Gang: Culture. Eidos and Process

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Abstract

The terms 'gang' and 'culture' are used with varying degrees of (im)precision in different fields of academe, media, public, and policy; and this paper will contend that this circumstance provides a fertile ground for the reification of these two concepts. It will suggest that this phenomenon of reification has already taken hold in various parts of the study of gangs more recently, and in cultural criminology in a more established way. This paper will deconstruct the concepts 'gang' and 'culture' and attempt to reconstruct them in a way that opens up the discourse of 'gangs' and 'culture' such that better sense may be made of the phenomena that these terms are intended to evoke.

Key words

Gang; Culture; otherness

Resumen

Los terminos "banda" y "cultura" se usan con diferentes grados de (im)precisión en distintos ámbitos del mundo académico, medios de comunicación, público y política. En este artículo se defiende que esta circunstancia ofrece un campo fértil para la cosificación de estos dos conceptos. Se sugiere que este fenómeno de cosificación ya ha arraigado de diversa forma en los estudios de bandas recientes, y en la criminología cultural de forma más consolidada. Este artículo deconstruye los conceptos "banda" y "cultura" e intenta reconstruirlos de forma que se abra el discurso sobre "bandas" y "cultura" para tener una sensación mejor del fenómeno que estos términos intentan evocar.

Palabras clave

Bandas; cultura; alteridad

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1. Introduction: Eidos

The Gang is *eidos*. The Gang, either as *idea* or entity is surface or appearance. This *eidos* is not that of the gang but of the objectifying observer other. In other words, the *eidos*, or surface, is given or attributed to the gang, making the gang Other, in Levinasian terms, or, more simply 'Outsiders' in Becker's terms. This is a 'truth' that we learn from interactionism and particularly labelling theory: 'The Gang' is a part of a symbolic order that is a tool designed or used to make sense of the world, a situation also attested to by Brotherton (1997). The *capacity* for this attribution *arises* out of the treatment of the gang *as eidos* and the failure in many cases to step beyond ostensive definition. In common language, gangs are problematic (often constituted of people of colour). In common language gangs appear to carry knives, congregate antisocially, prowl at night and murder each other's members: they exhibit 'gangsta' or gang culture. The established gang researcher John Hagedorn (2008) groups gangs and terrorists together in one sentence at the beginning of his *'World of Gangs: Armed Young Men and Gangsta Culture'* as extra state actors. This is a surface that Hagedorn appears to take for granted. Are there not unarmed gangs, are there not girl gangs, and are there not gangs without 'gangsta culture' or gangs within the state? This modernist *doxa* pre-circumscribes attempts to make sense of the problem at hand since what is says, in an inverted kind of logic, is that the problem is 'gangs' lets go and find out what gangs are. It then accepts the *doxa* concerning what gangs are and sets about describing their behaviour within a definition that frequently says what that behaviour is. This is not to say that any particular definition is right or wrong - all truth is truth of language (Tarski 1956) - but that definition is appropriate to entities (Heideger) and gangs are not entities; they only become entities when they are *created as such* by the *act* of definition, and since all definition is infinitely temporally contingent, no entity can have any temporal facticity over that of the (technically) infinitesimal. In other words, we must think of flows, not periods: entities exist only in the infinitesimal interstice between becoming and becoming.

It is also my contention that this eidetic view of gangs arises out of a view of culture, similarly taken as surface. This view has a long history grounded in the work of the early cultural anthropologists (Bauman 2000) such as Evans-Prichard in the UK and Boas in the States for example. It is a view evident when art history is referred to as a study of culture, as though the notion of cultural relativism had never appeared. Geertz' studies of cock fighting, or marriage in Bali for example concentrate on 'thick description' of the surface, external symbols in Asad's (1983) terms, at the expense of what Asad calls internal dispositions. Of course, as Evans-Prichard put it,

> there appears to be some kind of consistency between [a culture's] parts, at any rate up to the point of open contradiction and conflict being avoided, and that it has greater durability than most of the fleeting things of human life (Evans-Prichard 1950, p. 20),

but this says nothing of what enervates such stasis, or for that matter, change. It will not do that culture should be taken to be mere stability of surface, or collection of affects and artefacts. According to Kroeber (1948) eidos, in this sense of surface, appearance, or phenomenon is to be contrasted with culture as ethos. Ethos 'pervades the whole culture – like a flavour – as contrasted with the aggregate of separable constituents that make up its formal appearance [that constitute] the eidos' (Kroeber 1948, pp. 293-294). However consistent with the functionalist tone of much sociological thought in the 40s the failure to be able to conceive of entities at any scale as anything other than complete in their own right locks the eidos / ethos duality in a position where it is not able to account for change or process. Eidos is an emergent (in the hard sense) property of process, not a mere whole made of parts. This, of course, means that it cannot be reduced to its constituent parts, but it also means that mere examination of constituent parts as wholes in their own right is inadequate and we need to turn to the processes from which the

eidos emerges. This persistent view from Kroeber of culture in terms of eidos and ethos is a product of the marriage between modernist taxonomy and functionalist thought. An entity is placed in a particular taxon in virtue of the characteristics of its surface and although the concept 'role' as used by earlier interactionists no longer holds sway, the surface of the entity under consideration is still reduced in much sociological thought to the functions and roles of its subvening parts in much the same way as Radcliffe-Brown's (1940) 'social structure – social organization' dualism. Let me illustrate the existence of entities and defining processes thus. Imagine the sea-bed – let's say around Greece. In your mind, take away the sea. You are left with an undifferentiated land mass. When you return the sea and cover up various bits of the land mass, you have entities – islands. This does not mean that what you had previously has gone away, it just means that *you have introduced a way of seeing entities.* This is the process that we call reification. What I intend to do in this paper is to examine what I take to be two fundamental problems with gang research that are, in my view closely related – namely the problem of definition and reification, and the problem of the assembling processes – and suggest a model that overcomes some of the difficulties that these problems, conventionally viewed, throw up.

2. The problem of definition

It is not new of me to suggest that there are severe problems associated with the definition of the object of study, 'The Gang'. This problem was described by Ball and Curry in their (1995). If we do not have a sound definition, how can we be sure that we are investigating the whole problem or that better and more helpful explanations are not to be had of the same phenomenon under other names or definitions. This is of particular interest in the study of gangs in that some modes of definition tend to pre-emptively foreclose certain areas of study resulting, in this writer's mind, in a degree of reification of the phenomenon 'The Gang', and in the closing off of certain lines of thought that, to my mind, have much to say about gangs. Moreover, having a stable definition is crucial to the appearance of veracity, and efficacy in the hands of the policy makers to whom research is sold, such that the term 'gang' is not left as an empty signifier to be used at will by the powerful in their attempts to generate hatred of whatever particular group they may. My approach, however, is not to provide a concrete definition but to avoid definition and suggest that a particular mode of making sense of gangs, which has been called 'Assemblage Theory' after the work of Deleuze and Guatari (1988), and DeLanda (2006), for example, shows that 'The Gang' is not a phenomenon separable from social processes in general. To give the phenomenon a name and a separate definition is an exercise in falsehood and mystification.

Efforts to define the phenomenon 'The Gang' this far, look something like this. Leaving aside Puffer's (1912) Darwinist account of gangs, Thrasher's (1927) definition stands as perhaps the earliest important definition and a paradigm of elegance in the definition of gangs. Thrasher has it thus: A gang is "[a]n interstitial group formed spontaneously and then integrated through conflict" (Thrasher 1927, p. 57). The elegance and 'truth' of this definition, I hope will be made apparent through this paper. Indeed, I hope to show that the only major flaw with it is that it invokes the term 'gang'. Thrasher is a thorough-going modernist and as such he attempts to catalogue just about any kind of collectivity that falls under his definition. This is of particular interest where one aspect of this paper is concerned – the futility of definitions – as Thrasher is not just interested in criminal activity, or street activity, but stretches his research to school-yards and boardrooms. I can think of little more gang-like behaviour than frat-house hazing. *For this reason*, however, Ball and Curry (1995) see this definition as being distinctly anti-empirical and consequently obstructive to the processes of gang research. The disagreement evident here reminds us that there are differing types of definition that are more or less useful than others (Ayer 1971) depending on what the *purpose* of the definition

is. Katz and Jackson-Jacobs (2004) direct significant criticism of Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) work specifically because of its apparent *purpose* of providing empirical 'justification' for public policies such as those implemented by Johnson for example in 1963 in his War on Poverty, which, according to many became a war on the poor rather than a war on poverty. With insight and clarity Katz and Jackson-Jacobs say:

> criminologists have seen through the gang, using the gang as a window onto phenomena which are treated as far more important than documenting the everyday realities of gang members on their own turf and in their own terms. Like politicians and journalists who shape popular culture, gang criminologists have been preoccupied with the gang as [m]etonym, icon, or index. (Katz and Jackson-Jacobs 2004, p. 13)

In other words, reification of 'The Gang' also reifies the apparent processes that are relied upon in establishing definitions. This is evident in the common failing of gang research; the problem of tautology.

The simplest tautological construction involves the relationship between gangs and violent or otherwise criminal behaviour. The entity, 'The Gang' is taken to be responsible for criminal behaviour such that entities that don't commit criminal behaviour are defined out of the picture. 100% correlation is established and the public perception is cemented by the empirical research. This kind of thing is also apparent in the work of Klein (2001) and of Klein and Maxon (2014) who suggest that "[a] street gang is any durable street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity" (Klein and Maxon 2006, p. 4). It is not difficult to see that the 'new' 'Eurogang' definition introduces two other limiting presuppositions about gangs, namely their apparent association with the street and their assumed age (youth – whatever that might mean). Nonetheless these assumptions about occupation of the street are not new. For Short (1996)

> Gangs are groups whose members meet together with some regularity, over time, on the basis of group-defined criteria of membership and group-defined organizational characteristics; That is, gangs are non-adult sponsored, self-determining groups that that demonstrate a continuity over time (Short 1996, p. 5).

Short, however, in my view is wise to include self-determination to the party, as he is to absent lawbreaking. Also of note in this definition is the lack of specificity concerning age – I return to Thrashers inclusion of children and adults – however Short continues to insist on youths or children – shall we say – in a way that closes the investigation of adults engaging in the same patterns. Garot (2010), drawing on Goffman suggests that gang involvement is just one kind of 'performance' available to students who resist conventional normative structures. This kind of approach from the ethnographic traditions may describe lots of 'internal surface' -lots of "thick description" but it won't give us a framework within which to understand the relationship between processes and 'structures' (for want of a better word), between assemblage and assembling. Moreover, such definitions fail in that the purpose of much definition of 'The Gang' is to gain some consistency in investigations of the *entity* 'The Gang' in the business of generating policy. However, it also seems to this writer that 'The Gang' is not an entity but a process and, as Heidegger points out to us, definition is only appropriate to entities. Moreover, we might suggest that definition is *the formal cause* of entities. On this issue, it has been suggested to me that my conception of gangs as assemblages, imagines the move from motivations (in the sense of imagined futures or perceptions of interstices and so forth) to the constitution of an assemblage as rather sudden. Such a criticism, it seems to me, reifies assemblages as entities with finished-ness or wholeness, and of course, in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, or of DeLanda, nothing could be further from the truth. We are all assemblages all of the time, neither finished, finishing, nor finishable. Entities are *defined* into existence and as such are only virtual and not factical. It is this realization that

motivates the critique of functionalism in this paper. This issue also raised a question about joint responsibility, particularly if co-associations are only virtual. The response to this question is very simple. The co-association rules that govern judgement of joint responsibility and joint enterprise (in legal terms) are *shown* to be arbitrary by this view. They too are *defined into existence* by the reification of the gang or other association as real rather than virtual entities; the reified gang provides the model and the justification for, or inclusion in joint action[1] that is said to *define* the gang; it matters not one jot what those definitions and models of behaviour are specified to be. The tautology of teleological functionalism is, of course, self-defining.

3. Process: interstices, consolidation, spontaneity, and conflict

3.1. Interstices: becoming, and supplementation

Let us now return to Thrasher. Not that I intend to adopt his definition, but that I intend to use it as an invitation or a stepping stone, stepping over into a perspective on gangs that permits us to re-examine *what it is* that we should be talking about – to start to address the functionalist problem of treating the gang as entity. When Thrasher maintains that the gang is interstitial he means that the sees gangs as forming in the normative gaps, what would later be called 'innovation' by Merton (1957). What I wish to invoke here however, is the kind of gap – interstice – evoked by Heidegger, following Neitzsche, between being and becoming, the gap implied by "stepping over into…" or "thrown projection".

When we speak of gangs we speak of persons, and their being in the world. We do not speak of cultures of animals (*pace* Peter Singer) – let us leave plants out of this. This, however, is immediately problematic: how are we to characterise persons. Problems arise immediately in that the being of persons is both object and subject as attested to by existentialists Heidegger, Sartre or Jaspers for example, and reinforced by phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty or Schutz. Attempts to avoid the problems of subjectivity gave rise in the mid-to-late 20th century to the person as agent. However, agency has been defined in a way (Giddens 1976) such that it defines itself out of existence (Crewe 2014). One of agency's problems is that it relies on free will. Should the 'free'[2] be taken out of 'free will' we are left with will and this is, I believe, where we should start examining culture: with persons as exhibiting will.

Persons can exhibit will because they are unique (almost[3]) in having the experience of self. I can represent myself to myself as myself, as Mead (2015) would have it, and consequently, when I represent[4] others to myself I can see that I am not entirely the same, and not entirely different to them. (This, of course is Heidegger's *Da sein* 'there being' [in the world with others]). When we experience others in the world with us therefore, we perceive a gap, an interstice between how we perceive ourselves and how we perceive others. Now, this may be a topic for the psychologists, but we *more or less* desire to fill the gap, either to be more like what we perceive or to be less like what we perceive in others. In this respect, all human motivation is interstitial. We perceive a gap and that says to us that we are not whole: we are always merely partial beings: we are, as Nietzsche (2003) would have it, always in a state of becoming. Hence we might say that we have will to complete ourselves, and to adopt some kind of *supplement to our existing selves* to bridge these interstices. It is, however, of utmost importance to point out that not only are we able to represent ourselves and others to ourselves, but we are able to

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[1] The joint enterprise rule has been found to have been wrongly applied in the UK. R. *v.* Jogee [2016] UKSC 8 (Justices: Lord Neuberger, Lady Hale, Lord Hughes, Lord Toulson, Lord Thomas).
[2] Which I do as an incompatibilist.
[3] Some recent observations of elephants have indicated the possession of the experience of self (note not the possession of the *concept* of self).
[4] We *represent* others to ourselves rather than *see* them because of the principle of 'apperception'.

represent to ourselves future states. We can imagine ourselves as objects of the future: we can see ourselves as we might wish to be in the future – including in the very next moment – that very next moment into which Heidegger (2010) has us 'step over'. We might suggest that being occupies the infinitesimal interstice between becoming and becoming and in this way all being is interstitial. It is also important to point out that not all of these future states is possible and that is because *the future is always subject to constraint*, some positive, some negative. What it is also important to note is that what we will – what we *can* will – is also subject to constraint, some positive, some negative. At the very least we cannot imagine something that we know absolutely nothing about, we cannot imagine *what it might be* that we cannot imagine: more prosaically, many of us cannot imagine certain things in such a way that may be described as the constraint of aspiration – particularly among the poor for example, and this kind of constraint on imagination is frequently applied by states in attempts to pacify their populations. These constraints, what we might call aspirational constraints – positive and negative – are almost certainly what the study of society is about and I will return to them later. Nonetheless we may make a bold statement that all human behaviour is the product of constrained will. In other words, the choices that individuals make about their behaviour are in relation to the perception of themselves as objects of the future, and their perception of the nature of their history and current circumstance, which can be socially conditioning (constraining or enabling). To be constrained does not mean that individuals have no will. They can see themselves in the future in any way they can imagine but will not always be able to exercise that choice. This is not because of social controls such as those postulated by Travis Hirschi, but because of an historical a priori, a past environment that now limits or constrains their imagination of themselves as objects of the future (Crewe 2014). Much has been made in gang literature about these 'limitations' on aspiration or on achievement as constituting a reason for joining gangs. These limitations, rather in the fashion of Mertonian adaptation, or, to use my word, constraints, encourage the persons thus constrained into the normative lacunae or interstices that *are* available to them.

I turn now to the nature of these aspirational constraints as presented in the gang literature. It has been claimed for some time now that persons view themselves as themselves in contradistinction to their perception of others and that it is the interstices between self and other that promote efforts to bridge gaps of meaning through identification (with...) (Hewitt 1976). It is strongly suggested by interactionists, like Hewitt and perhaps more famously Blummer (1986) and in particular Goffman (*passim*)[5], that the maintenance of a favourable social identity is the prime motivation for social behaviour. Identification, however requires the perception of similarity (to) and difference (from), both of which require evaluation of self and other. This process is attested to by many writers as being fundamental to human existence, as Sartre would have it

> The for-itself is defined ontologically as the lack of being and possibility belongs to the for-itself as that which it lacks... The for itself chooses because it is lack; freedom is really synonymous with lack... Fundamentally man *is* (my emphasis) *the desire to be*, and the existence of this desire is not to be established by an empirical induction; it is the result of an a priori description of the being of the for-itself, since desire is a lack and since the for-itself is the being which is to itself its own lack of being (Sartre 1956, p. 565).

Or Deleuze and Guatari (1977, p. 29) "[t]here is only desire and the social, and nothing else".

The desire for identity (with) appears to be a powerful human need, particularly where a lack of ontological security is concerned. It is, however, a logical necessity that 'identity' (with) presumes difference from and as much as one may join a gang

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[5] Goffman's paper 'On cooling the mark out' (1952) is a classic example of this kind of thinking.

the means, probably that one comes into conflict with another social group. Such feelings may give rise to the will to join gangs through various kinds of marginalization such as belonging to an ethnic minority (Krohn *et al.* 2011), economic deprivation (Vigil 2003), or geographic location (Ralphs *et al.* 2009). The desire for ontological security reveals the lack; in this case, of ontological security and this lack promotes the bridging of the interstice between becoming and becoming, and as these studies attest, for some this means joining a gang. The gang is taken as a completing supplement to the current assemblage of supplements past, that constitutes the person at the heart of the self. One should note, however, that these processes are not limited in scale, except that they only happen for co-proximations of persons.

4. Process: consolidation, and territorialization

I turn now to an outline of why consideration of becoming as the adoption of supplements is helpful. I mentioned above what I take to be the poverty of functionalist thought. Entities, so functionalists tell us, coalesce to form wholes. Entities have a purpose – a function, allied to their properties – in upholding the whole and securing its stability such that *it* can fulfil *its* function in a larger whole. Thus, we must assume, entities possess telos. Of course, teleology is problematic because we cannot say what the origin of any telos might be, that is, unless it is Devine, as natural law thinkers believed.

> Knowledges [judgements concerning the purpose of objects or processes] are as pyramids … the vertical point [of which] *Opus, quod operatur Deus a principio usque ad finem*, the summary law of nature [the work that God makes from beginning to end – Eccles 3:11] (Bacon 1824, p. 104)

And, moreover, even Comté's 'positive' is merely a *kind* of Spinozan, pantheist deity. This functionalist view that finds its *ne plus ultra* in the work of Talcot Parsons prohibits – or at best limits – any account of change[6]. A view of 'societies' that does not rely on whole entities is required, a view that sees all things as becoming rather than being. As persons are assemblages of adopted supplements past and present and the possibility of adoptions future, so collectivities (of persons) are to be taken as assemblages with pasts and futures. That which we choose to call a gang (or not) is also an assemblage

We learn from the work of Prigogine and Stengers (1994) and Auslander *et al.* (1964) in particular that complex systems behave in such a way as they *tend* towards certain values from a wide range of starting conditions. We might call them points or states; those studying complex systems call them attractors. The study of attractors provides us with a metaphor, at least, if not a model, for the development of societies. Let us consider the most simple attractor. This is the single fixed point attractor and we may see it in the form of a bowl with a convex bottom containing a marble. In ideal conditions where gravity is the only element of the system[7] other than the marble's initial velocity the marble will trace a spiral to the bottom centre of the bowl and stop. This however is not a complex system. In complex systems the only 'stop' is total entropy – nothing is ever complete or whole. This attractor is, however useful to us in understanding cultures. Let us imagine something like this single fixed point attractor on a massive scale. Let us consider a spiral galaxy. Of course, a spiral galaxy is not a single point attractor but one of its great features, its spirality is a little like our dished bowl. Entities spinning in the galaxy are attracted by the gravity of a great mass at the centre of the

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[6] Incidentally, this is still true of the work of Giddens (1976), agency and structure – routines and cultural resources – mutually instantiate one another dialectically, presenting a continuous flow of action which contributes to a social whole, each element having its own function in generating or maintaining that whole. This whole is analysable only as an aggregate of the properties or functions of its internal elements: that is, it is reducible to them.

[7] Of course the inertia of the ball constitutes or generates another attractor in the form of centrifugal force.

galaxy. This combined with centrifugal force that belongs to its inertia of the attracted elements produces a spiral. The important thing for us here is that the more mass the nucleus attracts to itself, the more mass it is *able* to attract to itself. Let us now change the analogy. Imagine a thin rubber skin lightly stretched out horizontally. We place in it a blob of mercury and the skin stretches into a bowl. If we now introduce another blob of mercury it will spiral towards the centre and join the other blob of mercury, and the skin will distort further. We now add another blob of mercury and the same happens again, only this time the skin distorts further and the central blob gets bigger this goes on each time we add more mercury. In this model we can take the skin to be illustrative of the distortion of space time[8]. The mercury could represent our sun and the curvature of the skin represents the space-time path of our planets around it. More pertinently to this paper the blob of mercury can represent the density or uniformity of (culture or a gang). This is a process of the kind described by Deleuze and Guattari (1988) or DeLanda (2006) for example, as processes of territorialisation, and it is processes of territorialisation that are responsible for the establishment of cultures. Let us examine how this might be.

Processes of territorialisation can be described when the entities involved in the process are themselves described in terms of relationships of exteriority. The whole entities of Parsonian functionalism are made of relations of interiority: they are concepts constructed in terms of the *properties* of their interior elements. The society thus formed is a whole: an entity. It is the sum of all its parts, and each of those parts has certain properties which delimit their function in maintaining the whole. This permits a view of the *eidos* of these wholes: we are able to see 'a society', 'a culture'. In this view, the elements of a society exist *because* they serve a function in sustaining that society as a stable whole, thus telos and nature are indistinguishable from one another in the surface of the entity. Processes entailing relationships of exteriority however, rather than being characterized in terms of the properties of their elements are characterized in terms of their elements' capacities. Moreover, they are not locked together in some kind of Parsonian jigsaw, they coalesce in what DeLanda (2006, p. 10) calls an assemblage. Hence this view is sometimes termed assemblage theory. Whereas in the functionalist view, the dominant metaphor invoked the various functions of the organs of the body, where the properties and functions (co-conceived) of each organ reciprocally contribute to the body as a whole (totality), Deleuze and Guattari (1988) conceive of assemblages of different species. Symbiotic relationships such as that between bees and plants are based upon the capacities of each. Whilst it is true that the relationship is functionally necessary to the well-being of plant and insect, it is merely contingently so: the bee and the plant have come to rely on one another's *capacities* through evolution, and at some point in the future this assemblage will cease to exist in its current form. Not only do DeLanda and Deleuze and Guattari insist that assemblages are made up of the capacities of their constituents, but that capacities emerge (in the hard sense) from the assembling processes themselves. Moreover, every change in an assemblage results in new emergent capacities. In Benjamin Britten's opera Gloriana, his librettist William Plomer wishing to evoke a perfect society writes "Each needeth each: / The ripest fruit hangs where / Not one, not one, but only two, only two can reach"[9]. The assemblage (of two people) *can* pick the ripest fruit, whereas one person alone cannot – the capacity (can) has emerged from the assembling process; one person is a *supplement* to the other. Less beautifully, neither a gun nor a person can shoot anyone, this can only happen when the two elements are assembled together – the capacity to shoot someone *emerges* from the new assemblage: when the person takes the gun as a supplement to themselves to *make* a new assemblage. Individual elements may be removed from one assemblage and inserted into another without changing the

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[8] As attested to by Einstein in his '*General Theory of Relativity*' 1915.
[9] Britten Choral Dances from 'Gloriana'. 'Concord'.

capacities of those elements, but whilst changing their properties. This, it will be recognized is analogous to a person meeting with several different groups of people – perhaps during one evening. What the individual can do changes according to circumstance. What I wish to point out also is that the meeting with each group might be viewed as taking each group as a supplement to oneself. It is certainly the case that Deleuze, and Guattari, and DeLanda would take each group, including our actor, to be a new, *more or less* temporary, *more or less* un/stable assemblage. We must also state here that it is not only that collectivities of individuals are assemblages but we are each and every one of us *more or less* un/stable assemblages, and we are assemblages of all the supplements that we have adopted during our lives – and of the traces of rejection or discarding of a particular, previously adopted supplement: traces of periods of instability. Rejection and instability are referred to as processes of deterritorialization and may be analogous to shaking our dished bowl after it has settled down, or tipping the marble into another bowl, or our rubber skin bursting under the weight of so much mercury[10]; our gang members may move between one group and another. In a deterministic world, spontaneity is an illusion; in a complex world, that illusion is perfectly understandable. Such breakdowns – in astrophysics, or human systems (for want of a better word) may serve as an analogy for spontaneity; in DeLanda's terms: De-territorialization. Thus cast loose the persons move into a normative interstice where they collide with others and the process of consolidation begins again.

4.1. Process: territorialization, meaning, and normativity

The question arises, then, what are these supplements? Well they may be anything but in this circumstance of trying to view 'gangs' in a way other than mere surface I wish to invoke the nature of symbol and the fundamental question of human being or becoming – knowledge of other persons. Since it is impossible that we have *identical* experiences to other people, that would have to mean that we *were* identical – and that is impossible because no matter how similar we may be, you cannot occupy the same space as me, you will always be either to my right or my left, or above, or behind, or whatever: hence we cannot know *precisely* the content of others' minds. In this circumstance we cannot know *precisely* what others mean when they speak. This is the essence of the origin, necessity, and elasticity of symbols, and it means that we have to come to an agreement with others on what symbols mean: we have to negotiate with others in the world. In this circumstance it is a logical necessity that we cannot simply bring to a symbol any meaning we choose, this would constitute Wittgenstein's (2001) private language: our choice of the use of symbols and their meaning is constrained in some way. And that has to be to say "*someone or something has the power to constrain*" my will, my choice of symbol or of the meaning of the symbol that I choose. Now the symbol that I choose is a symbol or meaning I choose to *adopt*. It is a supplement that I take to complete myself in a particular way – to communicate. However, the way I communicate is constrained. It is incumbent upon us to question how that constraint comes about, and it is to this that I now turn.

Symbols are elastic because we cannot know the precise content of others' minds. Hence, for symbols to have meaning we have to *agree* more or less with each other what we take the meaning of a symbol to be. This is a part of what we recognize as normative processes – It is *right*, we say, because we have agreed, that we take this symbol to mean X – this symbol does represent X. It is *deviant* therefore, to take it to mean Y. 'A society can neither create itself nor recreate itself without at the same time creating an ideal' (Durkheim 1968, pp. 422-423). When we look at societies or cultures or gangs as *eidos* or as entities we can say that this norm belongs to the society. We can also say that this norm belongs to a culture, we can say this norm belongs to this gang. However, we can only do this if we see society

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[10] In astro-physics, this would constitute the making of a black hole.

and culture, this gang, as entity. Researchers have been uncritical of the arbitrariness by which we set the scale of that surface to which the normative requirement applies: norms can apply to groups (assemblages) of two, or to 'societies' (assemblages) the size of China that consist of a significant proportion of the world's population. In an infinite universe, all scales are *simultaneously* infinite and infinitesimal. Hence it is a logical necessity that our juxtaposition of them must be arbitrary. However, the processes of assemblage at work are the same – they are the processes of sharing meanings, the processes of establishing norms. When I meet two people (together in isolation for example) who wear odd coloured socks, I am one, they are two. The norm in this circumstance is to wear odd socks. If I wish to conform (I need not, of course) I will adopt the normal (appropriate to that circumstance) behaviour of wearing odd socks. We are then three people who wear odd coloured socks, when another comes to join us, the power to encourage the norm is stronger, we are three, they are one – we become four. The more a group is able to encourage a norm, the greater its capacity to encourage a norm *becomes*. This is, it will be apparent, a process of territorialisation, it is analogous to our spiral galaxy or our blob of mercury – territorialisation increases the *capacity* for territorialisation. However, our galaxy is not a simple single point attractor. We might suggest that it is a highly complex 'strange attractor'. Practically the appearance of this attractor is a large spiral with other spirals spiralling within it, i.e. solar systems, and smaller systems of planetary moons, each of which is more or less un/stable. These smaller systems are analogous to what we have called gangs. Each has its own 'central mass' to which elements are attracted. The central mass here is not a sun but a norm. The way we as individuals adopt these supplements constitutes the individual aspect of the collective emergence of culture. It is important to stress again that 'The Gang' is eidos. *Some* of these normative systems are what we have called gangs. Gangs are not made by these processes, norm-driven assemblages are.

4.2. Territorialisation: process

Gangs communicate their occupation of a particular social interstice through several means that have been identified by gang researchers. Identification behaviours serve to aid belonging to, and service of, the norms of the particular group (Turner *et al.* 1987, Abrahams and Hogg 1990). Different groups may adopt differing clothing styles – hats, jewellery and notoriously trainers for example (Blakemore and Blakemore 1998, Gambetta 2009, Densley 2012). Gangs may indulge in what Bandura *et al.* (1996) term 'euphemistic language' in a process of denial of their dehumanizing behaviour. However, such language is only euphemistic and such behaviour denial, only from the point of view of the observing outsider: deviance is only ever deviance from, never deviance to. This is the new language of a new assemblage that refers to behaviour that is normal in that circumstance because it has formed in a normative interstice. Indeed, there are several studies in what has become known as Ethnolinguistic identity Theory (Giles and Johnson 1981, 1987, Cargile *et al.* 1996) that proposes that such euphemistic language serves to cement the group's consolidation processes. Whilst this may be so, this is really a chicken and egg situation. The change in language *to* the new linguistic forms *emerges* (in the hard sense) from those assembling processes that arise from negotiating shared meanings. Norms concerning appropriate apparel also *emerge* from these processes in the same way. The view that arises out of questions concerning gang stability and eidetic *properties* gives rise to answers that have to them a significant functionalist flavour. This functionalist conception is also implicated in generating questions in this form. Recognition that assemblages – such as gangs – are predicated on their *capacities* eradicates this problem. An assemblage has capacities to adopt an interstitial supplement to itself. In doing so it changes its capacities. Each co-proximation of persons has the capacity to attract to it other persons not-so-different to its existing members, but different enough to change the capacities of that group. The more the arriviste conforms to the group, the

more stable will be its surface, the less the arriviste conforms, the more the group's capacities will change. There is no need to give more weight to processes that generate stability than processes of change or spontaneity. The appearance of stability is just that: appearance.

4.3. Gang: culture

Let us take a brief look at one of these norm-driven assemblages. This one is called *The Bullingdon Club*. At one time in the past this assemblage counted as members the current Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the UK government and the current Mayor of London (Sparrow 2009). This particular assemblage has rarely been called a gang, perhaps because they did not go equipped with knives or guns but with cheque books. They did however have a dress code (a £1,500 dress suit) and a way of speech (belonging to that of elite private schools). Moreover, I doubt that the state would at that time have counted them as its own. They also had a problematic way of behaving, taking delight in smashing up the restaurant at which they had dined and then leaving a cheque for the damage. This behaviour is a supplement to each of their existing assemblages and it is behaviour that is encouraged by the normative weight of the 'club' supported by considerable money. Their behaviour is positively constrained by normativity and wealth; it should perhaps have been constrained negatively by the law. The point here is that by any reasonable definition *The Bullingdon Club* is a Gang. It is a gang populated by people who now have as one of their *raisons d'etre* (as politicians) the elimination of gangs. Of course, political parties are gangs. Which assemblage gets labelled a 'gang' is the product of the power to label. Power is *an expression of continuous and universal* (though unequal) *distribution of capacities*. It equates to the *capacity* to do something, and not to the *ability* to do something, because abilities can be constrained. It also should not be confused with influence: power equates to the *effecting* of consequences whereas influence equates to *affecting* things or people. However, if one has power, one *can* influence things or people. Accordingly, institutions or social structures are greater than the sum of their parts because capacities *emerge* from their assemblage, what matters in the analysis of the structure of cultures is not their properties but the distribution of capacities (Crewe 2014). A larger and more durable assemblage (say a government versus a group of young men of colour) has more capacities to define a situation as one whose norms require the label 'gang'. It is therefore the concept 'gang' that creates the *problem* of gangs. As Woo *et al.* put it "fraternities and sororities offer members improved status and pleasurable experiences, but such groups are more accessible to middle- and upper class individuals" (Woo *et al.* 2015, p. 148). Nonetheless, fraternities and sororities are the site of significant problematic behaviour (Bauer Rapso *et al.* 2015).

Assemblages (which, in assemblage theory all things are) are formed from material things or affective states, as DeLanda (2006) puts it

> "the concept of assemblage is defined along two dimensions. One dimension or axis defines the variable roles which an assemblage's components may play from a purely *material* role at one extreme of the axis to a purely expressive role at the other extreme. These roles are variable and may occur in mixtures, that is, a given component may play a mixture of expressive or material roles by exercising different sets of capacities. Another dimension defines variable processes in which these components become involved and that either stabilize the identity of an assemblage, by increasing its degree of internal homogeneity or the degree of sharpness of its boundaries, or destabilize it. The former are referred to as processes of *territorialisation* and the latter as processes of deterritorialization" (DeLanda 2006, pp. 11-12).

Let us suggest that a particular kind of clothing is a material thing or that a gun is a material thing. A car is a material thing or a hot dog. All are material supplements to the assemblage that is a particular person. A person is a material supplement to

the assemblage that is a gang, let's say. Of course a person is also an expressive thing, but so is the gun. Its presence not only changes the capacity of the person or the gang it *signals* that change. The chosen trainer not only looks nice and fashionable but it signals inclusiveness and as such sharpens the definition of the edges of the gang in a process of territorialisation. A cucumber is a material thing – a supplement when bought – it is an expressive supplement when it indicates that the purchaser is a vegetarian. The purchaser's capacity to communicate with other vegetarians is altered (perhaps) when this expressive display is made. The point is, that when viewed this way, gangs are no different to other assemblages or rather are not differently different to other social assemblages. This is simply the way that social processes work.

The Gang in this view is an inevitable effluent of assembling processes of cultures and institutions. What this means for studies of gang culture is that there are no groups that are *really* gangs, there are no people who are inevitably 'gangstas'. All groups of persons are meaning sharing, norm generating groups. Power relations (the distribution of capacities) and our histories and aspirations govern the difference between groups, *each of which is unique*. The formation of these groups is the result of territorializing processes and their dissolution is deterritorializing in a fully complex and fluid way. The task for gang study is to investigate the constraints, positive and negative, that shape the normativity of these groups – gang, or *Bullingdon Club*, or indeed any collection of human wills.

4.4. Embodiment

I have concentrated above almost exclusively on the symbolic quality of assemblage. It must be remembered, however, that DeLanda is explicit in his belief that supplements may consist of elements that are not merely symbolic, but that are affectively embodied. This is so, in part, because *all* experience is factical in memory or trace, and as such cannot be eradicated as influences in the choice of the adoption of supplements: we are not free to discount our embodied experiences. It is also our disposition to observe others' embodied reaction to experience – "he looks like he's enjoying himself". This disposition permits a bodily interrelation between group members in that it provides the capacity for normative judgement and permits transgression in pursuit of various kinds of embodied behaviour. Hence, for example, the delight seen on the friend's face as she runs away after breaking a window reveals to the follower, that whilst attracting normative sanction from society as a whole, breaking windows looks like fun, and, moreover, oneself transgressing in similarly breaking a window, aligns one with the other window breaker. Here is a gang. Here is the beginning of "Edge Work": "happy slapping" or "joy riding" is just round the corner.

What does remain consistent with the symbolic account given above, however, is that reflection is always secondary to experience; quite simply, we cannot reflect upon something we have not experienced – *and this means any kind of experience.* Moreover, all reflection involves normative assessment (I take the Levinasian view that it is impossible to resile from one's responsibility for and to others), even if that assessment is negative or rejected (as in transgressive behaviour), it is merely a rejection of an *actual* normativity, not evidence of the absence of normativity. We must, of course, then state that all normativity is transmitted symbolically, even if those symbols are somatic rather than verbal, and it is the (attempt at partial) homogenization of meanings that drives the consolidation and territorializing processes (and *de*territorializing processes in failure) that constructs and dissolves all cultures: gangs included.

5. Conclusions

I began this paper by suggesting that there was a problem with ostensive definitions of gangs that take '*The Gang*' as entity or eidos; the functionalist view

that this entity and its subvening parts are related to one another by their properties allied to their functions. This, I contended, is a self-fulfilling view in that to think thus *produces* entities – but as reifications – which gang researchers have gone on to investigate *as* entities. I also suggested that the problem is further compounded when a similar ostensive approach to the study of cultures or culture (as art for example) is adopted. The phrase '*Gang Culture*' then becomes a conflation of two reified concepts. When concepts are reified, it is frequently that their definitions are tautologous, and it has been recognised for some time that this is so with gang research. Moreover, if we get our definitions wrong, we pre-emptively close off certain possible elements of study that may illuminate our field of interest. It appears very much that this is so with gang research. Thrasher's definition appears to avoid some of these problems at the expense, however, of the specificity required by the consumers of much research, namely policy-makers. I contend, therefore that a functionalist view of gangs as entities is doomed to failure.

Following from DeLanda (2006) and Deleuze and Guatari (1988), and from Crewe (2014) where I outline my own development of assemblage theory, I set out to illustrate some aspects of gang processes without offering an ostensive definition. My own development of assemblage theory includes an account of motivation, this, of necessity requires an account of persons and their place in the world. When we do this, it becomes apparent that humans perceive interstices and lack and they also perceive the possibility that such interstices may be stepped over or that such lack can be filled by the adoption of supplements to themselves. I later suggest, in line with assemblage theory that these supplements are always supplements to existing assemblages. It will be apparent, nonetheless, that we cannot always do the things that we wish to do, and that might mean the difference between continuing in the social space of one's current circumstance or the desire to move into a new social interstice where one may more likely express one's individuality for example. It may also mean that one's mans of achievement of what one has been brought to desire is not possible in the way that Merton has described. Gang researchers have consistently pointed out the kinds of benefits that gang members gain from gang membership; particularly things like ontological security.

Having established a picture of motivation or desire that rests on humans' place in the world with others, I went on to show how that desire is implicated in the formation of social groups. Social groups are nodes of concerted meaning. Groups are assemblages. Assemblages are producers of capacities. In complexity studies, groups may be considered complex or 'strange' attractors. Larger, more homogenous (denser) groups or simpler attractors, have greater capacities to attract new members. The kinds of processes that serve to increase feelings of belonging in gangs, and thus density, scale and homogeneity (simplicity of attractor) have been extensively researched by gang researchers. One thing we must remember, though, is that material objects are not just material they are also symbolic: expressive. The gang therefore is a node of concerted symbolic behaviour (not, not a *symbolic* node of behaviour), and as such it is a *normative node*. It is this normative quality that sets gangs apart from other social groups – that is because they too are normative in character. This normativity is unavoidable in human groups because it arises *out of* – the negotiation of – the elasticity of the meaning of symbols. These processes of increase of density, scale and simplicity are all processes that DeLanda would term processes of territorialisation.

This analysis shows us that gangs are no different on the macro scale to any other human groupings. Realization that this is so opens up a whole new realm for investigation of the 'gang problem'. What we may conclude is that the reasons for the formation of 'gangs' is very much bound up with the mechanism of the formation of gangs. Not on the definitional sense where gangs are defined *by* their processes or properties, but in a realization that a gang is not an entity to be formed but a process, common to all society. The treatment of its identity, or

reification as an entity, arises out of the very processes that shapes all human groups of all scales – namely normativity established through the negotiation of the meaning of symbols.

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