The Becoming Schizophrenic of Aesthetic Experience: A Comparative Analysis between Deleuze’s Transcendental Empiricism and Latour’s Empirical Metaphysics

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Abstract: This article defines the metaphysical condition that occurs when the distinction between the virtual realm of potentiality and actual reality has disappeared. Such a metaphysical condition is characterized by a radical continuity between entity and its environment in which any boundary has been eliminated. The lack of boundaries means that aesthetic experience as the determination of form is no longer possible. Experience becomes transformed into the illusion of experience, which is an experience without form, quality, or expression. Such an experience can be defined as the becoming schizophrenic of aesthetic experience and the transformation of process into a continuous process of becoming. In this article I argue that the metaphysical condition in which virtual and actual are equated is put forward by the metaphysics of Gilles Deleuze and Bruno Latour. Whereas Deleuze puts forward a metaphysics based on aesthetic experience (transcendental empiricism), Latour constructs a metaphysics based on science and technology studies (empirical metaphysics). An empirical metaphysics occurs when the distinction between virtual and actual disappears, which leads to an empiricism in which empirical form is only an illusion. Deleuze’s metaphysics is distinct from Latour’s empirical metaphysics, but nevertheless takes up the condition of the virtual-actual equation when experience operates as Face-machine or pure event. The virtual-actual equation is a distortion of experience and metaphysics, which I define as the ontological condition of the moderns. By comparing Deleuze and Latour, it becomes clear that modernity is not defined by the subject-object distinction, but by the becoming schizophrenic of experience in which the distinction between virtual and actual has disappeared.
I. Introduction

This article focuses on the danger of reducing process metaphysics to an experience that is characterized by a complete continuity between environment and actual entity. Such a radical continuity makes experience impossible and is therefore not only destructive of the actual entity in question, but of metaphysics itself. It reduces metaphysics to its actual component, which means a limitation of reality to its empirical condition. A reduction of reality or process to empiricism is a distortion because it neglects that it is the realm of the virtual (Deleuzian terminology) or the realm of eternal objects (Whiteheadian terminology) that decides the direction and form experience takes. Experience requires the virtual, which is its a priori condition, but also actualization as without actualization there can be no expression. This implies that virtual and actual are both related and distinct from one another. Following Alfred North Whitehead, it is through encounter with the environment that experience as process of determination becomes activated, but it is the eternal object that determines the particular form experience takes (PR 45, 50-51). Experience cannot be reduced to one’s situatedness within an environment, for then the a priori condition of experience (eternal object) becomes detached from actual reality. It is when experience becomes reduced to actual/empirical reality that virtual and actual become detached from one another. Such a detachment, however, does not mean that the virtual disappears, but that virtual and actual become equated with one another. It is when metaphysics becomes reduced to empiricism that empirical reality can no longer be empirical, but takes up the condition of the virtual. This means a reality that is without form, expression, or boundaries. The fact that the equation of virtual and actual is a result of their detachment is one of the paradoxes of metaphysics: when we deny the reality of the virtual, actual reality also loses its reality because it is only through the determination of a virtual potential that actual reality can exist. This becoming unreal of the actual is the virtual-actual equation. In this article I argue that this latter metaphysical condition is put forward by Gilles Deleuze’s metaphysics and Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory.

On a general level, the metaphysics of Deleuze, Latour, and Whitehead can all be characterized under the heading of process thought or process metaphysics. All three philosophers put forward a metaphysics in which an entity is not given, but needs to determine itself through experience.
The ontological condition of every entity is therefore not an underlying substance, but a continuous process. However, even though Deleuze, Latour, and Whitehead all argue in favour of a metaphysics of process, the type of process each puts forward is different. The present article argues that one could interpret Deleuzian and Latourian metaphysics through a radical continuity between entity and its environment in which any sense of boundary has disappeared. Such a radical continuity is a distortion of metaphysics and which is distinct from Whitehead’s concern with the order of nature. The order of nature requires that there is a distinction between an entity and its environment. This is visible in Whitehead’s statement that critique must always be possible, which means that an entity must be able to react against the environment if this environment prevents the subjective aim of an entity to be determined (AI 83). It is for this reason that the ultimate dimension of reality for Whitehead is not process, but atomism (PR 35). What requires explanation for Whitehead is not the occurrence of schizophrenia, but how there can be an order within reality (or an enduring entity) when experience always includes the other or environment in the process of determination (PR 107-108). Whitehead therefore does not simply argue in favor of process, but defines how process/experience must adhere to certain rules in order for there to be qualities and for determination to be possible.

Although Whitehead does acknowledge the danger of schizophrenia, he does not theorize it. This distinguishes Whitehead’s metaphysics from other metaphysics of process, such as the metaphysics of Deleuze and Latour. Deleuze defines his metaphysics as a *transcendental empiricism*, which means that – in a way similar to Whitehead – he defines metaphysics through a type of experience that cannot be reduced to empiricism/environment, but is based on the determination of a virtual potential, which makes empirical reality possible (Deleuze, *Difference*, 126-127, 188). However, in contrast to Whitehead, Deleuze also theorizes a type of experience/process, which he calls the *pure event* (Deleuze, *Logic*, 1, 21, 35, 53, 63). A pure event is not based on the determination of form, but on the fact that there is no form at all, as an entity is nothing but a constellation of affects, which become continuously modified. In other words, experience as pure event defines an ontological condition that is “immaterial” (the lack of the determination of form).\(^1\) Because Deleuze defines a pure event as a constellation of “affects,” it might seem similar to Whitehead’s idea that the ontological condition of an entity is
aesthetic experience (which is an affective experience). However, for Whitehead experience operates as the determination of form, whereas in Deleuze’s pure event there is no determination at all. The lack of determination can be reformulated as an experience based on radical continuity between entity and environment. The type of “process” associated with experience as pure event is a continuous process of becoming (in which an entity is continuously becoming other than itself), while Whitehead puts forward a type of process based on the becoming of continuity (in which an entity retains its enduring quality through time). In Process and Reality Whitehead clearly states that the continuity of becoming is not possible, as this would make any order or determination of form impossible (PR 35).

Process as the continuity of becoming is experience turning schizophrenic so that no quality or determination is possible. One could say for this reason that Deleuze’s theorization of experience as pure event is a distortion of experience. This is indeed true, but experience as pure event is far more radical than just a distortion (the failure of determination). The schizophrenic pure event defines a new condition of metaphysics: the simultaneous detachment and equation of virtual and actual. The detachment and equation of virtual and actual means that the condition of the virtual no longer is the realm of potentiality, which makes actual reality possible, but becomes the condition of actual reality as such. It means that the distinction between eternal object and environment, which is essential for Whitehead, has disappeared. In such a reality all actual form becomes an illusion as there can be no more expression or qualities. Actual form takes up the condition of the virtual in which there is no determination of form, but only potentialities, which lack any differentiation from one another. Determination of form becomes replaced by the attachments in which one is involved. This is no longer determination, but only the illusion of determination, as determination is not based on a virtual potential/eternal object, but on one’s situatedness within an environment. In such a reality, one could be anything one wants to be as long as one is connected to the right attachments/environments. It is then the relations or environment in which one is involved that defines one’s ontological condition instead of one’s virtual potential. Such a reality is much more radical than simply a distortion of experience. It is a reality in which radically anything is possible, including what should be impossible, in which any form can be created without any limitation. It means that the rules or laws to which experience must adhere have disappeared (Deleuze, Logic, 1-2, 35). This is a type of creation that does not create, but destroys.
Through creation, one destroys reality as one violates the rules/laws that must be respected in order to speak of reality at all.

Such a reality of radical creativity could be interpreted as the realm of ultimate self-determination. For Whitehead, self-determination can never be complete because there must always be a distinction between eternal object and environment. Ultimate determination would mean that this distinction has disappeared and that one reaches complete self-expression in an environment in which every obstacle has been eliminated. Deleuze calls such a condition the *Body without Organs*, which means a state in which the body (or form) has lost any sense of hierarchy and has merged completely with its environment (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 178, 182). What looks like a utopia turns out to be complete horror as reality then gives rise to creatures without any order, endurance, quality, or self (Deleuze, *Logic*, 3). It is this loss of an enduring quality, self, or order that defines the condition of schizophrenia. Reality takes up the condition of the *Body without Organs* when it has become “absolute.” It is his concern to define and understand the absolute that explains why Deleuze defines experience as pure event. The type of experience or process put forward by Deleuze is then not only a distortion of experience, but the becoming absolute of experience. Experience becomes absolute when it operates as complete self-determination. This ultimate experience is the destruction of metaphysics as it means that the distinction between virtual and actual, which makes experience possible, has been transformed into a simultaneous detachment and equation.

This article focuses on the new metaphysical condition that occurs when virtual and actual become simultaneously detached and equated. Experience itself becomes impossible and becomes merely the illusion of experience. This distortion of experience, I argue, is put forward by both the metaphysics of Deleuze and the actor-network theory of Latour. Whereas Deleuze’s metaphysics is a transcendental empiricism, Latour’s metaphysics is an empirical metaphysics (Latour, *Reassembling*, 51; de Vries 16). A metaphysics that is solely empirical means that the distinction between virtual and actual has disappeared. Latour’s conception of "actor-network" determination becomes reduced to empirical attachments (Latour, *Reassembling*, 5, 8). One’s ontological condition is then defined by one’s empirical attachments instead of the determination of a virtual potential. This implies that Latour does not put forward a new conception of the social, but defines a condition in which any social order is impossible. By
comparing Latour and Deleuze it becomes clear that Latour is not aware of the distortion of metaphysics/experience that he puts forward, whereas Deleuze is. Because Deleuze’s metaphysics is a transcendental empiricism, he does acknowledge that experience must be characterized by rules in order for expression to be possible. The distortion of experience only occurs when experience reaches the absolute. Rather than being opposed to Whitehead, Deleuze shares Whitehead’s concern for a metaphysics based on experience that gives rise to qualities/order. This is apparent in the fact that both Whitehead and Deleuze define experience through the autonomous logic of the aesthetic (Deleuze, Difference, 71, 85-86; Whitehead, AI, 265). It is only the autonomous logic of the aesthetic that can define the rules experience must adhere to in order to be creative and be generative of reality.

The determination of a virtual potential into actual form is aesthetic because it is a form of determination that is both defined by subjectivity and universality. Within aesthetic experience, universality and subjectivity, virtual and actual, are related yet distinct. When virtual and actual become detached, aesthetic experience loses its universal dimension and becomes reduced to an experience that is solely empirical. It is then an experience based on the fulfilment of personal desires and preferences, which makes a common world or the order within reality impossible. However, even though such an experience is solely empirical, it is simultaneously also solely virtual.5 This is the case because the detachment of virtual and actual is simultaneously also an equation of virtual and actual, which means that empirical form is only an illusion. An experience that is solely actual/empirical is then simultaneously not actual/empirical because the actual has become an illusion. An empirical experience in which empirical form is illusionary can only be schizophrenic because schizophrenia implies the lack of an enduring quality or determined form. The loss of the universal dimension of the aesthetic, then, does not mean that aesthetic experience becomes solely empirical, but that aesthetic experience becomes schizophrenic. The simultaneous detachment and equation of virtual and actual is the transformation of the universal into schizophrenia. By theorizing such a type of aesthetic experience, it becomes apparent that we should not simply justify a metaphysics of aesthetic experience or process, but examine critically the different forms (and therefore distortions) aesthetic experience and process can take. When one simply argues in favor of “process” or “aesthetic experience,” one risks justifying a type of reality
in which any order has disappeared and in which everything is nothing but a process of change. When there is nothing but continuous process, metaphysics has entered a state of distortion.

In this article I argue that such a type of process characterizes the ontological condition of the moderns. Through a comparison of the metaphysics of Deleuze and Latour, it becomes possible to theorize the modification of aesthetic experience/process that defines the ontological condition of the moderns. Whitehead’s metaphysical system is less capable of theorizing the ontology of the moderns because it does not include the theorization of experience/process that is completely without order. The ontological condition in which virtual and actual are detached and equated is not theorized by Whitehead, but it is theorized by Deleuze and Latour. I interpret Latour’s actor-network theory (ANT) as a social theory and metaphysics that is particular to the moderns. ANT does not prove that “we have never been modern” (as Latour argues), but defines itself as the ontological condition of modernity. I have chosen to discuss both Deleuze and Latour because their metaphysics are both conceptually similar and distinct. The similarity is situated in the fact that they both put forward a metaphysical condition based on the detachment and equation of virtual and actual. The difference is situated in the fact that Deleuze’s metaphysics is a transcendental empiricism whereas Latour’s ANT is an empirical metaphysics. A transcendental empiricism is a metaphysics based on aesthetic experience, whereas an empirical metaphysics is a metaphysics based on science and technology studies. A metaphysics based on science and technology studies, however, can be reconceptualized through a schizophrenic type of aesthetic experience. This explains why Deleuzian and Latourian metaphysics are also similar when we limit Deleuze’s metaphysics to the ontological condition of the “pure event” (in which aesthetic experience becomes schizophrenic).

In the first section of this article, I will demonstrate that both science and technology studies and the autonomous logic of the aesthetic are based upon a subjective universality or network-universality. A network-universal means that the universal cannot operate in a general way, but only in a particular way as it becomes activated within associations (Deleuze, *Difference*, 251; Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 430-431, 475; Latour, *We Have*, 24). In the case of aesthetics, this network-universal takes the form of a relation between the virtual realm of potentiality and actual reality. It is this relation between virtual and actual that for Deleuze defines
the way an experience (or association) can be productive of actual reality (and therefore provide the basis for metaphysics). The network-universal of science, on the other hand, is concerned with the fact that science is both socially constructed and capable of visualizing a universal fact of empirical reality (Latour, *We Have*, 6). This difference between aesthetics and science indicates that for Latour the universal is limited to the capacity of science to visualize empirical reality as a universal world, whereas for Deleuze the universal is present within the determination of a virtual potential, which makes the production of empirical reality possible. A metaphysics based on science studies therefore produces a metaphysics that is entirely empirical (which means that the distinction between virtual and actual is absent within ANT). A metaphysics based on aesthetics, on the other hand, relies upon the distinction between virtual and actual, which explains why Deleuze defends a transcendental empiricism instead of an empirical metaphysics.

In the second section of this article I will analyse how the constitution of the social requires a double-bind. Whereas Latour acknowledges this double-bind (Latour, *Reassembling*, 8), his conception of it is incorrect. I examine this by comparing ANT with Deleuze’s argument that the social requires the double articulation of content and expression (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 66). This distinction between content and expression is related to a second distinction, namely the difference between machine and assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 388). I will argue that ANT can be reinterpreted as a condition of the social in which the distinction between content and expression, assemblage and machine, has disappeared. This condition of the social is the ontological condition of the moderns. It means that ANT is not a theory that is applicable to many times and places, but is limited to the condition of modernity. This means that Latour’s statement *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) must be radically rethought. The fact that the social (and metaphysics) can indeed take up a form in which the distinction between content and expression, assemblage and machine, has disappeared is apparent in Deleuze’s concepts of the Face-Machine and the rhizomatic machine (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 141, 154-155, 199, 205). Experience as Face-Machine or rhizomatic machine is the transformation of experience into a pure event.

In the third part of the article I will analyze the concepts of Face-Machine and rhizomatic machine and examine how they can explain the condition put forward by ANT. This will allow me to explain why ANT
puts forward an empirical metaphysics. An empirical metaphysics emerges when the distinction between virtual and actual disappears, which is a consequence of the equation of content and expression, assemblage and machine. The simultaneous detachment and equation of virtual and actual constitutes a new form of universality in which actual reality has taken up the condition of the virtual. It explains why a conception of the social based upon science studies can only be applicable to the condition of the moderns, but not provide a general theory of the social or metaphysics (as does Deleuze).

In the fourth section of the article I will further examine how one should understand this new form of universality based on the simultaneous detachment and equation of virtual and actual. Although this detachment and equation is based upon the network-universality of science and technology studies, I argue that it suggests that an actor-network is based upon aesthetic experience after all. In a similar way as Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism is based upon aesthetic experience, I argue that empirical metaphysics (ANT) is also based on the ontological primacy of aesthetic experience. This reinterpretation of ANT through the aesthetic is possible because Latour eliminates the distinction between content and expression, assemblage and machine. I argue that the elimination of this distinction gives rise to a network that is based upon the desire for expression without content. This can be understood as the aestheticization of social relations, which means that relations become theatricalized. In order to differentiate between the aesthetic dimension of ANT and Deleuze’s reliance on the aesthetic, I propose that the former is based upon a universal aesthetic that is schizophrenic whereas the universal dimension of aesthetics for Deleuze is based upon aesthetic autonomy. When the ontological condition of the moderns is indeed based on the simultaneous detachment and equation of virtual and actual, it can be reformulated as a conception of the social based upon a schizophrenic aesthetic. This means that the social (and metaphysics) within modernity are in crisis.

In the final section of the article I examine how this crisis of modernity can be countered. Deleuze provides a solution through his concept of the Cosmic-Machine (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 388, 398). I will analyse how this concept is different from Latour’s solution, which takes the form of a call to reconnect to the Earth (Latour, Facing, 4, 61; Latour, Waar kunnen we landen?, 63, 66). By undertaking this comparative analysis between ANT and Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism, it becomes
possible to define the ontological condition of the moderns anew. The moderns are not a nature-culture constellation like the premoderns, but instead are based upon a new universality in which the distinction between nature and culture, virtual and actual, has disappeared completely. It means that the social no longer operates as assemblage, but as machine (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 451, 490, 532). It is only by becoming aware of this condition that the question of social change can be posed anew.

II. Distinguishing Between a Metaphysics Based on the Aesthetic (Deleuze and Latour) and Science Studies (Latour)

ANT is on a very general level equivalent to Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism because both Latour and Deleuze argue that the conditions of subjectivity and objectivity are not given, but need to be produced (Deleuze, Difference, 98-99, 103; Latour, Inquiry, 162). Latour speaks in this case of quasi-subjects and quasi-objects (We Have, 51, 79, 89; Inquiry, 488). A quasi-subject means that the condition of subjectivity only manifests itself through association with what is other than itself (in nonhuman actors—hereafter NH). In return, an object is not merely given as object, but is determined as object through the way it is used by human beings (human actors—hereafter H). We speak in this case of a quasi-object (Latour, We Have, 64). The similarity with Deleuze is situated within the fact that Latour proposes that reality is both socially constructed and ontologically real (Inquiry, 90). Reality needs to be constructed because the condition of subject and object is not given, but needs to be determined through the formation of associations. However, if associations are productive of the condition of subjectivity and objectivity, they simultaneously define the ontological condition of the constructed reality that emerges through these associations. ANT is therefore not solely a social theory, but a form of metaphysics (Latour, We Have, 128; Inquiry, 19). Both Latour and Deleuze redefine metaphysics from a general theory of reality towards what is produced through the association between H and NH entities (Latourian terminology) or through the modification of aesthetic experience (Deleuzian terminology).8

However, Deleuzian and Latourian metaphysics are not entirely equivalent, which is apparent in the fact that Latour proposes a metaphysics that is solely empirical, whereas Deleuze puts forward a transcendental empiricism. The difference can be understood if we acknowledge that
Deleuze relies upon the autonomous logic of the aesthetic in the construction of his metaphysics, whereas Latour upon science and technology studies (Latour, *We Have*, 55; *Inquiry*, 153). Following Latour, a scientific fact is both socially constructed and ontologically real. Science makes it possible to make a universal statement about empirical reality, but this universal statement can only be produced through the H-NH associations that define the set-up of a laboratory (Latour, *We Have*, 24, 28, 79). Through science and technology studies, Latour therefore argues against the idea that science could be based upon the bifurcation of nature (the distinction between nature as fact and nature as socially constructed). Instead of a general universal, science is based upon a subjective or network-universal. A network-universal means that the universal cannot be understood outside the H-NH attachments that make it visible (Latour, *We Have*, 113). It is this idea of a network-universal that Latour uses as his basis for a new conception of the social that is both socially constructed and ontologically real.

A subjective or network-universal is, however, also what defines the autonomous logic of the aesthetic. Deleuze relies upon the autonomous logic of aesthetic experience in order to understand how experience can be productive of empirical reality (Deleuze, *Difference*, 71, 85-86). Within aesthetic experience, the determination of a virtual potential becomes activated, which allows an entity to determine itself as subject. Aesthetic experience has this capacity because it is a type of experience in which one is forced to think and therefore an experience that is productive (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 167, 173, 182; O’Sullivan 50). Such a form of thought cannot be understood through representation as representation implies that the condition of subjectivity is already given. It is only through a type of affective experience that forces one to think that the condition of subjectivity can emerge (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 317; *What is Philosophy?*, 169). The autonomous logic of the aesthetic has this capacity because the condition of the aesthetic only manifests itself within encounter (Deleuze, *Difference*, 24-25, 29, 255; Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 183). This means that aesthetics is neither a property of the encountered object, nor of the experiencing subject, but a shared condition. The aesthetic has both a subjective and objective character, as it requires both subject and object in order to manifest itself (Shaviro 1-5). It is this paradoxical quality of the aesthetic to both align subject and object with one another (as it requires both in order to manifest itself) and to differentiate a subject and object from one another (as
aesthetic experience is a type of encounter in which a subject becomes produced because one is forced to think) that defines the autonomous logic of the aesthetic (Deleuze, Difference, 85-86; Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 355; Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 180, 186). It is for this reason that aesthetic experience can operate as a model for metaphysics in which experience as encounter operates as self-determination. The universal dimension of the aesthetic is situated within the capacity to align the virtual with the actual, which is a universal principle that can only emerge through the particularity of encounter. The aesthetic is therefore also defined by a subjective or network-universal.

The difference with the network-universal of science studies is that the universal dimension of science does not refer to the alignment between virtual and actual (the determination of a virtual potential), but to the universal character of actual (empirical) reality. This implies that science studies is solely concerned with actual reality and neglects the relation between virtual and actual, which forms the basis of Deleuze's metaphysics. When the relation between virtual and actual becomes eliminated, a relation cannot be productive and no world is possible. ANT is correct in arguing that the social (and metaphysics) is based upon a network-universal, but misconceives the character of this network-universal. Science cannot operate as a model for a network-universal precisely because it cannot understand how the encounter between two entities is productive of a virtual potential, which allows a shared world to occur. The network-universal of science studies is concerned with the visualization of the universal character of empirical reality, whereas the network-universal of aesthetics is based upon the production of empirical reality through the relation between virtual and actual.

In order to understand this distinction between a network-universal based on science and a network-universal based upon the aesthetic, I argue that Latourian networks are defined by relationality and symmetry, whereas Deleuzian networks are defined by singularity and asymmetry. Asymmetry emphasizes a confrontation with otherness, something that forces us to think. Aesthetic experience is asymmetrical because it generates a specific space-time of its own and therefore establishes a break with common sensory perception. The asymmetrical encounter is productive, it is a confrontation with otherness, generates thought, and therefore produces the new (Deleuze, Difference, 24-25, 29; Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 342). ANT, on the other hand, is not concerned with asymmetry, but
symmetry; this is because NH entities play an equal role in the constitution of the social as human agents (Latour, *Reassembling*, 76). This has resulted in the conception of distributed agency, which means that H actions can be influenced by NH entities. This would make agency not an asymmetrical condition (based upon the priority of H intentionality), but a symmetrical one (in which H and NH play an equal role). This blurring of the ontological distinction between H and NH is also visible in Deleuze’s metaphysics. However, the difference with ANT is situated within the way Deleuze conceptualizes the relation between entities as an asymmetrical type of encounter. This does not mean the priority of H over NH, but the fact that a relation itself has an asymmetrical character. A relation cannot be symmetrical precisely because something in reality must force one to think in order for the relation to be productive of a virtual potential. When a relation ceases to be asymmetrical, the determination of a virtual potential becomes transformed to determination due to the empirical attachments in which one is involved. Whereas Deleuze has indeed a concept of essence (essence as virtual potential) (Deleuze, *Difference*, 251; Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 430-431; Bryant 64), ANT has no concept of essence at all (Latour, *We Have*, 87). When an entity is defined by the empirical attachments in which it is involved, its ontological status is defined through a tracing of these attachments and not through the way an entity has striven for the determination of its virtual potential. This distinction between Deleuze and Latour can be understood through the difference between singularity (a network based on the actualization of virtual potential) and relationality (a network based solely on empirical attachments).

III. The Concept of the Social Needs to be Split into Two

*Gilles Deleuze: The Distinction between Content and Expression*

The network-universal of science and technology studies forms the basis of Latour’s new conception of the social. If we acknowledge that this network-universal leads to a distortion of the virtual-actual relation, then we can understand why Latour’s new conception of the social is in fact a collapse of the social order. ANT resulted out of the critique that traditional sociology mixed up two different meanings of the social: the assembling of the collective and the result of the assembling (society) (Latour, *Reassembling*, 8). By uncoupling the two, it becomes apparent
that society is the outcome of a constellation of movements that compose a collective out of heterogeneous elements (H as well as NH) (Latour, *Reassembling*, 72, 238). ANT would in this regard acknowledge that the social has a dual aspect, whereas traditional sociology is concerned with the social as One. However, even though Latour makes the statement that ANT acknowledges the dual-character of the social, I want to argue that in fact the opposite is the case. Whereas for Latour the dual aspect of the social is situated within the distinction between the composing of the assemblage and the stabilized result that is produced by assemblage, for Deleuze the dual aspect of the social is present within the composing of the assemblage itself. This is visible in the fact that *every assemblage needs to consist of two principles, which are distinct from each other: content and expression* (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 50, 67). In order to understand this double-bind of content and expression, one needs first to understand the distinctions Deleuze makes among stratification, assemblage, and machine (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 259). No assemblage can occur outside stratification, as it is through stratification that a form can be determined and the social can take up a particular form (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 83, 556). Outside stratification there cannot be anything at all (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 585). However, even though there cannot exist anything outside stratification, an assemblage can nevertheless not be reduced to stratified form. This is the case because a stratified form cannot exist in isolation, but only in relation to other stratified forms and therefore can only exist as assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 130). If a stratified form could exist in isolation, it would operate as a form of representation (the relation between signifier and signified). The fact that stratification, however, requires relation to other stratified forms means that it is not primarily about meaning, but about the creation of order, the generation of a pragmatic system that makes it possible for a shared world to emerge (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 78). In order for a world to be possible, we need stratification, the particularization of form, but also the integration of form within everyday practice. This means that there is no assemblage without stratification, but also no stratification without assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 82).

One could introduce the concept of the smooth in this case, which refers to the countering of stratification, the prevention of stratification from becoming a form of representation (complete alignment between
signifier and signified) (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 552, 556). An assemblage can then be defined as constellation of the smooth and striated, which is equivalent to Latour’s argument that the condition of an agent is not given, but emerges through inclusion within H and NH attachments (the inclusion within an assemblage) (Latour, *Reassembling*, 217). However, the difference with Latour is situated in the fact that stratification is a double articulation of both content and expression (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 46-48, 51, 83, 165-166). The dual aspect of the social is therefore situated for Deleuze within the act of assemblage itself (being a determination of both content and expression, which are distinct from one another) instead of the duality being situated between assemblage and the product of assemblage. This distinction between content and expression within stratification is related to Deleuze’s concept of the *machine*. A machine is distinct from assemblage, yet an assemblage requires a machine in order to emerge (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 117, 388). What defines a machine is that it connects actual reality (to which belongs the assemblage) to the realm of the virtual (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 164). Through a machine, the determination of a virtual potential becomes initiated, which makes an assemblage possible. Also, the machine is responsible for the opening up of the assemblage towards difference, the new, which is necessary in order to prevent an assemblage from becoming a closed system that is reduced to actual reality as such (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 116, 124, 167, 389). A machine is in this sense not equivalent to the smooth, but stands for the principle that connects smooth and striated. It is this connection between smooth and striated that makes an assemblage possible. The machine could be reformulated as the principle that connects virtual and actual; it makes the determination of a virtual potential into actual form possible without being equivalent to either the realm of the virtual or actual reality. The machine is the gap between virtual and actual, which explains why virtual and actual are both related and distinct at the same time. This concept of the machine is essential in order to understand stratification as double articulation of both content and expression.

The distinction between content and expression can be reformulated as the distinction between virtual Idea as potential (content) and actualization (expression). A virtual Idea itself, however, is not yet content, but only the potential of content (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 51). This is the case because the Idea for Deleuze is not a Platonic Idea (a content waiting to be realized), but operates as problem-Idea. This means that the Idea
has no model, but only takes up existence through particularization. The Idea as problem–Idea therefore implies that the Idea can be particularized in different ways (Deleuze, *Difference*, 212, 233, 240, 275). Otherwise, we would be dealing with the relation between signifier and signified. When the Idea can be particularized in different ways, it follows that Idea and particularization must be distinct from one another. Without distinction, Idea and actual reality would be completely aligned with one another. This would be an empirical reality incapable of difference and the new. Idea and actualization (virtual and actual) are related yet distinct (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 115). Only in this way can experience operate as the basis for metaphysics. Instead of an assemblage of empirical actors (H and NH) we are dealing with an assemblage in which an Idea strives for particularization. The Idea is then an integral aspect of assemblages and cannot be completely equated with expression. It is this dual aspect that makes assemblage itself possible, as it is responsible for the fact that stratified form does not operate as representation, but as pragmatic system (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 76, 77, 100). Without the inclusion of the Idea within assemblages through the machine, a stratified form would be a form without content. Instead of defining the social as a network of H and NH agents (ANT), we should define it as an assemblage in which stratification operates as a double determination of content (virtual Idea) and expression (actualization). This means that we are dealing with a network in which a virtual Idea becomes expressed in both H and NH agents. An Idea as potential could in this sense be understood as a belief, which finds expression in material objects and guides the process of determination of subjects without being represented by them (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 256). Material objects cannot represent a belief precisely because of the distinction between content and expression. This inclusion of the Idea is lacking within ANT. In order to understand the social, one does not need to trace the empirical attachments between actors, but the relation between Idea and particularization (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 116-117).

However, the dual aspect of content and expression is more complicated than the general inclusion of a virtual Idea in particularization. Instead of a general assemblage, content and expression constitute two distinct types of assemblages in their own right, which are integrated into one another yet distinct (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 66, 101, 126-127, 163). This distinction between an assemblage of content and an assemblage of
expression does not mean that expression would be lacking in the assemblage of content or that content would be lacking in the assemblage of expression. The double-bind between content and expression is present in both assemblages, but takes up a different form in each of them (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 51, 74). The assemblage of expression is concerned with language and the semiotic system (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 70, 72). It reintroduces the double-bind of content and expression in order for language to operate as pragmatic system instead of representation (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 88-89, 97). The assemblage of content is concerned with technology and power and refers to the relation of people with material/technological objects (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 69, 72). The dualism of content and expression is present in order for material objects and technology not to be a mere representation of belief (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 76-77). The distinction between content and expression therefore not only points towards the distinction between Idea and particularization, but also to the distinction between two domains of the social: the domain of language/semiotics and the domain of materials and technology. One could reformulate these domains as the lifeworld (language) and system (technology) (Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action: The Critique, 231). This simultaneous relation and distinction between content and expression on these two levels (Idea and particularization, technology and language) is completely missing in ANT.

A Critical Analysis of Latour’s Splitting of the Social into Two

If we follow the idea that assemblage must consist of two components, which are integrated yet distinct from one another (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 50), one can either conclude that the concept of assemblage (the social) put forward by ANT is incorrect or that it stands for a particular condition of the social in which the distinction between content and expression, lifeworld and system, has disappeared. If we consider that Latour defines a social relation through the attachments between H and NH actors (which are necessary in order for action to be possible) then we are not dealing with the assemblage of expression (lifeworld), but with the assemblage of content (system). The assemblage of content is concerned with the domain of materials and technology and therefore with the empirical matters that make action possible, whereas the assemblage of expression is concerned with the domain of cultural and moral values that
make communication possible (the lifeworld). Following the fact that ANT critiques the idea of the social as a set of cultural values and norms, instead focusing on the attachments between empirical actors, one can conclude that an actor-network solely consists of assemblage as system. The mistake Latour makes is that he considers the social as a set of cultural and moral norms to be the end result of the act of assembling H and NH actors (Latour, Reassembling, 8, 238). However, following my discussion of the distinction between content and expression, the lifeworld must already be present within the activity of assembling itself. It cannot be a mere end result (Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action: The Critique, 231). Content and expression (system and lifeworld) are integrated yet distinct, which implies that both are principles in their own right and therefore that one cannot be produced by the other. Assemblage as system cannot produce assemblage as lifeworld.

However, the neglect of the distinction between content and expression does not solely mean the reduction of the social to assemblage as content (system), but also the elimination of the distinction between content and expression within the assemblage of content itself. Because ANT defines a social relation through empirical attachments between H and NH actors, the elimination of the distinction between content and expression can only mean that the assemblage of content is solely based upon expression (therefore having no content). This might seem paradoxical, but it is a logical consequence of the fact that Latour neglects the inclusion of a virtual Idea within assemblages. When an assemblage consists of nothing but empirical attachments, it is solely expressive (because it lacks the inclusion of an Idea), yet these empirical attachments do not constitute the assemblage of expression because they are solely concerned with the material connections that are necessary for action to be possible. This interpretation of ANT defines it as a conception of the social that is solely concerned with the distribution of goods, the empirical attachments between H and NH entities, without the existence of a lifeworld of shared cultural and moral values that would give these attachments a content. This idea of an assemblage that operates regardless of a lifeworld is the condition of capitalism and modernity (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 527). It means that relations between H and NH entities are possible across different societies, regardless of their cultural norms and values. Such a conception of the social, in which the integration and distinction between assemblage as expression and assemblage as content has become reduced to assemblage
as content (being contentless), can only be understood through the idea that within modernity content and expression, system and lifeworld, become detached from one another (Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason*, xxxi; *The Theory of Communicative Action: The Critique*, 172).

This detachment is a result of processes of rationalization in which the lifeworld as a set of beliefs, cultural traditions, or superstitions has become replaced by the becoming autonomous of different value spheres (art, law, religion, and science) (Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason*, 23, 71-72; *The Theory of Communicative Action: The Critique*, 196). This differentiation of value spheres, however, means that there is no longer a shared lifeworld that forms the basis of everyday communication, but that it has become transformed into a realm for specialists: the scientist, artist, lawyer, etc. (Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason*, xxxi, 70). The differentiation of value spheres constitutes a detachment between system and lifeworld because the lifeworld is no longer integrated within everyday action and communication, therefore becoming detached from the relation of people with everyday objects and technology (system) (Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: The Critique*, 173). The detachment between lifeworld and system leads to an overtaking of lifeworld by system (Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: The Critique*, 155, 186, 232). This occurs because everyday communication has lost its reliance on a shared lifeworld and therefore becomes vulnerable to be become overtaken by system (Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: The Critique*, 196). The condition of modernity means that everyday communication has become included within assemblage as system, which as a result leads to a disappearance of assemblage as lifeworld (Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: The Critique*, 396). This also implies that the differentiation of value spheres must inevitably destroy itself because the overtaking of lifeworld by system means that there cannot be any value or content at all, also not within a specialized form. This condition can be theorized through ANT as an assemblage of content (system) that is contentless. It means that the social in modernity operates as assemblage as system that is solely expressive (having no content). Instead of ANT operating as a comparative anthropology (being a conception of the social that is applicable to different times and places), I argue that it defines the ontological condition of the moderns.
Following my argument that ANT is not an incorrect social theory, which neglects the distinction between content and expression, but instead describes a particular condition of the social in which expression (lifeworld) becomes completely detached from content (system) and overtaken by content, one can also understand the absence of the distinction between machine and assemblage within ANT. As argued above, a machine is what makes an assemblage possible and that opens up an assemblage towards difference. This is necessary in order for stratification to be possible and in order to prevent stratification from becoming a closed system (becoming reduced to actual reality). If there cannot be an assemblage without a machine, how is an actor-network then possible in the first place? How can the social take up the condition of an actor-network when an assemblage can only occur through a machine? An actor-network should not be interpreted as the absence of a machine, but as the disappearing of the distinction between assemblage and machine. The equation of machine with assemblage means that a machine no longer operates as the gap/principle that connects virtual and actual, but that the gap between virtual and actual becomes closed. The relation between virtual and actual through the machine becomes then transformed into a virtual-actual equation. This transformation of the virtual-actual relation is structurally equivalent to the transformation of the relation between lifeworld and system analyzed above. It is through the detachment of lifeworld and system that both become equated. The equation of virtual and actual also arises through a detachment. This detachment is the result of a reduction of reality to empiricism, which neglects the reality of a virtual Idea. A conception of the social in which lifeworld and system, actual and virtual become detached and equated means a conception of the social that is solely empirical while empirical reality has also disappeared. When the relation between virtual and actual through a machine becomes transformed into the simultaneous detachment and equation of virtual and actual, the machine does not disappear, but is itself this condition of simultaneous detachment and equation. Therefore, the gap between virtual and actual does not become eliminated, but the simultaneous detachment and equation of virtual and actual is itself the condition of the gap. The equation of assemblage and machine means that assemblage takes up the condition of the gap (meaning that assemblage becomes groundless) and that the gap takes up the condition of assemblage (meaning that machine as the principle of determination becomes reduced to empirical attachments).
Social change then becomes impossible as the assemblage can no longer be opened up towards difference through a machine. Instead of a machine being the principle that is responsible for the determination of a virtual potential, it becomes reduced to the determination of entities through their empirical attachments.

This is a form of determination that is solely expressive, but has no content. There cannot be any content when the inclusion of a virtual Idea within assemblage has become replaced by empirical attachments. The equation between assemblage and machine means that one’s ontological condition is defined by one’s empirical inclusion within an assemblage, instead of being defined by the striving for particularization of one’s virtual Idea. The equation between assemblage and machine is then the overtaking of machine by assemblage in a similar way as the overtaking of lifeworld by system. When social relations become reduced to assemblage as system, the social operates as a network of content that is solely expressive (having no content). This is consistent with the overtaking of machine by assemblage as being a transformation of self-determination into empirical connections. Both the determination of an actor and of the social becomes reduced to a network that is solely formal, which means a network that has only the illusion of determination, as in fact nothing is determined or expressed, for there is no content. The overtaking of machine by assemblage therefore generates a world that is both incapable of change (because the actual cannot be connected with the virtual) and delivers only the illusion of the social (no plateau can be constituted, as this implies the connection between virtual and actual) (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 201). The only thing that holds the world together are empirical networks, which can only deliver the illusion of a shared world.

IV. The Equation between Assemblage and Machine as the Ontological Condition of the Moderns

Deleuze: The Face-Machine and the Transformation of the Rhizome into a Machine

Whereas I have distinguished Deleuzian networks from actor-networks through the idea that ANT eliminates the distinction between content and expression, assemblage and machine, Deleuze, however, acknowledges that the elimination of this distinction can occur. He proposes in this regard
the concept of the pure event (Deleuze, Logic, 21) or Face-Machine (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 199, 205). The concepts “pure event” and “Face-Machine” are both concerned with a metaphysical condition in which virtual and actual become detached and equated and in this respect they are interchangeable. Deleuze uses the concept “pure event” in The Logic of Sense, whereas he introduces the term “Face-Machine” in A Thousand Plateaus. Because this article focuses mainly on A Thousand Plateaus, I will use the term “Face-Machine” throughout the remainder of the article and not “pure event.” The Face as a term refers to the regime of representation (the equation between signifier and signified) (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 134, 210). This can be understood as the equation of content and expression, which neglects the fact that stratified form can never be given, but must be produced within an assemblage. The equation between content and expression in representation is, however, not accompanied by the equation between assemblage and machine. It is a machine that has the potential to disrupt the closing down of assemblage that occurs through the overcoding of the Face (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 220). It therefore prevents representation from closing the world down to one state of affairs in which no difference is possible. The machine can be equated with Deleuze’s concept of desire, which means that desire stands for the principle that gives direction to experience as individuation or to the constitution of an assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 179, 256, 318). Because the machine is responsible for the connection between virtual and actual, it is what makes creation possible and therefore operates as a form of desire, the desire for the relation between virtual and actual. The Face is opposed to this desire for creation because it prevents the relation between virtual and actual by closing the world down to one interpretation, one image (the Face) (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 210). The Face and the machine are therefore opposed to one another.

However, the transcendence of this distinction is possible, which gives rise to the Face-Machine. The Face-Machine means that the machine becomes the desire for the Face, the desire to reduce the world to the overcoding image of the Face. Instead of operating through the regime of representation, the Face then itself becomes a form of desire, the desire to reduce creation itself to the Face (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 201). This is a contradictory situation as creation is opposed to the Face because the Face does not allow the relation between virtual and actual
to occur. The Face-Machine can therefore only mean that creation becomes the illusion of creation, while in fact being a form of destruction (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 155, 251, 332). The desire of the Face-Machine is a desire towards death because it is a form of creation only in appearance, a form of creation that does not determine a virtual potential, but destroys it. A Face-Machine is not based on interpretation, but upon the desire for expression without content (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 210). It means not the reduction of the world to a concept, but to appearance as such (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 212). Through his concept of the Face-Machine, Deleuze allows us to envision a conception of the social in which the distinction between virtual and actual, machine and assemblage, has disappeared.

The Face-Machine as the desire for expression without content can be equated with the detachment between content (system) and expression (lifeworld) leading to the overtaking of expression (lifeworld) by content (system), as analysed above (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 150, 152). This disruption of the relation between content and expression means that the Face-Machine disrupts the regime of signification. No signification is possible within a world that operates through the Face-Machine because it is a world that is solely based on the desire for expression without there being any content to be expressed (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 138, 141, 154-155). When lifeworld becomes taken over by system, no sign can any longer signify. The loss of the distinction between assemblage and machine is therefore called by Deleuze the entrance into a new Age: the Age of the Machine (as opposed to the Age of Assemblage) (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 399). Within the Age of the Machine, a social relation becomes itself a machine, which means that the social is no longer defined by one’s inclusion within an assemblage, but is solely based upon one’s desire for expression (without content) (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 525, 527, 532). This might at first seem contradictory to my argument that the equation of assemblage and machine results in an overtaking of the machine by assemblage: one is defined by one’s inclusion within an assemblage instead of through the determination of a virtual potential. However, the reduction of the social to assemblage also means that it can no longer operate through assemblage. When determination becomes reduced to empirical attachments it means that one’s inclusion within attachments functions through subjectivation, through desire: the desire to determine oneself through one’s inclusion within attachments.
The overtaking of the machine by assemblage therefore paradoxically means the end of the Age of Assemblage and the entering of the Age of the Machine. The social cannot operate any longer according to assemblages when assemblages become transformed from the constitution of a shared plateau (which makes a shared world possible) into the subjective desire for expression. Assemblage then becomes a way for people to fulfil their own desires instead of being the constitution of a common world. It is for this reason that the reduction of the social to assemblage means the transformation of a social relation into a machine. Such a conception of the social means that the regime of signification becomes replaced by the regime of subjectivation (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 148, 151).14

A different way to theorize the equation of assemblage and machine is through the transformation of the rhizome into a machine. The rhizome is an important concept within Deleuze’s philosophy as it stands for a new model that is opposed to the model of the tree (which means the model of representation). The model of the tree reduces the social to a hierarchical system in which the relation between actors is based on the logic of resemblance: X=X=not Y (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 16). The tree stands for a model of the social based on representation, the alignment between signifier and signified. A social relation within the regime of the tree takes the form of the faculty of judgment, which establishes analogy between subject, concept, and objects in the world. This means that a social relation is based on a judgement of truth as One: the truth of the State, of representation, which does not allow X to stand for anything else other than the concept it is supposed to represent (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 3). However, precisely because the model of the tree is based upon representation, it cannot provide a model of the social, but only a distortion of it. The model of the tree stabilizes social relations, makes them rigid (like the rigidity of the tree) so that change becomes impossible (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 6). A conception of the social based upon the model of the tree must therefore always be accompanied by a machine that disrupts the tree, disrupts the social order based upon representation (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 63, 117). A social order solely based upon the tree (without machine) cannot exist because the tree cannot connect the actual with the virtual and therefore cannot establish a plateau by itself. In order to counter this distortion of the social through the tree, Deleuze proposes the concept of the rhizome.

Within the model of the rhizome, there are no hierarchies, no stabilization
of relations, but everything is connected to everything else. Within a rhizome an entity can take up not only any position potentially, but also take up any form (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand, 5*, 21-22). Whereas a tree is based upon the differenciation and hierarchization of form (defining it according to a particular shape and position), within a rhizome entities are undifferenciated from one another. A rhizome does not consist of a constellation of formed entities, but only of undifferenciated potentialities, which means that entities are only defined relatively through their temporal connections to other entities, which are continuously modified.\(^{15}\) Within a rhizome one therefore has only movements of speed and slowness (the movement of the attachments of undifferenciated multiplicities), but no determination of form (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand, 22*). The rhizome takes up a paradoxical condition in this respect as it can neither be reduced to the One nor the multiple (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand, 22*). The rhizome cannot be reduced to a constellation of multiples precisely because entities are undifferenciated. However, the rhizome can also not be reduced to the One because, as a realm of undifferenciated potentials that are unhierarchized and without form, it is opposed to the condition of truth as One (the alignment between signifier and signified). Instead of the One or the multiple, a rhizome is defined by multiplicities (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand, 7*, 22). This allows us to understand why also the rhizome (as was the case for the model of the tree) cannot operate as model of the social. The social cannot take the form of a rhizome because the rhizome is without form, being a realm of undifferenciated multiplicities that are undetermined. *A rhizomatic world would be a world without differenciation, without expression, and therefore would not be a world at all.* Instead of the replacement of the model of the tree with the model of the rhizome, one should understand that tree and rhizome can only consist in constellation with one another (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand, 15*, 21, 39). Deleuze makes the argument that a tree has rhizomatic roots and a rhizome arborescent knots. It is only their constellation that allows us to understand that the social both requires the determination of form and the dismantling of form (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand, 63*).

However, whereas the rhizome can indeed not be a model of the social, this changes in the Age of the Machine. When the distinction between assemblage and machine becomes eliminated, the distinction between rhizome and machine becomes eliminated as well. The rhizome and machine are normally distinct from one another, as a rhizome stands for
the virtual realm of undifferenciated potentialities, whereas the machine for the principle that connects this virtual realm with actual reality (allowing undifferenciated potentialities to become differenciated). When the rhizome itself takes up the condition of the machine, undifferenciated potentialities can no longer be differenciated. This condition can be understood through the idea that a social relation is no longer made possible by a machine, but becomes itself a machine (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 532). A relation as machine means that desire no longer operates through the determination of a virtual potential, but through determination as empirical attachments. The assemblage in which one is involved becomes a determination of one’s own desire instead of being a constitution of the social. The determination of form becomes in this sense relativized: everything is potentially connected to everything else because the form of an entity is defined by empirical attachments, which can be changed continuously. When the determination of form is based on desire for expression (without content) form becomes undifferenciated. What an entity is, is defined by the desire for empirical attachments and precisely because these attachments can change and be desired by other entities, every entity in the end becomes the same as every other entity.

*When a social relation takes up the condition of the machine, it transforms the social into an undifferenciated realm of potentialities and therefore into a rhizome* (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 315, 451, 490). The rhizome as machine means indeed the absence of hierarchization and representation (one could be anywhere and take up any form), but simultaneously it generates an increased form of stratification: by reducing the machine to actual reality, no change is possible, the virtual realm of potentiality can no longer be connected to actual reality (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 245, 333). The rhizome as machine means therefore a closed world that is incapable of change while simultaneously being defined by continuous change: one could be anywhere and take up any form (which is only the illusion of form) (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 247, 533). A conception of the social based upon the rhizome could, according to Deleuze, only take up the condition of war: the destruction of the social and self-determination (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 268–269, 490).16 This is not a form of war in the traditional sense, but the transformation of experience itself into a form of war (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 267–268, 491–492, 543).17 Experience as machine means the destruction of both oneself and a shared world because experience as
machine is incapable of constituting a plateau. A rhizomatic world is only held together through the impossibility of social change (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 527, 532). The rhizome as machine transforms the world into a groundless world (which is not a world at all). It has only the appearance of a world because it is bound by the impossibility of change.

**ANT as a New Condition of Universality: The Simultaneous Detachment and Equation of Virtual and Actual**

Based on my analysis above, one can understand that the elimination of the distinction between content and expression and the transformation of the virtual-actual relation into empirical attachments within ANT can be theorized through Deleuze’s concept of the Face-Machine and the rhizome as machine.¹⁸ This condition is the ontological condition of the moderns, the Age of the Machine. It means that ANT should be reinterpreted from a comparative anthropology of nature-cultures (Latour, *We Have*, 107; *Inquiry*, 17) to the ontological condition of the moderns. Instead of proving that “We Have Never been Modern,” ANT proves the ontological condition of the moderns themselves. This ontological condition can be understood as a new form of universality: the simultaneous detachment and equation of virtual and actual. This simultaneous detachment and equation is a form of universality because it means that the virtual becomes the actual condition of reality as such. When actual reality takes up the condition of the virtual, actual form takes up the condition of potentiality, which means that the determination of actual form is only an illusion in that any sense of boundary has disappeared. The universal is then no longer situated in the virtual-actual relation, but in the fact that actual reality itself has taken up the condition of the virtual. The ontological condition of the moderns is in this sense indeed distinct from the ontological condition of the premoderns as it is not one nature-culture constellation among many others, but a nature-culture constellation that has taken up a new condition of universality.¹⁹ This means that the distinction between the moderns and premoderns (Latour, *We Have*, 97) is correct after all. The simultaneous detachment and equation between virtual and actual as a new form of universality means the realization of what Deleuze calls the utopian condition of the *Body without Organs* (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 179). The Body without Organs stands for the condition in which virtuality and actuality have achieved the most ideal condition of
reconciliation. It means that the distinction between an unrealized potential and the determination of this potential would have disappeared (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 175, 179, 182). This can be read as the most ideal world in which every entity has achieved and realized its inner potential to the fullest. However, such a condition is not possible to occur because ideal reconciliation means that the distinction between virtual and actual disappears. It means a reality that is simultaneously solely actual (which is a reality in which no change is possible) and a reality that is solely virtual (which is a reality without expression, without qualities) (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 187). The condition of the Body without Organs is not a state that should ever be achieved, but solely a principle that one strives for, that gives direction to creation (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 174). It is what guides creation through the desire for connecting the virtual with the actual and therefore protects creation from distortion. The Body without Organs as the desire for connecting virtual and actual implies their distinction.

My statement that the simultaneous detachment and equation of virtual and actual constitutes a new universality does not, however, mean a form of universality as One. Universality as One means the realm of representation, the model of the tree, which both Latour and Deleuze have critiqued. The simultaneous detachment and equation of virtual and actual is a form of universality that is subjective. It means a universal world in which the universal is bound to H – NH attachments and therefore cannot take a general form, but only a subjective one. It is precisely because Latour proposes a subjective form of universality (as does Deleuze) that it is easily overlooked that Latour’s conception of subjective universality is in fact a distortion of the virtual-actual relation. The distinction between both types of subjective universality can be understood through my argument that Deleuze’s subjective universal is based upon the autonomy of the aesthetic, whereas Latour’s subjective universal is based upon science. The autonomy of the aesthetic is a subjective universal because it stands for a relation between virtual and actual in which both are related yet distinct. The condition of the aesthetic is neither a property of the encountered object nor a projection by the subject, but a condition that emerges through encounter. A subjective universal based on science means that science can indeed make visible a universal condition of empirical reality, yet is bound to the H-NH attachments (the laboratory of the scientist) in order to make this visible. The difference with a subjective
universality based upon the aesthetic is that the subjective universality of science transforms empirical reality into a general universal, whereas the subjective universality of the aesthetic makes the self-determination of a virtual potential possible, which leads to a common world.

The subjective universality of ANT does not generate a common world, but a universal world.  

This can be reformulated as actual reality taking up the condition of the virtual. It is for this reason that Latour puts forward an empirical metaphysics. Because empirical metaphysics neglects the necessity of empirical reality to be determined out of the virtual, it must be based upon a new form of universality. This universality can only be situated within actual reality, which, as a result, takes up the condition of the simultaneous detachment and equation of virtual and actual. An empirical metaphysics is the metaphysics of the moderns, of the Age of the Machine. Because the subjective universality of ANT is based upon science studies (in which the universal stands for the universal dimension of empirical reality or nature) one could say that ANT is not a theory of society, but transforms society back into nature. This is indeed the condition of the Anthropocene: instead of a nature-culture entanglement, the distinction between nature and culture has disappeared completely. Society itself has become a natural force (Latour, Inquiry, 9; Waar kunnen we landen?, 53-54).

V. The Simultaneous Detachment and Equation of Virtual and Actual as a Universality Based upon a Schizophrenic Aesthetic

An Actor-Network is Aesthetic After All: a Formal Network without Content

Whereas I have argued above that subjective universality in ANT is based upon science, instead of the autonomy of the aesthetic, an actor-network paradoxically ends up affirming the condition of the aesthetic. This can be understood if we acknowledge that an actor-network means the equation of virtual and actual, assemblage and machine, content and expression. When these respective distinctions are eliminated, a social relation becomes itself a machine: a desire for expression without content. When an actor-network is a network based on the desire for expression (without content), an actor-network can only operate through aestheticization. Aestheticization operates in this sense not through the autonomous logic of the aesthetic, but through aesthetics as theatricalization: the illusion of form. This can also be understood through the idea that an actor-network
operates as Face-Machine: social relations become facialized, which means that a social relation operates through the desire for deception, the theatricalization of form. When the social takes up the condition of Face-Machine, the social becomes theatricalized. It is the plateau as a theatre stage, which is not a plateau at all, but is in fact a sort of groundlessness. Whereas Latour neglects that the social requires the aesthetic, he ends up affirming the aesthetic without realizing it. In order to understand why this is the case, one needs to take a closer look at Latour’s work *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*.

Within this work Latour further develops ANT by specifying that actor-networks can operate in different ways and therefore give rise to different ontological modes of existence. Whereas a social relation always operates as an actor-network for Latour, not every social relation is defined by the same content (Latour, *Inquiry*, 35-36, 64). The H-NH attachments that are present within the encounter with a work of art are not the same ones that are present when one has to appear before a court of law. In both cases we are dealing with attachments of H-NH actors, but the content that passes through these attachments is different (Latour, *Inquiry*, 177). In the case of a court of law, the attachments between files, stamps, judge, lawyer, etc., make it possible for a particular mode of existence to manifest itself, namely the law (Latour, *Inquiry*, 374). The content of a mode of existence is then defined by the particularity of the empirical attachments in which one is involved. This means that a mode of existence establishes itself when the right associations between H and NH actors are present (Latour, *Inquiry*, 153). However, this definition of content is incorrect, which is a result of the fact that Latour ignores the distinction between content and expression. Instead of content being a virtual Idea that becomes particularized through its inclusion within an assemblage, *for Latour an assemblage itself defines the content of that assemblage*. This is incorrect because it reduces content to empirical attachments, which can only occur when the distinction between virtual and actual has disappeared. An assemblage without content means that assemblage is solely based on the desire for expression without expression having any content. An assemblage operating in this sense is no longer an assemblage at all, but is a machine based on desire alone. *A mode of existence can from this perspective not be defined by an assemblage, not only because of the lack of content, but also because of the absence of assemblage itself: An assemblage is only an assemblage in illusion, while in fact it is a machine to fulfil personal*
desires. One can justify evil in the name of the law by behaving formally according to the network-attachments that define law as a mode of existence. Law as a mode of existence is then an illusion; in fact it is a network to fulfil personal desires.

The aim of An Inquiry into Modes of Existence is to deliver an anthropology of the moderns (Latour, Inquiry, 144). This means that, according to Latour, the ontological condition of the moderns is defined by the differentiation of particular modes of existence like law, art, science, politics, and religion (Latour, Inquiry, 290, 379). The differentiation of these value-spheres occurs through the taking up of different contents by different actor-networks. The ontological condition of the moderns for Latour is therefore defined by a constellation of actor-networks, which are integrated within each other, yet each have a particular content (mode of existence) (Latour, Inquiry, 307). From one perspective, one could say that this ontological condition of the moderns is incorrect precisely because ANT is based on the elimination of the distinction between content and expression. This means that ANT cannot explain the passing of value (content) through networks and therefore that the differentiation of actor-networks through the passing of a different content is impossible. An actor-network can only operate as an aestheticized network that has the illusion of content. However, from another perspective one could say that ANT provides an answer to the question regarding how the condition of the social of the moderns is indeed based on the differentiating of modes of existence, while at the same time being opposed to this differentiation. Within the Age of the Machine, the elimination of the distinction between assemblage and machine means that a social relation is defined by the desire for expression (without content) through its inclusion within empirical attachments. The different empirical attachments that constitute an actor-network can therefore indeed produce different expressions (different modes of existence), while in fact we are dealing with only the illusion of difference (as each expression has the same content, namely the desire for expression without content).

What defines the content of each expression is the fact that it stands for a formal network without content, a theatricalized network. The differentiation of modes of existence is then indeed a differentiation, but only a differentiation in appearance. The ontological condition of the moderns can be defined by the separation of art, religion, law, politics, and science as different value spheres, but only in appearance. This
statement might seem provocative, as it implies that science, art, law, politics, and religion would be without content in the Age of Modernity. It would mean that there can be no scientific truth, aesthetic truth, political or religious community within the Age of the Moderns.\textsuperscript{21} This is a logical consequence of the fact that a social relation based on desire for expression without content does not constitute a plateau, but destroys it. When a plateau does not become constituted, there can be no truth, as there can be no thought at all. Thinking, for Deleuze, can only occur through a form of becoming in which a plateau becomes constituted. Within the Age of the Moderns, plateau-constitution (and therefore thought) becomes replaced by theatrical actor-networks. What holds the social together are networks that have only the illusion of form, which constitute the illusion of a plateau, the plateau as theatre stage.\textsuperscript{22} This means that, although the moderns have made the autonomous dimension of the aesthetic explicit (through the invention of autonomous art and philosophical aesthetics), they have in fact destroyed the autonomous dimension of the aesthetic. Within a world in which the distinction between machine and assemblage has disappeared, the aesthetic can no longer be autonomous, as the relation between virtual and actual has been made impossible.

The ontological condition of the moderns can then indeed be described through the aesthetic and moreover through an aesthetic that is universal. \textit{The aesthetic must be universal as the simultaneous detachment and equation between virtual and actual gives rise to a new sense of universality.} This universal aesthetic is a subjective universal because the universality of the simultaneous detachment and equation between virtual and actual takes the form of networks between H and NH entities. This leads to a surprising realization, namely that both Deleuzian metaphysics and ANT are based upon a subjective universality that is aesthetic.\textsuperscript{23} This is paradoxical because the subjective universal dimension of the aesthetic is what defines aesthetic autonomy. This autonomy is, however, impossible within an actor-network. Instead of the autonomy of the aesthetic, I argue that ANT is defined by \textit{a universal aesthetic that is schizophrenic}.\textsuperscript{24} An aesthetics that is schizophrenic can be understood through the fact that ANT proposes a form of determination that is based upon the illusion of form, instead of the actual determination of a virtual potential. This is schizophrenic because the desire for the illusion of form implies the lack of an enduring self, quality, or order. Empirical metaphysics can then be reinterpreted as a metaphysics based on aesthetic experience that is schizophrenic, whereas
Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism is based on aesthetic experience that is autonomous.

A Deconstruction of Latour’s Statement “We Have Never Been Modern”

Latour’s view that “We Have Never Been Modern” is a complex argument because it does not solely operate as a critique of modernity (the idea that the moderns would be radically distinct from the premoderns), but also as a defence of modernity (Latour, *We Have*, 47, 78). By redefining modernity as an assemblage of H – NH entities (a nature-culture constellation), Latour also defends modernity. This defence is situated within the fact that the distinctions between nature and culture, subject and object, do not stand for the actual ontological condition of the moderns, but are only misinterpretations of it. Instead, Latour proposes a conception of modernity as nature-culture constellation in which the distinctions between subject and object, nature and culture, are the stabilized outcomes of assemblages of H and NH entities (Latour, *We Have*, 10-11). In other words, Latour does not critique the distinction between nature and culture, but reinterprets this distinction as being the result of acts of purification that are produced by assemblages. Whereas the practice of science itself is indeed an assemblage (and therefore is not based upon the distinction between nature and culture), it has nevertheless the capacity to make visible nature as a realm distinct from culture (Latour, *We Have*, 79). A scientific fact is both socially constructed and a natural fact. By rethinking purification (the distinction between nature and culture) as the result of assemblage, Latour can both critique modernity and defend modernity. Latour can then indeed make the statement that “We Have Never Been Modern” (because modernity is a nature-culture constellation, just as with the premodern) and defend modernity (through the inclusion of purification within assemblages) (Latour, *We Have*, 11, 134-135).

However, this redefinition of modernity is incorrect. Understanding both the modern and premodern as nature-culture constellations is incorrect because the ontological condition of the moderns is based on a new sense of universality. The simultaneous detachment and equation of virtual and actual means that the condition of modernity is based upon the simultaneous detachment and equation of nature and culture. The social is then not a nature-culture constellation, but is both completely detached from nature and itself transformed into nature. This takes the form of the destruction
of the social in which the constitution of a shared plateau becomes transformed into groundlessness. *A mediation between nature and culture (nature-culture constellation) is not the same as the loss of their distinction (detachment and equation of nature and culture).* Secondly, the reformulation of modernity as the inclusion of purification within assemblages is incorrect because an actor-network itself makes purification impossible. I have analysed how an actor-network is based on the elimination of the distinction between content and expression, assemblage and machine. This means that an actor-network is a formal network without content and solely based on the desire for expression. The differentiation of modes of existence can then be nothing but the illusion of purification. Because an actor-network is without content, it cannot include purification.

What defines the ontological condition of the moderns is ANT itself. ANT is based upon the equation of content and expression, assemblage and machine, virtual and actual, which defines a new form of universality that is schizophrenic. The ontological condition of the moderns is the transformation of the universal into schizophrenia. Although Latour fails to acknowledge this schizophrenic condition, he does give an indication of it in his work *We Have Never Been Modern* by defining modernity as threefold transcendence and threefold immanence:

They (the moderns) have not made Nature, they make Society; they make Nature, they have not made Society; they have not made either, God has made everything; God has made nothing, they have made everything. (Latour, *We Have* 34)

This definition of the moderns is put forward in order to explain why it is possible that modernity is based upon the distinction between nature and culture, while such a distinction is impossible, as nothing can occur apart from assemblages. Latour explains this by arguing that the conception of nature and culture (society) of the moderns is itself paradoxical. They envision nature to be what is distinct from society, what is not man-made, while simultaneously envisioning nature as a realm that can be manipulated to human advantages and therefore become human-made (Latour, *We Have*, 32). The same occurs in the case of society; society is the realm that is humanly made and in this sense is distinct from nature. However, society is at the same time envisioned as being outside the control of human beings as social order is based upon the law of God (Latour, *We Have*, 37). This reliance on God could be questioned, but can be replaced
by the idea that modern societies have become so complex that it is impossible for human beings to modify them or master them. This definition of modernity based upon threefold transcendence and threefold immanence is important because it highlights that modernity is intrinsically schizophrenic.

Latour argues that this schizophrenic condition can be countered by becoming aware that the distinction between nature and society is the outcome of assemblages (Latour, *We Have*, 79, 140-141). From this perspective, nature and culture are indeed both entangled and separate, but they stop being schizophrenic. However, this rethinking of modernity makes invisible the idea that modernity is schizophrenic also when it is redefined as assemblage of H and NH entities. *An assemblage itself can be schizophrenic*. Latour does acknowledge this in his argument that the moderns have made hybrids proliferate. This means that the moderns have produced a massive increase of nature-culture hybrids (more than any other premodern society) precisely because these hybrids are invisible (Latour, *We Have*, 12, 34). When modernity is based on the distinction between nature and culture, yet must nevertheless operate as a nature-culture assemblage, it produces hybrids without realizing it. What is important is that the hybrids of the moderns are distinct from the hybrids of premodern societies (Latour, *We Have*, 12, 42). Latour speaks in this sense of “monsters.” A monster becomes produced when the determination of a hybrid (the continuity between subject and object) is no longer based on the relation between virtual and actual, but can take up any form (Latour, *We Have*, 41).

I have argued above that the relation between virtual and actual has its own rationality (the autonomous logic of the aesthetic), which gives direction to determination. Individuation as becoming other must be both an experience based upon affect and upon thought (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 439, 441). *When this relation between virtual and actual becomes distorted (which occurs in an actor-network) hybrids become produced that are monstrous*. Latour argues that these “monsters” can be countered by becoming aware that purification is not given, but must become produced (Latour, *We Have*, 134-135, 141). However, this is not possible precisely because a schizophrenic assemblage does not allow purification to occur. Instead of including purification within assemblages, one should say that the moderns are incapable of purification at all. The moderns are not differentiated from the premoderns through the capacity of purification, but by the loss of it.
VI. A Schizophrenic Conception of the Social Can be Countered through the Cosmic-Machine

Deleuze: The Cosmic-Machine

When the ontological condition of the moderns is indeed based upon the simultaneous detachment and equation of virtual and actual, in which actual reality has taken up the virtual condition of undifferenziated potentialities, no social change is possible. Social change can only occur through the connection between virtual and actual by a machine. This is made impossible when an assemblage itself becomes a machine and therefore can no longer be disrupted by a machine. Can this condition be countered? Is there any way that the destruction of the social in the Age of the Machine can be resolved? I have argued that a social relation as machine cannot operate in terms of the determination of a virtual potential, but only as the desire for expression as such (without content). This is a result of the elimination of the distinction between content (system) and expression (lifeworld) in which the lifeworld becomes taken over by system. However, a social relation as machine can also operate in a different way. Instead of a machine based upon the desire for expression without content, it can be a machine based upon the desire for content without expression. The desire for expression without content can be reformulated as death-drive, which means an experience that is only the illusion of creation while in fact being destruction. The desire for content without expression can be reformulated as the drive to life, which means that one chooses for life and creation even though no life/creation is yet possible. The drive to life is the most ultimate sense of autonomy because it indicates that the principle of life is not dependent upon a world in which it can express itself, but even subsists when metaphysics has taken up the condition of schizophrenia in which no creation or life can occur. The drive to life shows the paradox that the most ultimate autonomous creation is "creation without creation," the drive for creation within a condition in which no creation is possible. It means that one does not let one's process of individuation be defined by the experiences and potentialities offered by society (which is a desire for expression without content, individuation as the illusion of form), but bases individuation upon the desire for content, the desire for the relation between virtual and actual, which is the true condition of metaphysics and the social. This desire for content can only
take the form of a desire for content without expression. Expression is impossible precisely because the Age of the Machine only allows expression to occur that is contentless.

This leads to the strange conclusion that the Age of the Machine is without form at all: it only allows the illusion of form to occur and prevents the true determination of form. This is the condition of experience as pure event or Face-Machine: experience not as the determination of form, but as the illusion of form, which is an experience that is immaterial. Deleuze argues in this regard that the Age of the Machine means that the relation between matter and form becomes replaced by the relation between material and force (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 398-399, 466). The relation between matter and form is the relation that defines the old age (the Age of Assemblage), which is the age in which machine and assemblage are related yet distinct from one another. This age is based upon the determination of unformed matter (matter as chaos) (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 50, 164). The formation of matter could be approached through the making of art, art as the ordering of chaos, the formation of matter from the state of nature into a nature-culture constellation (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 368). The relation between material and force, on the other hand, means that in the Age of the Machine there is no longer anything like matter that needs to be formed because everything already has a form. Instead of the mediation between nature and culture, we are dealing with the complete equation between nature and culture. Instead of matter we should then speak of material (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 56).

The equation of nature and culture, however, means that no true determination of form is possible. The idea that everything has a form therefore means that everything becomes reduced to the illusion of form. Material can then be defined as formed matter in which form is illusionary. Art cannot occur within this age because it prevents true form from being determined (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 401). There can only be the illusion of art, art becoming reduced to appearance, which is not art at all. When the determination of form is no longer possible, form becomes replaced by force (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 395-396).

Material as the illusion of form means that its “form” is shaped by force: the desire for expression without content. The desire for content without expression, on the other hand, means that force becomes the countering of the illusion of form, the refusal to become theatricalized. Force is directed by the desire for true content, the awareness of the force within oneself.
The relation between material and force as the desire for content without expression means that art in the Age of the Machine can only operate as the making visible of forces (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 398). The awareness of the force within oneself (the true relation between virtual and actual) is a becoming aware of the principle of metaphysics: the fact that determination is based upon an experience in which a virtual potential strives towards determination. This means that individuation in the Age of the Machine is no longer defined by society (the attachments in which one is involved), but upon an awareness of the universal principle of metaphysics (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 179; Deleuze, *Difference*, 212, 233, 240). This can be understood as a rationalization in that it is a type of experience in which people are forced to think for themselves instead of their behavior being dictated by society. It can be reformulated as the refusal to be theatricalized. It means the awareness that behavior should not be based upon individual desires, but should be directed by a universal principle. This principle cannot be generalized, but only becomes activated within a particular situation. It is a type of universality that has the logic of nomad-thought, a form of thought that is not based on a general truth, but upon the task to discover the truth every time anew within a particular situation. Whereas Deleuze argued against truth, justice, and beauty (as being the principles of the State) (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 439), a becoming aware of the universal principle within experience indeed means that every human being must strive for truth, justice, and beauty. This striving can, however, not take the form of the One, which is a general truth that is imposed on people by the State. This striving can only take the form of a striving for a relation between virtual and actual (even if the virtual-actual equation, which is the condition of the Age of the Machine, prevents the determination of form). This relation is not determined in advance and therefore cannot take the form of the One (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 439, 441).

This means the fight for truth and justice in a world that is defined by the illusion of form, which prevents the relation between virtual and actual. This can only occur through a making visible of invisible forces: the forces of desire behind the illusion of form (the Face-Machine) and the visualization of the universal force within oneself, the force of metaphysics itself (the relation between virtual and actual) (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 398). Deleuze calls the visualization of this force the Cosmic-Machine (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 398). The Cosmic-
Machine means a transformation of art in which art becomes experience that strives against the illusion of form, experience as the desire for the relation between virtual and actual (without this relation yet being possible). This could be called art in the metaphysical sense as Deleuze uses the encounter with art as model for metaphysics itself (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 402; Deleuze, Difference, 85-86). One could call it metaphysical creation because it is a saving of metaphysics, the refusal to let the true universal be destroyed through contentless aestheticization. Art as experience becomes a way to learn to differentiate again out of an undifferentiated realm in which all content and form has disappeared. It means that we are back at the beginning of times in which matter had to be formed out of the realm of chaos (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 398). However, the difference is situated within the fact that differentiation can no longer occur through form, but only through thought (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 399, 435, 439). It is through an experience based on thought that the forces behind the illusion of form and the true force of metaphysics can be visualized.

The Cosmic-Machine as the desire for content expression implies that the making visible of forces cannot itself become expressive. It remains limited to a principle within experience that allows people to direct their behavior in a way that is distinct from the direction that is offered by the Face-Machine. Whereas the Face-Machine directs behavior towards expression, therefore promising people that this machine will allow them to express themselves, the Cosmic-Machine does not deliver such a promise. The Cosmic-Machine means that experience becomes directed by a principle that does not allow itself to become expressed. The utopian promise of the Face-Machine cannot be countered through the promise of a different utopia: the Cosmic-Machine as promising true self-determination. The countering of the Face-Machine can only occur through a principle that is immaterial and formless in order to see through the deceptive character of form that defines the Face-Machine (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 439). However, through the Cosmic-Machine one saves oneself from self-destruction, from a process of becoming in which one transforms oneself into a form that is illusionary. Instead of expression as contentless appearance, one could say that the desire for content is itself a type of expression because it is the most ultimate sense of art: art as the principle of metaphysics. This is an expression that is immaterial, being a force instead of a form. When experience becomes a machine it cannot operate
as the determination of form, but only as force. Force is, however, not inferior to form, but superior as it is based on an advanced type of art: not art as form, but art as metaphysical creation, as metaphysical force.

This distinction between Cosmic-Machine and Face-Machine indicates how social change is possible within the Age of the Machine. Within the Age of the Machine, a community is not based upon the assemblage to which it belongs (assemblage either in the sense of living within a particular place/country or in the sense of belonging to a particular network that stretches across countries), but upon the equation of experience/relation with a machine. The Face-Machine generates the illusion of a shared plateau; what holds it together instead are theatrical networks, which are not equivalent to a plateau. The Cosmic-Machine, on the other hand, generates a community that is united through the desire for content (without expression) (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 402). Because such a community belongs not only to different assemblages, but is also opposed to the expression of the Face-Machine, it is a community that cannot express itself. Such a community is the international universal community of human beings that was the utopian dream of the moderns. However, the way it manifests itself is completely different from what the moderns envisioned. It is not a world-government or a general humanity that transcends all cultural differences. Instead, it becomes established through the reliance of people on the universal principle of metaphysics, the desire for the relation between virtual and actual. It means the refusal of people within particular situations to become theatricalized by the Face-Machine. This refusal cannot take a general form, but is bound to the networks of H and NH entities that define the ontological condition of the moderns. It can be taken up by a person of any age, religion, country, intellect, sex, etc. The universal principle of metaphysics only emerges in a particular situation and never in a general way. It is for this reason why it cannot be expressed as an international universal community of people, but only as a principle within experience. In order to counter the death-character of the Modern Age, one can base a social relation only on a new principle, which is the principle of metaphysics itself. It is then not through a modification of assemblages (a new model of society), but through a modification of experience that the Face-Machine loses its power and that social change becomes possible (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 407).
Latour’s Mistake of Proposing a Reconnecting to the Earth

The fact that Latour misunderstands the ontological condition of the moderns is also seen in his argument for a reconnection to the Earth in order to make social change possible (Latour, Facing, 4, 61; Waar kunnen we landen?, 63, 66, 71). The concept of Earth or Gaia is related to Latour’s writings on the Anthropocene. It should not be understood as the unification of the Earth, the globalized Earth of modernity (Earth as One) (Latour, Waar kunnen we landen?, 81), but as the impossibility of a common world (Latour, Facing, 87, 95, 97; Waar kunnen we landen?, 12). The Anthropocene makes a common world impossible because the distinction between nature and culture has disappeared completely (Latour, Facing, 4, 113). When nature and culture become completely equated with one another, both terms lose their meaning. This implies that expressions like “the entanglement of nature and culture,” “living in harmony with nature,” “the destruction of nature by culture,” etc., are no longer possible within the Anthropocene (Latour, Facing, 36, 107, 120). The Anthropocene means the end of nature because nature no longer exists (Latour, Facing, 142). Culture has become transformed into a natural force (has become like nature) and nature has become an active agent that promotes social change (having become like culture) (Latour, Facing, 39, 73, 113). When nature no longer exists, one cannot live in harmony with it or try to save it (Latour, Facing, 19-20, 216). This implies that the Anthropocene cannot be addressed through geo-engineering (the development of new technology to save nature) or becoming environmental-friendly via capitalism (Latour, Facing, 12, 260, 282, 284). The Anthropocene cannot be addressed through science and technology because it means the end of science’s capacity to visualize nature as distinct from society (nature as One) (Latour, Facing, 35, 142-143). Science has lost its capacity to make visible a universal fact about nature because the equation of nature and culture makes purification impossible.

Latour’s proposal for a reconnecting to the Earth means that one should not try to reconcile nature and culture with one another, but acknowledge that the Earth is the lack of a common world that prevents nature as One to be envisioned. Reconnecting to the Earth can only take the form of the acknowledgement that we have entered a state of chaos that cannot be addressed through the restoration of harmony, but only through conflict (Latour, Facing, 83, 101, 107, 142, 241). The equation
between nature and culture indicates that one should become aware that the relation between H and NH is based upon a distributed sense of agency that takes the form of conflict (Latour, *Facing*, 100, 284). It requires us to rethink the social from a system based upon the relation between H agents and natural resources towards a system based on the making visible of H and NH associations that are in conflict with one another (Latour, *Facing*, 182, 212; *Waar kunnen we landen?*, 70, 98). Latour calls this the awareness that we are in a state of war (Latour, *Facing*, 43, 73, 144, 149). This is not a war between nature and culture because this distinction no longer has any meaning in the Anthropocene. When nature and culture have become equivalent, war is a condition that becomes omnipresent and therefore also a condition within human affairs. This occurs because the equation of nature and culture means the impossibility of a common world and therefore the loss of the ability of people to agree with one another. The Anthropocene is not only post-nature and post-culture, but also post-truth (Latour, *Facing*, 142-144). The lack of a shared world leads to a war between human populations with contradictory interests, different territories and different conceptions of the Earth (Latour, *Facing*, 122, 183, 226-227, 245, 247). Latour’s proposal for a new form of politics based on the making visible of associations is therefore not limited to the relation between H and NH, but is also applicable to human affairs. However, what Latour neglects is the fact that a rethinking of society through the visualization of associations/assemblages is no longer possible when we have entered the Age of the Machine. *The re-envisioning of assemblages cannot be a solution because assemblages have become transformed into machines.*

The reason why Latour makes this mistake is because the Anthropocene for him signifies the end of modernity (Latour, *Facing*, 116). It means the awareness that the distinction between nature and culture of modernity was an illusion; the distinction never occurred. The Anthropocene, according to Latour, requires us to become aware of what we have always done: the formation of nature-culture collectives, which modernity had made invisible (Latour, *Facing*, 107, 136). However, a nature-culture constellation is no longer possible when nature and culture have become completely equated with one another. A nature-culture constellation does not mean only the integration between nature and culture, but also their distinction. This is related to the distinction between content and expression, machine and assemblage, virtual and actual, which disappears in the Age of the Machine
(the Anthropocene). This Latour neglects. Also, he misconceives the fact that the Anthropocene does not mean the end of modernity, but the true ontological condition of modernity. The Anthropocene is the ontological condition of the moderns because it is based on the transformation of actual reality into a universal world in which virtual and actual, nature and culture, are equated. Latour’s statement that the Anthropocene is a state of chaos is in this respect not entirely correct because the Anthropocene means indeed that the entire Earth has been transformed into a universal world. This mistake is related to Latour’s failure to distinguish between two different interpretations of the concept of Earth.

Earth as the lack of a common world could refer to a constellation of multiple plateaus that interact with one another, but which lack integration into a shared plateau. A constellation of multiple plateaus implies that there is still stratification because without stratification no form could be developed and no plateau could be constituted. It refers to the interaction between animals, plants, and environments that together make up an ecosystem of multiple plateaus (Latour, Facing, 133). The second interpretation is concerned with the transformation of actual reality into a rhizome (Latour, Facing, 104). This can only occur when virtual and actual, nature and culture, have become simultaneously detached and equated with one another. We are then not dealing with a constellation of multiple plateaus, but with the lack of any plateau. A rhizomatic world is a world without expression, without differentiation. This is also the lack of a common world, but with the difference being that the lack of the common has taken up the condition of the universal: the entire Earth has become a rhizome in which everything is connected to everything else without the possibility of expression. It is this second interpretation that defines the condition of the Anthropocene. It indicates that a reconnection to the Earth is no longer possible as the Earth itself no longer operates through multiple plateaus, but through the lack of any plateau (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 394-395). By reconnecting to the Earth, one further immerses oneself into the rhizome from which one wants to escape.

If we acknowledge that the Anthropocene is not opposed to modernity, but is the ontological condition of the moderns (a universal world based on the simultaneous detachment and equation of virtual and actual), one can understand that the Anthropocene is equivalent to the Face-Machine. The Face-Machine is a conception of the social based on the desire for personal expression without the constitution of a common world.30 This
is related to the condition of war Latour describes: a war between people who have contradictory interests, who strive for personal fulfilment without any concern for the common. However, precisely because the Face-Machine transforms actual reality into appearance, it is a form of war that can take up the appearance of harmony (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 212). The distinction Latour makes between, on the one hand, a reconciliation of nature and culture based upon harmony and, on the other hand, war (the impossibility of harmony) is incorrect because the desire for the Face (harmony) is itself a form of war. The fight between singularities of the Face-Machine means not only the lack of a common world (war), but also a universal world that takes up the condition of the Face (the illusion of harmony between nature and culture). ANT cannot operate as a solution because it defines itself the condition of the Face-Machine. It is for this reason that Latour fails to understand that the two conditions that he opposes are in fact equal to one another. *The simultaneous detachment and equation between nature and culture as a new universal world can only be countered by posing the question of the universal anew.* This universal is the Cosmic-Machine, the striving for the true relation between virtual and actual.\(^{31}\) It is only through a desire for the true universal as the principle that gives direction to experience that the Face-Machine (the equation between virtual and actual) can be countered. This indeed means that the question of universal humanity, universal nature, and universal truth needs to be posed anew. This is not possible, according to Latour, because the Anthropocene is post-nature, post-human, and post-truth. However, the Cosmic-Machine does not mean the universal as One, but the universal as a principle that directs experience and therefore operates as force instead of form. We are then not dealing with a fight between multiplicities (different communities with contradictory interests) or with a fight between the moderns and the inhabitants of the Earth (Latour, Facing, 248), but with a fight between two universals: the Cosmic-Machine versus the Face-Machine. Both the Face-Machine and the Cosmic-Machine belong to the ontological condition of the moderns because they are both based upon the question of universality.

The new universality of the Cosmic-Machine does not require a distributed sense of agency (becoming aware of the associations in which action is involved), but a *becoming autonomous of agency*. Agency needs to become autonomous because the Cosmic-Machine means the fight against assemblages, against being reduced/included within the assemblages
of the Face-Machine. It requires one to base experience upon the universal principle of metaphysics (the desire for content), which is distinct from the assemblages in which one is involved. The autonomy of agency is based upon the strength to react against associations, to define one’s behavior on the desire for the true universal instead of the desire for expression through assemblages. It means the awareness that agency is indeed bound to associations, but has nevertheless the capacity to react against them. This is distinct from the old agency of modernity, which was unaware of the associations that make one act, but also from the distributed agency of ANT in which agency is dependent upon assemblages (Latour, *Facing*, 14). The becoming autonomous of agency does not apply only to a new universal humanity, but also to a new universal nature. This is not the old universal nature (nature as One), but the activation of the Cosmic force within NH entities. The Anthropocene is defined not only by the inclusion of NH within H assemblages, but also by the fight of NH against this reduction. This explains why the Anthropocene is both a human domination over NH entities and the overpowering of human beings by NH forces (Latour, *Facing*, 4). The question of universal nature becomes posed anew through the transformation of nature as matter into nature as force. The universal humanity, nature, and truth of the Cosmic-Machine is a universal as force (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 398), which is a universal that cannot be expressed and therefore cannot operate as One. The Anthropocene does not mean the loss of universal nature, humanity, and truth, but the necessity to pose the question of the universal anew. This means to become fully modern.

**VII. Conclusion**

Within this article I have undertaken a comparative analysis between the conception of the social/metaphysics put forward by Gilles Deleuze (transcendental empiricism) and Bruno Latour (ANT). Latour and Deleuze both put forward a new social theory and metaphysics based on the ontological primacy of attachments, but nevertheless construct their theory according to a different principle. Whereas the relation between virtual and actual is essential for Deleuze in order to understand how experience (association) can be productive of reality, this relation is absent within ANT. The difference between Latour and Deleuze is also visible in the fact that Deleuze relies upon the autonomous logic of the aesthetic, whereas
Latour upon science and technology studies. Aesthetics and science are similar to a certain extent because both are based on a network-universal. In the case of aesthetic experience, this is seen in the way a virtual potential must be particularized in order to be productive of empirical reality. In the case of science, this is visible in the way science is both a social construction and the visualization of actual reality as universal. However, the network-universal of science cannot provide the basis for the social or metaphysics because it does not determine a plateau (which makes empirical reality possible), but transforms empirical reality itself into a universal world. I have argued that a network-universality based upon science does not mean the absence of the virtual, but the fact that the distinction between virtual and actual has disappeared. This means that actual reality has become transformed into an undifferentiated realm of potentialities (which is the condition of the virtual). By relying upon science studies Latour does not develop a general social theory or metaphysics, but a social theory and metaphysics that is specific to modernity. ANT does not prove that “We Have Never Been Modern,” but defines itself the ontological condition of the moderns as a new universal: the simultaneous detachment and equation between virtual and actual.

In order to redefine ANT as the ontological condition of the moderns, I have first examined that the concept of the social is based upon a double-bind. Latour does acknowledge this double-bind, but nevertheless he misunderstands it. For Latour, the social is split into the composing of the collective and the end result of this composing. This is incorrect because the split of the social is situated within the act of composing itself. I have analyzed this through Deleuze’s distinction between content and expression within the composing of an assemblage. Content must be distinct from expression in order to prevent a complete equation, which would result in the social becoming reduced to representation. The distinction between content and expression does not mean, however, a complete detachment. Instead, it must be understood as a relation that is simultaneous based on integration and distinction (in the same way that virtual and actual are related yet distinct). The double-bind of content and expression indicates that the social consists not of one assemblage, but of two assemblages, which are integrated yet distinct from one another: assemblage of content (system) and assemblage of expression (lifeworld). Assemblage as system refers to people’s engagement with material and technological objects, whereas assemblage as lifeworld refers to language as semiotic system.
ANT neglects this distinction and reduces the social to one assemblage: assemblage as system. This is the case because Latour’s conception of the social is solely concerned with the material associations between H and NH entities that make action possible.

This reduction of the social to assemblage as system occurs when the simultaneous integration and distinction between content and expression becomes transformed into their detachment. The detachment of content (system) and expression (lifeworld) occurs when the lifeworld becomes rationalized and therefore transformed from a shared platform for everyday communication into a realm for specialists: the becoming autonomous of religion, law, science, art, and politics. The rationalization of the lifeworld makes it possible for everyday communication to become overtaken by system. The detachment between content and expression therefore paradoxically leads to the overtaking of expression (lifeworld) by content (system), which means that the distinction between what is lifeworld and what is system disappears. It is through the detachment between content and expression that the loss of their distinction occurs. The loss of the distinction between content and expression is related to the loss of the distinction between machine and assemblage. When assemblage and machine become equated, the machine (as principle that connects actual with virtual) becomes taken over by assemblage and therefore is reduced to actual reality. A machine as assemblage defines the condition of an actor-network in which self-determination operates through empirical attachments. It means that assemblage is no longer based upon the composing of a collective, but upon the desire for self-determination through empirical associations. The loss of the distinction between content and expression, assemblage and machine, gives rise to a very particular conception of the social in which social relations have become transformed from the constitution of a common world into the desire for personal expression. We have left the Age of Assemblages and entered the Age of the Machine. I have claimed that Deleuze theorizes this condition through his concept of Face-Machine and the rhizomatic machine. The equation of assemblage and machine leads to the desire for expression that is contentless (the Face-Machine). Whereas Deleuze’s metaphysics is indeed distinct from Latour’s ANT, Deleuze does acknowledge that metaphysics can take up the condition that is put forward by Latour: the equation of virtual and actual in which self-determination becomes illusionary. This is the condition of the pure event/Face-Machine/rhizomatic machine in which metaphysics
has become completely immaterial.

The equation between content and expression, assemblage and machine, virtual and actual, can be understood as the transformation of empirical reality into a universal world. This is consistent with Latour’s reliance on the network-universal of science studies. A becoming universal of empirical reality means that the actual takes up the virtual condition of potentiality. Empirical reality is then no longer defined by actual/empirical form, but by the illusion of actual form. Actual form becomes illusionary because the virtual-actual equation means the absence of any boundaries and therefore the impossibility of the determination of form. The becoming illusionary of form indicates that ANT is not opposed to aesthetic experience after all. The aesthetics of ANT is aesthetic experience as the desire for expression (without content), which means that self-determination and the constitution of a common world are only illusionary. This type of aestheticization must be distinguished from Deleuze’s reliance on the autonomous logic of the aesthetic in which aesthetic experience operates as the principle for plateau-constitution and therefore makes a common world possible. When aesthetics becomes reduced to the illusion of form and the social, we are not dealing with the autonomous logic of the aesthetic, but with a type of aesthetics that is schizophrenic. A schizophrenic aesthetics is not an empirical aesthetics, but a universal aesthetics because the simultaneous detachment and equation between virtual and actual is itself a universal condition. The ontological condition of the moderns can then be defined as a universal aesthetic that is schizophrenic. Within Deleuze’s metaphysics a schizophrenic type of aesthetic experience only occurs when experience operates as Face-machine/rhizomatic machine/pure event.

In the final section of the article I have examined how a schizophrenic aesthetic can be countered. Deleuze provides a solution through his concept of the Cosmic-Machine. A Cosmic-Machine means that the equation between assemblage and machine can give rise not only to the transformation of social relations into the desire for expression (without content), but also to the desire for content (without expression). The desire for content (without expression) emerges through the refusal of being theatricalized, the refusal to live an illusionary life. This type of desire is without expression precisely because the only type of expression that the Age of the Moderns allows is expression without content. It means a desire for the relation between virtual and actual (without the determination of a
virtual potential into actual form yet being possible), which is the principle of metaphysics itself. Through this comparative analysis between Deleuze’s and Latour’s metaphysics, it becomes possible to envision that social theory today should no longer be based upon assemblages, but upon machines. The social within the Age of the Moderns has only the illusion of assemblage while in fact being based upon the choice of a machine: the Face-Machine or the Cosmic-Machine. It also indicates that Latour’s concern with the tracing of actors that make up an assemblage is incorrect. Through my reinterpretation of ANT, it becomes clear that ANT defines a conception of the social based upon the machine and not upon assemblages. This also has consequences for the way we theorize the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene cannot be theorized as a nature-culture constellation (assemblage), but only as the equation of nature and culture (machine).

ENDNOTES

1. Instead of “pure event,” Deleuze also uses the term “incorporeal event” (Deleuze, Logic, 8). This latter term more clearly indicates that a pure event is immaterial, without determination. Within this article I will mainly refer to Deleuze’s work A Thousand Plateaus. In this work he does not use the term “pure event,” but “Face-Machine” and “rhizome.”

2. Deleuze speaks about a becoming “mad,” a becoming without measure. Such a becoming is related to what Deleuze calls the “eternal return” (Deleuze, Logic, 1-2, 64).

3. An eternal object operates as pure potential, which guides the process of determination, but does not define it in advance. This means that an eternal object is indeed characterized by the subjective ideal of self-determination, but also that complete self-determination is impossible. An eternal object is not a dominant ideal that predefines how an actual entity must constitute itself. It is only through the act of determination itself that the “content” of the eternal object becomes defined.

4. Deleuze calls the absolute the pure ideal game. This is a game without rules in which anything is possible. For Deleuze the absolute condition of reality is absurd (Deleuze, Logic, 60).

5. In The Logic of Sense Deleuze argues that it is a radical empiricism, which gives rise to “pure events.” Because pure events are immaterial, such a radical empiricism is also non-empirical (Deleuze, Logic, 20).
6. Latour makes a distinction between empiricism based upon the bifurcation of nature (the distinction between nature as fact and nature as value) and empiricism based on the associations between human and nonhuman. It is the latter type of empiricism on which his metaphysics is based; he also calls it a radical empiricism because it means that there is nothing outside the associations that make up actual reality. (Latour, *Reassembling*, 51; Latour, *Inquiry*, 178; de Vries, 16).

7. ANT means that every society (both modern and premodern) must be rethought as a nature-culture collective. This forms the basis to compare different societies with one another through space and time as different nature-culture constellations. From this perspective, ANT operates as a comparative anthropology (Latour, *We Have*, 103, 104, 106, 107).

8. Latour, however, also uses the expression that “there is nothing but experience.” This use of “experience” must be distinguished from Deleuze’s reliance on experience/affect because it is not based on the relation between virtual and actual (Latour, *Inquiry*, xxv).

9. The fact that there is a mistake in ANT is apparent in Latour’s proposal of the concept “plasma” at the end of *Reassembling* (244-246). Plasma stands for the background that is not yet formed, being a realm of reserve that can be mobilized by action. This concept is equivalent to the realm of the virtual as the realm of potentiality. However, plasma or virtual is excluded from Latour’s conceptualization of actor-networks. It is only introduced at the end of *Reassembling* and does not return in any of his later work (Inquiry or *Facing*). It is also not present in *We Have*. This indicates that Latour does acknowledge that the realm of the virtual is an essential aspect of associations, but nevertheless he fails to understand how it becomes included within associations. I will argue that this requires the distinction between content and expression, assemblage and machine.

10. Deleuze argues in this regard that an assemblage consists both of a vertical and horizontal axis. The horizontal axis is the constellation of content and expression, technology and language. The vertical axis refers to the territorial and deterritorial sides of the assemblage (the relation between virtual and actual) (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 102-103).

11. Habermas argues that deception/pathological side effects occur when the rationality of value spheres (lifeworld) becomes overtaken by system (*The Theory of Communicative Action: The Critique*, 230). Whereas his argument is solely concerned with the destruction of the lifeworld as shared background knowledge, there is no reason why it could not be extended to the destruction
of value/content within the autonomous value spheres (politics, religion, art, law, and science).

12. Even though the Face-Machine is also called by Deleuze the regime of subjectification (the subjective desire for expression) (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 151), it is in fact a type of desire that operates through desubjectifying, a becoming other that destroys one’s condition as subject instead of determining it (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 156).

13. Instead of the Age of Assemblage, Deleuze uses the expression Age of the Earth (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 398). I have chosen the former term in order to highlight that this age is based upon the distinction and integration between content and expression, which is necessary in order for an assemblage to occur. Within the Age of the Machine, there cannot be any assemblages, only the illusion of assemblage.

14. Deleuze defines capitalism through the regime of subjectivation because capitalism is based on the desire for more capital/personal profit, while also being the reduction of the world to the image of the One. Capitalism is a Face-Machine because it is based on a type of desire, which reduces the world to an image of the One (the One being not the result of interpretation, but of the desire for personal profit) (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 151).

15. Deleuze makes a conceptual distinction between "differenciation" and "differentiation." Differenciation refers to the determination of a virtual potential into an actual form. Differentiation refers to the fact that the realm of the virtual is not a general oneness without difference, but a realm of potentialities that are distinguished from one another through relations of speed and slowness, movement and rest, instead of the determination of form. Without this differenciation, every virtual potential would have the same content. In "Difference and Repetition" Deleuze explains it as follows: "We call the determination of the virtual content of an Idea differenciation; we call the actualization of that virtuality into species and distinguished parts differenciation" (Deleuze, Difference, 269-270).

16. This can be related to what Deleuze calls the dangers of clarity, power, and disgust. The danger of clarity and power can be defined as the condition of ANT: the reduction of identity to a network-identity that is limited to actual reality. This is a condition in which everything is known and no change is possible. The danger of disgust is the transformation of experience into the death-drive, which emerges as a result of the impossibility of change (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 265-268).
17. The equation between assemblage and machine is related to, but different from, the adoption of the condition of war by a totalitarian State. In the latter case, the State does not itself become a machine, but operates as a State-army in order to counter the possibility of revolution or change. Assemblage (State) is then indeed based upon the principle of war, but is nevertheless not equivalent to a machine. This is the case because the machine stands for the danger of revolution, which the State-army is supposed to counter (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 261, 486).

18. The idea that ANT transforms the condition of the rhizome to actual reality/the social is also visible in the fact that Latour proposes *actant-rhizome ontology* as alternative term for ANT (*Reassembling* 9).

19. The equation between virtual and actual can be understood as a form of *literalism* because it literally transforms actual reality into a universal instead of understanding the universal as a principle that gives direction to experience. Latour makes the argument that: “We (the moderns) are those who know how to speak *literally* and not just figuratively” (*Inquiry*, 173—emphasis added).

20. Latour defines the Anthropocene as the universal loss of ground, the lack of a common world. This condition of a universal world that lacks a common world is what defines ANT (*Waar kunnen we landen?*, 12,15, 19, 20).

21. Latour argues that modernity is based upon a false consciousness because it is solely concerned with one type of knowledge (representation) while neglecting the practices that define modernity itself (the differentiation of law, science, art, religion, etc.), which each have their own type of knowledge production (Latour, *Inquiry*, 376). By neglecting this differentiation of knowledge, while nevertheless producing different value spheres, modernity reduces knowledge to meaning effects, a world of appearances (Latour, *We Have*, 64-65). According to Latour, this condition can be countered by becoming aware of the attachments that allow distinct types of knowledge to become produced. However, this is not possible because the attachments that define modernity are based themselves upon appearance.

22. This can be related to Deleuze’s argument that the *imitation* of a plateau gives rise to a form of self-determination that has only the illusion of being expressive, while in fact being a form of destruction. When one imitates, one does not create, but destroys. He gives the example of the state of hallucination associated with drugs (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 332).

23. Latour argues that no mode of existence can serve as a metalanguage for all the others. This implies that aesthetics (as a specific mode of existence)
cannot operate as a container of all the other modes, being superior to them (Latour, *Inquiry*, 316). However, the reason why this is possible is because aesthetics is not limited to the encounter with art (mode of fiction), but the principle that stands for the simultaneous relation and distinction between content and expression, virtual and actual, machine and assemblage. Aesthetics tends to be limited to the autonomous realm of art because a work of art is explicitly based on the constellation of content and expression; without this constellation, one can be reduced to the other.

24. Deleuze, however, argues that schizophrenia is an inherent aspect of every assemblage. Because the human cogito is the outcome of assemblage, it cannot be understood as One (the Cartesian cogito), but only as including many voices. One is made up of multiple personalities because one cannot exist outside assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 98). However, schizophrenia is distinct from the multiple voices of assemblage because it only manifests itself when assemblages have lost any sense of rule or planning. Schizophrenia occurs when experience as individuation does not determine a virtual potential, but destroys it.

25. Deleuze argues that the relation between virtual and actual, assemblage and machine, is defined by rules and must be consistent in order to prevent distortion. Distortion can take the form of a “becoming werewolf” or a “becoming vampire,” which means that human beings can indeed transform themselves into monstrous hybrids (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 292, 294, 320, 585).

26. A material is not based upon the determination of a stratified form, but consists solely of relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness. A material is therefore related to the condition of the rhizome in which there is no determined form, only a constellation of multiplicities. Matter, on the other hand, belongs to the realm of assemblages in which form is stratified. The transformation from matter into material implies that actual reality has taken up the condition of the rhizome. However, when actual reality becomes rhizomatic there cannot be any expression or quality and therefore material can also be defined as the illusion of form, the illusion of expression (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 383).

27. The distinction between matter-form and material-force is related to the distinction between tools and weapons. A tool belongs to the regime of assemblages in which work is concerned with the formation of matter. A weapon, on the other hand, means a tool that no longer operates as form (work), but as force (war) (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand*, 468).
28. When the virtual-actual relation becomes transformed into the virtual-actual equation, we can technically no longer speak of “desire,” but only of “drive.” The desire for the relation between virtual and actual without this relation yet being possible is the drive to life. The drive to life is opposed to the Face-Machine, which is the death-drive. Experience as desire for expression without content (Face-Machine) is then technically also no longer a form of desire, but the transformation of experience into drive. I have chosen, however, to use the term “desire” within this article because the conceptual distinction between desire and drive relates to aspects of Deleuze’s thought (e.g., eternal return, third synthesis of time) that are not discussed in this article.

29. Deleuze argues that the regime of subjectification cannot operate only through the desire for expression without content (the post-signifying), but also through the reestablishment of an imperial society (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 142). An imperial society is distinct from a constellation of people that are united through the desire for contentless expression (which implies the absence of a shared plateau). Whereas Deleuze does not define this imperial society, I argue that it can be understood as a universal community of human beings that fight against facialization.

30. Deleuze speaks about “a people to come” (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 402). This should not be interpreted as the absence of the people, but as the inability of the people to express themselves as community.

31. In Waar kunnen we landen? Latour does, however, use the term “universality” in the sense of a universal lack of ground, the universal incapacity to occupy a territory (Waar, 12, 15, 19-20).

32. Deleuze argues that we do not need a reconnection to the Earth, but the opening up towards the Cosmos (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand, 394-395, 398).

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