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*Crime as an assemblage*  
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## **Abstract**

This article seeks to make an original contribution to criminology and the sociology of crime and punishment by elaborating the 'assemblage', a concept which originates in the collaborative poststructuralist philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and discussing its ontological implications for researching crime. I will first introduce the concept and its application. I then discuss the relationship between the assemblage and Michel Foucault's concept of the *dispositif*. I demonstrate how the assemblage could be used to analyse crime events and discuss questions of change and scale within the assemblage. I conclude by outlining some implications for how adopting this concept would change the way we practice and research crime and punishment.

## **Keywords**

Assemblage, ontology, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, crime, dispositif.

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## **Introduction**

This article seeks to make an original contribution to criminology and the sociology of crime and punishment by elaborating the 'assemblage' concept which originates in the collaborative poststructuralist philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and discussing its ontological implications for researching crime. I will do this through a close reading of the concept as it appears in their co-authored work, primarily in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980, first translated into English in 1987).<sup>1</sup> I will first introduce the concept and its etymology. I then discuss the relationship between the assemblage and Michel Foucault's concept of the *dispositif*. I demonstrate how the assemblage could be used to analyse crime and discuss coherence and change within the assemblage. I conclude by suggesting some implications for how adopting this concept would change the way we practice and research crime and punishment.

As a model of multiplicity, the assemblage has been taken up and variously adapted and developed in the work of numerous scholars within the humanities and social sciences (for

example Bennett, 2009; DeLanda, 2006; Latour, 2005; Puar, 2007; Sassen, 2008). 'Assemblage' has also become something of a general term within academic discourse in recent years, used, for example, to indicate something's complexity, its determinative irreducibility, or as shorthand for a complex system (for example: Gray, 2013; Maglione, 2018). Whilst these descriptive uses can be productive, in this article I follow some recent scholarship (Buchanan, 2015, 2017; Nail, 2017) in emphasising the assemblage as an analytic tool – useful for defamiliarising and problematising things that seem stable, coherent and understood, by drawing attention to the way that things are included or excluded by the concept in its constitution as such. In the way that I am using it, the assemblage is a *political* concept. In the employment of the assemblage for analysis, it is not adequate to describe the content of the assemblage; we have to look at what it affects in its arrangement. So, if we were to think of a crime as an assemblage, we would have to ask: what is this configuration of crime in aid of, what are its limits, and what effects does it produce? Within criminology and the sociology of crime, the assemblage is currently most widely used by theorists of surveillance (for example: Brown, 2006; Bogard, 2006; Mantello, 2016). Haggerty and Ericson's conceptualisation of the networked 'surveillant assemblage' (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000), which incorporates Deleuze's late 'Postscript on the Societies of Control' (1992) is particularly influential here. However, in comparison with the humanities and other social sciences, the ontological implications of Deleuze and Guattari's work have been scarcely explored within criminology.<sup>ii</sup> Notable exceptions are found within the work of Dragan Milovanovic and Bruce Arrigo (Milovanovic, 1997; Milovanovic et al., 2005; Arrigo & Milovanovic, 2009), the collection *New Directions for Criminology* (2010), edited by Ronnie Lippens and Patrick van Calster, Don Crew's *Becoming Criminal* (2013), and Elaine Campbell's recent work (2016, 2019). Lippens and van Calster (2010, p. 10) stress the need 'to translate or at least direct the most important tenets of poststructuralist thought towards [Cohen's] three basic questions', these being (after Edwin Sutherland (1947)): 'why are laws made? Why are they broken? What do we do or what should we do about this?' (Cohen, 1988, p. 9). Although such engagements are productive, it is important to note that I do not share this orientation towards making poststructuralist thought 'work' within the familiar territory assembled through criminology. Instead, I share Jamie Murray's contention that a sincere 'cross over of Deleuze & Guattari and criminology would presage not only deviating concepts of crime, but also deviating ethical and political becomings' (Murray, 2010, p. 77). In other words, rigorous engagement with Deleuze and Guattari's thought entails accepting an ontological premise which (in their spatial terminology) 'deterritorializes' much of criminology's familiar terrain and entails a 'reterritorialization': a new practice of criminology in which commonplaces like 'crime', 'harm' and 'deviance' are understood as produced through interactions with other social assemblages and processes.

### The assemblage

In his earlier work Deleuze was engaged in an ambitious project that targeted what he termed the central 'illusion' of philosophy: that there is a transcendent principle or set of principles outside of our practices and discourses that can be invoked authoritatively and innocently to give order, value and meaning to the world. He argued that the dominant mode within European thought prioritised the representation and recognition of fixed identities, essences, origins and truths. Against this, drawing on a lineage of thinkers including Baruch Spinoza and Henri Bergson, he attempted to conceptualise life in the flux of 'becoming', rather than defining and fixing static forms of 'being'. Thinking with 'becoming' privileges experimentation and movement over placing things into a pre-existing schema. For works that develop this critique and a new 'image of thought' see in particular his *Difference and Repetition* (2004a) originally published in French in 1968, and *The Logic of Sense* (2004b) first published in 1969. In his collaborations with Guattari, Deleuze's processual ontology of 'becoming' rather than fixed 'being' was given a socio-political reformulation through Guattari's politicised practice of psychoanalysis. For example, the interpretive confusion in the wake of the events of May '68 led them to argue for political analysis which *also* attends to the 'micropolitics' of an event, rather than assuming that change can be fully analysed according to the actions of pre-established political groupings such as classes, factions, and political parties (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, p. 238).

The assemblage is an important concept within Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical framework, with versions of it appearing across their joint-authored works (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, 2004a, 2004b, 2012).<sup>iii</sup> Deleuze and Guattari claim that things usually categorised as discrete subjects or objects, for example humans, artworks, crimes, and institutions, can be conceptualised as assemblages: reasonably mobile configurations of acts, affects, emotions, utterances, things, practices and concepts that produce effects based on their shifting configurations and connections (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, 2004a, 2004b, 2012). Importantly, assemblages do not just exist on the level of discourse: Deleuze and Guattari describe assemblages as comprising both 'content' and 'expressions' which are mutually presupposed and co-constituted (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, pp. 200–201). The elements which constitute an assemblage are made to congregate via repeated couplings; assemblages are machinic and inventive in their operations, producing the connections and disconnections with other assemblages which maintain their existence as such (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, pp. 448–449). Assemblages are constituted by their relationships with other assemblages. This is not a closed or static model; rather its structure is always open, and provisional – although there are reoccurring features to which it is important to attend. Although assemblages are mobile and capable of change, they tend towards stability and stratification (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, pp. 4, 45). Assemblages are not static hierarchies of relations, but neither are they random in their configuration. It is important to be aware of the impact of a connection with a more immobile or enduring assemblage which has the power to affect and re-shape emergent assemblages. For example, we should critically consider how the existing prison assemblage weighs on any emerging alternatives and bends them back into line with its own character. As such, the way an assemblage is configured is not inevitable but 'always concerned about questions of power' (Buchanan, 2015, p. 382). They are 'purposeful' (Buchanan, 2015, p. 385) but not in the sense of comprising a homogenous intentionality that could be seen as evidencing simple causality or design. It is more a question of thinking about the assemblage as a machine<sup>iv</sup> for doing something, or that has a tendency to produce certain effects.

Etymologically, it should be noted that the English word 'assemblage' is an approximate translation of the original French *agencement*, which has no direct correlation in English.<sup>v</sup> Unlike the English word 'assemblage', which indicates a more-or-less fixed arrangement in which you bring the necessary parts together to create a whole (for example, to assemble a bike), an *agencement* is 'a construction, an arrangement, or a layout' (Nail, 2017, p. 22) which may change and does not have the same part/whole relationship. *Agencement* therefore indicates an arrangement of a multiplicity with associations of mobility that are lost in the English assemblage. Ian Buchanan suggests that the plain language meaning of the English 'assemblage' has resulted in an 'undue emphasis on the idea of "assembling" as the core process of assemblages' (Buchanan, 2017, p. 458). By this he means that the focus is too often on gathering things together (compiling), rather than analysing how things are structured or arranged (composing) (Buchanan, 2017, p. 458). This is an important point because the analytical power of the assemblage is in showing how its diverse components work in combination to produce particular effects. Despite these important issues of translation, and notwithstanding Deleuze and Guattari's inconsistent use of the term,<sup>vi</sup> in keeping with common academic practice I use the translated English term 'assemblage' throughout this article, inviting the reader to retain a sense of the assemblage as a composed yet mobile multiplicity.

### **Assemblage and *dispositif***

As Deleuze (1999, p. 14, 2007b) acknowledged, the assemblage is closely related to Foucault's concept of the *dispositif*, often translated into English as 'apparatus,' which gained importance within his later works.<sup>vii</sup> However, the assemblage should not be understood as a direct descendent of Foucault's *dispositif*, because of the reciprocal influence of Deleuze's work on Foucault's later thought, and their shared intellectual milieu.<sup>viii</sup> Giorgio Agamben argues that the *dispositif* is 'a decisive technical term in the strategy of Foucault's thought,' essential to his political philosophy of power and 'governmentality' (Agamben, 2009, p. 2). This locates the *dispositif* (and therefore, I would suggest, the assemblage), as part of a network of political concepts which

attempted to comprehend the period's altered sense of power, subjectivity, state and sovereignty, in the wake of contemporary anti-colonial and worker struggles, and to reckon with the future of Marxism in the crisis brought about by Stalinism.

Both Deleuze (2007b) and Agamben (2009) wrote influential accounts of the *dispositif* where they attempted to pull together a general definition from Foucault's contextual uses of the concept. In his essay Agamben quotes from a 1977 interview in which Foucault describes the *dispositif* as made up of:

a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions - in short, the said as much as the unsaid... The *dispositif* is the network which is arranged between these elements (Agamben, 2009, p. 2; Foucault et al., 1980, pp. 195–196).

The *dispositif* shares with the assemblage a conceptualisation as a reasonably mobile arrangement of practices, statements, things and the relations between them. In defining the *dispositif* as also the 'network which is arranged between these elements' it is clear that the configuration of the *dispositif* and what it includes and excludes is of vital political importance. According to Foucault, the *dispositif* works 'a perpetual process of *strategic elaboration*' (Foucault et al., 1980, p. 195 emphasis in original), which nonetheless has unforeseen effects (Foucault et al., 1980, p. 195). Foucault uses the historical example of the *dispositif* of imprisonment having the unintended effect of producing 'delinquency', a form of social life or subjectivity shaped by repeated imprisonment and surveillance (Foucault et al., 1980, pp. 195–196). Consequently, prison cannot be understood to be a response to, nor a remedy for, delinquency. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari pick up this example, arguing that following Foucault, we need to understand 'prison' and 'delinquency' as 'in a state of unstable equilibrium or reciprocal presupposition' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, p. 75). The unforeseen effects of the *dispositif*'s elaboration are also very close to the assemblage in its 'lines of flight' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, p. 9) which escape from the assemblage and mutate it.

As Foucault specifies, the *dispositif* is as much the 'said' as the 'unsaid', and it is in his work from this period that he began 'to examine the empirical interactions between [the] discursive and non-discursive' (Olssen, 2014, p. 37). In *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1991), he shows how 'punishment' is produced by an interactive articulation of both material practices such as torture and imprisonment *and* discourses, utterances and laws which are mutually shaping. Much can be drawn from Foucault's thought. However, as befitting his 'genealogical' approach, his materials were primarily historical textual artefacts drawn from institutional archives. I would argue that Deleuze and Guattari's work offers a richer conceptual vocabulary to comprehend research encounters as they are unfolding, and to try and capture the multiplicity of events. Writing on *Discipline and Punish*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that understanding how these different things are brought together requires attempting to map or diagram 'a whole organization articulating formations of power and regimes of signs... operating on a molecular level' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, p. 75). In other words, it requires us to map out the assemblage.

*A Thousand Plateaus* attempts just such a mapping; indeed Deleuze described the assemblage as the 'general logic' of the book (Deleuze, 2007a, p. 177).<sup>ix</sup> As with the *dispositif*, the assemblage is not introduced as a formal analytic model but rather is presented through a series of examples such as the 'rhizome' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, pp. 3–28). A rhizome is a plant with an acentered root system, for example ginger. These can grow in any direction and if cut off or blocked in one path, they will sprout forth elsewhere like the mythical Hydra's heads. Deleuze and Guattari invoke the rhizome for the differing model it provides from the biological image they claim dominates Western thought: the tree. Trees are organised hierarchically, with branches growing out from a central trunk, and all the root network and spread of leaves working to nourish and maintain a central stem. They argue that dominant western philosophy has modelled itself upon this 'arborescent schema' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, p. 323), to produce a rigid hierarchy of concepts with largely unquestioned transcendental truth claims at the top, organizing the production of thought all the way down and rendering some thoughts inconceivable. Considering

this critique, re-producing concepts as assemblages could be seen as a politicised thought experiment. If we conceptualised crime as an assemblage, what thoughts become possible?

### Crime as an assemblage

In conceptualising crime as an assemblage or multiplicity the first thing to note is that crime is *both* a designation for an event, and a category of acts and practices which are diverse and historically and geographically contingent, sharing an essential commonality only in their illegality. The social and political effects of false equivalences between qualitatively different kinds of crime are well known. For example, the effect of treating a racialised, street-based crime like ‘mugging’ as a metonym for crime per se, has the effect of imputing features such as acquisitiveness or confrontation to all crime, but also of making crimes which happen in other spaces such as domestic or cyber spaces less visible as crimes. I suggest that the assemblage can help us both to attend to differences within the category of crime, and to analyse singular crime events as multiplicities. It encourages us to decentre individual accounts and experiences, whether those of the criminal, the victim, or researcher from our analysis of crime. It urges us to pay attention to the workings of non-human actors. The assemblage allows us to treat each crime as plural and irreducible. This doesn’t mean that we cannot engage with questions of agency, intentionality or responsibility, but it means that we do not have a blueprint for doing this work.

In thinking through crime as an active or purposive assemblage we might notice the way that certain versions of the concept dominate, appearing tenacious, or stratified. There are recurring features within different versions of the crime assemblage. As an in-exhaustive list of materials that *might* be included in an assemblage of crime, I offer:

The acts and statements of state agencies such as the various courts, prisons, police forces, parliaments, the Home Office, political parties, semi-autonomous think tanks, grassroots political organisations, religions and social movements, universities, schools and other sites of learning. The acts and statements of academics who assemble versions of crime through their work, and of those persons produced as ‘criminals’, and of those who break laws through their actions but are not criminalised. The affective and emotional states of these human and non-human bodies. The algorithmically-determined search results returned upon querying ‘crime’ on an internet search engine. Present and past conceptualisations and practices of morality, law, virtue, human nature, property, need, violence, justice, society, community, danger, harm, gender, revenge, race, class. Concepts and feelings that cause some people to decide to cross the street to avoid other people. Doors locked or unlocked at night. The statements made in prior criminological texts and by contemporary practitioners, all of which interact with ideas and affects outside the discipline. The statements which enact the laws that define the criminal in a specific time and place, simultaneously defining the ‘victim’ of crime. The domestic extremism watch list. Technologies, like DNA testing, the survey, handcuffs, CCTV, or the interview and the different kinds of data they produce. Forms of representation – graphs, maps, photographs and diagrams and text and novels and films and TV judges. Characters enunciated – plural images like crime as a ‘disease’ or an ‘epidemic’ of a certain type of crime. Images of crime as rarity like the ‘serial killer’ or the ‘career criminal’. Stock phrases with built in social explanations such as ‘crimes of passion’, ‘honour killings’, ‘mercy killings’, ‘angels of mercy’, ‘black widows’, ‘dirty cops’, ‘knife crime’, ‘broken windows’, crime as the glue of our social fabric, a crime of opportunity, crime as inevitable or banal, the ‘ex-con’, the retired gangster living in the Costa del Sol...

This list should not be imagined as comprising unchanging, discrete elements, but rather as composed of materials that themselves are also multiple, complex, transforming and interactive. Some of the institutions and agencies included above are themselves social assemblages (for example, prisons, courts, and religions) which produce their own shifting territory. For example, Elaine Campbell (2016) discusses how the digital vigilantism of ‘paedophile hunters’ is mutating the concept of policing. The reader may have noticed how geographically and temporally located my list is – even this initial list hints at a territory and casts a shadow portrait of the list-maker, who is part of the assemblage rather than outside of it. As I have already noted, assemblages comprise both ‘content’ and ‘expressions’ which are mutually presupposed and co-

constituted (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, pp. 200–201). Crucially, the above list is not an assemblage of crime, it is merely a speculative list of materials. Each assemblage takes:

a particular form: it selects, draws together, stakes out, and envelops a territory. It is made up of imaginative, contingent articulations among myriad heterogeneous elements... these bodies only appear to be in proximity with one another given a particular act of imaginative gathering (Slack & Wise, 2014, p. 156).

Despite this mutability, assemblages also have (at least some) appearance of coherence and boundedness. Thus, although connectivity is an important principle of the assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, p. 7), it is not the case that everything is therefore connected together. The way these assemblages are figured intersects with organising flows of power, making inclusions and exclusions, determining what can be said and done. The territory produced through an assemblage of crime might work to hide other possible ways of assembling crime which would necessarily have different effects. Thus, the content and form of the constellation of crime *matters*, affecting our lives, our representations and practices.

The mobility of the assemblage can help us think about the contingency of crime; a particular shift in the arrangement of elements included in an assemblage might mutate it into something else, for example an accident rather than a crime. Different versions of crime are assembled from different elements, and stake out territories of differing scales, based on the extensity of their networks of elements, and the stratification of certain elements through their repeated inclusion – for example, the police as actors. This repetition might appear to give the assemblage an essence or attribute of enduring power. However, it's important to note that Deleuze and Guattari follow Foucault (1990, pp. 92–101) in maintaining that features of assemblages such as power, agency and organisation are *effects* of the articulations or elements, rather than *properties* of things or persons.

### Coherence and change

Any account of a social phenomenon must account for change, and deal with scale. So how and where does change occur within the assemblage model? As we have seen, despite occupying various states of stratification, assemblages are not static, timeless, or inevitable. They are relatively open systems animated by the dynamics of social processes. Deleuze and Guattari write: 'the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, p. 98). Although the assemblage reproduces itself to stabilise and establish a territory, every brush against the outside of the assemblage entails deterritorialisations, otherwise known as 'lines of flight' which transform it. As William Bogard writes, 'in a crucial sense, assemblages as a whole are lines of flight' in their mobility (Bogard, 2006, p. 108). Bogard (2006, p. 108) draws attention to the way in which assemblages pursuing a line of flight, for example the shift from the spectacle of public torture to the isolation of prison, nonetheless retain deterritorialised traces of the former configuration within the new assemblage of punishment. Public adulation of the clandestine 'master criminal' is an example of a 'line of flight' in the crime assemblage. As Foucault noted (1980, p. 46), the popularity of physiognomic theories of deviance in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century had the unforeseen effect of creating the character of the unmarked 'master criminal' who is able to pass unknown among polite society. Perhaps the best example of this character is Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre's anti-hero Fantômas, who perpetually outmanoeuvred the police detectives committed to his capture and thrillingly denied a fascinated public the visual pleasure of looking into his eyes and *knowing* him. This is not an arc of pure freedom or escape route, as lines of flight get tied up again (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, p. 250), and we should consider the deterritorialising faceless, fictional Fantômas in conjunction with the reterritorialising relentless public appetite for mugshots and other images of 'real' criminal bodies.

Furthering their account of how change happens, Deleuze and Guattari contend that assemblages operate between two immanent and intersecting processes: the 'molar', and the 'molecular' (see especially Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a: 229–255). It is important to note that their theory doesn't map onto common sociological ideas of the more easily separated (large-scale) macro and (small-scale) micro social phenomena in which each could be claimed to condition the other. The difference between these processes is qualitative, not quantitative (Marks, 1998, p. 100). Thus we cannot 'scale up' from molecular flows to grasp molar segmentations. Instead, the processes are enmeshed; both 'haunted' in their 'operation and organization' (Ansell-Pearson, 2012, p. 182) by the other. This invites us to attend to the interaction of subtler affective, molecular flows with molar processes. Particularly within complex criminal justice processes like sentencing, risk assessment, and release on license. Emerging from thresholds of molecular flows of force, the molar process is formed of clearly defined and rigid segments. This is the level of individual entities, whose formation is dependent on the actions of machines which through a process of 'exclusive disjunctions' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004b, pp. 83–90) – 'this, not that' – cut out, or mark, binary subjectivations, races, sectors, professions, crimes, classes, genders etc. from the flux of force and energy. They also refer to this process as 'coding... a socius of inscription where the essential thing is to mark and be marked' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004b, p. 156). Historically, much thinking about crime has followed the machinations of molar selection to constitute crime from the populations already codified as criminal, for example the working class, the male, the young, the unemployed, and ethnic minorities. To do this almost inevitably means working from a sample to produce a general theory of crime that both pre-criminalises those who fit the code (scaling down) and treats qualitatively different crimes as if they were the same (scaling up). The second, 'molecular' process consists of 'fluxes' of pre-personal affects and perceptions (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 124). Deleuze and Guattari warn that molecular processes should not be misconceived as being more 'intimate', 'imaginary', of a more 'personal' nature, or 'freer', as molecular processes are constantly being brought back under the order of molar representation in a mode which is complex and subtle in creating new codes (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, p. 237). Attentive to the 'micropolitics' of an event, Deleuze and Guattari note the potential for erroneously 'believing that a little suppleness is enough to make things "better"... microfascisms are what make fascism so dangerous, and fine segmentations are as harmful as the most rigid of segments' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, p. 237).

As Deleuze and Guattari make plain, exclusive disjunctions or segmentation also operates on the molecular level, for example through the machine of 'faciality':

The face is not an envelope exterior to the person who speaks, thinks, or feels... A child, woman, mother, man, father, boss, teacher, police officer, does not speak a general language but one whose signifying traits are indexed to specific faciality traits. Faces are not basically individual; they define zones of frequency or probability, delimit a field that neutralizes in advance any expressions or connections unamenable to the appropriate significations (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, p. 186).

The workings of faciality are not random, and Deleuze and Guattari are keen to diagnose 'the relation of the face to the assemblages of power that require that social production' (2004a, p. 201). So, if not all assemblages require facialisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, p. 194), when does this occur? They suggest instances such as 'the maternal power operating through the face during nursing... the political power operating through the face of the leader ... the power of film operating through the face of the star and the close-up' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, p. 194). The criminal justice system has always required facialisation. One could add examples like the face of the ringleader who led the 'headless' mob; the face designated as that of a properly *political* prisoner; or the serial killer who looked like a heartthrob. As Kelly Gates argues: 'a cultural analysis of automated facial recognition and expression analysis technologies provides evidence that the drive to "know the face" continues to be stimulated by new photographic technologies, while at the same time pushing the development of these technologies in particular directions' (Gates, 2011, p. 8). These new developments in surveillance and image analysis correspondingly drive new technologies of masking, evasion and image scrambling (Hern, 2017). Faciality reminds us that subtle interpersonal acts of looking and being looked at form part of the machinery of social

codification and inscription. For example, we might think about the subtle reading of working class bodies as 'respectable' (Skeggs, 1997) or not; or the affective reading of a racialised urban area as 'sketchy' or dangerous; or the feeling that someone is giving a truthful account; or the legitimisation of an act of violence based on the agent's fear or sense of foreboding.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed the assemblage as it appears in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. I have argued that the assemblage is most useful as a tool of critical analysis, rather than for the description of a complex system or network. The assemblage can help us to think about the micropolitics of crime, social control and punishment. It helps us ask how was this crime produced as such, and what effects does this have. Deleuze describes the assemblage as part of a 'theory-practice of multiplicities' (Deleuze, 1999, p. 14). So, to conclude I will sketch some of the ways that adopting this conceptual framing might affect the way we practice and research crime and punishment.

In conceptualising subjects as assemblages or multiplicities, we cannot simply invoke criminals, victims, witnesses, or researchers as discrete individuals, let alone as sharing essential qualities with all others we might seek to categorise with them. With a mobile, non-essential model of things and people in mind, we cannot accept that criminalised people are simply or intrinsically criminal. Instead, we recognise that people are in process, and are produced from their material and affective relations with the rest of the world. A non-essential and non-unitary conception of the subject as an assemblage has strong implications for the researcher as one who is constantly being constituted as a researcher *through* the research process, rather than a pre-formed subject who then commences their research. Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of 'becoming' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a, pp. 256–341), the anthropologist Alphonso Lingis invokes a sense of research as practicing a social bond, one that is not premised on a 'social contract', or a relationship of extraction or exchange, but rather on 'couplings' (Lingis, 1994, p. 293).<sup>x</sup> This is not a coupling at the level of discrete individuals, but an affective becoming-with in a symbiotic relationship. Whilst mutually affecting, these couplings are not necessarily benign, and can also be violent or unequal. Becoming-with is not mimesis: it is not to suggest, for example, that researching with police is to become identifiably *like* police, but rather that in the encounter we both affect each other and become different. Becoming is not turning from one thing into another; it is not an in-between state moving from one identity to another. Instead it refers to a ceaseless process of transformation. We and everything else are always becoming-different, even when it appears as if nothing is changing.<sup>xi</sup> This has methodological implications for how we treat the materials of research which have a propensity to become 'fixed' and treated as evidence, such as interview transcripts. A desire to do research which better captures the process of 'becoming' together might also lead to the use of more durational or collaborative forms of research and representation. It also encourages us to be more modest in our claims for the impact of our research.

Jasbir Puar argues that adopting the open model of the assemblage allows us 'to attune to movements, intensities, emotions, energies, affectivities, and textures as they inhabit events, spatiality, and corporealities' (Puar, 2007, p. 215). It also encourages us to move beyond legal definitions and temporal boundaries when considering the event. Assemblages produce a multitude of effects that are not direct or linear, but diffuse. As a result, one cannot engage Deleuze and Guattari's work to produce a theory of strong crime causality. Thinking about the 'cutting edges' of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation reminds us that criminalisation and punishment are not a necessary outcome of committing a crime, but an effect of molecular and molar processes that codify some of us, and not others, as criminal or punishable. This draws our attention to the politics of the crime assemblage, and also to the differing temporalities of crime as an event, and criminalisation as an effect of longer process involving repeated social codification. This has implications for social policy: for instance, what is the appropriate time and space for punishment if we are not singular and authentic subjects but multiple selves shaped by our ongoing social interactions with others? Thinking with the assemblage also enables us to decentre the individual, be it the criminal or the victim, from our analysis of crime. It allows one to

pay attention to the workings of other human and non-human actors in the assemblage of crime, and it forces us to pay attention to the labour of the researcher. The assemblage of crime is not static: it is always being deterritorialised and reterritorialised, even if it appears relatively stable. Actualisations of the assemblage don't exhaust its potential to be otherwise, and to produce a different actuality in the future. The concept sensitises us to repetitions and stratification within the assemblage of crime but enables us to effect some change in our pursuit of lines of flight.

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<sup>i</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus* is the second part of two-volume text *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the first part being *Anti-Oedipus* (1972, first translated into English in 1977).

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ii At the request of an anonymous reviewer, the following is a note on my use of language and aspirations for this piece. Like many scholars inspired by the work of Deleuze and Guattari I admire their dazzling linguistic style. However, when scholars emulate this style the result is sometimes a kind of conceptual ‘word salad’ which is impenetrable and alienating for the unattuned reader. I find this most unhelpful in scholarship which brings these philosophical concepts into new disciplinary spaces, where readers are more likely to be encountering these ideas for the first time. As such, here I aim to write in a way that might encourage wider engagement with the philosophical concepts which have so greatly enriched my own work.

iii The assemblage is a redefinition and development of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘desiring machines’ in *Anti-Oedipus*, where, according to a set of relational rules, machines are coupled with each other in a ‘productive synthesis’. See (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004b, p. 5) They also previously discussed the assemblage in relation to the fiction of Franz Kafka (Deleuze & Guattari, 2012).

iv The concept was developed during the heyday of systems theory and as such these machines are conceptualised as inherently leaks and producing unexpected excesses rather than closed systems with perfect functionality.

v This translation is attributed to Paul Foss and Paul Patton see: (Deleuze & Guattari, 1981) Ian Buchanan (Buchanan, 2015, p. 383) suggests ‘arrangement’ as a preferable translation.

vi By ‘inconsistent’ I mean that sometimes they don’t use the term itself but it is clear that they are using the model of the assemblage.

vii It is present in works written in the mid-1970s for example in *Discipline and Punish, The History of Sexuality Volume 1*<sup>vii</sup> and his Collège de France lectures from 1975/6 onwards.

viii In the creation of their concepts Deleuze and Guattari drew inspiration from literary theory, structuralist linguistics, novels, visual art, music, cybernetics, complexity and systems theories and Guattari’s clinical observations as well as anthropology, political theory, psychoanalysis and philosophy.

ix In this interview, from the year of the publication of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze suggests that the work of analysing assemblages to find their ‘general logic’ had only just begun.

x For an alternative discussion of ‘becoming-together’ see (Fraser, 2009)

xi As Deleuze argues in *Logic of Sense* ‘This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present. Insofar as it eludes the present, becoming does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of before and after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once’ (Deleuze, 2004b, p. 3).