Theory in Perpetual Motion and Translation: Assemblage and Intersectionality in Feminist Studies[1]

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Abstract

The article examines the French theoretical concept of *agencement* developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and its English translation as *assemblage* which has been widely used in feminist, philosophical, and theoretical work. Starting with Jasbir Puar's critique of intersectionality, I argue that although assemblage may now be called upon to provide a corrective to intersectionality, not too long ago, intersectionality, with very similar arguments, was viewed as the most promising alternative to categorical thinking.

Résumé

Cet article traite du concept théorique français de *l'agencement* élaboré par Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari et de sa traduction en anglais comme *assemblage* qui a été largement utilisé dans les recherches universitaires, y compris les analyses féministes ainsi que les travaux philosophiques et théoriques. Bien que l'assemblage puisse maintenant être appelé à fournir un correctif à l'intersectionnalité, il n'y a pas si longtemps, l'intersectionnalité, avec des arguments très similaires, était considérée comme l'alternative la plus prometteuse à la pensée catégorique.

Introduction

In her recent work on assemblages, Jasbir Puar (2011, 2012) formulates a critique of intersectionality within feminist studies and calls for its supplementing and complication. Puar (2007) posits that "intersectional identities are the byproducts of attempts to still and quell the perpetual motion of assemblages, to capture and reduce them, to harness their threatening mobility" (213). Intersectionality can become an alibi for re-centering the white, middle-class woman as the universal subject of feminism since feminist theorizing on the question of difference continues to be "difference from" and, in particular, "difference from white woman" (Puar 2012, 53). Intersectionality as a method, Puar (2012) argues, has contributed to the reification of identity categories. Instead, intersectionality should be re-read as assemblage in order to highlight movement and mobility: the subject should be viewed as composed of dissipating, indiscreet elements always in the process of becoming.

Intersectionality can be broadly defined as "the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Davis 2008, 68). Intersectionality is often traced back to Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) writing on violence against women of colour and the intersection of race and sex with roots in Black feminism and critical race theory. Now more than 20 years later, scholars engage in a rich production of intersectional scholarship but also in its critique. In her reading of intersectionality, in her work on the "queer terrorist," Puar (2005) concludes that some of the main limitations of intersectionality include the presumption that components (race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion) are separable analytics but also the notion that intersectionality can become the state's "tool of diversity management" or "a mantra of liberal multiculturalism" (127-128).

In this article, I argue that a re-reading of intersectionality as assemblage calls for a further examination of assemblage as a theoretical concept, its translational history (from French to English, from *agencement* to assemblage), its reception in feminist theory, and its potential to supplement or even supplant intersectionality or, more pointedly, to act as a cure to the ills that have beset the feminist method of intersectionality.[2] My main claim is two-fold: i) the project of supplementing intersectionality with assemblage theory needs to re-examine the parallels between the two theories, paying particular attention to the notion of fluidity in intersectionality; and ii) a historical and linguistic contextualizing can help us understand what is at stake in a feminist appropriation of the concept of assemblage. A focus on translation is meant to destabilize and challenge the dominant position of English in theoretical writing and to bring to the fore the complexities involved in adopting a concept from one language to another, an aspect rarely discussed in English-language literature (see Lima Costa and Alvarez 2014).

I first trace the philosophical origin of assemblage in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's philosophical writings (*agencement*), including the challenge of rendering *agencement* as assemblage by the translators (Dana Polan, Brian Massumi, Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, among others). Second, I present the feminist reception of Deleuzian philosophy and suggest that this initial reluctant reception needs to be taken into further account, given the growing scholarship employing the concept of assemblage. Third, I argue that there are a number of parallels between the arguments highlighting the productive uses of assemblages and those arguments calling for introduction of intersectionality in feminist studies. Both assemblages and intersectionality encourage interrogations of what a theoretical concept *does* as opposed to what it *is*. Depending on the way they are developed, both notions can be seen to emphasize fluidity and fluctuating processes. They have both, at different times, been called upon to displace and deconstruct binary logics, universalism, and categorical thinking. Moreover, I return to Crenshaw's (1989) traffic metaphor where discrimination, rather than identity, is caught in the accident. This re-visiting of the traffic metaphor can explain why intersectionality is sometimes viewed as reifying identity categories. I conclude with two brief examples of the use of assemblage in recent research and a consideration of some of the concept's limitations, in particular as it pertains to power relations.

Assemblage and *Agencement*

The introduction of the concept of assemblage in social sciences announces a paradigm shift from "dualistic to relational ontological thinking" (Dewsbury 2011, 148). Conceived of as an *ad hoc* grouping of diverse elements (Kennedy et al. 2013), assemblage focuses on process and unpredictable, fast-changing relations, thus not on essence but on adaptivity (Venn 2006, 107). As such, it has been welcomed by social scientists as a kind of thinking that can help us make sense of globalization, including connections, flows, and multiple configurations that seem to characterize it:

> New assemblages of social research are clearly required to fit together all the ways in which the world is now characterised by flows, connections and becomings whose functioning logic is more about folds than structures, more complex than linear, more recursive than dialectical, more emergent than totalising. (Dewsbury 2011, 148)

Other scholars have also observed an important shift in theorization and methodology in social sciences. In addition to a number of other theoretical concepts, such as multiplicity, flow, continuum, and structure, assemblage was derived from developments in natural sciences and mathematics in order to explain the complexity of cultural and social phenomena (Venn 2006; Tasić 2001). Assemblage appears at a time when the notion of discrete determination supported by positivism and various forms of structuralism continues to fail "to account adequately for change, resistance, agency and the event: that is, the irruption of the unexpected or unpredictable" (Venn 2006, 107). The borrowing of theoretical concepts from mathematics by postmodern theorists is not without its problems and has invited its share of criticism, most notably for the misuse of mathematical and scientific concepts by postmodernism in academia (Sokal and Bricmont 1998).[3] Similarly, borrowing a theoretical concept from French theory could also potentially open a space for misuse, given the difficulty of finding an adequate equivalent for such a philosophically loaded term with roots in the sciences.

Deleuze and Guattari first write of *agencement* in *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (1975), translated into English in 1986, within the context of enunciation and the desiring-production (Bacchetta 2015). For Deleuze and Guattari, an *agencement* is an open multiplicity, with points of deterritorialization and lines of escape (or flight) (1975, 153; 1986, 86). It is a combination of heterogeneous elements adjusted one to another (Callon 2006, 13). Deleuze and Guattari's theorizing must be understood within a specific historical context: their writing on *agencement* invokes disparate elements, dynamic constituents, caught in the process of connection and disconnection, at a time when the dominant theories treated social reality as a closed, organic system (Bacchetta 2015, para. 19). *Agencement* is a common French word that means "arrangement" or "fitting" and is used in many different contexts such as arranging parts of a machine (Phillips 2006, 108). In theoretical writings, there are two main philosophical principles that underpin the concept of *agencement*. First is the notion that *agencement* includes both the subject who is acting and the act of arranging, on the one hand, and the resultant arrangement itself, on the other. Second, *agencement* includes both human and non-human elements.

Agencement can suggest the act of arranging but also the arrangement itself, therefore encompassing both the subject (the agent) and the object (the result). What this implies for knowledge production is, as John Phillips (2006) explains, that the subject of knowledge is not simply "separated out from his [*sic*] objects, which he transforms by making them his project" (108-109); the emphasis is on the connection. Thus, in this sense, Deleuze and Guattari's insistence on relations between concepts and things, as opposed to an isolated subject separated from its objects, can also be seen in Michel Callon, John Law, and Bruno Latour's actor-network theory and sociology of associations and relations (Latour 2005).[4] The emphasis is on connectivity, beyond a focus on meaning-making and representation, and on the question of what exceeds representation (Kennedy et al. 2013, 46). This aspect of *agencement* then, as I will show below, becomes important for theorizing intersectionality.

Elucidating the term further, Callon (2006) underscores the concept of agency in *agencement*. Arguing against the idea that there is a divide between those who arrange and the resultant arrangements, Callon writes: "This is why Deleuze and Guattari (1998) proposed the notion of *agencement*. *Agencement* has the same root as agency: *agencement*s are arrangements endowed with the capacity of acting in different ways depending on their configuration" (13). Rather than viewing an *agencement* as an arrangement separated from the acting subject, we are encouraged to see *agencement* as already imbued with agency. The non-discreet parts that constitute agencement have agentic capacities, that is, *agencement*s in their different configurations are a form of distributive agency (Bennett in Kennedy et al. 2013).

Second, *agencement* includes both human and non-human elements. Precisely by rejecting the division between those who arrange (presumably humans) and that which is being arranged (non-humans), Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *agencement* brings into play an intermingling of bodies. One example includes the feudal *agencement* which, according to Deleuze and Guattari, comprises "the body of the earth and the social body; the body of the overlord, vassal, and serf; the body of the knight and the horse and their new relation to the stirrup; the weapons and the tools assuring a symbiosis of bodies – a whole machinic assemblage" (2004/1987, 98). Including both humans and non-humans then dismantles the delineation between the social and nature, leaving nothing outside of *agencement*. Deleuze and Guattari (2004/1987) in *A Thousand Plateaus* further identify *agencement* as featuring a horizontal and a vertical axis. A horizontal axis comprises two segments, content (bodies, actions, passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another) and expression (acts and statements) (97-98). The vertical axis, however, refers to the processes of reterritorialization which stabilizes the *agencement* and deterritorialization which carries it away; or, in other words, *agencement*s are continuously being made and becoming unmade (98).

A Translation History: From Agencement to Assemblage

Not surprisingly, the term *agencement* has no exact counterpart in English. Some translations, however, can be labelled 'mistranslations' when they fail to carry over the core meaning contained in the original. In this respect, "assemblage" as a translation solution can be

viewed as a mistranslation. There are two potential ways of dealing with this slippage. First, we can ask whether this mistranslation can have productive effects (Puar 2011, para. 12). Second, we can adopt a point of view that treats the notion of translation as catachresis, "as an always already misuse of words, an impropriety and inadequacy that underpins all systems of representation" (Lima Costa and Alvarez 2014, 562; Spivak 1999). Not only is translation always embedded in a specific cultural and historical context, it also always produces an imperfect rendering, not unlike the processes of representation. The instability of translation leaves space for new meanings that can have, it is hoped, productive effects in further knowledge production.

In the case of assemblage, however, the two philosophical principles outlined above complicate the translation. In particular, the difficult part about translating *agencement* into English is that, in French, it implies both a process and a state of being: both the act of fitting/arranging and the arrangement itself. As in French, the English word assemblage tends to imply only the state of being, therefore eliminating the active aspect, the process. Both in English and French, the term assemblage emphasizes collection, collage, and content as opposed to relations. *Agencement* was first translated as assemblage by Paul Foss and Paul Patton in their translation of Deleuze and Guattari's article "Rhizome" which appeared in the journal *I & C* in 1981 (Phillips 2006). This translation solution was subsequently maintained by other translators, Brian Massumi, Dana Polan, Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, among others, who are also scholars and authors in their own fields such as philosophy, law, politics, and social theory. Translation solutions provided by Brian Massumi in the English rendition of *Mille plateaux* (*A Thousand Plateaus*) in 1987 have been influential and have served as examples for later English translations (Habberjam and Tomlinson 2006/1987, x). Translators Tomlinson and Habberjam (2006/1987) explain in their translators' introduction to *Dialogues II* that they followed "earlier translations in rendering *agencement* as assemblage" but that the French word has both an active and a passive sense (x).

The translators, whether working on their own or in pairs like Tomlinson and Habberjam, through their translation solutions necessarily expand the philosophical field in the target language, that is, in English

in this case. The translators are not only finding linguistic equivalents but are also bending, expanding, and pulling Anglo-American philosophy in new directions through translational innovation. The responsibility is great since the new terms introduced in this way are taken up over and over again in further translations and theoretical writings. But the great responsibility that comes with translating more or less celebrated thinkers, and frequently French authors, can also catapult academics into the wider international academic scene as was the case with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Derrida's *De la grammatologie*), Brian Massumi (Deleuze and Guattari), and Hazel Barnes (Sartre). As translators, they act as intermediaries or as cultural brokers (Spivak 2001). Translation studies scholar André Lefevere (1992) argues that translators act as re-writers and that translation is effectively a re-writing process which is responsible for the general reception and survival of original works (or source texts). Viewed in this light, assemblage as a translation solution can be seen as an act of re-writing which opens up whole new imaginary and theoretical spaces.

As *agencement* has travelled from French-language philosophical frameworks into English academic ones as assemblage, this movement has created a slight shift in meaning. The word-play evident in the French term *agencement* – highlighting the role of agency and the active aspects in the concept – is erased in English, exposing only the state of affairs at the detriment of relations and connections. For this reason, some scholars in social sciences choose to keep the French word *agencement* in their otherwise English writing (Hardie and MacKenzie 2007, 58). In more recent translations of Guattari, however, *agencement* is at times rendered as arrangement as follows: "Now the notion of arrangement can be useful here, because it shows that social entities are not made up of bipolar oppositions. Complex arrangements place parameters like race, sex, age, nationality, etc., into relief" (Guattari quoted in Puar 2012, 59). But one could argue that the translation solution *arrangement* is still not satisfactory since it fails to account for the actual process of arranging and the connectivity between heterogeneous elements.

If the concept is to gain in currency in the English academic work, then the "mistranslation" in question in English calls for some caution.[5] What is lost in

translation is a sense of the relationship "between 'the capacity to act [and] the coming together of things' as 'a necessary and prior condition for any action to occur', be that human or non-human, organic or inorganic (Braun 2008 quoted in Dewsbury 2011, 149). One way out of this conundrum, Puar (2012) suggests, is to look at what assemblages do as opposed to what they are.

A linguistic contextualizing through an examination of translation issues challenges a taken-for-granted practice of adopting theoretical concepts in translation, particularly in English-language academic literature (see Descarries 2014). Similarly, a historical contextualizing helps us understand what is at stake in a feminist appropriation of the concept of assemblage. In the following section, I propose to bring the focus on the ways in which both the concept of assemblage and intersectionality can be thought through the notions of fluidity and (in)separability.

From Assemblage to Intersectionality: Making the Connections

An overview of the feminist reception of Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy reveals that in the past feminist scholars have been highly critical but have nonetheless proceeded cautiously to engage with their philosophy of connectivity. As a growing number of scholars apply Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts, a revisiting of this reception and initial reservations offers a platform for critical engagement. I highlight a number of parallels in arguments proposing assemblages and intersectionality to show that their deployment in research arises from a similar set of concerns, in particular from the attempts to find alternatives to reification and static conceptualization of identity.

Elizabeth Grosz (1993, 1994) was one of the first scholars to weigh in on feminist engagement and reception of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy. Grosz (1994) observes a paradoxical vacillation in feminist writing between equally strong criticism of and fascination with their philosophy: "[Rosi Braidotti] is clear in her ambivalences, her unresolved relation to and against Deleuze's writings—as, it seems to me, feminists must be if they are on one hand to benefit from men's modes of production of knowledges while on the other hand moving beyond them in recognizing their limitations" (162). In her summary of feminist critique of Deleuzian philosophy, Grosz (1993) argues that there

are valid reasons feminist scholars should remain suspicious of masculine interests and metaphors, models of machines, assemblages and connections, as well as references to manifestly misogynist writers. Feminist scholars should remain "critical of an apparently phallic drive to plug things, make connections, link with things" (167). Nonetheless, it is a worthwhile endeavour, Grosz maintains, to examine concepts, such as rhizomatics, assemblages, multiplicity, and becoming, in the hope that they can help feminist theory displace the binary logic in Western philosophy which has been so pervasive in regimes of oppression, including the oppression of women.

In their edited volume titled *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook (2000) address directly the question of compatibility between Deleuzian philosophy and feminist theory. The relationship between feminist theory and Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical concepts seems to be a rather difficult one, full of hesitation and distrust but also of curiosity. The main issue raised by feminist scholars revolves around Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming and, in particular, becoming-woman.[6] In the volume's introduction, Colebrook (2000) engages with their philosophy but is never quite at ease with it. Referring to Deleuze and Guattari's writings on Virginia Woolf, becoming-woman, and molar identities (based on divisions, binary codes, and oppositions), she asks: "Just what are Deleuze and Guattari doing when they take Woolf and the women's movement away from the concepts of identity, recognition, emancipation and the subject towards a new plane of becoming?" (3). Although Grosz (1993) remains highly suspicious of Deleuze and Guattari's process of becoming-woman, she maintains that feminist theory should not shun or ignore Deleuzian philosophy but has much to gain from it without having to abandon feminist political projects. Grosz understands *becoming-woman* as "destabilization of molar (feminine) identity" (177) and Jerry Aline Flieger (2000) describes it as "the paradigmatic instance of changing one's perspective, one's very essence, one's very status as 'one'" (39). Assemblages, as conglomerates of heterogeneous elements in symbiosis and in constant transformation, are understood in their connection with *becoming*, a continuous process between two states, a "betweenness" which displaces and disorients the subject and identities (43). Within this framework

then, becoming-woman is about transforming and transgressing identity.

While some feminist theorists (Grosz 1993, 1994; Braidotti 2011) remain critical of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, they nonetheless call for an engagement with their concepts which, if theorized with caution, can offer a number of solutions to challenges currently posed by feminist theory. Viewed in this light, Puar (2012) posits that Deleuze-Guattarian assemblages can be a productive way of formulating epistemological correctives to the feminist knowledge production which, mainly driven by intersectional analysis, has produced a normative subject of feminism. Neither assemblages nor intersectionality are to be dismissed but assemblages are useful since they "encompass not only ongoing attempts to destabilize identities and grids, but also the forces that continue to mandate and enforce them" (63). It is suggested that what intersectionality sees as separate, assemblages bring together as there is nothing outside the assemblage.

Within the context of intersectionality, the notion of separability is pertinent since it raises the question of whether the intersecting entities are indeed discreet and distinct from one another. Lena Gunnarsson (2015) takes up the either/or thinking which characterizes much of the intersectionality scholarship regarding the debate on in/separability of intersectional categories. Gunnarsson uses Roy Bhaskar's dialectical critical realist philosophy, in particular the figure of unity-in-difference, to argue that intersectional categories are both separate and unified. She questions the unclear meaning of 'inseparability' and exposes the ambiguity in stating that different categories (gender, sexuality, race, class, etc.) are not separable while at the same time separating them in the very statements (4-5). Nira Yuval-Davis' (2006) influential writing on intersectionality warns that intersectional analysis is not meant to discover several neat identities under one since this would reinscribe the notion of the fragmented, additive model of oppression. However, she cautions that we need to differentiate between different kinds of difference, that is, between different social divisions: "[The] ontological basis of each of these divisions is autonomous, and each prioritizes different spheres of social relations" (200-201). Gunnarsson (2015) complicates Yuval-Davis' position and stresses "that even if analysed on the deepest level of abstraction, I doubt that we can think of

economic, gendered, sexual and racialized relations as absolutely independent from one another. I am unsure how starkly Yuval-Davis' claim about autonomy should to be [*sic*] interpreted" (6).

This notion of separateness or autonomy of ontological bases of social divisions or intersectional categories can be seen in stark contrast to Deleuzian philosophy which refuses to engage in traditional metaphysics and questions of the ontological identity of an entity. Rather, Deleuze and Guattari ask what things do as opposed to what they are. Entities enter assemblages through connections and engage in movement that should be thought as movement "rather than arrested and identified" (Currier 2003, 332). Dianne Currier (2003) sees this refusal to engage with ontological differences between beings, which are based on their essential identities, not as unification and creation of sameness but rather as a "refusal of a mode of knowledge ordered by identity" (332). Currier further explains:

> To claim that assemblages are not grounded on a framework of identity is not, however, to claim an exemption for assemblages from the matrices of power/knowledge through which the logic of identity has proliferated and been active historically. It is to claim that the concept of assemblage is not elaborated through and cannot be grasped by the epistemological frameworks of identity. (333)

This move then signifies a more complex relationship with the matrices of power and a move away from being to becoming, that is, a move away from identity, the One, and the oppositional binary logic of Western philosophy, as Grosz (1993) argues, leading to an open-ended epistemological horizon.

It appears at first that the fundamental modes of knowledge production in assemblages are in contradiction with intersectionality. While Puar's (2012) re-reading of Crenshaw's (1989) foundational text—to show that intersectionality can be seen as more invested in movement and flows than in reified identities—is instructive, it can be further nuanced. In her attempt to illustrate the ways in which Black women experience "double-discrimination" (on the basis of both race and sex), Crenshaw (1989) writes:

> The point is that Black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways and that the contradiction

arises from our assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional. Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (149)

After quoting Crenshaw's passage on the now-famous metaphor of the traffic accident, Puar (2012) concludes that "identification is a process; identity is an encounter, an event, an accident, in fact" (59). Puar makes an interesting shift in her reading of the traffic metaphor: where Crenshaw is referring to "discrimination," Puar is reading "identification."

Rather than viewing *identity* as that which is caught in the accident, as arrested movement on the grid, Crenshaw's metaphor invokes *discrimination* as that which is flowing through the intersection. In this re-visiting of Crenshaw's metaphor, intersectionality is intended to emphasize *structures of inequality*. In their introduction to an issue of the journal *Signs* dedicated to intersectionality, Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall (2013) provide a critique of those works which treat intersectionality as a theory fascinated with overlapping identities: "While this theme has surfaced in a variety of texts, particularly those that might be framed as projects that seek intersectionality's rescue, in this issue we emphasize an understanding of intersectionality that is not exclusively or even primarily preoccupied with categories, identities, and subjectivities" (797). Instead, the authors foreground political and structural inequalities.

Moreover, Puar (2012) uses this re-reading of Crenshaw to argue for the usefulness of assemblages as a theoretical concept that can "focus on the patters of relations—not the entities themselves, but the patterns within which they are arranged with each other…Not Assemblage, but *Agencement*." (60-61). However, an offering of such a re-reading needs to be contextualized and placed in dialogue with the works of other intersectionality scholars who have theorized intersectionality through the lens of *doing* rather than *being*: "Intersectionality primarily concerns the way things *work*

rather than who people *are*" (Chun et al. cited in Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 797; my emphasis). Here, Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) see critiques of intersectionality's supposed reification of categories as reflecting distorted understandings of identity politics. In a similar vein, Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall reflect on the astonishing growth of intersectionality scholarship and observe that "[This] framing—conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power—emphasizes what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is" (795). Once again, a renewed emphasis on *doing* (actions, events) and a distancing from *being* (descriptions of entities) reconstruct a familiar perspective that is also seen in writings on assemblages.

Kathy Davis (2008) in her article "Intersectionality as Buzzword" notes that, while intersectionality is most often associated with the U.S. Black feminist theory and the political project of theorizing the relationships between gender, class, and race, it has also been taken up by feminist scholars working with postmodern theories. These scholars welcomed intersectionality as a "helpmeet in their project of deconstructing the binary oppositions and universalism inherent in the modernist paradigms of Western philosophy and science" (71). Moreover, they viewed intersectionality as capable of neatly fitting into the "postmodern project of conceptualizing multiple and shifting identities" (71).

In her account of the history of intersectionality in feminist theory and feminist political projects, Davis (2008) highlights a point that is instructive for the issues at stake here. As intersectionality was taken up, in the 1980s and onwards, by both feminist political projects and feminist theorists inspired by postmodern theoretical concepts, their motivations differed. For the theorists of class/race/gender, intersectionality and identity politics were an effective strategy of resistance, while for the postmodern feminist theorists, intersectionality provided a way out of gender essentialism and toward abandoning categorical thinking (73). Intersectionality has provided a common footing for both groups of feminists since it is able to tackle the feminist political project "of making the social and material consequences of the categories of gender/race/class visible, but does so by employing methodologies compatible with the poststructuralist project of deconstructing categories, un-

masking universalism, and exploring the dynamic and contradictory workings of power" (74). Davis shows the ways in which the introduction of intersectionality had the potential to reconcile the two strands of feminist scholarship. In this light, Puar's (2012) suggestion to supplement intersectionality with assemblages can be seen as further expansion. However, depending on the theoretical point of view, such supplementing may be viewed as unnecessary, given that re-readings of originating literature on intersectionality, as argued by Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013), may suffice in resolving the current tensions in intersectionality scholarship (788). The re-visiting of the traffic-accident metaphor is a case in point.

Assemblage in Social Science Research

While feminist reception of Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy has been marked by hesitation, as illustrated above, a number of examples show that scholars are cautiously proceeding and finding productive ways of deploying assemblages in their research. I suggest that it is worth exploring the ways in which these more recent formulations of research questions may not supplement but rather supplant intersectionality. The following two examples illustrate the shift that assemblages can bring to social sciences research and to highlight the ways in which they can differ from intersectionality. The authors deploy the concepts from Deleuze and Guattari but their primary aim is not the usage itself of Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts but rather the rearticulation of their research questions within the context of their own disciplines. The themes taken up by these two studies, sexuality and masculinities, on the one hand, and race and gender on the other, could have been interpreted through the lens of intersectionality; however, the authors advocate explicitly for an approach that emphasizes process, connections, effects, and doing rather than being or meaning-making. Their choices of methodology are telling of the paradigmatic shift that proposes capturing encounters, events, and affect.

One example is the way male sexuality and masculinity can be studied through the lens of the "sexuality-assemblages" of teen boys and young men (Alldred and Fox 2015). Pam Alldred and Nick Fox (2015) take the focus away from socialization and/or identity-construction and explore sexuality, sexual desire, and the physicality of sexual practices. The authors foreground the fluctuating assemblages and the events they produce in order to "firmly [shift] the focus away from bodies and individuals toward relationality and assemblages, to affective flows in place of human agency, toward capacities to act, feel and desire rather than bodily attributes" (910). Moreover, they opt to focus on "an impersonal affective flow within assemblages of bodies, things, ideas and social institutions" and not on an individual sexed body (907). In this approach, hegemonic masculinity is not viewed as an explanation of young men's heterosexual identities but is to be "explained at the level of actions, interactions and event" (917).

Similar to the first example, the authors in the second example use a language that clearly announces a move away from concerns around the "foundation" of a subject's identity. Rosanne Kennedy et al. (2013) are interested in moving the concept of agency beyond the human body to include nonhuman entities. In one of the three case studies, Kennedy et al. analyse Miley Cyrus's performance at the Video Music Awards through assemblage theory. Instead of focusing solely on Miley Cyrus as the subject who *twerked*, Kennedy et al. study the assemblage of the Twerking Miley Cyrus Body (TMCB) as a recurrent event, affect, and ongoing process. This formulation allows them to ask not what TMCB *means* with regards to race and gender but rather to identify TMCB's *capacity*. The wide and repetitive availability (through GIFs, YouTube, etc.) of TMCB prompts the authors to ask: if TMCB is happening again and again, what *is it doing* as opposed to what *did it once do*? Importantly, the authors consider the ways in which TMCB contributed to re-fixing identities (the black versus white body, the female body as sexual) as well as the role of sensations (56). Both examples are excellent illustrations of a flexible, innovative but also critical approach to Deleuzian concepts. Spaces for a "frictional," but complementing, dialogue between assemblage and intersectionality are, however, less obvious. These examples, among others, illustrate a form of distancing from the body, identity (assumed to be fixed), representation, and social institutions to focus on movement, entities, and events. The appeal of the concept of assemblage seems to lie in the apparent possibility to grasp the effect of encounters produced by assemblages.

Assemblages, however, have their own limitations. Paola Bacchetta (2015) posits that, while assemblages can supplement intersectionality, they do not nec-

essarily take into account certain power relations, which can remain invisible, such as the role of colonialism in the construction of queer subjects in the West (para. 23). To counter these limitations, Bacchetta proposes two other theoretical concepts, that is, *co-formations* and *co-productions*. Co-formations are used to think through dynamic, contextual, and localized power relations such as gender, sexuality, racism, class, caste, disability, and speciesism; and co-productions allow us to think through broad, thick, and intense power relations spanning over wide spatiotemporalities such as global capitalism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and occupation (para. 27-28). Once again, there is an attempt to supplement intersectionality while co-production and co-formation are seen as attempts to further decolonize feminism. Nevertheless, the shift away from identity is still seen as unsettling. Alexander G. Weheliye (2014) calls for caution regarding "the complete disavowal of subjectivity in theoretical discourse, because within the context of the Anglo-American academy more often than not an insistence on transcending limited notions of the subject or identity leads to the neglect of race as a critical category" (48).[7] This critique brings us yet again to the thorny questions of power relations and identity, as the limitations of the assemblages lie in their evacuation of the notions of power, ideology, and the political. One solution, however, can be to "put [assemblages] to work in milieus" such as racialized minority discourse and queer theory (47).

Conclusion

When evaluating possibilities of re-reading intersectionality as assemblage, I have argued that it is instructive to pay attention to translation as an innovative research approach. Translation is itself a very political act and translation flows in academia and elsewhere are not coincidental but are rather reflections of geopolitics, socio-historical moments, and power relations (Descarries 2014). When we grasp the difficulties of translating a theoretical term into English (or into any language), we are able to evaluate it more critically, including its functions and productive possibilities. I have also suggested that there are a number of parallels between the arguments highlighting the productive uses of assemblages and those arguments reaffirming the importance of intersectionality. Both assemblages and intersectionality encourage interrogations of what a theoretical concept does as opposed to what it is; both notions can be seen to emphasize fluidity and changing processes with the potential to displace and deconstruct binary logics, universalism, and categorical thinking. These parallels, or repetitions, reveal the continuing struggle to unseat dualisms and reification in Western modes of knowledge production. Although assemblage may be now called in to provide a corrective to intersectionality, not too long ago, intersectionality was viewed to be the most promising alternative to reification of identity. While feminist scholars have been reluctant to engage with Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy in the past, the new research signals that cautious use of assemblages in academic research may appear increasingly attractive to some scholars. The two examples, with their attention focused on events, affects, and relationality, illustrate the ways in which assemblages can be deployed in social science research, potentially signalling the so-called paradigm shift. Within this type of research, intersectionality just may be more likely to be supplanted rather than supplemented by assemblages. In this article, I have argued that suggestions to employ assemblages should keep in view the particularities of previous historical searches for alternatives. Lastly, in an age of advanced capitalist globalization, the functioning logic of the world we live in today is "more about folds than structures, more complex than linear, more recursive than dialectical, more emergent than totalising" (Dewsbury 2011, 148). In such a nondialectical and multilocal world, then, we are left with an increasingly difficult task of mapping sites of power and its effects and intersectionality and assemblage are examples of this enduring struggle for theoretical alternatives.

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Endnotes

[2] Legal scholars such as Devon Carbado (2013) and Sumi Cho (2013) have argued that making space for "new and improved" analytical frameworks need not culminate in calls to erase or supersede intersectionality (Cho 2013, 389). Carbado (2013) cites "cosynthesis," "inter-connectivity," "multidimensionality," and "assemblages" as improved candidates: "Proponents of these theories implicitly and sometimes explicitly suggest that each has the inherent ability to do something−discursively and substantively − that

intersectionality cannot do or does considerably less well" (815-816).

[3] Mathematicians, however, question postmodern theorists', including Deleuze and Guattari's, use of mathematical concepts. Vladimir Tasić (2001) asserts that "postmodern theorists produced a series of brave utterances that make little sense mathematically" (149).

[4] For an overview of the differences and similarities between Latour, Callon, and Law's actor-network theory and Deleuze-Guattarian assemblages, see Muller (2015).

[5] Francine Descarries (2014) writes: "While translation makes it possible to disseminate ideas to a certain extent, there are nevertheless few concepts or models of interpretation that can be shared among different cultures in a completely analogous fashion" (566). The case of the assemblage is a good illustration of the ways in which theoretical concepts carry their own theoretical and cultural baggage.

[6] Due to space restrictions, I focus on the concept of assemblage. However, Deleuze and Guattari employ a number of other crucial concepts such as becoming, becoming-woman, Body without Organs, rhizome, multiplicities, molar, molecular, lines of flight, territorialization, etc., all of which work together to elucidate their philosophical principles. For a detailed analysis of these concepts, see Currier (2003), Grosz (1993, 1994), among many others and in addition to Deleuze and Guattari (2004/1987).

[7] For a critique of the ways in which intersectionality has been neutralized and race erased in intersectionality scholarship (and, in particular, in sociology), see Sirma Bilge's (2013) work.

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