

The Lens of Agency of Assemblages:

**A theory that alters our vision of
societal structures and psychology**

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Introduction

The concept of agency, when looked at through the lens of assemblages, is a philosophy deeply stemming from the works of Deleuze, which were later on expanded by DeLanda. It offers a new perspective that goes beyond traditional boundaries in both social theory and psychology. This philosophy, which departs from human-centred points of view, portrays reality as a dynamic interaction of all elements. In social theory, it prevents oversimplification and makes us reevaluate power dynamics, hierarchies and societal structures. It also implies a shift within psychology, away from narrow-minded approaches and towards a more integrated insight of human behaviour, considering the complex web of familial, societal and cultural impacts. By accepting agency within a variety of assemblages, we gain deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of human experience. This essay will explore how the agency of assemblages serves as a conceptual bridge, challenging traditional frameworks and promoting a diverse perspective to the study of human behaviour.

Unraveling the Agency of Assemblages -

The agency of assemblages theory is a concept that redefines traditional notions of agency by acknowledging the influence of both human and non-human elements. It proposes that agency is not only a human attribute, but rather a characteristic of assemblages: dynamic networks of interconnected elements. These elements, animate and inanimate, collectively contribute to the behaviour of the whole. This theory challenges the human-centred view of agency, recognising the capacity of non-human factors to influence outcomes and behaviours. Real-world examples, such as eco-systems and technological networks, emphasize the multidimensional nature of assemblages, illustrating the complexity and interconnectedness innate in this theory. This perspective offers a more holistic and complex understanding of agency, with profound consequences in various fields, such as psychology and technology.

Challenging traditional perspectives -

In this section, I explore the theory of agency of assemblages, its key elements and principles. I talk about the insights of Manuel DeLanda, Jane Bennett, and Paul Dourish, who challenge traditional perspectives on agency.

Manuel DeLanda focuses on agency as emergent behaviour, meaning agency is not assigned to individual entities in isolation, but to the collective behaviour. His assemblage theory offers an interpretation based on the idea that reality is understood due to interactions and connections between various entities, rejecting an idea of a central organising structure, focusing on the non-hierarchical nature of assemblages, DeLanda takes on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of multiplicities and singularities while introducing the concept of intensive and extensive properties. Multiplicities interact and form connections that cannot be pinpointed to individual components while singularities represent unique components in the assemblage; extensive properties relate to quantitative aspects of entities while intensive properties relate to the qualitative aspects, the interaction between entities can transform these properties in any way. These ideas align with Bennett's work by challenging human-centred ideas proposing inanimate objects are capable of influencing outcomes.

Bennett challenges anthropocentrism by suggesting agency is not exclusively a human aspect and argues that things such as objects, materials and forces can also exhibit a form of agency, meaning they have the capacity to contribute to shaping events and influencing outcomes. She introduces the concept of vibrant matter which is an essential component of agency within assemblages. Again, Bennett argues that agency is a collective event that is the result of all interactions between human and non-human entities, she explores how material forces impact human bodies, perceptions and emotions and argues that the agency of things could also inform a more ecological and ethical politics.

Dourish, even though he was not an advocate of the assemblage theory, contributes to the concept of socio-materiality which looks to understand how the social and the material are entangled in our day-to-day existence. Like DeLanda and Bennett, he challenges the perspective on agency and argues against abstract and isolated views of agency and is in favour of understanding action depending on specific social and cultural contexts. Continuing to challenge traditional views, Dourish stops seeing agency as solely being in mind or consciousness, he emphasises the importance of the body and its interactions with the environment in shaping human action and encourages a practical understanding of agency, suggesting agency cannot be defined by individual intentions or pre-existing structures.

Agency of Assemblages: The Reality -

Real life examples, such as ecological systems and technological networks, illustrate the multidimensional nature of assemblages. These examples show the intricacy and interconnection innate in the agency of assemblages, providing us tangible illustrations of the theories previously discussed.

Jane Bennett's vibrant matter refers to the non-living components, recognising their ability to influence living behaviour. This approach is consistent with many cognition theories in psychology that recognise the collective influence of a variety of elements in cognitive processes. For example, an ecological system showcases Bennett's concept by highlighting the dynamic influence of non-living factors on living behaviour. Drawing inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari, Bennett's insights come from a revaluation of the traditional separation between human and non-human worlds. Trees, for instance, engage in chemical signalling to communicate with each other and influence their growth patterns. Animals play a role in seed dispersal, contributing to the regeneration of the forest. The weather conditions affect the growth cycles of plants. Here, agency is distributed among both living and non-living entities, challenging anthropocentrism and highlighting the ecological interconnectedness of vibrant matter.

Dourish's work on embodied interactions and situated computing expands our knowledge of some of the central ideas of the assemblage theory as he challenges a purely symbolic view of computing, suggesting that the material aspects of our interactions with technology are as crucial for understanding the experience as the physiological ones. Think of an office space as a socio-material assemblage. The physical layout of desks, the design of meeting rooms, and the technology influence the social interactions and work practices of individuals. Dourish's ideas on the body and its interactions within this context can be seen in how the design of the workspace impacts collaboration and communication among colleagues. The practical understanding of agency in this scenario involves recognising that the physical environment and technology shape how work is performed, moving beyond traditional views of agency and relating to Bennett.

This exploration lays the groundwork for a deeper examination of the implications of assemblage theory in psychology. It serves as a bridge, connecting the introduction's broad overview with the more detailed discussions to follow, and provides a foundation for understanding complex psychological phenomena through the lens of interconnected elements.

Ethical Considerations and Implications in Assemblage Theory -

While these points of view offer valuable insights, it's important to acknowledge potential limitations or controversies. Critics may argue that concepts like vibrant matter and the materialities of information oversimplify or neglect certain aspects of agency. Exploring these critiques fosters a nuanced understanding of the challenges and debates surrounding the agency of assemblages in both theoretical and applied contexts. Ethical considerations are extremely important when applying agency of assemblages in psychology, a topic discussed further on, with the integration of AI-driven chatbots in therapy as a clear example. Assemblages, being made up of both human and nonhuman actors, introduce difficulties related to things such as trust, privacy, and human emotions.

Assemblage theory is frequently used to deal and talk about complex systems like social networks and cognitive processes. However, while discussing these systems, it is easy to oversimplify the subjects into simpler sentences or subsections that could not fully reflect their complexities. Sorting out subjects into simpler categories may also lead to reification, a process where these categories are given concrete properties and generalised into abstraction. This theory also highlights the interconnectedness of entities which downplays the influence of individual components, giving way to possible complete neglect of individual agency. There is also a possible neglect of how power dynamics affect assemblages as some people may argue the theory doesn't acknowledge them properly, focusing more on forces and capacities.

Another issue with the assemblage theory is the deficiency of a structured method, as it provides more of an abstract conceptual framework instead of a structured set of guidelines it can lead to misinterpretations and diverse applications of the theory, complicating evaluation and comparison of research. It also rings up doubts on accounting responsibility when a non-human entity is involved, this causing a debate on whether non-human entities deserve ethical consideration.

Agency of Assemblages in Psychology -

Assemblage theory presents massive change in psychological practice, making practitioners rethink how they assess, intervene, and touch on ethical considerations. Building on Bennett's concept of "vibrant matter," explored in her work *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), psychologists are urged to adopt a holistic assessment approach. This new idea helps highlight the interconnectedness of human and non-human elements within networks, offering the new perspective of the intricate web of influences impacting mental health. Dourish's research on *The Stuff of Bits: An Essay on the Materialities of Information* (2017) focuses on the need for adapting spaces and meetings. Material aspects, like devices, significantly influence cognition and behaviour. This new idea encourages practitioners to address not only isolated factors but also more generalised and context-based elements such as social structures and the technology's capabilities.

The concept of the agency of assemblages is like understanding a dance of elements between individual psychology and the wider social context, not just about our minds individually but including our environment, our materials and our culture. The assemblage theory, with its fluidity and interconnectivity gives us a conceptual framework for understanding the complexity of social systems, which is not defined by isolated human interactions but includes the complex web of interactions between human and non-human actors in a network. This idea helps us see that our thoughts, behaviours and emotions aren't the result only from our individual mental processes, but from our many interactions inside a network or assemblage which includes many things from other people, societies standards, different cultures to even physical environments including technology resources.

A topic briefly discussed previously which also relates to psychology is responsibility and accountability. This concept redefines responsibility when it recognises outcomes are not only the result of human interactions, giving way to the concept that in an assemblage, responsibility is distributed among many living and non-living factors. The idea also changes accountability views from individual to a wider view that considers how all entities may have contributed to different results, another focus brought I on this topic is political accountability proposing people rethink how it is assigned in political contexts. All this encourages another shift of views in moral limits and definitions forcing us to try and think how they could fit in these broader and more complex interactions.

A new take on the topic of agency of assemblages or theory of assemblages would be to consider individual psychology, the assemblage theory is vital in unravelling social complexity. As suggested by the assemblage theory and mentioned before, human action is defined by complex interactions of social and material entities. This means that acknowledging the dynamic and multifaceted connections between various elements within a given context is necessary to understand the individual human behaviour. The

consequences of applying this theory go beyond traditional psychological practises, nether point that encourages researchers to investigate the complexities of human experience within a larger scale.

In conclusion, the agency of assemblages offers a mentality transforming lens for understanding the complex facets and interactions of how individual human psychology works when applying the theory of assemblages and how the theory is helping broaden and expand the thoughts and perspectives and psychologist's approaches, connecting back to the works of Jane Bennett, Paul Dourish, and Manuel DeLanda, who have each contributed valuable insights to this evolving theoretical framework.

Conclusion: Embracing Assemblage Theory in Psychology

In conclusion, the exploration of assemblage theory has demonstrated its capacity to reform and broaden traditional views on topics in psychology. And it's not use about discussing individual thoughts and behaviours, it's about recognising the complex dance of entities, human and non-human, that constitute who we are and how we interact with reality and the world around us.

The assemblage theory also encourages us to think about ethical arguments, such as those that stem from AI psychological meetings, and to objectively evaluate the interactions between human and nonhuman agency. It serves as a bridge, to consider a more inclusive approach to studying human behaviour. As the industry of psychological practice continues to change and evolve, the views of the theory of assemblages encourages us to view mental health and being as many dynamic interactions of a variety of entities, helping our current understanding of psychological occurrences in the interconnected network of our interactions with our environment.

This new lens, influenced by thinkers like Bennett, Dourish, and Negroponte, encourages us to think out of the box of traditional thinking in complex networks and their interactions. It also encourages a holistic approach that recognises the active role of non-human entities in shaping many mental health factors, advocating for meeting and spaces in the industry that acknowledge not only isolated factors but also wider context-based elements. We're encouraged to really think and process the fact that our actions are not isolated events but form part of complex social and material networks.

In recognising this interconnectedness, we give way to potential of stronger understand and empathy in the world.

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