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Spitting in the Salad: Minor Rebellion as Institutional Agency

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Abstract

How can a desire for rebellion drive institutional agency, and how is such desire produced? In this paper, we develop a theory of minor rebellion as a form of institutional agency. Drawing from the work of Deleuze and Guattari as well as from notions of social inquiry and the sociology of punk, we qualify and illustrate minor rebellion as a lived-in field of desire and engagement that involves deterritorializing of practice in the institutional field. Three sets of processes are involved: (i) *minor world-making*, through establishing the aesthetics and relations of an outsider social network within a major field, including the enactment of cultural frames of revolt and radicalism; (ii) *minor creating*, through constructing and experimenting with terms, concepts, and technology that somehow challenge hegemony from within; and (iii) *minor inquiring*, through problematizing social purposes and the related experiential surfacing of the desirable new. Minor rebellion suggests a new solution to the paradox of embedded agency by describing institutional agency as shuttling between political contest and open-ended social inquiry, involving anti-sentiments, but also being *for* something. The paper also contributes to recasting institutional agency as a process resulting from emergent collective action rather than preceding it. To illustrate our theorizing, we describe the emergence of Robin Hood Asset Management, a Finnish activist hedge fund. At paper's end, we discuss how minor rebellion raises new questions about the multiplicities and eventness of desiring in institutional agency.

Keywords

Agency, institutional work, rebellion, minor, desire

Minor is something that always brings together the personal and political. It is always about making our existential territories more habitable. And it is always something collectively produced. (…) Robin Hood practices a special way of managing assets that makes something new possible in a situation when nothing new seems possible. It is a becoming. This is our invention. At the same time, it is also management of the assets of minorities, in Kafka's sense, who will and can never become major, but will always remain like spit in the salad.

– Akseli Virtanen, Robin Hood Asset Management (Piironen & Virtanen, 2015, pp. 93-94)

Research on institutional agency typically cast it as structurally and historically embedded and refer to a basic paradox of how actors can pursue intentional change while being institutionally determined by the same system they seek to influence (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; Garud, Hardy, & Maguire, 2007; Seo & Creed, 2002). This paradox has typically been resolved through notions of dialectics (Seo & Creed, 2002), such as clashes between logics and actors representing opposing politics (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006). Only recently has agency been theorized as more open-ended in terms of how actors respond to ambiguities (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2016), resolve contradictions through experimentation (Smets, Jarzabkowski, Burke, & Spee, 2014), and explore alternative social purposes through forms of social inquiry (Nilsson, 2015).

In this article, we extend this line of theorizing by introducing and discussing minor rebellion as a distinct and overlooked form of institutional agency that involves the emergence of political desire. This emergence is part political contest, antagonistic in nature, and part (minor) social inquiry (Nilsson, 2015; Selznick, 2008), involving striving towards and experiential surfacing of something that is yet, or about, to exist. Our use of the conception of minor rebellion is inspired by the works of Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986, 1980/1987). Referring to Franz Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986) suggested that "minor" in literature characterizes the struggles of someone such as Kafka, who was forced to write in a time, place and language (German) that were hostile to his (Jewish) identity. The opening quote by Akseli Virtanen, founder of the Finnish cooperative Robin Hood Asset

Management, suggests a parallel. Virtanen positions Robin Hood in the world of finance: highly institutionalized and regulated and also distasteful to the precariat whom the cooperative claims to serve. Like Kafka coming to terms with his dilemma by "setting up a minor practice" that deterritorialized his writing, Robin Hood set up a minor practice that reclaimed finance as its rebel artistic territory.

We use this parallel between the minor practice of Kafka and Robin Hood in a dual manner. We pursue the conceptual apparatus of Deleuze and Guattari (1972/1983, 1975/1986, 1980/1987) to theorize about minor rebellion as institutional agency and use Robin Hood as an illustrative case. Minor rebellion recognizes the change-inducing power of agency (Jasper, 2004), while not reverting to naïve accounts of limitless heroism (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009). It presents a new take on the paradox of embeddedness by highlighting a form of agency that opens up and explores, instead of being merely a time-bound revolt against particular adversaries.

We seek to explore how desires for minor rebellion constitute institutional agency and how such desire, in turn, is produced. Rebel figures – like outliers, mavericks, originals, punks, or non-conformists – have recently been celebrated and explored as potentially beneficial for change in institutions (Jones, Svejenova, Pedersen, & Townley, 2016) and radical innovation (Gino, 2018; Rudningen, Carlsen, Clegg, & Gjersvik, 2012). Much of this research on rebellion emphasizes functional practices and, with a few exceptions (Kurik, 2016; Patriotta & Hirsch, 2016; Svirsky, 2010a), says little about the development of agency and the forms of desire that may follow or sustain rebel activity. As we will qualify, for minor rebellion to be a useful conception in understanding institutional agency, one cannot see it merely as a ploy, like putting on red shoes (Gino 2018), or a time-bound activity scheduled for casual Fridays. Rather, we are referring to deep-seated fields of desire and engagement that are partly unconscious and continuously produced in collective activity.

The forms of desire we attend to, are, like in the writing of Deleuze and Guattari, irrevocably political and institutional in nature (Goodchild, 1996). They include the desire to both explore and reject the institutional authority of whatever existed before (Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003, p. 808; Thompson, 2004, pp. 4-5). This *institutional* outlook remains, whether we are talking about what fuels open critique of established structures, exploration and surfacing of alternatives (Nilsson, 2015), or more implicit calls to action. The opening quotation illustrates a double borrowing of rebel figures from the tale of Robin Hood and the story of Kafka and exemplifies how narrative templates implicit in rebel figures may convey a sense of purposefulness and animate people's capacity for action in the institutional field. The quote also speaks to aesthetic preferences for particular ways of acting and being in the world. Should we think of Virtanen's expressed desire to spit in the salad as an opening shot for a political journey of becoming or as a desire to spit for the sake of spitting? We take this as a cue to explore minor rebellion as a capacity to act that may be both *for* something, in a Deleuzian sense, but also one that carry strong anti-sentiments with a punk aesthetic (Thompson, 2004).

The paper makes two sets of contributions. The first is to theorize minor rebellion as a form of institutional agency that shuttles between political contest and open-ended social inquiry, thus accounting for a fuller and more radical notion of institutional agency than previously described. The second contribution is to unpack institutional agency as a process of desiring *agencing*, resulting from emergent collective action rather than preceding it, and with multiple sources (both collective and personal becoming) and addressees (being against and for something). Minor rebellion suggests a new solution to the paradox of embedded agency and answers a call for agency conceptions to describe "a liminal and performative site of disruption, invention and enunciation" (Putnam, 2018, p. xii) in the institutional field.

We start the paper by locating our research within conceptions of agency in institutional theory, in particular the tradition of institutional work that has explored agency as micro-processes in material practice. We go on to qualify why the notion of the minor – and its kindred conceptions in the works of Deleuze and Guattari – is valuable for research on institutional rebellion and resistance more broadly and how minor represents an untapped resource for understanding institutional agency. Next, we present and illustrate a framework of minor rebellion as institutional agency through processes of minor world-making, minor creating, and minor inquiring. We end with a discussion of implications.

Agency, institutional work and social inquiry

What is agency?

From the outset, institutional theory has been occupied with questions of agency, whether in the early work of Selznick (1949, 1957/2011), in institutional entrepreneurship (DiMaggio, 1988), or in efforts to create a coherent theory of action in institutions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), including deinstitutionalizing (Oliver, 1992). Most scholars emphasize how agency takes place within forces of structural and historical determination (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and its consequential embeddedness (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; Seo & Creed, 2002). Following the influential work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998), a typical definition of institutional agency within this line of research is "an actor's engagement with the social world that, through the interplay of imagination, habit and judgment, can both reproduce and transform an environment's structures" (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009, p. 46)

This attention to embeddedness may have inadvertently led to downplaying the role of agency and the power of singular actors in facilitating institutional change and renewal (Battilana et al., 2009). Partly in response to this, and also to connect different strands of institutional theory, scholars within the institutional work tradition have sought to "bring the actor back in" and increase the attention to agency as a micro-phenomenon formed in social

practice (Lawrence, Leca, & Zilber, 2013; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009). For example, Smets and Jarzabkowski (2013) recently showed how English and German banking lawyers constructed the same two institutional logics and their associated practices as strange, contradictory, commensurable, or complementary. The authors evidence how different dimensions of agency interact dynamically within these four cycles of change, with specific weight being placed on practical-evaluative judgment.

The contribution by Smets and Jarzbkowski (2013) typifies a type of research intended to solve the paradox of embeddedness by casting it as a clash between logics or political interests – in this case, a constructed clash of using contradiction to escape embeddedness (Seo & Creed, 2002). There are other examples of recent research that oppose or challenge the idea that agency is entirely political. In a study of two public schools undergoing reform, Bridwell-Mitchell (2016) found that agency emerged from the uncertainty and ambiguity of solving practical dilemmas, rather than from political conflict. Overall, though, current conceptions of agency seem to miss the notion of a form of political agency that is not only reactive but proactive, and of agency as a more open-ended search beyond the established.

Agency as social inquiry

One of the strongest challenges to current conceptions of institutional agency comes from the recent work of Nilsson (2015), who offered a solution to the paradox of embeddedness through collaborative inquiry. Nilsson proposed a concept of positive institutional work that privileges experiential rather than symbolic legitimacy in institutions. People can foster institutional renewal through the surfacing of experiences that exemplify the realization of some social good as well as the sharing of inner experiences that such surfacing allows (Nilsson, 2015, p. 376). One of the main inspirations for Nilsson's conceptions is the works of Selznick (Selznick, 1992, 2008), who was occupied with the contextual and institutional basis of values – in a dialectical inquiry between the facts of

everyday realities and ideals of human good. To Nilsson and Selznick, such inquiry is ultimately a form of agency that involves people at all levels of the organization.

Selznick's (2008) theory of social inquiry was heavily influenced by the work of Dewey, and we may see it as a form of extended experiential learning. Dalpiaz, Rindova, and Ravasi (2016) recently made a case in point when describing how people at Alessi combined the logics of industrial manufacturing and cultural production to facilitate embedded agency. Central here is the use of contradiction and associated inquiry in the form of bold, borderline experimentation to envision new possibilities for value creation and product design: "Unless you 'transgress' the boundary and risk overstepping the borderline, the reasoning went, you will never know where the boundaries lie" (Dalpiaz et al., 2016, p. 31).

When theorizing about social inquiry as a producer of agency, Selznick (2008), like Nilsson (2015), emphasized how inquiry goes beyond the purely experiential to a Deweyan moral inquiry (Alexander, 1993; Martela, 2015) that asks fundamental questions about human betterment and social goods. In this sense, social inquiry feeds institutional agency not only by being used to realize interest-based goals or particular institutional arrangements, but also through attempts to raise awareness about how collective value is produced beyond any one organization. Experiential surfacing works by inquiring into the actual experience of an internal or external beneficiary of the institution. Such surfacing has the capacity to produce "distance experience" that enables people to imagine and move on to new possibilities for action (Emirbayer & Mishe, 1998, p. 984).

Surfacing may also raise awareness about the boundaries of one's agency as a singular actor. In a recent article, Cooren (2018) criticized Emirbayer and Mishe (1998) for failing to problematize how social structures and non-human actants, like a speed bump, may be implicit representations of the agencies of others. This extends how we see that social inquiry

may produce agency because it includes not only attending to how people are *actors* based on their own intensions, but also how they are *passers* of the agencies of others.

Resistance and (minor) rebellion as sources of institutional agency

The theory of minor rebellion developed in this paper presents an alternative to the paradox of embedded agency: an insurrection (Mumby, Thomas, Martí, & Seidl, 2017) marked by a dual thrust of political opposition and continued social inquiry. We start with the conceptions of the minor and minorization as a form of (institutional) deterritorialization in Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986). We are also informed by the broader conceptions of a philosophy of desire (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1983) as well as by the notions of rhizome and deterritorializing nomadism (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987) that preceded and followed this work. In the initial work on minor literature as a way of understanding the writing of Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986, p. 18) emphasized three characteristics of the minor: a high degree of deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation. Understood in these terms, minor rebellion is not a revolution with clear ends in sight but a continued wandering along lines of flight – creative escapes from hegemonic institutional territories, away from the dominance of the major (Goodchild, 1996) while staying within it. Furthermore, while the book on Kafka may be taken as conceptual inspiration for how to think about institutional activism (Ganesh, 2015; Lenskjold, Olander, & Halse, 2015) more broadly, we acknowledge that the main intent of Deleuze and Guattari's scholarship is one of political radicalism (Munro & Thanem, 2017) against the institutions of capitalism.

Why, then, should we appropriate this set of conceptions for theorizing on institutional agency as a form of resistance and rebellion? Three reasons appear. The first is to more fully acknowledge resistance as an active productive force, rather than a passive one (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016), as something that people do and desire rather than maintaining and

defending fixed adversarial positions (Bignall, 2010; Courpasson, Dany, & Clegg, 2012; Hjorth, 2016). In Deleuze and Guattari's work, the minor represents a straightened head rather than one bent or oppressed, marking "a desire that straightens up or moves forward, and opens up to new connections" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975/1986, p. 5). The central concept here – one that runs throughout the works by Deleuze and Guattari – is *desire*: agency as a politics of desire. Such desire is not one of lack, oppression, or refuge (Deleuze and Guattari, 1975/1986, p. 41, 56), but of creative desire for endless becoming. The minor operates in the service of experimentations of desire, rather than in the service of economics and culture (Goodchild, 1996, p. 55). The shift in emphasis is significant for several reasons. One is that it cannot be taken for granted that principles originally used to explain the constraining forces of institutional structures can be readily applied to explain forces of renewal in the form of emergent and collective experimental action (Aldrich, 2011). Another is that we are not talking about a form of agency that can merely be associated with identity as "resisters" alone (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016) or a radicalism that is tempered (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Rather, the desire underpinning minor rebellion is a free-flowing desire in the quest for knowing and becoming (Clegg, Kornberger, & Rhodes, 2005; Linstead & Brewis, 2007)).

A second reason to use Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the minor to theorize institutional agency, that it allows us to recast agency from being the attributes of preformed subjectivities toward being a product of a collective and emergent process (Kurik, 2016; Painter-Morland, 2011). A core term here is the complex and partly enigmatic notion of *assemblage* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975/1986, pp. 81-88). An assemblage may be understood as an emergent, heterogeneous and self-organized collage of people, things, concepts, aesthetics, voices and technologies – an evolving whole with many non-human actants (Bennett, 2005). The word *assemblage* is an uneasy translation of the French *agencement*,

which may be used in the sense of "fitting" and "fixing" and corresponds to notions like *events* and *becoming* (Phillips, 2006). Key here is holding assemblages in play as a duality of nouns—the state of affairs of what has been brought together—and as verbs or *activities*—the acts of connecting and bringing together. As recently highlighted by Gherardi (2016, p. 689), we may then talk about agency as the situated activity of agencement: the activity of establishing connections. The connections in question fortify becoming and new lines of flight (Clegg et al., 2005), the "fixtures and furnishings, by elements that allow lines to be drawn and territories to be constituted" (Callon, 2008, p. 38).

A third reason to invoke Deleuze and Guattari here is to find a way of talking about institutional agency that allows the opposite poles of action and structure to be kept in simultaneous play (Putnam, 2018, p. xi). Jones et al. (2016) recently pointed to a range of contrary forces from the perspective of creative industries, in which conflicting agencies are played out by misfits, mavericks and mainstreams, with amphibians supporting the dynamic across the core and periphery: "Actors with different roles and network positions collaborate, compete or engage in political efforts to mobilize support for new courses of action" (Jones et al., 2016, p. 756). In the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, we can understand institutional agency as a ceaseless interplay of territorializing (by the major), deterritorializing (by the minor) and reterritorializing (when the major's forces strike back). Minor rebellion may involve a desire to escape dominance by the forces of the major, which in turn may create its own subjugated counterforce to maintain and feed dominion (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016).

How, then, is the agency of minor rebellion produced? To complement the theoretical inspirations of Deleuze and Guattari, and further pay homage to the political radicalism of their philosophical project (Munro & Thanem, 2017), we shall also draw selectively from a stream of research that offers a parallel set of conceptions with a non-compromising edge: the sociology of punk. This research tradition grew out of the sociological studies of subcultures

of the Chicago School (Lohman, 2017; Williams, 2011), such as the work of Becker (1963) on outsiders. The sociology of punk focuses on a phenomenon that began as a radical departure from the mainstream music scene, but eventually extended to a rebellion against commercialism more generally. Stacy Thompson (2000), whose work on punk was inspired by Deleuze and Guattari from the start, has defined punk as "the name that can be assigned to an organization of radical desires that, combined, express a wish for a non-capitalist-structuring of social reality" (Thompson, 2004, p. 78). Deleuze and Guattari might have approved. Punk always stood for something: a world yet to be imagined but experimented on, born out of a do-it-yourself (DIY) attitude – a minor creating. The research tradition as a whole has also moved from shifting the study of subcultures away from firm insider–outsider categories towards how agencies are produced in discourse and practice (Lohman, 2017; Williams, 2011). Thus, punk too can be seen as a phenomenon of politically charged rebellion that achieves its agencies from experimental action and a desire for de-territorializing. Punks, quite like in minor rebellion, engage by acknowledging the commodified nature of their music while cultivating a critical non-capitulation (Thompson, 2004).

An illustrated framework of minor rebellion as institutional agency

In this section, we present a theoretical framework of minor rebellion as a particular form of institutional agency. Minor rebellion means a deterritorializing through discourse, practices and services that challenge the hegemony in the institutional field while still using elements of the current dominant language. Such deterritorializing involves a positioning of one's ways of operating and creative output as being bold and advantageous—or at least, different from the hegemony—as well as a continued inquiry into new and adjacent territory. The framework consists of three interrelated processes of minor rebellion—minor world-making,

minor creating and minor inquiring—which will be further explained and illustrated in three dedicated sections.

On the whole, the framework we present was derived deductively. We build on the conception of minor suggested by Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1985) in their book on Kafka, which was further developed in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987) and interpreted by Goodchild (1996, pp. 3-6) as desire produced through connecting lines that form a space of immanent relations – a desiring agency. We combined these conceptions with selected works on the sociology of punk and social inquiry. The notion of minor creating is very much at the heart of the conceptual apparatus in the book on Kafka (Goodchild, 1996), while the term minor inquiring is also derived from secondary literature (Mazzei, 2017).

The case that we present below is meant for illustrative purposes, but also inspired our reading; hence our reasoning here has inevitable abductive elements. Once theoretical concepts are put in contact with a particular case, the case tends to talk back. This is particularly so for what we have coined minor world-making, in which the rich and intensive use of metaphor and symbolic language in the Robin Hood case adds to the conceptions of nomadism and inhabiting of new territory described by Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987).

The overall function of the processes of minor creating, minor inquiring and minor world-making is that they constitute agency or, more illustratively, a process of *agencing* – through collective and emergent combinations of (previously independent) elements played out by and within desires along a new line of deterritorializing. No orchestration, central control, or executive intentionality of preformed subjectivities is assumed. With minor rebellion, we specify a process model of distributed and emergent institutional agency that is part political contestation with what-is and part inquiry into what-could-be.

Minor world-making establishes and maintains an outsider social space within a major field, including enactment of cultural frames of revolt and radicalism, resulting in both an

intensification of relations and a spontaneous attraction between heterogeneous elements. *Minor creating* involves constructing and experimenting with a productive machine, here understood as a set of terms, concepts, and technologies that somehow challenge the hegemony from within. *Minor inquiring* problematizes social purposes, concepts, and practices within a major institutional field and related investigation and experiential surfacing of the desirable new.

We further suggest that all three sets of processes are necessary to sustain minor rebellion as a form of institutional agency over time. By processes we mean analytical categories for a range of collective activities that may not at all be designed or heavily patterned, in the sense of being recurrent practices (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). Together, the three processes constitute the ongoing pulsating assemblage of people, concepts, technology, and questions that make up an evolving rhizomatic field of engagement and desire. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986, p. 81), "it is a collective assemblage of enunciation; it is a machinic assemblage of desire." Without minor world-making, deterritorialization will be insufficient for building external visibility and internal community. Without minor creating rooted in concrete experimentation by a productive machine, consistency and thus legitimacy are lost. Without minor inquiring, the vitality of the intellectual search is gone.

A vignette to illustrate the model

In the sections below, we use the case of Robin Hood Asset Management Cooperative (Robin Hood) as an illustration of minor rebellion in action.

Method notes. The case illustration is based on archival studies, participant observation by one of the authors, who was a board member over a three-year period, and eight interviews with protagonists at Robin Hood. The interviews, all but one taped and transcribed, each lasted about 60 minutes and followed a semi-structured guide in which we

asked questions to elicit narratives (Kohler Riessman, 2008) about personal engagement, sources of motivation and participatory activities within the context of the organization's development history. The archives included memos, minutes of general meetings, newsletters, white/gray papers, a member survey and interviews in journals, newspapers, periodicals and academic journals. We also compiled data on the fund's performance and membership. All interviewees were given a chance to comment on the article draft and discuss it with the authors, alone and in a joint skype session.

Case background. Robin Hood was established in 2012 through the efforts of a small activist group consisting of young economists, artists, and other intellectuals. The group sought to combine art and finance in novel ways and was based at Aalto University's School of Business and the School of Arts, Design and Architecture in Helsinki, Finland. Robin Hood was one of the projects linked to a research program titled Future Art Base, with the mission of creating a "new autonomous institution of artistic research, social innovation and political intervention" (http://www.futureartbase.org/about-fab/), thereby providing the School of Arts with the status of an incubator of new ideas. Future Art Base was positioned between the schools and scholarly disciplines, creating its own deterritory of philosophical and technological exploration. It succeeded in attracting international attention and visiting researchers and in generating numerous publications. However, project funding came to a sudden end when the university decided that Robin Hood presented a potential threat to its reputation at a politically sensitive moment during the merger of three existing universities into one. After an imminent crisis when Future Art Base activities almost ceased, Robin Hood continued as a cooperative, its founder gaining support from Kone Foundation in Finland and from loyal members.

At the core of Robin Hood operations was, until recently, "the Parasite". This is a patented algorithm that had been trained on data produced by the U.S. stock market,

developed and maintained by Sakari Virkki. The basic idea, controversial in origin and implementation, was to produce high returns on investment by imitating the behavior of successful investors, on for example the New York Stock Exchange. The algorithm performed well at the outset, with a cumulative performance of almost 40% from August 31, 2012, to August 31, 2014 (http://www.futureartbase.org/portfolio/robin-hood/accumulated capital).

Despite this emergent success and the considerable media attention in Finland and internationally (including from the US-based Huffington Post and the Keiser Report, a UK news site), Robin Hood never managed to attract a single major institutional investor to expand its operations. Some of the organization's founding members saw this as a disappointing failure caused by spokespersons being unable to tone down their Deleuzian–Marxist rhetoric in meetings with potential investors. Other key stakeholders emphasized that the project as a whole was a performative arts object that achieved its purpose primarily by the attention it provoked. For yet others, the sources of pride lay in "projects building the commons." Examples included the support for Casa Nuvem, a social center in Rio de Janeiro, and a project in northern Greece against the exploitation of a gold mining company.

In 2015, a new unit in California – Robin Hood Services – was founded to expand activities abroad. After various problems with the Parasite algorithm, website crashes that threatened the co-op model, and investment losses, Robin Hood decided to abandon Parasite and develop its own cryptotokens for a member exchange called HoodNotes and later RobYns, which were based on emergent blockchain technology. The co-op is currently in the process of recreating its digital platform to make it operational again. Robin Hood continued to invest in Parasite through a bank fund that acquired the algorithm but had also diversified into a cryptocurrency fund. The "wild side of finance" still had some 900 members, but its net asset value had shrunk to 220,000 euros in 2018.

Minor world-making

By *minor world-making*, we understand the process of establishing and maintaining an outsider social network within a major field, including enactment of cultural frames of revolt and radicalism. This process involves marking the position as an outsider and challenger through both discursive positioning against the hegemony and an invitation to a figured world (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) of possibility. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987, p. 445) suggested that deterritorializing is possible only as long as "something else" is simultaneously being created: a new geography or a deterritory, a minor world. When establishing "vectors of deterritorialization," the outsiders – the nomads – "inhabit these places; they remain in them, and they themselves make them grow, for it has been established that the nomads make the desert no less than they are made by it" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 404). World-making is founded on the framing of this nomadic possibility and thereby strengthening the assemblage by increasing the intensity and number of relations (Goodchild, 1996, p. 3).

Minor world-making has the function of building a sense of community among the directly involved activists, thereby strengthening belief in the group's overall possibilities (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016). This dimension of the assembling is also likely to involve the invocation of textual agents from outside the immediate network as sources of authority and inspiration, i.e. agency by ventriloquism (Cooren, 2015). A special case of this intertextual world-making may be the invocation of cultural frames and narrative templates that provide agency-inducing action frames (Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2014). The artifacts, heroes, action scripts, tunes, images and spitting assembled in the various scenes of punk aesthetics (Thompson, 2004) is an example. The tying together of nearby and distant voices furnishes descriptive content for action.

The establishment of Robin Hood provides a vivid example of minor world-making. The future arts-based research project at Aalto University was the initial social space, and from the start, the establishment of Robin Hood has been followed by a discourse of positioning against the hegemony. In virtually every public statement, members of Robin Hood defined themselves as an alternative to exploitation by established players – "the power to create money is in the hands of the financial market, but we have no access to it" (http://www.futureartbase.org/portfolio/robin-hood/). Parasite, the mimetic algorithm that was to provide access to financial returns, was a powerful way to communicate a minor in-your-face position within a major financial field.

With its symbolic connection to the metaphor of Robin Hood as a protector of the common land and common forest from appropriation by the Norman Kings (Nelms, Maurer, & Virtanen, 2016), Parasite implied a social agenda for the redistribution of wealth in favor of the unmoneyed, aiming at providing elite investment returns to the "precariat." The metaphor seemed to be a legitimizing device that portrayed the mission as just, daring, and clever, against the more unjust, dated, and even monstrous world dominated by the hegemony. The territorial markings also included aesthetics of roughness:

> In this world, the high priests of finance tell you that you cannot touch their temples. But if something is sacred you must profanate it to bring it back to earth. The best way to do that is to reach out and touch it, make it dirty. We want to be irreverent and scandalous. (Virtanen in Scott, 2016)

The metaphor of minor from Kafka was appropriated as a further positioning against the establishment. It can further be understood as seeking validation of cultural and intellectual sophistication, or even as a form of posturing.

Looking across these accounts, we may say that Virtanen and colleagues used the terms *minor*, *Kafka*, *Robin Hood*, *Sherwood*, *the Sheriff of Nottingham* and the *precariat* as alternative and complementary cultural tools for agency production (Holland et al., 1998) that worked as pivots to the same frame: the minor world of financial activism and social

redistribution of wealth in favor of the common land. This imagined deterritorialized world is a collectively produced realm of interpretation that is situated in joint activity and works to fashion collective agency.

Minor creating

By *minor creating* we mean constructing and experimenting with a set of terms, concepts and technologies that somehow challenge the hegemony from within. Following Goodchild (1996, pp. 3–5, 45–52), we see minor creating as achieving consistency among heterogeneity through the repetition and style of practice and output. On the one hand, minor creation connects various surprising, even tortured elements: "negotiating all of the variables both to constrict the constants and to expand the variables: make language stammer, or make it 'wail', stretch tensors through all of language, even written language, and draw from it cries, shouts, pitches, durations, timbres, accents, intensities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975/1986, p. 125). In its explorative sense, minor creating amounts to a practice of "inventing while doing" (Gherardi, 2016). The thirst for direct participation in minor creation is also found in the do-it-yourself ethos of punk (Roberts & Moore, 2009, p. 22):

> The DIY ethic states that punks should not be content with being consumers and spectators but instead should become active participants in creating culture by starting their own fan magazines […], creating their own record labels, starting their own bands, and creating a network of venues for live performance.

Practices in punk, as a field of music, involve the technical simplicity of the "loud, fast, and aggressive but deliberately short and simple" (p. 23) to allow anyone with even minimal proficiency to play.

On the other hand, this process of exploring and re-connecting needs to have a recognizable concrete output that somehow sets it apart and temporarily stabilizes it as minor in relation to the major. Minor creating means that something is produced through a productive machine with a recognizable core of acclaimed and evolving nomadic territory.

Without such consistency, desire may be lost. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987, p. 9), multiplicities achieve their internal consistency in "the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities." For minor creating to achieve agency as a practice, the various resources mobilized need to be connected and temporarily stabilized (Gherardi, 2016).

Robin Hood also exemplifies minor creating, one that has undergone at least two major shifts. In its infancy as a research project, the grouping behind Robin Hood performed minor creating by assembling people from different backgrounds, financial concepts and technology and producing a range of research outputs. Artists and economists together explored novel combinations of financial ideas, interrogated established meanings of finance like value creation and the precariousness of work, and translated them into experimental action such as art performances. With the exodus from Aalto University, this set of creative activities changed to gain its pivotal expression in the Parasite algorithm, the co-op organization of the hedge fund and the use of profits on idealist activist projects. All three mechanisms illustrated a contradiction "as a radical anti-capitalist investment fund" (John W. Fail, Web designer/Vice-CEO) that nevertheless was invested in the stock market. The fund required an "attitude of resistance…from within" (Ana Fradique, a founding member/Vice-CEO). Also attractive to several was the punkish attitude to "not only *think* about things" but take "things in your own hands, put your hands in the mud and get dirty" (Tere Vadén, CEO).

The next shift in minor creating took place through exploration of emergent technologies and investment strategies and most recently blockchains. Recreating a Robin Hood 2.0 based on the Ethereum blockchain was presented as a strategy to protect the fund from mainstream players while giving members new tools, such as the cryptocurrency RobYin, to engage in mutual trading and collaborative asset creation. The adoption of leading-edge technologies

also signals the co-op's desire to be part of the vanguard of the new 'fintech' (Yermack, 2017), with its potential for bypassing or disrupting dominant financial institutions.

Minor inquiring

While minor creating may provide consistency and movement in the core producing activities of minor rebellion, minor inquiring has an opening-up and questioning function, the "*cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 108, italics in original). We refer to *minor inquiring* as the problematizing of social purposes, concepts and practices within the major institutional field and the associated investigation and experiential surfacing of the desirable new. This part of the assembling involves both conceptual and moral searches – neither of which is centered on any one individual or single voice but instead constitute a collective political endeavor (Mazzei, 2017). Such inquiring may contest the sedimented patterns of (major) thought and provide new centers of vibration (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994, p. 23) as well as explore the various resonances between concepts.

Minor inquiring is a particular form of the social inquiry suggested by Nilsson (2015). It is similar to social inquiry more broadly in that it represents a moral search that may pose fundamental questions about human betterment and social goods. It is different in the sense that it is geared more toward confronting the establishment and radically problematizing and criticizing existing practices and purposes while establishing new lines of flight to open up and evolve a new territory. Deleuzian-inspired activism involves an inquiring attitude, a situated engagement from within and confrontation (Svirsky, 2010a, pp. 165-166). Likewise, confrontation in minor inquiring was always part of punk, characterized by "its underlying refusal to give up on imagining something other than the world as it is" (Thompson, 2004, p. 4).

Minor inquiring has been an important formative process in Robin Hood from the start and its main source of attractiveness to many stakeholders. It has involved two book series (Polemos and n-1 Edições, the latter in English and Portuguese) with 31 books and several sets of collaborators, types of questions, and intellectual deliverables over the years, all addressing larger issues regarding the justice and democracy of financial systems and wealth distribution, rather than mere technical economics. The co-op also regularly published newsletters, videos, blogs, and working papers on its website, featuring titles like "Welcome to the Wild Side of Finance." The organization has attracted several notable thinkers into its network, including Bracha Ettinger, Brian Massumi (the acclaimed translator of *A Thousand Plateaus*), Tiziana Terranova (who also served on the co-op board) and Franco "Bifo" Berardi.

Artistic performances have also played an important role. In interviews, members highlighted the importance of *KAFKAMACHINE*, a "Project for a Film by Kafka" written by Félix Guattari and involving six workshops and audiovisual production in collaboration with leading Brazilian and French artists. Another highlight occurred when Robin Hood was invited to participate in the prestigious German art exhibition dOkumenta13, held in Kassel in 2012.

Robin Hood also organized nomadic "open offices" in cities throughout Europe, including Stuttgart, Berlin and London. Other events followed, such as "connecting cities" in Madrid or the Berliner Gazette Slow Politics Conference. Over 200 persons participated in Robin Hood activities. As one member noted, Robin Hood allowed experimentation on novel financial concepts in the context of a social collective; setting up a commons for sustained inquiry. The expansive conceptual gymnastics earned criticism at Aalto University and elsewhere. Virtanen, in response, referred to a story of Guattari being asked to temper his tendency for cliquey use of language (Virtanen, 2014):

Guattari's response was calm: Inventing concepts was an adventure. And the concepts he had invented, his "little machines", were his personal adventure. They were not some kind of means of communication or tools of marketing. He added that the paths of independent life, as his own, were often lonely, accompanied perhaps sometimes only by an echo or a few friends. Then, after a moment of silence, he suddenly asked: what would life be, if we could not invent new words and concepts?

We understand this to mean that minor inquiring may be fed by a desire to inquire for its own sake. This inquiring took a significant turn in May 2015. A paper titled *Robin Hood 2.0 Gray Paper: Equity, Options, Assemblage* showed the way forward with new horizons related to financial innovation, including the notion of cryptoequity. It had become increasingly clear to the coop members that cooperatives were a somewhat dated organizational form and inadequate for their collaborative aspirations. Something new was needed. Further experimentation with technology and more distributed organizational forms commenced in collaboration with a Robin Hood spinoff called the Economic Space Agency (https://economicspace.agency).

Discussion and implications

We began the article by asking the following questions: How can a desire for rebellion drive institutional agency and how is such a desire produced? In response to these questions, we have developed and illustrated a framework of minor rebellion—a particular form of institutional agency—that presents a new take on the paradox of embedded agency by combining political contests with open-ended social inquiry. We further noted how minor rebellion is animated by a desire for active creation rather than reactive resistance. This desire is partly set up against the major, thus using embedding structures as fabric for agency (Garud et al., 2007), and partly driven by reflexive critique (Seo & Creed, 2002) and endogenous exploration to escape embeddedness. The framework consists of three interrelated processes – minor world-making, minor creating, and minor inquiring. We suggested that they are complementary processes in constituting minor rebellion as

institutional agency. Following Deleuze and Guattari, we have qualified that these processes are at once dimensions of an evolving, heterogeneous assembling of people, things, concepts and technologies – processes of agencement/agencing – and a field of desire and engagement. We cannot claim that the three processes are exclusive to minor rebellion but have argued that all are important for the strength of the desiring field. Minor world-making builds a descriptive, symbolic deterritory that attracts participants and furnishes action. Minor creation fosters novelty and stability through a productive yet experimental machine. Minor inquiring involves refusing to accept any old world simply because it is available and ensures continued evolution along new lines of flight. The resulting proposition is radical; institutional agency is recast as emerging from desiring collective action rather than preceding it. From desiring collective action, minor rebellion proceeds both inwards to individual subjectivities and outwards to the institutional field. We chart two sets of implications.

Multiplicities of desiring – from collective action to subject

Most theories of agency suggest that while it may develop in collective practice, agency involves some kind of intentional forethought (Bandura, 2001), projective capacity (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) or reflexive, purposive propensity to act upon the world (Holland et al., 1998). By contrast, minor rebellion involves movement from collective to subject, a collective desiring in which agency is rooted in shared experimental processes, rather than projected by intention. As highlighted by Gherardi (2016), theories of action emphasize intentionality, while theories of practice approach "actions as 'taking place' or 'happening'" (pp. 684–685). Are these theories incommensurable? If we grant agency to processes or practices, where does this leave the subject? This paper certainly makes no claim of losing the subject altogether. Rather, the question becomes: When and how can individuals

be successful in intentionally influencing which assembling processes will build strong fields of desire and engagement and which will fizzle out and lose their mobilizing force?

A related set of questions concerns which constellations of assemblages may be most likely to gain the agency to fuel rebellion and which will not. Some human-material combinations may be seen to perform and organize action, propose solutions, and cooperate (Callon 2008, p. 35), even causing black-outs in electrical power grids as if assembling on their own (Bennett, 2005). What major fields are available for minor rebellion and what combinations of assemblages are possible? The framework we have introduced—consisting of three rebel activities in minor world-making, creating and inquiring—may open up avenues for studying such augmenting of collective and connected agency in institutional work.

As the agencing of minor rebellion is distributive rather than centralized, it may offer important pathways for expressing and studying a multiplicity of desires. The heterogeneity of rebels—from artists to economists—appears to be characteristic of such deterritorializing, or interstitial spaces (Furnari, 2014), yet what are the limits of this heterogeneity? How does minor rebellion navigate a multiplicity of rebel desires – some involving wishing to build minor worlds and commons, others focusing primarily on financial earnings and yet still others seeking to advance international careers through minor inquiring? There are minor rebellions within minor rebellions, so to speak. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of consistency might be investigated here, not as homogeneity but as a holding together of disparate elements.

The relationship between minor and major presents further questions about the vulnerabilities of different forms of desires. Rebels, for some we talked with, may also find their minor worlds potentially deflating or disillusioning, such as when the stabilizing effects of a productive machine are lost. Minor rebels are vulnerable not only to revenge by the

hegemony, but also to their own aspirations to become major, beyond what minor world-making may be able to deliver. There are also questions about the (at least partly) unconscious nature of collective desires in minor rebellion. What are the sources of the unconscious desires, and how may they be brought into awareness? One of the more puzzling things about the case of Robin Hood is how the level and intensity of their rhetoric dwarf any reasonable estimate of the impact of the fund in its current size. The quest has been portrayed as nothing less than fostering relief from the semiocapitalist suppression of subjectivities and potentially offering revolutionary wealth redistribution. Such disproportionate grandiosity may not speak to the quixotic nature of minor quests but to their logic as projects of passion (Svejenova, Strandgaard Pedersen, & Vives, 2011), for which material gain is subordinated to their idealized cause and to intrinsic rewards that may not be fully articulated. Escaping rational calculus, Robin Hood expressed a relationship to the world which is more typical of an artist than of a financial concern (Strati, 1999).

This leads to questions about individual sources of desire in minor rebellion. One could follow Deleuze and Guattari in suggesting that the patterning of desire has, first and foremost, external origins and that subjectivity is a resultant and purely retrospective phenomenon. To paraphrase Samuel (2002, p. 420); how can I know what I am and what I can do until I see what I desire? But that would be an entirely unsatisfactory answer; it would rob people of projective capacities and sources of agency carried over from other assemblages that constitute subjectivities. Why then may minor rebellion be life enriching for people? Here, we cannot be conclusive; we can merely suggest that the lure of minor rebellion as an agency of *becoming*, rather than merely belonging to some outsider social group, may be further explored with respect two key features. One is the thirst for battle and drama (Scheibe, 2000): the dangers and rewards of facing and conquering bulwarks of power by engaging in political contestation. The other is more open-ended, tied to collaborative

inquiry and restless search, thriving on undirected forms of hope (Carlsen, Hagen, &
Mortensen, 2012) for human betterment (Alexander, 1993) that keep the lived-in story alive
and moving.

Events of desiring – from collective action to field

So far in the argument, the model of minor rebellion that we have outlined says more
about the emergence of collective desiring and the contours of a deterritory than the
dynamics of potential uptake in the institutional field. We have reasoned from a case whose
minor territory has yet to achieve strong field visibility. As much as punk was overtaken by
commercial interests (such as the Sex Pistols; see Thompson, 2004), our case, used primarily
for illustrative purposes, also suggests the severe difficulties of escaping the entrapment of
major financial interests. The core of the previous minor creating at Robin Hood, the parasite
algorithm, was reterritorialized when appropriated by a major bank. When then, and how, is
minor rebellion sustainable over time, and when (or how) does it become vulnerable to being
reterritorialized?

Svirsky (2010b, p. 2) has noted that a major task for "activist war machines" is precisely
to escape entrapment from "the black hole of the majoritarian discourse." However, the
institutional significance of the notion of minor rebellion and the potential resolution of the
paradox of embeddedness (Seo & Creed, 2002) cannot be limited to what happens to the
eventual development of singular actors. The movement from the originating collective of the
minor to the field may be a rhizomatic one, where the collective desiring activities of one
actor become events representing sprouts and offshoots for others, with possibilities for
growth in various directions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 23). Minor rebellion, then,
can help explain why politicized experimental action has more significance in institutional
fields than is often acknowledged (Marti & Mair, 2009; Rao, Morrill, & Zald, 2000).

As a form of social inquiry, the telling and retelling of the story of a case like Robin Hood amounts to experiential surfacing (Nilsson, 2015). What is surfaced is not just a socially desirable way of operating, but the activities of minor world-making, minor creating, and minor inquiring that expose others to both new exemplars and desires for becoming. Experimentation helps make the potential concrete and stimulates the imagination of others. When the event itself is made an actant (Cooren, 2018), it may be considered the equivalent of a speed bump or catapult: prototypes, broken pieces, even gossip that may impact an institutional field in making it more of a rhizome and less homogeneous. One may also see events of minor rebellion and their narration as a burning fire of desire (Hjorth, 2007, pp. 719-724), whose vibrancy and intensity attracts new players who want to be lit up or light new fires themselves. In this way, events of minor rebellion may be researched as both providing exemplars for further imagination and generating creative social energy (Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018).

This line of argument raises a new set of questions for research. What are the conditions under which an event of minor rebellion is taken up by others and has a more lasting effect on the field? How far does an event of minor rebellion extend? At first glance it may appear that the case of Robin Hood, like Occupy Wall Street (OWS) (Barthold, Dunne, & Harvie, 2018), can be written off as an ephemeral event – an entertaining carnivalesque breather with limited lasting effects. Barthold et al. (2018) have recently argued that OWS produced an interpretive shift leading to several other events in the larger Occupy movement, thus was made a field-configuring event (Hardy & Maguire, 2010) that created ruptures within a rhizomatic logic. This raises the question of how concrete and vivid the surfacing of the *actual experiences of the beneficiaries* (Nilsson, 2015) needs to be in order to stimulate further social inquiry down the line. Would the minor rebellion of an organization like Robin Hood have achieved larger field impact if narratives of the funded projects for the commons

had been surfaced more persistently? Would #metoo have caught fire without the vivid exemplars of those who struggled?

Finally, there are questions about how the dynamics between deterritorializing of minor rebellion and major reterritorializing may be enabled by technology. Buchanan (2007) has discussed how the internet supports both rhizomic and arboreal cultural forms, emphasizing the underestimation of arboreal tendencies of stability, surveillance, and centralization of wealth by actors like Google. On a more optimistic footing, social media technology may be seen as having the capacity to strengthen the revolutionary and fire-making potential of events of minor rebellion, exemplified by the deterritorializing the media and the music industry (Munro & Thanem, 2017) or the escalation of the Occupy movement (Barthold et al., 2018). Likewise blockchains, the technology eventually adopted by Robin Hood, promise a distributed, peer-to-peer consensus capability without a controlling authority, one that can enable new models of non-hierarchical governance (De Filippi & Wright, 2018). While many commentators underline this decentralizing and transformative power (Yermack, 2017), the issues of regulation and governance appear far from straightforward, with new opportunities for control and further centralization of power (Roubini, 2018).

Conclusion.

In Love Letter After Dinner in Kassel (internal memo), Robin Hood founding member Karolina Kucia wrote: "You must want to know why I spit into the salad." Kucia admits that she would rather work with love but "every time I say this word [love], I smell flowers. And it smells too much of perfumes here." She acknowledges that spitting may spoil the dinner but insists that it produces agency by giving a sign of "our alive smelling body" and reminding of "our potential to do anything" and foster constant reinvention.

Spitting in the salad as a metaphor for minor rebellion expresses a multiplicity of institutionally directed desires. The audacious energy of immediate antagonistic action (the

spit) may live alongside the surfacing of positive alternatives (the flowers). As a way of

escaping the paradox of embedded agency, what may at first fail as political contestation can

succeed in feeding powerful social inquiry. In the latter sense, minor rebellion may produce

creative variation in the institutional field as desiring events seed the imagination of others.

This also is where Deleuze and Guattari's politics of desire meets the roots of critical social

inquiry in Deweyan pragmatism: agentic growth of meaning through action as the basis for

moral imagination and democratic renewal (Alexander, 1993). Conceived as such, while

minor rebellion may at first be fueled by political desiring, its functions are not determined

by it. The multiplicity and eventness of desiring suggest that the growth of meaning through

collective action proceeds inwards to facets of the self, outwards to institutional renewal and

the rowing imagination of human betterment, and where the latter may lead is everybody's

guess.

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