualizations of space and individuation. We will see that their ways of thinking individuation (what it is that ‘makes’ something an individual) and what is considered to be a “space of action” share important similarities and yet are different in ways that significantly alter how we are able to think about the sphere of action.

Both Arendt and Deleuze and Guattari undermine our standard ways of understanding the individuation of actors and actions in that they focus on the emergent character of action and its dependence upon others. In this chapter we will see that the “who” of Arendt’s theory of action is not determined prior to the act, but is individuated in acting. Further, the “who” that emerges from acting is significantly reliant upon the presence of a spectator. The difference, however, is

that the others that Arendt’s actor depends on for their becoming the specific “who” are other humans, whereas Deleuze and Guattari move the focus beyond the human. It is the task of this chapter to flesh out the differences in their approaches to individuation, and to elucidate the role played by individuation in their theories of action. We do this by looking at how they theorize spaces of action.

In our analysis of the correlations between action and individuation in Arendt and in Deleuze and Guattari, we will see the significance of the earlier analyses of the collective constitution of capacities insofar as this complicates notions of stable individuality. After exploring Arendt’s depiction of two kinds of space which are necessary to action, the *common world* and the *space of appearance*, we will see that her account of action is dependent upon a space where individuals are distinguished from one another by occupying separate spaces in a common world; individuals are determined by spatial limitations, the space of one cannot be the space of another.

Deleuze and Guattari, however, develop the concept of “smooth space” which they distinguish from the “striated space” that involves spatial limitation. In the final section of this chapter we will analyse how this concept of “smooth space” entails an affirmative conception of limit, different both from the kind of limit operative in the concept of negative freedom and from enabling constraints (productive obstructions). This new kind of limit is expressed by the imperative: “go to the limit.” Arendt’s theory of action diverges from that of Deleuze and Guattari in her concern with the public sphere where, according to her, actions are brought into being. No such corollary sphere is found in Deleuze and Guattari’s work. Their concern is more with the development and deployment of concepts that can enable us to think and analyse
actions. Further, Arendt’s notion of the public sphere is the space of appearance where human actors appear to one another in speech and in deed. Deleuze and Guattari, by contrast, develop a theory of action that is based on power, desire and affect rather than on speech, appearance and recognition, and they thereby do not exclude in principle the non-human as actors or from an analysis of action.

The Space of Appearance

In Arendt’s work we find two distinct accounts of space and individuation. On the one hand, we get an account of a “common world” where individuality is constituted by spatial separability. And, on the other hand, we get an account of the “space of appearance” which emerges from individuals acting and speaking together. The “common world” is the condition of the “space of appearance,” and the “space of appearance” is both a product and condition of action. First, we will look to the conception of space she offers which focuses on its function in terms of separating beings (in this case humans) from one another. After, we will turn to her account of space as emergent and produced by individuals acting and speaking together.

Common World

According to Arendt’s first conception of space, human beings are separated from one another by virtue of their differing spatial locations. She terms this kind of space the “common world,” the world of things that we have in common, and which endures beyond the life of human individuals. This common world, and the stability and durability that it provides, is made possible by the artifice produced by "homo"

The production of stable objects makes possible a world that humans share in common, and it is within this world that humans are individuated. The significance of this realm for Arendt’s theory of action cannot be underestimated; without stable objects there is no common world and there can be no action. As we saw in chapter three, *animal laborens* is worldless and incapable of action without the production of stable objects.\(^{218}\)

The common world is that by virtue of which we are separate from each other as individuals with distinct identities.

This world...is related...to the human artefact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together. To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.\(^{219}\)

In giving each individual a unique spatial location, the common world enables the distinction of individuals from one another; in other words, spatial separability is a condition for the formation and maintenance of distinct identities. In individuating human beings, the common world reproduces the plurality that began in natality,\(^{220}\) and is, according to Arendt, an ongoing condition for genuine action. She conceives of human commonality and difference (in terms of plurality) as first enabled by natality, and secondarily by the common world. Thus both natality and the common world separate and relate us to one another.

\(^{218}\) Arendt, *Human Condition*, 119.
\(^{219}\) Arendt, *Human Condition*, 52.
\(^{220}\) Arendt, *Human Condition*, 178.
Space of Appearance

Arendt’s second conception of space, the space of appearance differs from the first in that it emerges from individuals acting and speaking together. Unlike the common world, the space of appearance is not stable:

The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized. Its peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men—as in the case of great catastrophes when the body politic of a people is destroyed—but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever.221

This space of appearance constitutes the public (political) realm for Arendt wherein human individuals act and speak together. The political realm, the polis, is for Arendt not a previously organized space nor is it a physically situated place, but one which has its conditions of emergence in the actions of people. In Adriana Cavarero’s words:

The polis…is not physically situated in a territory. It is instead the space of appearance, always and everywhere capable of being enacted, where human beings actively show who they are….It extends as far as the interactive space generated by those who share it.222

Cavarero argues that political theory, based on the detached position associated with the sense of sight,223 has consisted in observing and seeing, looking upwards, and away from the contingencies generated by plural agency.224 In focusing mainly on the

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221 Arendt, Human Condition, 199.
224 Cavarero, “Politicalizing Theory,” 529.
question of order, on that which can be governed, predicted, just and legitimate,\footnote{Cavarero, “Politicizing Theory,” 511.} politics was stripped of plurality and action. On Cavarero’s reading, since Arendt conceives of action as “a relational event that generates space for reciprocal self-revelation,” political theory should not consist in neutralizing “the risky, unpredictable, contingent, and unruly effects of plural relationality.”\footnote{Cavarero, “Politicizing Theory,” 515.} Instead it should look downward and look to “the contingency of an agency in which plurality is the disclosure of a uniqueness that presents itself as absolute, unclassifiable, and nonorderable difference.”\footnote{Cavarero, “Politicizing Theory,” 529.} Cavarero suggests that this is a project of “politicizing theory,” to overturn the tradition that theorized politics from a detached perspective.\footnote{Cavarero, “Politicizing Theory,” 529.}

Where the common world individuates people in terms of distinct spatial location, and whose durability provides them with a stability in virtue of which individual identities can be formed (that which \textit{animal laborens} cannot provide), the space of appearance also has an individuating function. Anna Yeatman argues that Arendt (contrary to a great deal of Western political thought) posits a view of individuality as \textit{emerging} in inter-individual relationships where “human beings desire to appear as distinct beings to their fellows and in which their fellows are receptive to such appearance.” Individuation in Arendt’s conception of the “space of appearance,” Yeatman considers, occurs through the risk of disclosing oneself to others in action. Individuality is appearance, a “relational and worldly
phenomenon.” The space of appearance as a “relational space wherein individuals can appear to each other” is also that which enables the individuation of actors. It is produced when people act and speak together, and individuals are individuated through action and speech within this relational space. The space of appearance, as a space of individuation, emerges from collective power and enables the emergence of individuals in relations with one another.

The individual that emerges through action in the space of appearance is, according to Cavarero and Yeatman’s readings of Arendt, a relational individual that does not pre-exist the relation. This kind of relational individuality can be contrasted with the view of the fully formed individual put forth in social contract theories, and it can be distinguished from sovereign individuality by way of the concept of negative freedom that we discussed in chapter two. The limits to my individuality posed by other individuals will not, in themselves, be seen as negative limitations in a theory of action based on relational individuality, but rather as opportunities, resources, and possibilities for the emergence of new ways of acting and speaking together.

**Smooth Space**

Deleuze and Guattari also have two concepts of space: “striated space” and “smooth space,” and the contrast between them recalls that between the war machine and the State-form explored in chapter one. Striated space is State space insofar as it

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230 Yeatman, “Individuality and Politics,” 84.

231 Yeatman, “Individuality and Politics,” 70.
is an ordered interiority. Smooth space, the space of the war machine, is an open exteriority. Eugene Holland describes it as “a space not subject to the laws and mode of organisation of the state.”232 The contrast is played out in the difference between the activity of dividing and distributing space (to striate space) and the activity of distributing oneself in open space (smooth space). A solitary individuality is the product of striated space, whereas an anonymous collective emerges from and produces smooth space. Like Arendt’s space of appearance, smooth space is produced by acting together. However, with Arendt, the common world (which can be considered to be striated insofar as it delimits individuals from one another) is a condition for the space of appearance; this does not seem to be the case with the relation between the smooth and the striated. The space of appearance can be considered to be a “smooth space” in that it is open and incompatible with organized political spaces. We cannot *organize* space for action; rather, in acting we produce spaces of action. The difference, however, is that Arendt’s conception of the space of appearance has for its condition the striated space of the common world which enables the distinctness of human beings in their plurality, whereas Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of smooth space does not emphasize distinctions between entities (in terms of separability) nor in terms of kinds of being (humans, animals, machines); heterogeneity is quite different from plurality when considered from the perspective of space. Where Arendt’s account of the space of appearance supports a relational conception of individuality, Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of smooth space emphasizes the process of individuation over inter-individual relations. As a

result, the corresponding conceptions of limit are different on these two accounts: a
relational conception of individuality aligns with a sense of limit as productive
(enabling constraints and productive obstructions explored in chapter two) and the
process of individuation aligns with a sense of limit as “affirmative limit.”

Deleuze and Guattari use Chess and Go as examples to illustrate these
different kinds of distribution, the “‘smooth’ space of Go against the ‘striated’ space
of chess.” In chess one begins with all the pieces on the board, each piece placed in
its own square. Go begins by placing pieces on the board one at a time, each piece is
placed at the intersection of the lines on a 19 by 19 grid. The object of Chess is to
take the other player’s King, while the object of Go is to hold the greatest amount of
territory. In order to hold more territory, however, it is frequently necessary to give up
some territory to engage in a battle where the other player invades your territory;
these skirmishes can lead to an increase in one’s territory. Chess pieces are taken
directly by playing a piece into the space occupied by one’s opponent’s piece.
Capturing pieces in Go is different because you surround your opponent’s piece in
order to limit its liberties. Chess pieces are differentiated by type (King, Queen,
Bishop, Knight, Rook, Pawn), each with its own power of movement: diagonally in
the case of the bishop, L-shape in the case of the knight, and one space forward in the
case of a pawn. Go pieces are all the same: small round pellets which once placed
cannot move unless taken by the other player. Although go pieces do not move once
played, their value changes situationally; a go piece is a unit of an assemblage of
other pieces holding territory which undergoes high levels of variability throughout
the game. For instance, if white holds a particular territory, black may attack by
encircling that territory. If the attack is successful then black will have encircled white’s territory such that the white pieces have no more liberties (they cannot forge new connections); the white pieces are then considered to be captured by black and will be removed from the board. The territory which was once occupied by the white pieces will for now be held by black.

Deleuze and Guattari claim that the space of chess is striated because each of the pieces are distinct individuals by virtue of possessing properties or qualities which determine how they can move, the situations which they will enter into, and the confrontations they will have. “Each is like a subject of the statement endowed with a relative power, and these relative powers combine in a subject of enunciation, the chess player himself or the game’s form of interiority.”233 The space in which Chess is played can be said to be already distributed because the ways in which the pieces can move is determined prior to any situation they can enter into. In other words, the ways that space can be used or taken up is pre-determined. The space of Go, by contrast, is described as smooth because the pieces have only emergent or situational (not intrinsic) properties. Deleuze and Guattari claim that this gives Go pieces an anonymous, collective, or third-person function: “It” makes a move. “It” could be a man, a woman, a louse an elephant. Go pieces are elements of a nonsubjectified machine assemblage with no intrinsic properties, only situational ones.234

Where chess has a milieu of interiority, Go has a milieu of exteriority. Recall that in chapter one we saw that Deleuze and Guattari develop their theory of action in terms of the war machine which is exterior to the state apparatus. Here we see that this

233 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 3.
234 Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 3.
exteriority involves another conception of space: where the state striates space, the war machine occupies smooth space. The game of Go is illustrative of nomadic distribution because the space has not been limited by prior distribution, but rather the distribution is determined as beings distribute themselves in space. As games, both Chess and Go have rules; the rules of Chess can be said to “strate” the space of the game because they attribute forms of significance and subjectivity to the pieces themselves (a knight has a determinate role, function, and movement) and this then determines their movements and situations. With Go it is the situations that influence the movement of the pieces, and the space of the game unfolds as you go.\(^{235}\) (Recall the *bricoleur* we encountered in chapter one.)

Deleuze and Guattari also refer to “smooth space” as *nomos*. It is the “conditions of the war machine in space,”\(^ {236}\) what this work considers to be the space of action.

We must first of all distinguish a type of distribution which implies a dividing up of that which is distributed…A distribution of this type proceeds by fixed and proportional determinations…Then there is a completely other distribution which must be called nomadic, a nomad *nomos*, without property, enclosure or measure. Here, there is no longer a division of that which is distributed but rather a division among those who distribute themselves in an open space – a space which is unlimited, or at least without precise limits…To fill a space, to be distributed within it, is very different from distributing space.\(^ {237}\)

Nomadic distribution then is both the production of smooth space and a way of occupying space. Or, more precisely, nomadic distribution is both an action and a space; smooth space is produced through a mode of occupying space.

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\(^ {235}\) I would like to thank Jay Lampert for helping me to develop my understanding of the game of Go by sharing an unpublished paper he wrote on it with me. I certainly need to play the game many more times in order to learn its nuances in greater detail.

\(^ {236}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *Nomadology*, 50.

\(^ {237}\) Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 53-4
“Smooth space” does not exist prior to its occupation (prior to the activity which produces it), and it is not at all the same as “striated space” which has already been divided according to conditions determined by a visual sensibility. “Smooth space” is tactile or haptic space\(^\text{238}\) that not only does not conform to spaces understood on the model of visual sensibility, but has other dimensions and qualities. Vision privileges height and enforces a separation between the viewer and the object viewed, supporting a subject-object divide (this recalls Cavarero’s reading of traditional political theory in the last section). Haptic space, by contrast, is taken up by way of our capacity to touch and to be touched (sense of touch). Contact is privileged; the border separating self and other is considered as indistinct or porous. When considered from the perspective of visual sensibility, space is seen as demarcated in various ways – the “line separating earth and sky”\(^\text{239}\) – which marks various boundaries and enclosures within space and between beings. Smooth space cannot individuate beings from one another in the way that the common world and striated space can (both modes of space that demarcate and separate beings from one another). Thus different accounts of individuation and action are going to arise depending on whether we consider space as smooth (open and unlimited) or as striated (closed and limited).

**Affirmative limit: Non-organized bodies and capacities for action**

Striated space enables a view of individuality in terms of a separation of beings from one another and from the spaces in which they act; it supports a

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\(^{238}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *Nomadology*, 53.

\(^{239}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *Nomadology*, 53.
conceptualization of autonomous action. Smooth space, on the other hand is prior to these kinds of separations, and thus provides a conceptualization of anonymous collective entities without subjectivity. When considered in terms of smooth space, actions are fully situational, heteronymous rather than autonomous. Clearly, when conceived in this way, situational action is troublesome for ethical and a political thought which aims to separate out a space of action wherein praise or blame can be assigned to individual agents. When we consider the causal efficacy of a self, we tend to rely on a conception of space in which individuals are clearly delimited from one another. Arendt’s notion of the common world, like a table between us that individuates us, is one such model: the space of my individuality excludes the space of yours, and while our individualities do not overlap, they are nonetheless related. Insofar as it is thought of in terms of susceptibility and affectivity, collectivity tampers with this conception of relational individuality. The space of the “I” can no longer be delimited in the same way, and we are motivated to think in new terms.

Smooth space is a conceptual resource for thinking non-individuated elements and a space prior or exterior to one which is clearly delimited and where properties belong to already-constituted individuals. It can enable us to think heterogeneous collective action, where the unit of analysis is not fully constituted or individuated. When the unit of analysis is already an individual person, or even an already constituted group, we are thinking of actions where the cause is separated from the effect, the producer from the product. This way of seeing, however, covers over and divorces “what is produced, such as reified persons and things, from their molecular

A key claim of this work is that we miss many important features of action when we approach it in this manner. Probing the question of action in terms of capacity, we are compelled to take up individuation as a problem and to look for more complex modes of accounting for the constitution of individuals and groups in terms of their abilities for action. It is not just that actions never occur in isolation, or that individuals never act without the aid and constraints of contexts which are inclusive of others and history, but more significantly, that actors are always multiplicities which are constituted and individuated in the process of acting itself; there is therefore an impossibility of separating the actor from the act, the producer from the product. The implications of this shift in thinking action from individuality to the processes in which individualities emerge is that we no longer see actions simply as the effects of actors, but develop the concepts to read actions and actors as caught up in larger, more complex, emergent, and ongoing processes which are productive of both actors and actions themselves.

Non-organized body as limit:

Like Arendt, Deleuze and Guattari are also critical of organic conceptions of individuality and they offer ways to think beyond the functionalism and biological necessity of the organism. Where Arendt posits a non-bodily space of action which transcends things, materials, and nature, Deleuze and Guattari do not eschew the body, but rather consider it in its capacities for becoming. Both sets of thinkers are concerned with getting outside of the biological determinism of organic bodies, but

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242 Arendt, *Human Condition*, 188.
their solutions to the problem are radically different. Deleuze and Guattari’s response is a conception of the non-organized body that carries with it a new sense of limit and ways of thinking individuality. This section will explore what this alternative sense of limit offers in terms of thinking capacities for action.

Deleuze, in his book on Nietzsche, argues that adaptation, reproduction conservation and nutrition are organic functions which deploy reactive rather than active force, and in so doing they separate beings from what they can do. “Inferior forces are defined as reactive; they lose nothing of their force, of their quantity of force, they exercise it by securing mechanical means and final ends, by fulfilling the conditions of life and the functions and tasks of conservation, adaptation and utility.”

Deleuze is interested in giving an account of active bodies, but this, he finds, poses a problem for thought: “The only true science is that of activity, but the science of activity is also the science of what is necessarily unconscious.”

In differentiating Spinozist ethics from morality, Deleuze asserts that “the body surpasses the knowledge we have of it, and that thought likewise surpasses the consciousness that we have of it.” Thinking beyond the organism, it would appear, will require a new mode of thinking that does not privilege consciousness. We will return to the problem this poses to thinking in final chapter of this work, for the time being we will explore how Deleuze and Guattari deploy the concept of the “body without organs” (BwO) as a way of thinking bodies beyond organic functionalism.

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244 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 42.
245 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 18
The term, *body without organs*, is an unfortunate term because their issue is not actually with organs, but with the organization of the organs within the organism:

The BwO is not opposed to the organs; rather, the BwO and its “true organs,” which must be composed and positioned, are opposed to the organism, the organic organization of the organs. The judgment of God, the system of the judgment of God, the theological system, is precisely the operation of He who makes an organism, an organization of organs called the organism...  

From this point on we will refer to the body without organs as the “non-organized body,” to make clear the meaning of the concept. Deleuze and Guattari consider the organism as a restrictive entity (a stratum) that functionalizes the body for a certain work assemblage or social machine, and they use the concept of the non-organized body to illuminate how the body is more than the organism.

The organism is not at all the body, the BwO; rather, it is a stratum on the BwO, in other words, a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labor from the BwO, imposes upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences.  

The body exceeds the organism that attempts to capture it. The organism, in functionalizing the parts of the body and subordinating them to a global whole, restricts the body by separating it from what it can do. Organic structure gives us an inferior, reactive account of the capacity for action.

Deleuze and Guattari, following Antonin Artaud’s “poem” “To have done with the judgement of god,” claim that the organized body, the organization of the organs within a body, is an effect of a transcendent judgement. They suggest that we should aspire to tap into, by approximating or becoming nearer to the non-organized body.

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This body is the intensity which any body, organic or not, carries along with it and by which it is able to become. The non-organized body enables us to think “unnatural participations”\textsuperscript{248} (human, animal, and plant couplings) because it frees our thought of bodies from organic determinations which narrow the ways in which we can think the world and its heterogeneous connections and activities.

This does not mean that anything goes; Deleuze and Guattari explicitly caution against becoming completely non-organized.\textsuperscript{249} The dismantling of the organism correlates strongly with designification and desubjectivation.\textsuperscript{250} In all three cases, a kind of dissolution of individuality appears to be espoused, but the impetus of such activities is to open up the space for new actions, to increase the body’s power of acting.

With the non-organized body, then, it is not that it is disorganized but rather that it is not yet organized, that it has a capacity for organization and in some instances to ward off certain forms of organization. One does not proceed from a judgement of normalcy (conformity to the sameness with others of the same type), but rather with an experimental approach to discern ‘what a body can do.’\textsuperscript{251} What the idea of the non-organized body highlights is the source of a body’s capacity to become, to take shape, and to take up actions. Rather than seeing an individual body in its generic determination as a certain type of body, human, animal, or element, we look to the body in its processes of composition and we attend to the emergence of capacities. Deleuze and Guattari assert that the non-organized body is an unattainable

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\textsuperscript{248} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{Thousand Plateaus}, 240. \\
\textsuperscript{249} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{Thousand Plateaus}, 160. \\
\textsuperscript{250} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{Thousand Plateaus}, 159. \\
\textsuperscript{251} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{Thousand Plateaus}, 256.
\end{flushleft}
limit, something you make, an exercise in experimentation, a “component of passage,” a becoming. The non-organized body, as an affirmative limit, is the source of capacities for action and these are never “possessed” by an individual.

The BwO is never yours or mine. It is always a body. It is no more projective than it is regressive. It is an involution, but always a contemporary, creative involution. The organs distribute themselves on the BwO, but they distribute themselves independently of the form of the organism; forms become contingent, organs are no longer anything more than intensities that are produced, flows, thresholds, and gradients. “A” stomach, “an” eye, “a” mouth: the indefinite article does not lack anything; it is not indeterminate or undifferentiated, but expresses the pure determination of intensity, intensive difference.

In order to account for the relationship between limit and capacity in Deleuze, it is necessary to draw out features of his theory of difference. On his account of the capacity for action (what a body can do), a specific difference is not a difference from but an individuating difference. Individuating difference is not determined by the comparison of the difference between two things. One avenue for thinking through his theory of difference is in terms of his analysis of real and numerical distinction that he develops in his work on the status and relation between Substance, thought, and extension in Spinoza. Deleuze explains that in Descartes thought and extension are numerically distinct (they are two separate substances), whereas in Spinoza there is a real, not numerical, distinction between thought and extension (they are coextensive attributes of a one substance). Numerical distinction relies on a separation between things and corresponds to a concept of difference as difference.

252 Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 149.
253 Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 158.
254 Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 164.
255 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 164.
256 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 28.
By contrast, real distinction posits a difference without division. So in Spinoza, modes are numerically distinct, they are separate, countable, individual beings, but the attributes (thought and extension) are characterized by real distinction; they are not separate from one another but rather entirely coextensive, and yet they are qualitatively different. One consequence for our purposes of these two types of distinction is that when we think about finite, determinate beings (modes) we see that they are limited by one another; this is insofar as we see them as numerically distinct. This is what Arendt’s notion that the common world individuates us (by both separating and relating us to one another) does. If we do not conceive of beings in terms of type, nor in terms of their relations to one another, but instead in terms of their capacities and what they can do, then we will see them in their fluctuating potentials for action. We get one view of action if we look firstly to the individual, but if we look to the capacity to act then we have introduced power into our understanding and this prompts us to think another kind of individuation, one wherein individuals are secondary and are seen in the processes by which they are constituted.

Deleuze refuses an oppositional reading between the capacities of a thing and its limit. His reading is that things and beings are both determinable and find their determination in “going to the limit,” in exercising capacities. For Deleuze, going to the limit does not occur through resistance, delimitation or opposition. Instead limit is a being’s capacity; the limit of something is what it can do. The view of capacities as arising from the relations between individuals (which we see in both Dewey and Arendt insofar as they advance a relational view of individual agency) and their limits

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257 Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 203.
is untenable on Deleuze’s account because he gives ontological priority to the processes of individuation from which individuals emerge. Deleuze challenges us to think a field of individuation beneath, or prior to, constituted individuality, and thus changes the meaning of the concept of limit. An analysis of limit shifts from constraint to power or force. As a consequence, we lose the usual sense of separation, and delimitation amongst entities and processes of transformation take priority over stable, individuated beings or states. This way of conceiving limit, however, poses a problem for thinking of capacities as constituted by limits because it does not rely on the kind of delimitation and separation between things that the concept of limit requires when it is seen as interference or obstacle. Although, there is clearly a significant link between limit and capacity on Deleuze’s account, since “capacities” for Deleuze do not seem to be constituted through the reciprocal determination between a being and its limit: neither between individuals themselves, or between an individual and its situation.

While the concept of “limit” means different things whether we are considering logical, ontological, physical or organic domains, in all of these it seems to imply constraint or condition, neither of which have the affirmative character which Deleuze and Guattari attribute to it. Corresponding to nomadic distribution is another sense of hierarchy that does not rank and organize beings in terms of their limits but is an aspect of something fully expressing its power, by going to the limit of what it can do. 259 Going to the limit can enable a being to transcend its limits. We know this in swimming and in running, it is only by going to one’s limits (but not

259 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 37.
beyond them) that one is able to transcend that very limit. At first, perhaps, the limit of one’s capacity to run might be for five minutes and in going to that limit one is able, over time, to transcend it by running for seven minutes, then ten. If, however, one pushes beyond one’s limit too quickly, exhaustion and injury are likely to decrease one’s power. A careful experimentation with limits can increase capacities, but not by directly pushing beyond them.

The point of view shifts with Deleuze’s senses of distribution and hierarchy; we attempt to think of the becoming of beings rather than by way of the law or principle by which we organize their potential for development. In other words, instead of looking at the fully constituted individual, where a principle predetermines its potentials, limits and stages of development, we attend to processes of individuation by way of which individuals are constituted.

There is a hierarchy which measures beings according to their limits, and according to their degree of proximity or distance from a principle. But there is also a hierarchy which considers things and beings from the point of view of power: it is not a question of considering absolute degrees of power, but only of knowing whether a being eventually "leaps over" or transcends its limits in going to the limit of what it can do, whatever its degree. "To the limit", it will be argued, still presupposes a limit. Here, limit [peras] no longer refers to what maintains the thing under a law, nor to what delimits or separates it from other things. On the contrary, it refers to that on the basis of which it is deployed and deploys all its power; hubris ceases to be simply condemnable and the smallest becomes equivalent to the largest once it is not separated from what it can do.260

Deleuze identifies three different senses of limit in the above, the last of which is the limit he is proposing we think: going to the limit. First, there is the limit which maintains something under a law. For instance, one limit to thinking is that it is impossible to think \textit{A and not A} simultaneously, according to the law of non-

\footnote{260 Deleuze, \textit{Difference and Repetition}, 37.}
contradiction. Another limit to thinking is that when given proposition \( x \), \( x \) must either be true or false, according to the law of the excluded middle. Second, there is limit as that which delimits or separates a thing or being from other things: We employ limits when we recognize things as different kinds of beings. A plant is not a fox, a bird, a river, a sack, or wind. It is by way of limits, also, that we mark off one being as separate from another; so the exterior edge of a plant’s roots, stem, and leaves are its limits that mark its separation from water, soil, and air. The limit of a plant is both what ensures its separation from its environment and its connection to it.

Third, there is the limit which a being transcends by going to the limit of what one can do, that on whose basis it is deployed and deploys all its power. In this conception of limit we do not mark a separation between individuals, nor between individuals and their environment. This sense of limit is neither fixed, nor limiting; it is a mobile boundary rather than an enclosure.

This poses a problem for thought which tends to think in terms of constituted individuals. It is in response to this problem that Deleuze and Guattari deploy concepts like body without organs, war machine, assemblage and smooth space, as ways to think entities which are open, partial, indeterminate, and yet determinable. These concepts support attempts to think processes of individuation rather than the already constituted individuals. While having the status of an individual is an important condition of action, there is much more to the story of action and individuality if we consider capacities. In order to account for capacities for action, we need to look to the pre-individual, non-human, and impersonal elements wherein

261 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 169.
individuals become capable of acting. In other words, an individual’s capacity for action does not arise from its status as an individual, but rather from the conditions of its emergence. While it is certainly true that Deleuze’s thought in various places appears to undermine traditional notions of individual agency, I do not think that this is in order to do away with individual agents all together, but rather to demonstrate that we cannot understand an individual’s power to act without understanding its capacities for being affected and the processes in which they are constituted. The trick is to see both.
Chapter Five
Limits and Agency: The Dangers of Dissolution

Up to this point this thesis has argued that Deleuze and Guattari’s work makes a contribution to a philosophy of action by providing conceptual resources (war machine, nomad science, assemblage, smooth space, and non-organized body) that enable us to conceive of a complex of heterogeneous elements as contributing to the constitution of capacities for action. Like Arendt, Deleuze and Guattari re-conceptualize action beyond the bounds of political sovereignty, autonomous individuality, and intentions. Unlike Arendt, however, they do not delimit action to a strictly human realm separate from other human and non-human activities. Their concepts advance a theory of individuation that operates with an affirmative limit and enables us to conceive of the human power of action as collective in nature and entwined with non-human entities and elements. Several thinkers, however, argue explicitly that Deleuze’s thought (alone and with Guattari) has nothing to offer a philosophy of action because it lacks limit, constraint, and individuality (concepts which are considered necessary to thinking about agency). The common critical charge of Mark Hansen, Katherine Hayles and Peter Hallward is that Deleuze’s thought imperils agency altogether because he has dismantled the limits and constraints that are required in order to conceive individuals and their relations (both with one another and with their environments).

The main claim of this chapter is that those critiques which hold that Deleuze’s thought undermines core features necessary to the maintenance or development a concept of political action (limit, specific difference, and relational
individuality) fail to engage the explicit critique of modes of thought within his work. In other words, while they do point out that the concepts of limit as constraint, specific difference, and individuality are displaced in Deleuze’s work, they do not fully understand why this is the case and what this displacement achieves in terms of possibilities for action. These critiques fail to attend to Deleuze’s reasons for displacing or reconceptualising these concepts. It will be argued that a prioritizing of negative limit, exclusionary distinction and specific difference (in thought) disables capacities for heterogeneous action and assembling. The very ways that we think, or fail to think, about action can enable or disable the formation of new modes of acting and relating. (In the following chapter we will explore this through the concept of solidarity). It will be argued that these critiques of Deleuze themselves operate with a conception of thought – or the activity of thinking – which is critically assessed and purposively displaced in Deleuze’s work.

**Organic Limits**

Mark Hansen, in his article "Becoming as Creative Involution?: Contextualizing Deleuze and Guattari's Biophilosophy", interprets Deleuze and Guattari as providing resources for thinking the wider contexts from which actions emerge, and in this regard he is in agreement with the account provided in this thesis. However, he outlines a major critical concern with what he sees as a dangerous lack of limits in Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of agency that leads to a dissolution of individuality and, as a consequence, any meaningful sense of agency. Before turning to Hansen’s analysis, let’s take a moment to connect this concern with similar
concerns raised within Arendt scholarship in order to contextualize the problem we are exploring in this chapter with a wider problematic within political philosophy. In chapter three of this thesis we explored Arendt’s concern that understanding the world in terms of process undermined conditions for action because it did not enable a space separate from nature from which to act. We critiqued her position as failing to take into account the complex entwinement of beings (natural, artificial, human, and animal) that make capacities for action possible. Here, however, we wish to return to this line of critique so that we might gain a deeper critical understanding of the political implications of Deleuze and Guattari’s thought.

Dana Villa, in his article entitled "How Nietzschean Was Arendt?" takes aim at what he sees as the "Deleuzian/Foucauldian picture of Nietzsche as the philosopher who dissolves the world (and every 'stable' entity in it) into a “play of forces.” Villa's concern is that such a dissolution, which he thinks at its best can produce a "radical skepticism towards all doctrines of institutional legitimacy," actually ends up amplifying the "dominant tendencies of the late modern (capitalist and technological) world." Villa argues that our world is already a world where "all that is solid melts into air" and that we ought to take Arendt's critique of process reality seriously and care for the public world whose relative stability is threatened by "the imperatives of the global marketplace and capitalist expansion." Process reality, on Villa's reading of Arendt, "dissolves everything in a Heraclitean flux" wherein true change as the "creation of something genuinely new" is not possible. Action, as the beginning of
something new, is undermined in a system of reality that admits of no stable and
enduring entities.\textsuperscript{262}

Hansen reads Deleuze and Guattari correctly as rethinking agency as emergent
and “inseparable from a larger ecological context,”\textsuperscript{263} but he thinks that they take
things too far in their account of individuation and end up dissolving the very limits
and constraints that are necessary for agency. Their “ecological model of agency,” he
argues, resonates with thinkers from biology (such as Gregory Bateson, Humberto
Maturana and Francisco Varela), and cognitive science (such as Andy Clark and
Rodney Brooks) who understand “adaptive behavior as a coproduction of intrinsic
dynamics and response to environmental conditions.”\textsuperscript{264} He conceives Deleuze and
Guattari as furnishing a view of agency to be “rooted in biology,” and as such, he
thinks that they provide a conception of agency that enables the “affirmation of the
rich, multi-levelled embodiment that characterizes our existence as human beings.”\textsuperscript{265}
However, he thinks that Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of action is so
heteronomous that the environment actually becomes the agent.\textsuperscript{266} The main focus of
Hansen’s critique is on Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of the non-organized
body. He argues that in dismissing the organism "as nothing but a limited, molar, and
thus epiphenomenal entity,” they fail to do justice to the "significant agency...that we
acquire by dint of our multi-levelled embodiment."\textsuperscript{267} By privileging "the flexibility
of the plane of immanence over any constraint imposed by organization" and by

\textsuperscript{262} Dana Villa, “How Nietzschean Was Arendt?” p. 403.
\textsuperscript{263} Hansen, “Becoming Other as Creative Involution?,” paragraph 6.
\textsuperscript{264} Hansen, “Becoming Other as Creative Involution?,” paragraph 6.
\textsuperscript{265} Hansen, “Becoming Other as Creative Involution?,” paragraph 7.
\textsuperscript{266} Hansen, “Becoming Other as Creative Involution?,” paragraph 27.
\textsuperscript{267} Hansen, “Becoming Other as Creative Involution?,” paragraph 7.
emphasizing "ecological context at the expense of emergent organism or system," Hansen argues that Deleuze and Guattari risk "dissolving the body into the vast sea of life that is the plane of immanence." 268

Hansen’s approach to a philosophy of action involves aligning philosophical conceptions of agency with the biological sciences, in such a way that biological theory forms the basis by which to test and correct philosophical thought. He states that

the BwO seems intended to furnish not so much an alternative model of the organism as a radically divergent organization of organs that acquires its advantages expressly by shedding all traces of the rigidity and constraint structurally constitutive of organisms. 269

Hansen thinks that Deleuze and Guattari view the “organism as negative limitation” because of the radical indeterminacy that they accord to the molecular field; “organic form of any sort cannot but restrict the pure open-ended potentiality of the undifferentiated molecular field.” 270 Deleuze and Guattari's theory of becoming as involution does not, unlike evolution, involve heredity:

We oppose epidemic to filiation, contagion to heredity, peopling by contagion to sexual reproduction... The difference is that contagion, epidemic, involves terms that are entirely heterogeneous: for example, a human being, an animal, a bacterium, a virus, a microorganism. Or in the case of the truffle, a tree, a fly, and a pig. These combinations are neither genetic nor structural; they are interkingdoms, unnatural participations. That is the only way Nature operates-against itself. 271

Hansen's analysis is that this points to a "rich field of heterogeneous molecular activity" that Deleuze and Guattari think "is responsible for the creation (as well as

268 Hansen, paragraph 8.  
269 Mark B. N. Hansen, "Becoming Other as Creative Involution?: Contextualizing Deleuze and Guattari’s Biophilosophy," Postmodern Culture, 11:2000, paragraph 32.  
270 Hansen, "Becoming Other as Creative Involution?,” paragraph 40.  
the creativity) of life, organic and nonorganic alike.”\textsuperscript{272} He agrees that this molecular account of activity is helpful for thinking human agency as much more interconnected with other elements of the world. However, he takes issue with what he sees in Deleuze and Guattari as a complete disavowal of any autonomy of the organism. He finds their account of action overly heteronymous: the environment takes on agency.\textsuperscript{273}

Katherine Hayles, in her article "Desiring Agency: Limiting Metaphors and Enabling Constraints in Dawkins and Deleuze/Guattari" which follows Hansen’s analysis closely, claims that the “plasticity and mutating potential” of the Deleuze and Guattari’s non-organized body are:

unlimited because it needs to perform no functional work in the world, either in terms of its internal structure or its ability to survive in a dynamic environment...In this vision of living beings as movement, all internal functioning is evacuated and all couplings with the environment that lock in certain behaviors are ignored.\textsuperscript{274}

Their rhetoric, she argues, consists in the imperative to construct a non-organized body “as an intensely privileged state toward which we should all aspire.”\textsuperscript{275} Her concern is that the concept of the body without organs, in its depiction of “being as movement,” ignores individual-environment coupling and behaviour determination that the concept of the organism provides. Unlike works in evolutionary biology (such as Lynn Margulis’ work on bacteria\textsuperscript{276}) and cognitive science (such as Andy

\textsuperscript{272} Hansen, "Becoming Other as Creative Involution?,” paragraph 23.
\textsuperscript{273} Hansen, "Becoming Other as Creative Involution?,” paragraph 27.
\textsuperscript{274} Hayles, “Desiring Agency,” 153.
\textsuperscript{275} Hayles, “Desiring Agency,” 154.
\textsuperscript{276} Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, Microcosmos: Four Billion Years of Microbial Evolution (Berkeley: UCP, 1986).
Clarke’s theory of the “extended mind” which attend to the complexity of interactions between organisms and their environment and blur “clear distinctions between inside and outside,” Hayles argues that Deleuze and Guattari’s "desiring-machines...are envisioned as mutating without any meaningful constraints.” The environment, she argues, becomes a plane of consistency and "loses the constraining specificity that makes it contribute to self-organization." She is in full agreement with Hansen that their conceptualization fails to “recognize the constraint built into self-organization in the biological domain.”

In order to illustrate how Deleuze and Guattari differ from extended mind theorists in terms of the role of constraints in behaviour determination, she draws on an example from Andy Clark about the bluefish tuna’s ability to swim faster than what would be expected if one were to study their physiology alone. Andy Clark says this about the situated embodiment of the bluefish tuna:

Consider first the swimming ability of the Bluefin tuna. The Bluefin tuna is a swimming prodigy, but its aquatic capabilities – its ability to turn sharply, to accelerate quickly, and to reach such high speeds – have long puzzled biologists. Physically speaking, so it seemed, the fish should be too weak (by about a factor of seven) to achieve these feats. However, an explanation for this prodigious ability can be found in the use of embodied, environmentally embedded action by the tuna. Fluid dynamicists have suggested that the fish uses bodily action to manipulate and exploit the local environment (the water) so as to swim faster, accelerate more quickly, and so on. It appears that the tuna find and exploit naturally occurring currents so as to gain speed, and use tail flaps to create additional vortices and pressure gradients, which are then used for rapid acceleration and turning. The physical system whose functioning explains the prodigious swimming capacities of the Bluefin tuna is thus the fish-as-embedded-in, and as actively exploiting, its local

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281 Hansen, “Becoming Other as Creative Involution?,” paragraph 49.
Hayles finds this sort of example significant because it illustrates how properties of the physical environment “determine the fish’s behavior” and that the fish is able to behave in ways that alter the environment in ways beneficial to its survival. Deleuze and Guattari, she thinks, do not recognize the significance of such relationships between behaviour and environment and hence they "erase the powerful role of constraints in creating complex feedback loops that make organism and environment into an integrated system." This recalls the conception of enabling constraints that we dealt with in chapter two of this thesis, where limits understood as constraints were considered to give rise to capacities and which rely on a separation of individual and environment. In chapter three we argued that Deleuze and Guattari provide us with a way of thinking about capacities for action as collectively constituted and where the separation of the individual and environment is not foregrounded in the analysis.

Hansen’s assessment is that their work fails to maintain the conditions necessary for agency because of their tendency to devalue the organism and to eschew all constraint. For this reason, Hansen thinks the biological constraints entailed by organisms need to be re-injected into Deleuze and Guattari’s work. He proposes that their concept of machinic assemblage ought to be purged of its “anti-organicism” and “developed into a form” of “structural coupling.” Structural coupling is the term that Humberto Manturana and Franscisco Varela use to refer to

284 Hansen, “Becoming Other as Creative Involution?” paragraph 9.
the structure-determined interaction between two entities or an entity and its environment.\textsuperscript{285} Hansen’s view is that for Deleuze and Guattari’s thought to be a good resource for complex accounts of actions (that take into account the capacity to affect and to be affected), it needs to be brought into conformity with complexity theorists in order to correct what he sees as their “illegitimate appeal” to factors from macro-evolutionary processes in their account of becoming.\textsuperscript{286}

Hansen’s charge that Deleuze and Guattari make illegitimate theoretical moves in their conception of becoming rests on his assumption (previously stated) that Deleuze and Guattari are attempting to give an account of agency that is rooted in biology. He finds that they are seeking an account for the emergence of "organismic effects from the molecular standpoint."\textsuperscript{287} This manner of thinking organisms, where "the organism has no causal autonomy," is, Hansen claims, "alien to the conceptual terrain of current biology and complexity theory."\textsuperscript{288} The core of his critique of Deleuze and Guattari’s model of agency, then, is that it does not conform to biological science. In short: not that it doesn't work as a theory of agency but that it doesn’t work as a theory of agency rooted in biology. This approach to a critique of Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of the organic is curious, because it assumes they are after a correct or scientifically verifiable conception of life, rather than concepts and ways of thinking that promote life. The two are not the same aims. If anything, their work actually attempts to disengage some of our thinking about action from its formation.

\textsuperscript{286} Hansen, “Becoming Other as Creative Involution?” paragraph 57.
\textsuperscript{287} Hansen, “Becoming Other as Creative Involution?” paragraph 29.
\textsuperscript{288} Hansen, “Becoming Other as Creative Involution?” paragraph 29.
by organic, biological structures. Insofar as Hansen sees Deleuze and Guattari as advancing a biological conception of agency (view of action as reducible to biological thinking), he obscures the real contribution they make to theorizing action. It would be more appropriate, as well as more fruitful, to read their engagement with biological thought as one among many ways that they attempt to develop a thought of individuating entities. The result of their efforts is a thought of individuality in generative process and therefore multiple rather than unified. Hansen’s analysis misconstrues the philosophical motivations behind Deleuze and Guattari’s work.

In their critiques of Deleuze and Guattari, Hayles and Hansen endeavour to make the individual the locus of agency, but in doing so they both overlook and disable our resources for conceiving of collective action in any meaningful sense. Returning to the Bluefin tuna example, our analysis suggests it is a case of co-action of the tuna with water currents. Rather than considering an account of co-action, however, Hansen and Hayles immediately assume that the agency has been totally lost because the stability of organic form has been displaced or, in their terms, dissolved. Keith Ansell Pearson, in his book *Germinal Life: The Difference and Repetition of Gilles Deleuze*, also interprets Deleuze as giving “primacy to the dissolution of form and the freeing of life from entropic containment in organisms and species.” However, he argues that the value of dissolution (and decomposition) in Deleuze’s thought is the role it plays in the “creative evolution of matter and complex systems.”

Rather than advocating for the dissolution of form and the decomposition of forms of bodily (and psychic) life for their own sake, Ansell Pearson finds that

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Deleuze is often at pains to show that it is by virtue of degrees of dissolution and decomposition that creativity and novelty can emerge. The question of what a body can do encompasses its potential for change and becoming, and this means that we do not look to the body in terms of its static identity but in terms of its capacities for assembly and alteration. In order to get a view to these capacities, it is necessary that we dissolve our standard notions of what a body is.

Hansen is correct in his diagnosis that there is a risk for thought that everything dissolves in a sea of immanence whereby we cannot differentiate one thing from another. However, it can be argued that there is a greater risk of remaining trapped within a functionalist and identity based conception of bodies, thereby failing to better conceive their capacities (which arise from complex, heterogeneous constellations). The view of immanence furnishes thought with the ability to see bodies along new lines (in terms of power rather than form) and thereby also in terms of their capacities for becoming and assembly; it does not disable a view of bodies.

The non-organized body is not meant to replace the organism as a functional entity; it is not a living being but a modality of the body, the capacity of a body to become. As such, a non-organized body is an important dimension of any living body since one cannot live without a capacity for becoming.

It is not clear why Hansen thinks that the non-organized body was intended to be an alternative to the organism. It appears he is approaching the question of bodies and organisms from a unilateral perspective (the account is either one way or another without the possibility for both). This prompts him to think that just because Deleuze and Guattari provide an alternative mode from the organism of thinking about bodies,
then this concept must be meant to supersede or replace the organism. The interpretation given in this thesis, however, is that the non-organized body is not meant to name an alternative organization of the organs, however radical, but rather the capacity of the organs to distribute themselves or their capacity for re-organization. Thus, the body without organs is logically prior to organization, and as a concept serves to draw attention to the very conditions for organization and re-organization. The conditions for the kind of organization an organic body exhibits are for Deleuze affirmative limits. Affirmative limits are just these capacities for becoming. The organism is not replaced so much as displaced from being the sole and primary model of body, action and individuality.

In his analysis, Hansen correctly connects the non-organized body with the molecular in contradistinction with the organism as a molar entity. He is mistaken, however, in his subsequent assertion that the molecular is an indeterminate and undifferentiated field. It is certainly correct that Deleuze and Guattari claim that the organism restricts the body, but this does not entail that the body, as a molecular entity, is an indeterminate and undifferentiated potentiality. The concepts that Deleuze and Guattari develop do not only or primarily dissolve structures so much as they enable their proliferation.

A multiplicity is defined not by its elements, nor by a centre of unification or comprehension. It is defined by the number of dimensions it has; it is not divisible, it cannot lose or gain a dimension without changing its nature. Since its variations and dimensions are immanent to it, it amounts to the same thing to say that each multiplicity is already composed of heterogeneous terms in symbiosis, and that a multiplicity is continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities, according to its thresholds and doors. For

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290 Hansen, "Becoming Other as Creative Involution?" paragraph 40.
example, the Wolf-Man’s pack of wolves also becomes a swarm of bees, and a field of anuses, and a collection of small holes and tiny ulcerations (the theme of contagion): all these heterogeneous elements compose “the” multiplicity of symbiosis and becoming. If we imagined the position of a fascinated Self, it was because the multiplicity toward which it leans, stretching to the breaking point, is the continuation of another multiplicity that works it and strains it from the inside. In fact, the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities.²⁹²

Their work repeatedly invokes multiplicity against oneness or unity. In doing so they also enable a conceptual precision, without which our analyses of capacities for action are otherwise lacking. The molecular account of the body is not wide open, but limited. In response to Villa and Arendt’s concern that the dissolution of stable entities disables the possibility for something new, for action, it is here argued that some degree of dissolution of existing forms and structures is a necessary condition for newness.

Individuality and Relationality

In his assessment of what he considers to be the problematic implications of Deleuze’s thought for political theories and practices, Peter Hallward is most concerned with the status of individuality in Deleuze’s works. He states that what is at issue are “our most elementary questions regarding individuation and relationality. What qualities must an individual have in order to remain distinct from other individuals? How does one individual relate to another?”²⁹³ This recalls our discussion in the previous chapter where it was shown that Deleuze and Guattari offer a conception of space and individuation (smooth space and affirmative limit) that

²⁹² Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 249.
²⁹³ Peter Hallward, Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 1.
does not begin with the separation of one individual from another, but instead with
the processes of individuation from or through which individuals emerge. Arendt’s
conception of the common world, by contrast, is that which separates and
distinguishes individuals from one another, and enables their relation to one another.

In this way, Hallward can be seen to be Arendtian insofar he is concerned with a
certain version relational conception of individuality where each individual is clearly
distinguished from others.

Hallward argues that Deleuze’s thought advances a theory of singularity that
excludes specific difference and thereby individuality. Or, similarly, that Deleuze
advances a “philosophy of creation without limits” which maintains “a non-relational
type of difference,” and excludes individuality. Like Hansen and Hayles,
Hallward takes issue with the status of limit and constraint in Deleuze’s work (alone
and with Guattari). He thinks that he has isolated a common current in Deleuze that
is concerned solely with a creativity that moves “out of the world,” away from the
limitations of material conditions and “creatural confinement.” He finds this in
the concept of the non-organized body that he reads to be a virtual, creative body and
not an actual body. This difference (between creative, virtual being and created,
actual beings) is symptomatic, Hallward thinks, of a dualism in Deleuze’s
“philosophy of creation” between the “actual and virtual, or between created and
creating (or again: between naturata and naturans, composed and composing,

294 Hallward, Out of this World, 160.
295 Hallward, Out of this World, 3.
296 Hallward, Out of this World, 2.
297 Hallward, Out of this World, 55.
298 Hallward, Out of this World, 61.
individuated and individuating, reactive and active, definite and indefinite, molar and molecular, striated and smooth, etc.).” In addition to the difference between the creative and the created, Hallward identifies a further difference between “forms oriented towards a way of being in the world and forms oriented towards a way of being out of the world,” a difference between two “orientations of the creature” or two “kinds of actuality.” Hallward thinks that there are “forms of actuality” that aim towards their preservation through such things as “personal fulfillment, social interaction, political integration, responsible communication, ethical concern, etc.” and forms of actuality that are “oriented towards their dissipation.” On Hallward’s assessment, Deleuze’s philosophy of creation is the latter. He names this view of creativity “substractive” in that it repeatedly moves away from creatural form (such as the I and the self); “the actual is not creative but its dissolving can be.”

On Hallward’s analysis, Deleuze’s thought thus aims at a dissipation of ethical and political life comprised of such things as personal fulfillment, social interaction, and concern for others. Hallward carefully picks his passages in order to present a strong case for his analysis, but he does so in such a way as to overlook key aspect of Deleuze’s work which complicate such a dismissive reading. With regards to the non-organized body, Deleuze and Guattari expressly state that one ought not to completely disarticulate. They do not by any means suggest that one ought to entirely dismantle the organism, to fully desubjectify or designify it. Rather, they advise that one experiment with such disarticulations in small dosages. “Dismantling the organism

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299 Hallward, *Out of this World*, 82.
300 Hallward, *Out of this World*, 82 and 86.
301 Hallward, *Out of this World*, 82.
has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage” made up of “circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensities.” Deleuze and Guattari claim that this is something we all do every day.302 Take the following simple example they provide:

x starts practicing piano again. Is it an Oedipal return to childhood? Is it a way of dying, in a kind of sonorous abolition? Is it a new borderline, an active line that will bring other becomings entirely different from becoming or rebecoming a pianist, that will induce a transformation of all the preceding assemblages to which x was prisoner? Is it a way out? Is it a pact with the Devil? Schizoanalysis, or pragmatics, has no other meaning: Make a rhizome. But you don't know what you can make a rhizome with, you don't know which subterranean stem is effectively going to make a rhizome, or enter a becoming, people your desert. So experiment.303

If one wants to (and it’s clear that Hallward doesn’t), it is not hard to see that minor changes of habit and routine qualify as a kind of dismantling that open one’s body to new connections. For instance, walking to work rather than driving or taking the bus profoundly alters the assemblage one is a part of and opens the body up to a whole host of new connections and conjunctions: dogs, cats, birds, flowers, trees, pathways, parks, food, protests, groups doing yoga, joggers, bike riders, newspapers, rain, wind, snow, garbage removal, broken pipes, park sleepers, and pamphleteers to name only some of the elements with which one can connect while walking. One or more of these new connections may lead to much larger subjective and social transformations; one might get caught up in a street protest against tuition hikes, becoming politicized about education and society, or develop affections for green spaces that activate relations and actions surrounding the reclamation of public spaces. We all develop

302 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 160.
303 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 251.
habits and routines: repetitive behaviours with which our subjective, bodily identities are bound. Minor alterations in habits simultaneously (and sometimes radically) alter both one’s subjective, bodily identity and the assemblage of which one is a part, and this can have profoundly affirmative effects on one’s sense of personal fulfillment, social connections, and the ways in which one can experience and take up concern for others (all things that Hallward considers important elements of ethical and political life).

*Singular Individuation and Specific Difference*

Hallward pushes his analysis of the differences between the actual and the virtual and between the two kinds of actuality further and articulates them in terms of the contrast between singularity and of specific difference. He thinks that Deleuze is concerned predominantly with singularity and has little concern for the actuality of this world, actual beings and concrete circumstances. Hallward claims that in Deleuze there is a “singular conception of individuation” that “recognizes only one entity as fully individual”: this entity is the creative. “The singular creates the medium of its own substantial existence or expression… it takes place as an ‘inflation’ creative of its own ongoing space of expansion.”

Hallward argues that in Deleuze active differentiation does not take place within the field of actuality or experience but at the level of its production – not in creation, but from its creator. In every case, Deleuze reserves differing power to an effectively absolute determining instance, a pure creating in some sense outside or beyond its derivative (differed) effects, or creatures.

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305 Peter Hallward, "The Limits of Individuation, or How to Distinguish Deleuze and Foucault," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 2:2000, 95.
Singular individuation, according to Hallward, “always posits a single scale of reality, organized in terms of determined degrees of proximity to a principle that is itself effectively beyond being or pre-actual.” Deleuze, Hallward thinks, directs most of his concern to dissolving or dissipating structures of actuality in order to free a creative force which moves through them. He states that: "The singular always moves with the force of a power creative of the very medium of its movement, a power beyond all possible mediation." Singularity is the term for this force, and on Hallward’s reading, it is largely indifferent to the actual creatures and beings that it moves through.

Although Hallward concedes that only “the creature can overcome its own creatural limitations,” and that this “overcoming will involve experimentation and invention, the configuration of new actualities or bodies and new assemblings of bodies,” he argues that “the purpose of such assembling is not their consolidation but the dissipation of the actual, not the solidification of materials but their dematerialisation, not the preservation of embodiment but an intensive disembodiment.” Hallward thinks that Deleuze’s thought is always only looking for ways to get out the world, beyond “creatural confinement.” In contrast with singularity, Hallward prefers and argues that the specific…implies a situation, a past, an intelligibility constrained by inherited conditions. The specific is the space of interests in relation to other interests, the space of the historical as such, forever ongoing, forever incomplete, the space where “we make our own history but not in circumstances of our

308 Hallward, “The Limits of Individuation,” 95.
choosing.’ Within the world, the specific relations subject to subject and subject to other: the singular dissolves both in one beyond-subject.\textsuperscript{310}

Here we see Hallward aptly get to the heart of the issue we discussed in chapters three and four of this thesis when we saw Arendt’s similar concern with the maintenance of a common world that would distinguish and relate individuals to one another, enabling a space of interest. What we saw with Deleuze and Guattari was a concern with the processes out of which such relations come to be constituted.

Hallward’s argument is opposed to the analysis we have given in this thesis as he argues that the motivation and goal of Deleuze’s work is primarily de-individuation, or the dissolution of individuality, and hence cannot rightly be considered to contribute to political philosophy. This thesis, however, has argued that in order to get a view to capacities for action, political or otherwise, one needs to look to more than the individual because capacities themselves are not individualised. In other words, this thesis has not advocated for the dissolution of individuality as an appropriate goal, but that one cannot see what an individual can do, or can become, without first looking at those things with which a given individuals is composed or constituted by. So, where Hallward thinks that Deleuze’s aim is to get beyond the individual entirely, this thesis has thus far argued that thinking more than individuals may enable us to achieve a richer understanding of action, both collective and individual. We have sought to show that capacities for action are collectively constituted and that viewing action too individualistically in fact obscures important elements of the actual world, the very world Hallward is concerned about.

\textsuperscript{310} Hallward, \textit{Absolutely Postcolonial}, 5.
Hallward turns to Deleuze’s theory of difference in order to illustrate that Deleuze advances a non-relational theory of difference and that this theory of difference undermines the very ground of politics. Hallward’s position is entirely at odds with the analysis given in this thesis, specifically where, in chapter four, we found that Deleuze offers a conception of difference that provides valuable resources to thinking about capacities for action. The reason Hallward’s account is so different is due to the fact that he is not concerned with giving an account of capacities for action (and the complexity of their constitution); rather, his concern is to explain politics in terms of the interactions between stable political entities, that is, already constituted individuals and groups. He is uninterested, it would seem, in attempting both to give an account of capacities for action and also interrelations between individuals. Contrary to commentators that interpret Deleuze as advancing “a relational account of being as difference” (because he privileges multiplicity over unity, refuses a “transcendent principle of individuation,” and emphasizes “the way becomings take place ‘in the middle’, in a ‘between’”), Hallward argues that in Deleuze’s thought there is always “the exclusive primacy of a non-relational difference” that is an “intra-elemental rather than inter-elemental difference.” In other words, primacy is given to a difference that is not between entities (beings or individuals) but is instead a differing power which precedes entities, what Hallward calls “intra-elemental” difference. Deleuze, Hallward asserts, foregrounds a difference that differs with itself before it differs with any external thing.  

311 Hallward, Absolutely Postcolonial, 152.  
312 Hallward, Absolutely Postcolonial, 153.
Difference, creation and affirmation all proceed (on Hallward’s account of Deleuze) without relations: “a differing differs itself by itself,” an “affirmation affirms itself by itself,” and “a creating does what it is, in the absence of any constituent relation either to other creatings or to the creature it creates.” Deleuzian difference (“absolute difference”) “creates rather than relates what it differs.” As such, Deleuze’s theory of difference is a non-relation, and is not focused on the difference between two terms (or beings), but is rather the prior differentiating power from which such relations emerge. It is on this basis that Hallward reads Deleuze as encouraging a non-relational conception of the world, one wherein individuals and their relations dissolve so as to affirm or to give way to a creative, differing power which runs through them. As such, Hallward thinks that Deleuze, in focusing his attention on non-relational difference (or non- “mediated difference”) “rejects any theory of inter-individual relation.”

The problem that Hallward finds with Deleuze is that distinction and differentiation are secondary to a primary power that generates them. Individuation does not proceed from distinctions between qualities, species, forms or parts, but is instead what gives rise to them. As such these distinctions are secondary in Deleuze. Further, Hallward reads Deleuze as mostly concerned with the dissolution and dissipation of distinctions (and the relations which they enable). It is on this basis that he can conclude that Deleuze’s philosophy is indifferent to the world; it is trying to get out of it.

Hallward finds in Deleuze an absence of “constituent relational differences between creatures,” and it is on this basis that he claims that Deleuze advances a “non-relational theory of difference” that is “indifferent to the politics of this world.”

A specific rather than singular mode of individuation yields elements whose individuality can only be discerned through the relations they maintain with themselves, with their environment, and with other individuals. The condition of identity for such an individual is that it be constituted through and persist in relations with others. It is the unconditional status of relationality itself that allows us to anticipate and disarm an eventual deconstruction of the specific.

Again, Hallward’s account echoes Arendt’s conception of individuation and its political nature that we discussed in the previous chapter; identities are formed and maintained through the interrelations in a stable environment, and individuality emerges between individuals in the space of appearance. The stability of the environment is a condition for identity. Arendt thinks that animal laborens cannot achieve identity in distinction from others both because of the processual nature of their activities, but also because in labouring she thinks humans are all the same, allowing no place for distinction.

Hallward and Arendt share a certain version of a relational conception of individuality as forming the basis for political action. Specific individuals, according to Hallward, exist in relation to an environment and to other individuals, whereas a singular individual “like a creator-God transcends all such relations.”

314 Hallward, “Limits of Individuation,” 95.
315 Hallward, Out of this World, 155.
316 Hallward, Out of this World, 162.
317 Hallward, Absolutely Postcolonial, 4.
318 Hallward, Absolutely Postcolonial, 1.
philosophy, in privileging singularity over specificity, Hallward argues, does not support any conception of relational individuality. In fact, he thinks that Deleuze “would like to get rid of the relational subject all together.”\(^{319}\) While Hallward is correct in his assessment that Deleuze prioritizes singularity and individuating rather than specific or relational difference in his thought, he is incorrect to suggest that Deleuze’s work does away with the relational subject. In other words, granting a priority in thought to singularity does not do away with specific and relational differences. It does, however, provide a way of giving an account of them. In other words, the identities supported by specific differences and relations are not ontologically fundamental.

Hallward’s analysis of Deleuze’s thought constructs an impasse between either the undifferentiated creative power of individuation or formed individuals. The notion of pre-individuality, however, presents another position for thought; the pre-individual domain is that in which individuation occurs. Deleuze defines the pre-individual in terms of singularities and thinks that it serves as an alternative to the choice between a formed individual and an undifferentiated ground that dissolves it.

[S]ingularities are not imprisoned within individuals and persons; and one does not fall into an undifferentiated ground, into a groundless depth when one undoes the individual and the person. The impersonal and pre-individual are the free nomadic singularities.\(^{320}\)

He derives his concept of singularity from Gilbert Simondon who develops the concept of the pre-individual in his work on individuation: *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information.*

\(^{319}\) Hallward, *Out of this World*, 160-161.

\(^{320}\) Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 140-141.
The operation of individuation, Simondon argues, should be given priority since it is from it that the individual comes to exist with characteristics that reflect the operation. So, where Hallward thinks that the individual and its relations should be given priority, Simondon thinks that we cannot understand individuals and their relations without a consideration of the individuation which gives rise to them. Considering individuation in this direction (in reverse of a thinking that begins with a principle) shows the individual as a relative reality, a certain phase of being that supposes a pre-individual reality, and that, even after individuation, does not exist on its own, because individuation does not exhaust with one stroke the potentials of pre-individual reality. Moreover, that which the individuation makes appear is not only the individual, but also the pair individual-environment.\(^{321}\)

Pre-individuality is the complex reality full of potentials from which individuals are generated and which they maintain and carry with them; individuals maintain characteristics of the pre-individual reality from which they emerge. “In order to think individuation,” Simondon tells us, we need to consider “a system that is charged and supersaturated…not consisting only of itself, and that cannot be thought using the law of the excluded middle.” Unity and identity exist at the level of constituted being and do not apply at the level of pre-individual being.\(^{322}\) Further, living individuals are not only the result of individuation but carry the activity of individuation with them, the process of individuation does not “exhaust all of pre-individual reality.”\(^{323}\) In other words, individuals carry with them different capacities for further individuations.

Simondon argues that a great deal of philosophy has given ontological privilege to the constituted individual by deriving the principle of individuation from already existing individuals (he sees this both in substantialist and hylomorphic theories).\(^{324}\) This approach to individuation fails to place the individual in the “system of reality in which the individuation occurs,” and it therefore does not account for the genesis (ontogenesis) of individuality.\(^{325}\) Principles of individuation, according to Simondon, prefigure the properties that an individual will possess once it is constituted. Simondon argues that it is an open question as to whether or not individuation has a first term from which it begins. His concern is that theories of individuation that rely on a principle of individuation presuppose the following temporal succession: principle of individuation, operation of individuation according to the principle, appearance of constituted individual. He proposes, however, that if we suppose that more than the individual is produced in individuation then we might “attempt to grasp the ontogenesis in the entire progression of its reality, and to know the individual through the individuation, rather than the individuation through the individual.”\(^{326}\)

Simondon’s argument, that we cannot understand a given individual without first attending to the process(es) of individuation from which it emerged, is reiterated in Deleuze’s theory of difference. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze argues for a conception of “individuating difference” that precedes generic, specific, and

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individual differences. This difference cannot be fully captured by representational thought because when we think representationally, difference is subordinated to a principle of identity. Thought operates by way of representation when it understands difference as the difference between this or that being (whether in terms of generic or specific difference): an animal is different from a plant, a horse is different from an ox, a cup is different from a flowerpot. This form of difference is what Deleuze argues is difference inscribed within concepts. What he means by this is that the operation of “difference” in these cases is determined by the conceptual categories of genus and species (plant, animal, horse, ox, etc.); it does not have a concept of its own but is rather derivative of categories; it is a relation between other concepts.

While Hallward is at pains to show that Deleuze’s way of thinking individuation and difference undermines individuality because it does not begin with specific difference, Deleuze and Simondon are expressly critical of any attempts to begin from specific difference when thinking about individuality since it cannot yield a robust conception. Instead, specific difference tells us that a given individual is one instantiation of a species of being; specific difference tells us that an individual horse is a species of animal and that is different from another species of animal, for instance an ox. It tells us what kind of being a particular individual is, but says nothing of what it can do or become. Deleuze and Guattari argue that rather than thinking in terms of organic form and specific difference, attending to the powers or affects of

327 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 38.
328 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 29 and 137.
329 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 32.
individuals enables a subtler understanding. It is in this respect that Deleuze claims that a “racehorse is more different from a workhorse than a workhorse is from an ox.” While such an example may tempt us to think that they are simply advocating for a new system of categorization, their point is to illustrate that conceiving beings in terms of degrees of power (or capacities for action) will give a very different view of the world. If one is concerned with possibilities for social and political transformation, or if one agrees with Arendt that actions are new beginnings, then it is easily conceivable that this different view may be important.

**Political Relations**

Hallward finds that Deleuze’s thought paralyses the actor by privileging creation such that a “a creature’s own interests, actions or decisions are of minimal or preliminary significance…the renewal of creation requires the paralysis and dissolution of the creature.” Deleuze, Hallward claims, “obliges us…to make an absolute distinction between what a subject does and what is done or decided through a subject,” thereby abandoning “the category of the subject altogether…in favour of our more immediate subjection to the imperatives of creative life or thought.” All this, Hallward thinks, is of no value to a “politics of the future” which is likely to depend “less on virtual mobility” than “on more resilient forms of cohesion, on more principled forms of commitment, on more integrated forms of coordination, on more resistant forms of defence.” He argues that Deleuze’s thought is “indifferent to the

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331 Hallward, *Out of this World*, 163.
politics of this world” because it does not provide “a coherent theory of relation between terms,” such as “relations of conflict, solidarity, and so on (and thus a coherent theory of the circumstances and decisions that serve to orient relations between subjects, between priorities, between perspectives, between political classes…?)” According to Hallward,

Deleuze writes a philosophy of (virtual) difference without (actual) others. He intuits a purely internal or self-differing difference, a difference that excludes any constitutive mediation between the differed. Such a philosophy precludes a distinctively relational conception of politics as a matter of course.334

In describing the social field more in terms of “the lines of flight running through it” than in terms of “its conflicts and contradictions,” Hallward thinks that Deleuze subsumes “any distinctive space for political action” within “the more general dynamics of creation or life.” And, because Deleuze’s philosophy is considered by Hallward to describe non-relational dynamics, he concludes that “there can be little room in Deleuze’s philosophy for relations of conflict or solidarity, i.e. relations that are genuinely between rather than external to individuals, classes, or principles.”335

The following passage illustrates that Deleuze, in contrast to Hallward, thinks that there is a more nuanced and productive difference (or limit) than that of limitation and opposition.

There is a crucial experience of difference and a corresponding conceptual experiment: everytime we find ourselves confronted or bound by a limitation or an opposition, we should ask what such a situation presupposes. It presupposes a swarm of differences, a pluralism of free, wild or untamed differences; a properly differential and original space and time; all of which persist alongside the simplifications of limitation and opposition. A more

332 Hallward, Out of this World, 162.
333 Hallward, Out of this World, 152.
334 Hallward, Out of this World, 162 -3.
335 Hallward, Out of this World, 162.
profound real element must be defined in order for oppositions of forces or limitation of forms to be drawn, one which is determined as an abstract and potential multiplicity. Oppositions are roughly cut from a delicate milieu of overlapping perspectives, of communicating distances, divergences and disparities, of heterogeneous potentials and intensities… Everywhere, couples and polarities presuppose bundles and networks, organised oppositions presuppose radiations in all directions … Everywhere, the depth of difference is primary… There is a false profundity in conflict, but underneath conflict, the space of the play of differences.336

So where Hallward thinks that a difference between beings (what he calls a specific difference or a relational difference) is a condition for solidarity and political action,337 Deleuze suggests that there are deeper conditions of solidarity that cannot be captured by the kind of individuation (by way of limitation and opposition) that proceeds from already constituted individuals. While Hallward thinks that the most dangerous thing for a theory of agency is to let go of the primacy of specific difference, Deleuze is at pains to show how singular processes of individuation provide resources for individual and collective transformations, something that accounts of individuality that focus on specific difference are unable to grasp. The last chapter will take up and assess what Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy can contribute to thinking about the question of solidarity.

336 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 50 – 51.
337 Hallward, *Out of this World*, 162.
The previous chapter explored a certain line of critique that finds Deleuze and Guattari’s work lacking in resources for thinking agency and politics because of an apparent absence of limit, individuality, and specific difference. The examination of the content of these critiques revealed that their reliance on an individualistic sense of agency resulted in a failure to exploit the resources that Deleuze and Guattari provide for thinking collectivities and collective action. This chapter revisits the idea of collective action and considers the ways in which Arendt as well as Deleuze and Guattari articulate notions of collective responsibility which, although different, share significant features. They diagnose a contemporary shame at being human which calls forth a collective responsibility distinct from individual responsibility. After having explored some ways of thinking through collective responsibility, we will explore how the theory of collective action we have been advancing in this thesis compares to ideas of solidarity developed in ethical and political thought.

Collective Responsibility

While Deleuze and Guattari’s thought appears to some as lacking in certain features considered necessary to political thinking, Arendt, by contrast, is widely recognized as a significant political thinker. However, her works have been criticized for promoting an overly abstract and idealistic conception of the political without
normative foundations. Her scepticism regarding the possibilities for universal human rights and her reluctance to attribute a moral motivation to action make it difficult, without additions and revisions, to mobilize her thinking towards an analysis of political institutions. In spite of these issues, however, we find nascent theories of responsibility in both Arendt and Deleuze and Guattari’s thought, the potentials of which we will explore in this section.

In what follows we will explore their divergent ways of thinking the connections between shame, collectivity, and responsibility. Arendt points towards the notion of collective responsibility for a common humanity, while Deleuze and Guattari posit a becoming wherein one is responsible “before” others rather than responsible for them. I will argue that although their respective conceptions of responsibility are considerably different, at the very least Arendt’s conception rests on being a member of the same species, and Deleuze and Guattari’s directs us outside humanity towards a “becoming-animal.” Nonetheless, in both cases there is a kind of responsibility at work that is collective in nature, enacted towards the future, and not ascribable to an individual.

_Shame at being human_

Arendt and Deleuze and Guattari consider that we are at present complicit in unjust, oppressive and intolerable conditions of others, the awareness of which arises in an experience of shame. This shame, however, is not a feeling of guilt

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340 Deleuze and Guattari, _What is Philosophy_, 109.
accompanied by a sense of individual responsibility, but rather an “elemental shame”; the “shame of being human.”341 Both their remarks on shame are written with reference to Nazism and both point to a loss of solidarity that has resulted from it. This shame, says Arendt, "which many people of the most various nationalities share with one another today, is what finally is left of our sense of international solidarity; and it has not yet found adequate political expression."342 Deleuze and Guattari describe our present situation as a kind of catastrophe whereby

the society of brothers or friends having undergone such an ordeal that brothers and friends can no longer look at each other, or each at himself, with a “weariness,” perhaps a “mistrust,” which does not suppress friendship but gives it a modern color.343

This shame, and the precarity of solidarity which accompanies it, is considered both by Arendt and by Deleuze and Guattari as a powerful motivation for thinking and philosophy. Arendt suggests that the “speechless horror at what man may do and what the world may become is in many ways related to the speechless wonder of gratitude from which the questions of philosophy spring.”344 Deleuze notes that it is not only extreme situations that give rise to shame, but that “we can feel shame at being human in utterly trivial situations, too,” such as the “vulgarization of thinking, in the face of TV entertainment, of a ministerial speech, of 'jolly people' gossiping.”

Echoing Arendt, Deleuze suggests that this shame, both with regards to extreme and

343 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy, 107.
trivial situations, is “one of the most powerful incentives toward philosophy, and it's what makes all philosophy political.”

Arendt urges that the feeling of repulsion and shame at violence, oppression and injustice that some inflict upon others results from an experience of shared human identity and gives rise to a general or collective “responsibility for all crimes committed by men.” Arendt thinks that the idea of being a part of a common humanity “implies the obligation of a general responsibility,” a responsibility which many “do not wish to assume.” In not assuming a general human responsibility, however, Arendt fears that people will look to separate racial origins rather than common human origins. Assuming a common human responsibility is coincident for Arendt with an anti-racist politics.

Arendt, however, holds considerable scepticism that common membership in the human species is adequate to elicit respect from our fellow humans. This in fact forms the basis of her critique of human rights; they are not natural features of humanity but require membership in political community. Simply being a human, a natural being, is insufficient to ground rights. It is only in political community where one’s actions have effect and one’s words matter that one has rights. Arendt argues that the formulators of the “Rights of Man” failed to see that the most basic human right is not liberty or equality but the “right to have rights” which is achieved in political community. So, while she thinks that there is a collective human

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345 Deleuze, Negotiations, 172.
responsibility for the actions of all humans she is arguably reserved about the kind of world or actions which such a responsibility entails, and she does not link this responsibility to claims to human rights.

Iris Marion Young develops Arendt’s notion of collective responsibility into the idea of political responsibility by articulating two key features: first that one is responsible for things one has not done, and second that this responsibility is due to membership in a group that cannot be voluntarily dissolved. Young thinks that this notion of political responsibility is “forward looking” in that one has a responsibility to consider the future in taking up the present; if there are injustices being committed in the institutions of which one is involved then one has a responsibility to act politically (which for Arendt is always to act collectively) to bring about institutional transformation. Young reminds us that this “responsibility is largely unavoidable in the modern world, because we participate in and usually benefit from the operation of these institutions.”

She provides Arendt’s concept of collective responsibility with a normative dimension; it is a political “responsibility for justice.” We will further explore this kind of political responsibility in the following section on solidarity.

Where Arendt does not fully articulate what collective responsibility entails, Deleuze and Guattari advance another sense of responsibility, also arising from the experience of a “shame at being human.” This is not to be responsible for, but to be responsible “before”, and I will argue that it can be seen, in light of the work done in

351 Young, Responsibility for Justice, 92.
this thesis, as a kind of collective responsibility. Like Arendt, they are sceptical that human rights are the path to overcoming the intolerable.\footnote{Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy}, 106-107.}

In capitalism only one thing is universal, the market. There’s no universal state, precisely because there’s a universal market of which states are the centers, the trading floors. But the market’s not universalizing, homogenizing, it’s an extraordinary generator of both wealth and misery. A concern for human rights shouldn’t lead us to extol the “joys” of the liberal capitalism of which they’re an integral part. There’s no democratic state that’s not compromised to the very core by its part in generating human misery.\footnote{Deleuze, “Control and Becoming,” \textit{Negotiations}, 172.}

They are also concerned with how thought can be linked with notions of racial purity and superiority; “the race summoned forth by art or philosophy is not the one that claims to be pure but rather an oppressed, bastard, lower, anarchical, nomadic, and irremediably minor race.”\footnote{Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy}, 109.}

Unlike Arendt, however, they do not conceive of responsibility as responsibility for, but rather “before,” and they do not locate responsibility in a common humanity; while shame may arise from a common humanity, responsibility before initiates becoming.\footnote{Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy}, 109.}

We do not feel ourselves outside of our time but continue to undergo shameful compromises with it…We are not responsible for the victims but responsible before them. And there is no way to escape the ignoble but to play the part of the animal (to growl, to burrow, snigger, distort ourselves): thought itself is sometimes closer to an animal that dies than to a living, even democratic, human being.\footnote{Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy}, 107-108.}

Deleuze and Guattari assert that we “become animal so that the animal becomes something else.” ³⁵⁸ It is clear that while Deleuze and Guattari’s consideration of responsibility takes a rather radical departure from Arendt’s, it is not yet clear what kind of departure it is. In what follows we will attempt to develop clarity around the notions of “responsibility before” and “becoming” animal or other, as well as the interconnection between these seemingly distinct ideas.

To be responsible for something is most often (although this may not be the case in Arendt’s theorization) to be able to be held individually accountable; either to be held accountable for something that has happened, to be guilty of an act, or to be held accountable for the success or failure of taking on the projects of another. In each case the self is set apart from the object of their action. By contrast, responsibility before does not rest on such a separation; it is, rather, to be in the midst of, to be among others. ³⁵⁹ Erin Manning suggests that since “we cannot have already positioned ourselves,” to be responsible before is to “engage at the non-human limit.” This “involves the embrace not of an other qua human other, but of a tendency toward becoming. We are responsible before in a collective individuation.” ³⁶⁰ By contrast, Marks tells us that being responsible for “implies reactive feelings of guilt whereas being responsible before implies an active commitment to inventing and making connections.”³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy, 109.
Earlier chapters of this work (specifically three, four, and five) advanced the idea that there is a way of thinking about action that does not begin with a separation of actor from their act or subject from object, but rather attends to the processes within which individuation of actors and acts are caught up and from which they emerge. Capacities for action are constituted in such processes and thus are properly conceived of as collective rather than individual. Here, it is important to bring this way of thinking to a consideration of responsibility before; it can be understood as acknowledging being in the midst of processes of individuation and committing to the action of experimentation that this kind of being in the midst of requires. In the terms used in this thesis, to be responsible before is to attend to the dynamic and collective constitution of capacities. This bring us to the significance of the notion of becoming; responsibility before calls forth a becoming because to become is to experiment with capacities. To experiment with capacities is to engage with a heterogeneous collectivity, to be in the midst of collectivity. Responsibility before is, in this sense, a collective responsibility.

Deleuze claims that our “hope lies in a revolutionary becoming: the only way of casting off [our] shame or responding to what is intolerable.”362 This notion of becoming, however, requires further explanation if we are to assess what merit it has to political thought. Next we will consider a case of responsibility and becoming before turning to one way of understanding it in terms of subjective modification. We will then turn to an exploration of solidarity and consider how this notion of becoming relates to solidarity thinking.

362 Deleuze, Negotiations, 171.
Responsibility Before and Becoming: A teaching scenario

Most, if not all, of the few people who read this will be teachers, most likely teachers of philosophy. While the relationship that Deleuze and Guattari posit between shame and becoming can easily appear trite and inadequate to real social and political violence and real world suffering, if we consider our roles as teachers there is a way whereby it can be understood in quite concrete ways. As teachers of philosophy we are frequently in the position to teach philosophical concepts and arguments, many of us will have taught ethics and social and political philosophy at one time or another. While teaching applied ethics for instance, we may find ourselves teaching Peter Singer’s argument that one should give up luxuries in order to contribute to famine relief,\textsuperscript{363} or that one should give up meat (especially meat produced through industrial agriculture) in recognition of animal equality in terms of suffering.\textsuperscript{364} Depending on the composition of one’s classroom one may find that most of the students are in agreement with such edicts; ‘of course, the way we live is wrong,’ ‘we feel guilty and yet we will not change.’ Now, in one way, getting one’s students to understand Singer’s arguments and to the point where they are in agreement with his reasons and their implications, is arguably to have done one’s job; the material has been taught and it has been understood, the students can be evaluated and as a teacher you have fulfilled your role.

In this teaching scenario, there are two ways in which the idea of “responsible for” arises. One is that as the teacher, you are responsible for teaching the material.

\textsuperscript{363} Peter Singer, \textit{The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty} (New York: Random House, 2009)
You are responsible for student learning, to prepare the students for evaluation, by making them (or helping them to be), as far as possible, as good as they can be at explaining philosophical concepts and arguments. If you are a more socially and politically engaged teacher, you might consider yourself as having further responsibilities for: for engaging students, for getting them to think and consider their actions, etc. However, both the narrow and wide conceptions of being responsible for one’s students will arguably fail to effect any real change in subjectivity and modes of relations; the actions of students, for the most part, will remain intact. It is quite likely that the material will be covered, the students will be evaluated, and the structures of the political-ecological landscape will remain unchanged; after all, you’re a teacher not an activist.

The second way in which the idea of “responsibility for” arises in this scenario is that the students feel individually responsible for failing to contribute to famine relief or failing to cease consumption of meat in the face of an awareness of significant animal (and also human and environmental) exploitation and suffering. The focus on individual responsibility has a way of imperilling action; to be individually responsible for, to be guilty, to be complicit in large scale exploitation and socio-ecological degradation is paralyzing. “What difference can I make?” a student asks. Another expresses a sense of hopelessness at the immensity of the problem. Another points out that it is as if “society” doesn’t want them to act differently. The position of being just one individual acting against “society” is self-defeating. A poignant example of such despair and the impaired desire that results from it is one student who after watching “Supersize Me,” a documentary on the
relationship between industrial agriculture and the fast food industry, experienced the simultaneous feeling of being appalled by the state of affairs and an increased desire to eat a hamburger; after watching the film she and her sister went to McDonald’s. I submit that the coupling of despair and a seemingly contradictory desire to further participate in the commercial food industry is not at all aberrant or surprising. This is not a question of conscience. It is not simply an issue of becoming “aware” of suffering and one’s complicity in it and rationally and intentionally altering one’s actions. It is just not that simple.

Enter shame. For some, perhaps even many of us, this experience of teaching will bring with it an experience of shame. Shame at being a teacher insofar as we function in a certain role as teacher; to teach material and prepare students for evaluation feels grossly ethically and politically inadequate. We will not only notice but be deeply troubled by having done nothing but bring students to a position of guilt at their actions coupled with a sense of despair at their inability to act in ways that they personally deem ethically and politically appropriate. Shame, however, unlike guilt which focuses on individual responsibility for one’s action, is collective. With the experience of shame one is “responsible before” one’s students, a very different way of being responsible. To be responsible before means to be “in the midst of”; it calls forth becoming. Now, it is just not possible to lay out a program of becoming for others; each constellation of beings, each heterogeneous collective, each “individual” will have vastly different resources by which to become. Nonetheless, a becoming in a classroom would at the very least involve straying from the assigned subject matter in order to find a way through the despair and paralysis produced by the subject
matter. This could include injecting experiences of joy into the discussion; eating is not only an individual act that produces suffering; it is a joyful, celebratory, collective activity. Allowing collective dimensions of eating to enter into the food ethics discussion is a becoming. Why is it a becoming? Because the material did not include it, it was not on the syllabus (that organized body that deems what is included in the classroom). Confronted with an experience of shame, becoming responsible before turns the curriculum into a non-organized body; it dissolves a little, making room for something else, something appropriate to the discussion and the affect that engaging with the material has produced, affects that suggest lines that can be followed. This is the difference between maintaining a static identity and going to the limit. It does not imply a complete dissolution of a body (curriculum, classroom, person, etc.), however it does signal places for experimentation with limits that produce transformative capacities. Without directly intending a specific effect, except for following and experimenting with the dynamic and affective lines within the environment (the classroom), the possibilities for new modes of subjectivity, acting and relating can emerge. A space is opened for further becomings where there was none before.

Subjective Modification as Indirect Action: Responsibility for the involuntary

Leonard Lawlor argues that if "we want to change our relationship to the world, to others, and to animals, we must understand how it is possible for us to change - how it is possible to enter into the experience of becoming."³⁶⁵ In the classroom scenario above, we explored how becoming is operative in a dynamic,

³⁶⁵ Lenord Lawlor, “Following the Rats,” 171.
heterogeneous assemblage. Another way of understanding becoming is in terms of an alteration of how we think of our subjectivity, namely, the realization that modifications of one’s subjectivity can facilitate new relations. Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of non-organized body, heterogeneity, and becoming facilitate subjective modifications in thought, modifications which subsequently, though indirectly, affect action. While subjective modification is not often considered to be a mode of political action, or a primary theme in theories about action, there is a history in feminist philosophy of considering alterations in subjectivity as an important ethical and political task, one that results in changes in one and other’s fields of action. Alterations in my subjectivity can change the way I comport myself with others thereby making space for the subjectivities of others to flourish in new ways.

We find an example of subjective alteration leading to potential alterations of political action in the work of Iris Marion Young. Her chapter, “The Scaling of Bodies and the Politics of Identity,” in Justice and the Politics of Difference, argues that a revolution in subjectivity is a necessary mode of overcoming oppressions that result from cultural imperialism. According to Young, cultural imperialism, where the “values, experience, and perspective” of dominant social groups are taken as normative and universal, is a pervasive form of oppression that impedes the capacities for action of those whose bodies do not conform to dominant norms (gender, age, ability, ethnicity, etc.). Cultural imperialism, Young argues, unlike overt

366 Caren Kaplan argues that Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization of “becoming minor” shares a great deal in common with contemporary feminist theory that stresses difference in the creation of identities. Caren Kaplan. "Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse," Cultural Critique 6, 189.

367 Iris Marion Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 124
domination, is insidious and indirect, often occurring beneath the register of conscious thought and reflection. It is for this reason, Young thinks, that overcoming cultural imperialism does not consist primarily in changing institutions or even attitudes; rather, what needs to be changed is the experience of one’s very subjectivity. Specifically, she suggests that rather than holding fast to the idea that the self is unified, we should learn to accept ourselves in our heterogeneity; accepting differences within ourselves might enable us to accept the differences of others.

The recognition of one’s own heterogeneity, Young thinks, could decrease a host of aversions (culminating in aversive oppressions of “ugly bodies”) that decrease the capacities of “others” to act.

Young argues that people are averse to the bodies that they perceive as different. This form of aversion (racist, sexist, ableist, etc.) does not operate at the level of conscious thought but at the level of what Young refers to as practical consciousness; “the habitual, routinized background awareness that enables persons to accomplish focused, immediately purposive action.” Aversions play out at the level of habit in subtle ways that subjects are not often aware of: how close one stands to another, whether one looks directly at another or averts one’s eyes. All these non-conscious, micro-actions affect the capacities for action of those who are the recipients of such aversive behaviour. This also may or may not be entirely conscious, but a decreased ability to feel oneself as valid, legitimate, equal or capable are all potential consequences of aversion. Young asks if there is a way that we might come

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368 Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference, 124-125
369 Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference, 153
370 Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference, 131.
to be responsible for these kinds of involuntary actions?\textsuperscript{371} In other words, to what extent can we be responsible for our habits, for that which is not voluntary?

Young deploys an interpretation of Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection\textsuperscript{372} to suggest that a work upon subjectivity is an important political project with revolutionary potential. On Young’s reading of Kristeva, the subject is able to experience herself as unified with clear boundaries between self and other only by expulsing differences from herself.\textsuperscript{373} In other words, the unified, stable subject that understands herself as a self separate from others is the product of an operation that derives from a prior heterogeneous subjectivity. (This is consistent with Deleuze’s claim that difference is prior to identity, that identity is produced from difference.) Young argues that if we as subjects understood ourselves as heterogeneous and multiple rather than unified, then we would be less averse to others who are different.\textsuperscript{374} This, she thinks, is because difference in others would not be perceived as a threat to one’s subjectivity since subjectivity would not be constituted by way of an expulsion of difference.

Young’s analysis can help us to make sense of Deleuze and Guattari’s claim that one becomes x, so that x can become something else. Alteration of one’s own subjectivity can enable (or disable) the alterations of other’s subjectivities. This kind of work indirectly alters the field of action and politics. Working on thought, identity and subjectivity is an important form of indirect ethical and political action. Insofar as we do not attend to this register of political affect, subjectivity and action in thought

\textsuperscript{371} Young,\textit{ Justice and the Politics of Difference}, 150.
\textsuperscript{373} Young,\textit{ Justice and the Politics of Difference}, 145.
\textsuperscript{374} Young,\textit{ Justice and the Politics of Difference}, 153.
then we will miss a great deal that could help us to understand political movements, social stratification and social justice.

Simone Bignall, in her book *Postcolonial Agency*, uses Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the non-organized body in order to argue that experimentation with one’s subjectivity is an important kind of agency that can facilitate post-colonial politics. Like Young, she argues that understanding oneself as multiple is important to the generation of new modes of relating with others. Her analysis focuses on the ways in which subjectivity is constituted by an assemblage of “institutions, discourses and practices that assign meaning and identity and regulate social relations and positions.” She suggests that by “cultivating an awareness of the assemblage(n) one embodies” one can identify “sites in one’s own self where one’s identity is multiple” and “points where the constituting discourses are unstable.” One is then able to engage in experimentation “with the assemblage(n) he embodies” and work with the non-organized body “in order to become identified otherwise.” This kind of experimentation, Deleuze and Guattari think, enables the formation of new collectivities.

We are in social formation; first see how it is stratified for us and in us and at the place where we are; then descend from the strata to the deeper assemblage within which we are held; gently tip the assemblage, making it pass over to the side of the plane of consistency.

It is there that the non-organized body is revealed as "connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities. You have constructed your own little

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machine, ready when needed to be plugged into other collective machines.” The consideration of oneself as multiple and assembled, and the alteration and experimentation with the constitution of one’s subjectivity, is on these accounts a mode of ethical and political agency insofar as it makes possible new forms of subjectivity and new kinds of relations.

The concern that Deleuze and Guattari (and other “post-structuralist” thinkers) eschew human agency by dismantling the human subject, or by dissolving individuality, is based on the assumption that a complete and fully formed individual subject is necessary for agency. After all, it is the individual subject who forms intentions, makes decisions about action, and enacts plans. Without such an entity, ethical and political activity and responsibility as we understand it is difficult to account for. The relation of thought to action on this model is that thought guides or determines action. The pertinent aspects of thought are reflection, problem-solving and planning. A requisite distance between thinking and action is preserved in order for action to be planned, intentional, intelligent, considerate, etc. In other words, the ethically and politically pertinent features of action are those that are qualified by thought properties or thinking capacities.

The desire to work upon thought and subjectivity in ways that increase, rather than decrease, spaces for action, however, does not entail a refusal of any of the standard components of human agency, including consciousness, rational reflection and decision-making. It is a call for new ways of thinking, and attentiveness to how the forms thought can increase or decrease capacities to act. William Connolly thinks

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that working on our capacity for thought is an ethical task; to work on our
“preconscious modes of thinking to untie knots in our thinking, to desanctify
elements of our own identity, and to foster ethical nobility in relations with others.”

Connolly tells us that there is a work to be done on thought that has ethical
implications for our relations with others. Where a unified and stable subject is
frequently seen as necessary to agency, when we look to effects that this form of
subjectivity has on a person in terms of their comportment with others, we see that
there is work to be done on subjectivity that can enable more “joyful encounters.”

**Solidarity**

In the previous section we explored how collective responsibility can be
conceived as a being responsible before, whereby we are situated in a field of
dynamic collective capacities. Experimentations with these capacities and with our
very subjectivity can alter, indirectly, the field of action of others. In this section we
turn to the question of solidarity. While subjective modification is one mode of
becoming that has ethical and political potentials, solidarity as collective action for
social change is a different and more direct mode of ethical and political action. Our
question is what bearing Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of becoming and
assembling has on such discussions.

Solidarity can be conceived as resulting from empathy or fellow-feeling
arising from a shared situation, a shared identity, or the bond between people acting
together for a common cause. In all cases solidarity rests on something shared

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(situation, identity, or cause), but solidarity that is action for a shared cause does not necessarily require actors to share an identity or situation. In this section we will explore two approaches to the conceptualization of political solidarity: the separation of solidarity from fellow-feeling and the operation of identity and difference in certain conceptualizations of solidarity. In the following section we will turn to Deleuze and Guattari and explore how becoming and assembling can contribute to the theorization of solidarity.

**Shared situation**

The coming together of people to act collectively in solidarity to resist oppression and injustice is a significant feature of political movements advocating for social change. Action in solidarity can be a powerful force without which individuals are isolated and dispersed, their actions having little impact. Labour unions provide a good example. Individual workers have little power to make changes in their working conditions. As a union (solidarity collective) however, they have a power to negotiate and agitate for change. The threat of collective action in the form of labour strikes can enable unions to improve working conditions for their members. At the turn of the twentieth century, solidarity extended beyond particular unions to bond workers internationally; workers of the world unite! Solidarity is also an important feature of social justice and civil rights movements and is expressed in the form of collective actions to ameliorate the status and conditions of peoples who suffer from gender, ethnic, and cultural oppressions.

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Banding together to struggle against shared oppressive conditions is without a doubt a significant political tactic for bringing about social change. No one would argue that these movements do not have powerful effects on social and political landscapes. Collective actions in the form of protests and strikes can increase public recognition of oppression and injustice and enable those whose lives and interests are excluded from the realm of political decision making to gain popular support by altering the consciousness of other members of society, thereby influencing policies and practices.

Conceptions of social solidarity, as in the socialist tradition, often construct the norm of social solidarity as the cohesion of a subaltern group in a situation of asymmetrical power. To be in solidarity in an oppressed group is to resist oppression by sticking together. The shared experience of injustice and deprivation both generate a sense of shared fate and shared identity for the subaltern group and provide a weapon in its struggle insofar as these experiences themselves strengthen the group’s resolve.

In some cases, solidarity dwindles; social and political forces have altered the labour landscape in such a way as to undermine the power of labour unions. Changes in labour laws in Canada and the United States have depleted the collective bargaining power of labour unions. The migration of manufacturing from North America to countries in the Southern hemisphere where labour laws are lax or non-existent has either left workers in North America unemployed, or the very threat of moving manufacturing has deterred workers from taking collective action. Competition for jobs is substituted for worker solidarity both locally and globally; the result is an individualization of workers which undermines capacities for collective resistance by separating them from their collective power.

**Shared Identity**

Another way of conceiving solidarity is in terms of shared identity. However, does not come without certain difficulties. Feminism, as women’s solidarity, is one such case. North American feminists in the 1960s and 1970s aimed to change the position of women in society and considered themselves to be speaking and acting in solidarity with all women. They learned, however, that such solidarity was illusory and that the voices of the women’s movement were actually a particular group of women (white middle-class women in North America) and thus their experiences and interests were not those of all women. Judith Butler, in her essay “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism,”’ discusses this problematic aspect of feminist politics. Speaking in the name of “women” is a powerful political tactic yet she is concerned that in the very struggle toward enfranchisement and democratization, we might adopt the very models of domination by which we were oppressed, not realizing that one way that domination works is through the regulation and production of subjects. Through what exclusions has the feminist subject been constructed, and how do those excluded domains return to haunt the “integrity” and “unity” of the feminist “we”? And how is it that the very category, the subject, the “we,” that is supposed to be presumed for the purpose of solidarity, produces the very factionalization it is supposed to quell? Do women want to become subjects on the model which requires and produces an anterior region of abjection, or must feminism become a process which is self-critical about the processes that produce and destabilize identity categories?

Solidarity founded upon a shared identity (women) and a shared cause (improvements in women’s lives) is an important feature of feminist politics, one that Butler thinks

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should not be abandoned. However, she thinks that the endless contestation of the
category of “women” should be embraced as an essential democratic process.\(^\text{384}\) It is
a risk, however, in that the very solidarity aspired towards could become fragmented
and dispersed leaving individual women and groups vulnerable and without the kind
of political power that collective action in solidarity generates.

\textit{Empathy}

Both the cases of solidarity examined above could be understood as solidarity
based on empathy. Empathy, understood as the “fellow-feeling,” is a basis for
solidarity when people in the same or similar conditions (since solidarity is often seen
as a response to injustice, the shared condition is often theorized to be one of
oppression) work together to better their circumstances by achieving empowerment
and/or gaining rights and recognition. While the empathy that exists between those
who share an identity (or situation) is widely considered as a basis for various forms
of solidarity (friendship, camaraderie, hope),\(^\text{385}\) many theorists of solidarity are
concerned that it provides too narrow a basis for a robust conception of political
solidarity.

Empathy, it is thought, gives rise to “exclusive solidarity”\(^\text{386}\) (a solidarity
which excludes those of different identities and situations) because it only brings
together those who are proximate enough to develop emotional ties based on a shared
identity or a shared situation. Examples of exclusive solidarity could be drawn from

\(^\text{385}\) Sally Scholz, \textit{Political Solidarity} (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 79.
25:4, 1992, 725
various collective actions that have aimed to empower particular groups by conceiving their members in separation from others. In addition to women’s movements discussed above, we can consider African-Americans in the black power movement and Indigenous peoples involved in struggles for the recognition of Indigenous rights as operating in terms of exclusive solidarity insofar as they aim to empower their members through strengthening their group identity. In each of these cases the individuals involved in collective struggle are considered to share common oppressive conditions and as such can empathize with each other. A concern amongst theorists of political solidarity, however, is that this form of solidarity, based on empathy, excludes those outside the oppressed groups from joining in solidarity with the oppressed, thus leaving these solidarity movements weaker than they would be if they were able to mobilize a greater number and diversity of people to join with them and share their cause.

**Common Cause**

Arendt acknowledges that feeling may have a role to play in inspiring solidarity, however she thinks that reason rather than feeling should be the basis for solidarity. As such she advances an inclusive conception of solidarity. On Arendt’s account, those individuals who desire to make common cause with those who are oppressed may at first be affectively aroused to do so; however, that solidarity should be separated from the feeling which gives rise to it. Arendt, in her analysis of the French Revolution, distinguishes between pity and solidarity: "It is out of pity that

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men are ‘attracted towards les hommes faibles,’ but it is out of solidarity that they establish deliberately and, as it were, dispassionately a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited.” The common interest that Arendt thinks arises out of solidarity is the “dignity of man,” something she considers to be necessarily conceptual rather than emotional or affective; although it may be “aroused by suffering” it “is not guided by it.” Her desire that solidarity be a principle, inclusive of all humanity, to “inspire and guide action” prompts her to see it in terms of reason rather than emotion. Solidarity can “comprehend a multitude conceptually” beyond a particular class, nation or people to reach a conceptual comprehension of humankind. Ken Reshaur, in his article "Concepts of Solidarity in the Political Theory of Hannah Arendt,” names this “inclusive solidarity” (in contrast with the exclusive forms of solidarity we examined above) where those who are differently situated take common cause with those who are oppressed.  

The solidarity of humanity is, for Arendt, a concept which we can endow with meaning by giving ourselves over to a “moment of recognition” whereby we both see ourselves in others and retain our “unique space in the world.” Remembering the importance of plurality for Arendt’s theory of action, we can say that it embodies Arendt’s concept of the solidarity of humanity whereby human individuals retain their unique identities while participating in the common identity of being human; it is a

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coincidence of sameness and difference. Solidarity enables the deliberate and dispassionate “community of interest with the oppressed and exploited.”

The idea that political solidarity should be based on a conceptual comprehension rather than an emotional connection with the position of the other is shared by Max Pensky. In his work, *The Ends of Solidarity*, he argues that a concentration on the affective dimensions of solidarity such as shared identity, fellow-feeling, friendship, or empathy tends to undermine the basic and productive sociological claim that there is a qualitative difference in premodern and modern forms of engendering social solidarity, and that this qualitative difference entails both mechanisms for inclusion into social groups, and...the capacity to move mechanisms for inclusion beyond contingent...morally arbitrary features of history.

He argues that modern solidarity requires broadly inclusive “communication communities” that are constituted more by membership based on “abstract capacities” rather than by “ascriptive likenesses.” He conceives modern solidarity as the “universal and symmetrical inclusion of persons into an ever expanding community of reciprocal recognition.” Social solidarity in modern society, Pensky suggests, must be structured along lines which are inclusive of difference, rather than based on shared identities which result in the exclusion of those who are different.

Sally Scholz, in her book *Political Solidarity*, distinguishes between different types of solidarity (social, civic, and political) and argues that in political solidarity there is no identification with the other, but rather a recognition of difference and a commitment to collective action for a shared cause. For Scholz, one acts in solidarity with others who are also acting in order to bring about an end to a social injustice.

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393 Pensky, *The Ends of Solidarity*, 182.
Political solidarity, arising “in response to a situation of injustice,” consists in individuals making a “conscious commitment to join with others in struggle” to challenge the injustice.\textsuperscript{394} Insofar as political solidarity is in order to combat a group’s oppression, Scholz distinguishes between the solidarity group and the oppressed group.\textsuperscript{395} The solidarity group consists of the diversity of peoples who act together with a common purpose. One cannot, Scholz thinks, be in solidarity with those who are not themselves engaged in political action. For instance, if one is engaged in collective action to ameliorate or eradicate homelessness and poverty one is not necessarily “in solidarity with” those who are homeless and/or poor but only those who also are politically active for that purpose.

An example that can help to elucidate Scholz’s manner of conceptualizing political solidarity is a recent day of action in Montreal to publicly oppose the proposed “Quebec Charter of Values” which would outlaw the wearing of religious symbols while working in any public profession (doctor, professor, mailperson, etc.) in Quebec. Anyone whose cultural religious practice includes wearing anything the Quebec government deems a religious symbol (hijab, kippah, turbans, large crosses, etc.) would need to either cease their participation in these practices or cease their employment. This charter is seen by many as a form of cultural oppression that is particularly harmful for Muslim women who wear the hijab. One form of action in resistance to the proposed charter is non-religious persons wearing one of the contentious religious symbols in order to demonstrate their opposition to the new legislation. Scholz’s analysis suggests that we read the actions of these people as in

\textsuperscript{394} Scholz, \textit{Political Solidarity}, 34
\textsuperscript{395} Scholz, \textit{Political Solidarity}, 186.
solidarity with others who are also acting to oppose the legislation. Those who will be affected by the legislation, but who are not acting politically in opposition to it, do not form the solidary group.

*Conceptualizing Solidarity across Species Differences*

In contrast with Scholz’s position where solidarity only occurs between human beings who are acting together for a common cause, Val Plumwood, in her book *Environmental Culture*, argues that humans can act in solidarity with non-human nature.\(^{396}\) She agrees with Scholz that identification with the other should not be a requirement for solidarity\(^ {397}\) (and could be at odds with ethical respect and political action). She does not, however, think that voluntary and intentional recognition of a shared cause is required for solidarity. Plumwood argues that humans, in acting to overcome the oppression of non-human nature, can be considered to be in solidarity with non-human nature. This form of solidarity requires a complex attitude towards one’s identity as a human being; in order to be in solidarity with non-human others, Plumwood argues, one needs to become a “species-traitor,” a “traitor” to one’s human identity. This calls for "a revised conception of the self and its relation to the non-human other, opposition to the oppressive practices, and the abandonment and critique of cultural allegiances to the dominance of the human species and its bonding against non-humans."\(^ {398}\)

\(^{396}\) Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 204.
\(^{398}\) Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 205.
Traitorous identity practices negotiate sameness and difference in complex ways; while identities are maintained, they are also subverted such that new alliances (for instance between humans and non-humans) can be formed. Traitorous identity practices do not aim only at direct political action, but are also considered as a form of epistemic justice or politics that involves working upon oneself. Taking up a traitorous identity is a tactic for becoming aware of how one’s identity and ways of thinking and knowing are structured by one’s position in social and political structures. In the case of solidarity with non-human nature, Plumwood thinks that traitorous identity practices are a way of taking responsibility for one’s “interspecies location.” This awareness is then meant to contribute to ways of thinking and relating with others that do not suppress the experiences of others and do not perpetuate forms of oppression.

**Sympathy, Assemblage, Becoming**

Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming falls outside the register of solidarity thinking in significant respects, but as we will see it can make significant contributions which are complimentary to the analyses we have looked at. As we have seen, several solidarity theorists are keen to avoid any identification between self and other in solidarity (this is a major reason for rejecting empathy as an adequate basis for solidarity), and in this respect Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization of becoming as distinct from imitation and identification is similar: “becoming is not to

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399 Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 204.
imitate or identify with something or someone. Nor is it to proportion formal
relations. Neither of these two figures of analogy is applicable to becoming: neither
the imitation of a subject nor the proportionality of a form."

Their notion of becoming differs from thinkers of political solidarity insofar
as they consider becomings in terms of sympathy and affect. "Each multiplicity is
symbiotic; its becoming ties together animals, plants, microorganisms, mad particles,
a whole galaxy." Multiplicities "with heterogeneous terms, confunctioning by
contagion, enter certain assemblages", the "assemblage is co-functioning, it is
'sympathy', symbiosis." This affective register of becoming neither reproduces an
exclusive solidarity based on empathy, nor consists in the voluntary coming together
for a common purpose.

A solidarity group is an individuated entity and as such Deleuze and Guattari’s
work will be helpful in thinking the process of individuation from which such groups
emerge, their capacities for action, and their potentials for transformation. We see in
solidarity thinking a focus on the intentions of individuals to enter into relations of
solidarity, the constituted solidarity body or group, and the appropriate moral
principles for solidarity action and formation, rather than on the capacities that enable
the emergence of solidarity. Attending to becoming and assemblage, provides us with
a different yet complimentary way of reading these actions, one that highlights the
constitution of political actors and actions.

402 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 272.
403 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 250.
405 Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, Dialogues, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, (New York: Columbia
University Press, 2002), 52.
Deleuze and Guattari propose that becoming (becoming-animal, becoming-woman, and becoming-child, to name only a few modes of becoming that appear in their work) is both worthy of political thought and can support a new way of understanding responsibility.\textsuperscript{406} With the notion of becoming, Deleuze and Guattari articulate a molecular politics that relates with but is irreducible to the macropolitical order:

all becomings are already molecular…Starting from the form one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are closest to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire.\textsuperscript{407}

Becoming, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is always a “political affair and necessitates a labor of power (puissance), an active micropolitics.”\textsuperscript{408} Karen Houle describes micro-politics as involving "the capacity to aim towards change that is not directed towards any goal that as yet can be conceived."\textsuperscript{409} Becoming involves deviation from molar entities that are recognizable, for instance “the woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject.”\textsuperscript{410} There is “no becoming-man because man is the molar entity par excellance.”\textsuperscript{411} Rather, all “becomings are molecular: the animal, flower, or stone one becomes are molecular collectivities, haecceities, not molar subjects, objects, or forms that we know from the outside and recognize from experience, through science

\textsuperscript{406} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy}, 108-110.
\textsuperscript{407} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, 272.
\textsuperscript{408} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, 292.
\textsuperscript{410} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, 275.
\textsuperscript{411} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, 292.
or by habit. Solidarity thinking provides accounts of the macro-political order made up of molar subjects, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming describes a micro-political register composed of multiplicities, collectivities, and assemblages in processes of composition.

This thesis has argued, in contrast to solidarity thinking, that all action when considered from the point of view of capacity is already collective. The starting point, then, for thinking about solidarity along these lines is not to consider solidarity as the result of individual commitments so much as it is to understand the capacities and conditions from which solidarity groups emerge. Deleuze and Guattari’s work contributes to theorizing solidarity by pointing us to a micro-political order (plane of composition) from which solidarity groups are extracted. It points us towards a complex constellation of bodies, desires, ideas and contingent events that constitute capacities or “puissance for solidarity.” In what follows we will briefly explore a case of political solidarity, the “anti-fracking” protests (in Elsipogtog/Rexton, New Brunswick and across Canada) to see what aspects our reading of collective action will pick out.

**Elsipogtog Solidarity**

In the fall of 2013, Mi’kmaq peoples engaged in a protest to oppose the development of the shale gas industry which would employ hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) on their lands (which were never ceded) in Elsipogtog (an area of land located near Rexton, New Brunswick). The government of New Brunswick has

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contracted an energy company to conduct seismic testing for the exploratory phase of developing a shale gas industry in New Brunswick. The shale gas industry is considered by many to be excessively invasive, resource intensive, and a potential polluter of ground water. The protestor’s actions were supported by a diversity of indigenous and non-indigenous groups (Council of Canadians, students, New Brunswick residents and labour groups). Protests were held across Canada expressly “in solidarity with” the Mi’kmaq’s actions to oppose fracking. The solidarity theories we have looked at in this chapter enable the following analysis of these solidarities.

1. Mi’kmaq protesters can be understood as being united by a fellow-feeling brought about by shared cultural identities and shared experiences of colonial oppression. (This is the form of exclusive solidarity to which empathy is thought to be involved.)

2. All those who are not Mi’kmaq but who protest on behalf of them can be considered to be in solidarity with the Mi’kmaq protesters and to share the common cause of stopping the development of the shale gas industry in New Brunswick (Scholz).

3. Non-indigenous protesters can be seen to be identity traitors insofar as they acknowledge that as Canadian settlers (historic and contemporary) they are complicit in indigenous oppression and who act in solidarity with indigenous peoples to combat that oppression (Plumwood).

Indigenous – Non-Indigenous Assemblage and Becoming

Scholz’s manner of conceiving political solidarity as the voluntary coming together of people to act for a common cause facilitates thinking about the solidarity of non-Indigenous protesters with Mi’kmaq protesters. Insofar as they are all acting to
oppose fracking, they are considered on Scholz’s account to be in solidarity. What Scholz’s notion of political solidarity does not ask us to consider are the modes of symbiosis between heterogeneous elements that carry latent powers or potential for transformation.

Between the two, there is a threshold and fiber, symbiosis of or passage between heterogeneities...Not following a logical order, but following alogical consistencies or compatibilities. The reason is simple. It is because no one, not even God, can say in advance whether two borderlines will string together or form a fiber, whether a given multiplicity will or will not cross over into another given multiplicity, or even if given heterogeneous elements will enter symbiosis, will form a consistent, or cofunctioning, multiplicity susceptible to transformation. No one can say where the line of flight will pass.\footnote{Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, 250.}

On this reading, we consider that various symbiotic assemblages between \textit{Mi’kmaq} and non-\textit{Mi’kmaq}, humans and land, land and water, gas and land, humans and gas, are be “susceptible to transformation.” We look beneath the voluntary coming together of people for a common cause (protection of land and water) to the sympathies with land, water, future generations, neighbours, and democratic structures that generate capacities for solidarity.

For instance, we can consider the \textit{Mi’kmaq} of Elsipogtog and the non-Indigenous people of Kent County as multiplicities (rather than unified individuals within homogenous groups) who have entered into a symbiosis. While those participating in the protests are mostly \textit{Mi’kmaq} (from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia), other Kent county residents have apparently been supporting the protestors by bringing food; the “non-Indigenous residents are the ones bringing chicken fricco, poutine rappe and other traditional delicacies to the warriors and protectors.”\footnote{Miles Howe, January 14th, 2014: http://dominion.mediacoop.ca/story/showdown-elsipogtog/20423} We
know, from Deleuze and Guattari, that symbiosis and becoming can result in the transformation of constituent elements and the formation of new entities and relations. The sole focus is neither on the common cause of action, nor on direct methods of overcoming the social and political divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, although attention to the micro-political dimension can enable us to understand ways in which such divides are produced, maintained, and potentially transformed. It is conceivable that the configurations of identities and state power can be radically transformed. Of course, as Deleuze tells us, “we’ve no sure way of maintaining becomings…How any group will turn out, how it will fall back into history, presents a constant “concern.””


Acting with the land

The collective resistance to the government sanctioned industry-led fracking in New Brunswick can also be understood as constituted by a heterogeneous complex of land, water, people, animals, symbols, gestures, histories, institutions and desires. The capacity to act in solidarity occurs by virtue of a power to act that precedes and exceeds solidarity groups and which is constituted by a complex constellation of elements. Rather than focusing on the cause of the collective action (protecting human health and/or the integrity of the land and ecosystem) we can consider it as acting with the land in the midst of all the material, affective, institutional, discursive and symbolic elements from which different identities (indigenous, settler, government, industry, New Brunswick, Canada) emerge and can be transformed.
When peoples across Canada act in solidarity to oppose fracking, on our analysis we consider what heterogeneous, collective assemblages constituted the capacities for action. In considering capacities for action, differentiating between types of human actors is secondary to considering the collective assemblages that give rise to the capacity for solidarity. Where solidarity describes the collective action in opposition or resistance to a given arrangement, the capacity to act describes a “potential (puissance) or potency (vertu) for solidarity.”\textsuperscript{417} It is not oppositional because it is not directed. Houle’s description of the micropolitical can help hone our understanding:

The micropolitical is a potency, a constitutive force that is neither an opposition and counterpower. Nor is it utopian. It is a force of precipitation that is experienced as an eruption from within the macrolinear order of presence that, in turn, forces the experiencing subject to act, and act along and toward the singular, the heterogeneous, the yet-unimagined.\textsuperscript{418}

The task is to explore the capacities (or in Houle’s terminology micropolitical potency) that give rise to action. In doing so we will unearth compositions of material, affect and desire that are obscured when we focus on the goal of action. In other words, we consider minor or molecular elements that generate capacities for action and can thereby give rise to new political formations.

Deleuze and Guattari provide conceptual resources such as the war machine, assemblage, non-organized body, smooth space and becoming-animal that facilitate modes of thinking where conceptual distinctions (specific differences) between individuals, individuals and environments, and thought and world, are less pronounced because they do not take priority. Their concepts do this because they

\textsuperscript{417} Deleuze and Guattari, Nomadology, 26.  
\textsuperscript{418} Karen Houle, “Micropolitics,” 110.
consider pre-individual fields (process of individuation) from which individuals emerge. In other words, by not limiting their focus to constituted individuality, their concepts implicate our understanding in the consideration of more than individuals (the fields in which individuals emerge with certain capacities) and less than individuals (the pre-individual or larval states of being). This is beneficial to understanding the larger systems of desire and materiality in which capacities for action are formed and because of which actions occur. Further, as was argued in the first part of this chapter, insofar as these concepts can work on thought in ways that alter thinking patterns, subjectivities and identities, they can be considered as tools for indirect action. And indirect action generates capacities for new modes of acting and relating.

The alteration of subjectivities plays an important role in thinking about the emergence of solidarity groups because it asks us to consider the potency of affective alliances that alter an experiencing body (a subjectivity) in such a way as to open it to other dimensions. The affective alliance opens the way for a reorganization of the body in question; a non-organized body is constructed, a becoming is initiated. This becoming is an aspect of the story of solidarity group formation and action. And, working upon oneself and re-conceiving and re-configuring one’s limits is a significant dimension of indirect ethical and political action that enables or disables capacities for affective alliances and potential solidarities. This involves working with constraints, contingencies and affects and that involve a kind of responsibility for indirect actions (action that does not aim at an outcome) and that open spaces for something to occur or emerge. Recalling Arendt’s conception of action as a “new
beginning” we can ask ourselves what work facilitates new beginnings that can neither be predicted nor caused?

This thesis through an exploration of resonances between Arendt and Deleuze and Guattari has developed a view of action as a collective capacity activated by plural (in the case of Arendt) or heterogeneous (in the case of Deleuze and Guattari) assemblages. This way of viewing action doesn’t eschew the actor but it does prioritize the processes in which actors are individuated rather than their goals and intentions. The merits to viewing action in this way are that it prompts consideration of the dynamic elements that can augment or deplete capacities for action and it furnishes a view of the collective and thereby transformative nature of action. In the previous chapter we attended to the concern that the prioritization of becoming and creative transformation in Deleuze’s thought makes resistance and solidarity inconceivable. Similar concerns have been raised (though with less vigour) about Arendt’s thought, that her view of action prioritizes potentiality to the extent that the maintenance of the public sphere is inconceivable. Alan Keenan calls this the “paradox of freedom and the public realm.”419 However, there is equal cause for concern with political theory that gets its aim from already existing institutions and political concepts, since it will fail to register anything new and simply reproduce pre-existing identities and social formations. These two general approaches to political thinking, however, need not be mutually exclusive even if their projects cannot be unified. The question is whether the politics of this world require new subjects, ways of thinking, and modes of relating?

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