

The Non-identical 'Self'

Nonlinear ontologies as incompatible with the Self

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Acknowledgements

When I started this PhD process, I naively thought that this would be fun. I had really enjoyed writing my master's thesis, so I had expected the process of writing a PhD to be a replication of that positive experience, except now I would get to enjoy it for three to four years. I could not have been more wrong, though I don't think anyone can know what it is like to write a PhD until they have tried it, and I don't think I would recommend anyone to give it a try. These past four years have been some of the toughest, loneliest and scariest times of my life. But they were also some of the best, and that is mainly due to all the people who were there to pick me up when I was down and to the fact that I got to spend more time across the Channel, this time exploring the wondrous city of London. When I picked the topic of nonlinear time, I was happily oblivious to the fact that I would be condemning myself to trying to write on a subject that, as is acknowledged by all three of the philosophers' whose writing on the subject has become part of this thesis, resists being captured in words. As frustrating as it has been to try to say something that cannot be said, it has allowed me to grow, to test out the limits of my perseverance and my creativity. But mainly it has made me want to bang my head against a wall.

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Abstract

This thesis will argue that nonlinear ontologies are incommensurable with a notion of self as an embodied, enduring agent. Nonlinear ontologies are centred on contingency and dynamism, as opposed to the stasis and predictability of linear ontologies. As a result, nonlinear ontologies engender multi-directional conceptualisations of development, complicates the notion that elements are separable and often locates agency below the level of the individual, as it is seen as an assemblage of forces. These tendencies problematise notions of the self, as it is predicated on the idea that it is delineable, constant and capable of acting independently.

In order to substantiate this argument, I will explore three different nonlinear ontologies, each with its own implications for the concept of the self. First, I will show that the concepts of the will to power and the theory of the drives in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche problematize the assumptions of agency and unity of the self. Second, I will argue that Bergson's understanding of the world as composed through duration and materiality engenders two incommensurable conceptualisations of logic and causality - as emergent and efficient respectively - which creates a split sense of self. Third, I will demonstrate that Serres' attempt to approach the 'multiple as such' expresses nonlinearity in the form of productive chaos, which problematizes the notion of the individual as a "unity" and an agent.

The final chapter explores how Connolly and Bennett use nonlinear ontologies to create a sense of fluidity and contingency in a self that can resist the tendency towards dogmatic and monolithic understandings of itself. However, because nonlinear ontologies are incompatible with the self, these attempts to combine the two create various tendencies, which I will show to resonate with the accounts of nonlinearity by Nietzsche, Bergson and Serres, upon which they based their theories.

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Introduction

My PhD project evolved out of an interest in the politics of identity and difference. The first time I remember engaging intellectually with politics was in response to the changes I saw in the Dutch society towards the Islamic faith and Muslims in the wake of 9/11. I remember feeling surprised and dismayed that people that had been part of our society for decades¹ were being blamed for heinous acts carried out by people that were - to me at least - clearly unconnected to them. The common denominator of their religious faith seemed a poor basis for the discrimination that I saw intensify in society. When I started my bachelor's degree and enrolled in political theory classes, I was interested in learning more about where such social pressures and exclusions come from. This is when I was first introduced to the problem of difference as a political construct. It revolves around the interconnected questions of what we understand by difference, and the ethico-political connotations of considering things to be different. In everyday life we usually consider difference in relation to concepts of identity, sameness, and similarity, seeing difference in terms of degrees of opposition to sameness. This is a simple explanation of the hardening socio-political climate towards Muslims after 9/11, who suddenly found themselves classified as different after people who shared their faith were seen to attack "our" society, "our" way of life. A focus on sameness and identity is explained as a strategy to cope with the endless complexity of the world around us. We tend to reduce dissimilarities to similarities, for it is much easier to understand things by comparing them in terms of similarity than by trying to understand them as something that is completely alien that cannot be folded into familiar binaries (Nietzsche 2001, §355). Hence, on a basic level, it makes sense to consider the world primarily in terms of sameness and a corollary conception of difference. Yet, as Connolly notes, identity requires difference to provide it with

¹ Muslim immigration to the Netherlands really took off in the 1960s and 1970s when predominantly Moroccan and Turkish labourers were invited to come work low skill jobs. The Dutch government intended their presence in the Netherlands to be temporary and, initially, made little to no efforts to ensure integration into Dutch society, which created problems of intolerance and difference which persist to this day (Fennema and Tillie 2004, 89-92).

“distinctness and solidity” (Connolly 1991, 64). Moreover, the focus on sameness has important ethico-political consequences that cannot be underestimated and that have become increasingly harmful in recent years, as a result of increased multiculturalism, globalisation and immigration.

In Western liberal theory the political problem of difference is often solved through the practice of toleration, which is based on the idea that we can peacefully coexist with those who do not share our beliefs and ways of life. It recognizes that there may be limits to toleration, but this only indicates that some differences might be too hostile or too extreme to be welcomed within the sphere of tolerated ways of life. Some communitarian theorists have pointed out that this solution disguises the problem of toleration: tolerance harbours hidden tendencies to denigration even among differences that are considered acceptable, meaning that the tolerated is seen as lesser than the tolerant (Tønder 2013, 2).² Under the problem of toleration, difference is perceived as either quantitative or qualitative in nature - as expressing either differing degrees of the same quality or an altogether different quality or otherness. This difference is then turned into an inequality in the sense of valuation, where the difference is translated into categories of better and worse and thereby used for purposes of social organization. In Foucaultian terms, Western society is based on normalisation, which characterises tolerance merely as the attitude towards those who are at the outermost edges of a society’s inter-subjectively constructed “normal;” those who exhibit behaviour that is not up to the standard of desired behaviour, but does not deviate far enough from it to be penalised (Foucault 1995, 177-184).³ The political virtue of toleration becomes ethically dubious as it is seen to carry a lingering sense of *ressentiment*⁴ against difference at its best and a negative moral judgement towards the differences it is meant to tolerate at its worst, and this negative attitude, in turn, becomes the basis for an uncritical

² This creates a society in which there is competition over who is allowed to tolerate and who can only hope to be tolerated.

³ This is also what Connolly discusses on the tendency to “evil within faith”. His book *Pluralism* consists of an attempt to come up with strategies to withstand this tendency. (Connolly 2005)

⁴ *Ressentiment* in the Nietzschean sense indicates resentment that arises out of our inability to withstand the source of our misery. For Nietzsche this is particularly important in relation to morality.

affirmation of a “certain”⁵ identity or identities deemed to be “normal.” This is particularly problematic in democratic societies, which are supposed to be based on equality (Taylor 1979).⁶ Hence the political ideal of toleration retains the problem of difference by way of an inability to conceive of difference without implying a recourse to a negative attitude to that which is considered different.

Ontological Turn

While my original interest in the problems surrounding identity and difference framed it as a political problem, I came to see that this political problem rests on ontological considerations about these two terms. In this respect my focus on difference and identity has followed a path that in political theory has been identified as the ontological turn. The interest in ontology in political theory was surprising, because ontology had previously been a rather restricted speculative philosophical field, closely connected to the unpopular metaphysics, concerned with the nature of being or existence⁷ that did not appear to be applicable to the practical field of ethico-political considerations. These objections to ontology were lessened through a change in the understanding of ontology, which was now taken to mean an examination and sometimes problematization of the general assumptions underlying mainstream political theories that have tended to ignore or dismiss ontological issues. This change toward the problematisation of general assumptions was useful to introduce the notion of ontology into political theory. Thus

⁵ Certain here is used in both senses. On the one hand it means to denote a particular identity as opposed to other supposedly discrete identities. On the other hand, it is meant to point ironically towards the uncertainty of identities, which are often viewed as certain and stable.

⁶ Taylor presents this problematic in detail in §2.6 of *Hegel and Modern Society* (1979). In a nutshell, he states that democracy and difference clash because the consensus necessary for radical freedom in democracies requires a high level of homogeneity in its populace. Yet it is unable to eradicate difference and create this homogeneity, or at least Taylor is unable to explain how this would happen if it did.

⁷ I prefer to define the concept of ontology as the nature of existence over the nature of being, because, as will become clear in the following chapters, nonlinear ontologies, which are the chief object of study, tend toward a focus on becoming and change over being and stasis. Therefore, it seems less appropriate to determine ontology as concerned with the nature of being, when I will primarily be discussing ontologies of becoming.

William Connolly, for example, casts his version of the ontological turn with the statement that every political theory, including his own, asserts a series of “onto-political” assumptions about the nature of identity and difference that need to be critically examined and problematised (Connolly 1995: ch. 1). This understanding of ontology as necessary but always problematic defines what Stephen White calls the “weak ontology” that characterizes recent political theory’s ontological turn (White 2000: 6-8). However, in this PhD I will be using the traditional sense as that which concerns the nature of existence. The first reason for this is that, though the problem under discussion in this thesis is inspired by political theory, the majority of this thesis will discuss philosophical works, which understand ontology in the classic sense mentioned above. In addition, the themes that I will be discussing, in particular the notion of time, are integral to our understanding of the world, of what characterises the nature of our existence. As such, the philosophical use of ontology is more appropriate in this context than that which has become common in political theory.

Despite this choice, it is useful to consider the ontological turn in political theory in more detail, because it introduced into political theory a new way of understanding the world and introduced new themes of study that have been integral to the development of the problem under consideration out of political theory. The ontological turn was strengthened by the realisation that the modern epoch was ending, which led to an awareness in the Western postmodern world that in the modern West certain entities and concepts that were previously considered to reflect absolute truth, could no longer be seen to reflect such an unambiguous certainty. This fuelled the notion that previous certainties and assumptions were contentious and therefore should be questioned. A particular notion that came under fire was the modern notion of the subject as invulnerable and detached from its surroundings (both biological and social), which allowed the supposition that it could master them that gave modernity an overblown confidence in human capacity (White 2000, 3-5). White states: “It is precisely the waning of this self-confidence that engenders such a widespread recourse to ontological reflection. Accordingly, the current turn

might now be seen as an attempt to think ourselves, and being in general, in ways that depart from the dominant - but now more problematic - ontological investments of modernity” (White 2000, 4).

The ontological turn also developed into an interest in difference, in particular in ontological notions of difference which do not directly map onto actualized individual and group differences we see in society around us.⁸ Yet, by questioning the ‘nature’ of difference, theorists of the ontological turn have shown that the understanding of ontological difference can influence our perception of actualised differences.⁹ I realised that the notion of identity from which the problem of difference emerges is itself predicated on an interpretation of the notion of the individual, or the self.¹⁰ White notes that the ontological turn has resulted in attempts to reconceptualise the individual and its relation to the world. This involves in particular, according to White, considerations of:

“language, mortality or finitude, natality, and the articulation of “sources of the self”.

These figurations are accounts of what it is *to be* a certain sort of creature: first, one entangled with language; second, one with a consciousness that will die; third, one that, despite its entanglement and limitedness, has the capacity for radical

⁸ By this I mean that though ontological and actualized differences are related they are not identical in nature. Actualised differences concern differences between given identities, which are never quite fixed, they are always subject to fluctuation and change - for example the sudden change in the perceived differences between the “Western” and “Muslim” identities after 9/11. Ontological difference is concerned with how identities and the differences between them come into being.

⁹ Examples include theorists such as Mouffe (2000) Tønder and Thomassen (2005) and of course Connolly (1991, 1995 and 2005).

¹⁰ I will use these two terms interchangeably through this thesis, despite the fact that the word individual has strong connotations with liberal individualism in political theory. I have decided to use both, because the majority of this thesis concerns philosophical works, which do not make this distinction. In addition, I feel that having acknowledged that the concept “individual” can evoke a sense of liberal individualism, and having stressed that for me it does *not* carry those implications this can be avoided. As such, it is no different from the concept of the self. That being said, I will try to avoid the use of the term “subject” except when it is used explicitly by the authors of my source texts, because this term implies a sense of agency for the self, which is problematised in the nonlinear philosophies that are one of the central focus points of this thesis.

novelty; and finally, one that gives definition to itself against some ultimate background or “source,” to which we find ourselves always already attached, and which evokes something like awe, wonder, or reverence.” (2000, 9)

The notion of the self that is proposed by White is quite common sense. We generally expect the individual to have the capacity to engage in some sort of language, to be (in maturity at least) aware of its mortality, to be able to change and to be distinguishable from that which surrounds it even while acknowledging that the individual is indelibly connected to it. It is this common sense definition of the self that I will be using in this PhD. There are three reasons why I use this definition, in the first instance because this common sense understanding of the self is dominant in the political theory discourses on identity and difference. Therefore, in order to engage with this debate, it is important to use a similar if not the same definition. Secondly, it is a broad definition, as it allows for different viewpoints on how each of these four attributes operates and on their relative significance to the individual. This assertion is acknowledged by White who argues that though the self is “universally constituted” through the four aspects - language, mortality, natality and “source” - discussed above, the ontological turn is characterised by a change in attitude towards the self, one that acknowledges that though understandings of the individual involve a certain interpretation of these four terms, the particular meaning of each of these terms is contingent and therefore cannot be deemed fixed or universal. This is the basis for the rejection of the modern subject’s self-confidence (White 2000, 9). The idea that the particular understanding of self in relation to these characteristics is not fixed is important, because it dovetails into the third reason that I use this definition. Namely, because all of the thinkers engaged in this project appear to concur that these elements are part of the individual even if they disagree on the ways in which these various elements operate and to what extent they each

determine the self.¹¹ In addition to White's attributes, I want to highlight two further aspects of the self that are already implied by White's attributes and which are of central concern to this thesis: agency and materiality.¹² For, despite the fact that the end of the modern epoch broke the notion that the individual was sufficiently powerful to master its environment, there is a common sense notion that the individual has agentic capacity, that it has the ability to effect action. The self's agentic capacity is predicated on its materiality, which ensures that it partakes in and is capable of interacting with the material aspects of its environment. It is necessary to highlight these two aspects of the self for they are, as I will show in this thesis, important factors in nonlinear ontologies, which are the second axis of interest in this thesis. Thus, when I use the terms individual or self, I refer to the entity they designate to be the result of assumptions about language, mortality, natality, "source", agency and materiality.

The notion of the self is often considered to be intimately related to that of identity. Connolly for example defines identity as:

what I am and how I am recognized rather than what I choose, want, or consent to. It is the dense *self* from which choosing, wanting, and consenting proceed. Without that density, these acts could not occur; with it, they are recognised to be mine.¹³ (1991, 64)

The dense self that Connolly discusses is not discussed in much detail, he simply assumes a common sense notion of the self. However, this common sense understanding of the self, if

¹¹ However, it is interesting to note that though none of them imply that mortality is not part of the human condition all appear to be more focused on the notions of language, natality - as the "capacity for radical novelty" -, and "source" - in terms of the individual's relation to its environment. These three terms will recur repeatedly throughout this thesis.

¹² They are most clearly implicated in the attribute of source which seems to encompass both the – material – delineation of the self as well as the way in which it *interacts* with its environs.

¹³ Emphasis added.

coupled with the notion of identity, brings other aspects of the former to fore. In order for that self to be recognisable it is necessary for it to be delineable, which is to say it must be distinguishable from other selves. In the common sense definition this is provided by the materiality of the body. Insofar as the ontological turn has focused on the (human) individual and its identity, it has defined these in terms of “the essential traits or characteristics the thing retains over time” (Widder 2012, 2).¹⁴ This points towards the notion of a self that is enduring. Finally, as I have argued above, the self is considered to be the site of agency. Taken together a notion is produced of a self as an enduring, embodied agent, and a canvas or container endowed with particular characteristics, traits and beliefs that factor into, and perhaps even co-constitute,¹⁵ its identitarian commitments. These portrayals of the stable self depend upon a sense of essentialism, wherein the self is endowed with certain attributes that remain more or less constant and allow it to be recognisable and delineable. It promulgates the idea that while some characteristics of a person (or object) may alter over time, its fundamental nature, its identity, will stay the same.¹⁶ As such, it is crucial to the formation of identity and, hence, the problem of difference: the politics of tolerance and exclusion they engender are based in an essential sense of self with certain enduring characteristics that set one individual or a group apart from others.

So far, I have given an account of the ontological turn in political theory and the way in which it opened up considerations of the nature of the self and in turn of identity. One of the most important influences on my studies of the problem of difference was the work of William Connolly, which I encountered in the course of my Bachelor’s degree and chose to continue pursuing during

¹⁴ As White puts it: “Ontological commitments in this sense are thus entangled with questions of identity and history [as a reaction to the assumptions of modernity], with how we articulate the meaning of our lives, both individually and collectively” (2000, 4).

¹⁵ By this I mean that certain physical and psychological proclivities and aptitudes can affect both the process of identification and the perception of the self both internally and externally. That is to say, even though the self is understood in terms of stability and endurance this does not mean that it is a blank canvas, its internal makeup and external environment are intricately related in processes of identity formation, and this is particularly the case in Connolly’s work as we shall see in the final chapter of this thesis.

¹⁶ At least to the extent that they are recognizable as the same qualities belonging to the same person.

my Master's. I was intrigued by his elegant solution¹⁷ to the problem of difference and the violent exclusion it leads to. He argues that the continuing modern insistence on the existence of an enduring truth that establishes a notion of monolithic essentialist identity. Connolly tries to mediate the negative aspects of monolithic, essentialist identities in order to mitigate the justification for exclusion and violence toward those that are perceived as other. Ultimately, this enables the possibility of creating a society on the basis of agonistic respect instead of antagonism. Central to Connolly's philosophical engineering with identity is the attempt to make it less essentialist and monolithic, or in its positive inverse, more fluid and diverse, so that identity becomes capable of accommodating difference. In other words, for identity to become less rigid so that it can find difference within itself. This in turn helps diminish its fear of external difference and reduce the temptation to use exclusionary tactics or violence in response to that fear. A crucial factor in Connolly's theory for achieving this aim is an appreciation for contingency and change, accepting that neither self-identity nor the world around us is static and that difference therefore is a fact of life. However, in the development of his oeuvre, the importance of contingency and vicissitude grows into an interest in nonlinear temporality and complexity theory.¹⁸

The interest in temporality is also part of the ontological turn. As Hutchings argues, time and space condition all thought (Hutchings 2008, 3), hence changing our understanding of either time or space results in a momentous ontological shift. The implicit understanding of the self as a constant and coherent agent is itself predicated on a particular understanding of time as linear and progressive. As we shall encounter in chapter two on Bergson, this is the traditional portrayal of time as a homogeneous backdrop that passes constantly and uncritically, unbiased and without tendencies or proclivities, just a conditioning factor of our life. However, as a result of the increase

¹⁷ It is elegant in the sense that the theory is simple to grasp even if hard to carry out. Moreover, it is elegant because it is pragmatic, offering concrete starting points to work toward a more open, pluralistic society.

¹⁸ Or rather, his earlier works already show a tendency towards nonlinear logics, which was formalised into a commitment to nonlinear temporality and complexity theory in the mid 2000s.

in interest in ontology, time and temporality have been rediscovered as sites of contention. An important factor in this renewed interest is a dawning realisation that under the influence of technological advancement and globalisation, socio-political processes are increasing in speed. This has resulted, as Widder writes, in a “renewed interest in time as an active force of change, contingency, and novelty. ... Time’s multiplicity, manifesting itself in the coexistence of different tempos and velocities of time, is now used to account for complex and ambiguous processes of contemporary life and to outline” (Widder 2008, 1). This is significant, because its focus on movement as the defining aspect of temporality is problematic for conceptualisations of the self (Grosz 2004, 4; Widder 2008, 2; Connolly 2002, 141). The dynamism of time and the processes it spurs on portray the world and the self that inhabits it as contingent and fluctuating, which challenges the implicit ontological assumptions of stability and coherence associated with the - common sense - self. It is exactly this dynamism that attracts those who, like Connolly, are trying to address the problem of difference. A more fluid notion of time would allow for less rigidity within the self and reduce the demand for self-certainty and the consequent temptation to act violently towards those whose difference might undermine this self-certainty. However, the lure of dynamism is also its downfall, for, as I will argue in this thesis, the fluidity that is supposed to solve the problem of difference, if considered as an ontological condition of life and thought, which is the case with temporality, also dissolves the very foundation upon which the self is built. Therefore, I contend that fluid, nonlinear understandings of time cannot solve the problem of difference, as, in doing so, they also dissolve the very constituents of the problem itself, collapsing the ontological basis that establishes the problem by creating a completely different – and problematic – understanding of reality. Therefore, this dissertation will demonstrate that while the recent interest in non-linear ontologies of time has been an important resource for recent political theories that have sought to challenge stable linear conceptions of identity and selfhood, these same ontologies have proven fatal for these theories when they have sought to provide consistent alternative understandings of the self that have the kind of political agency these theories also

admit are indispensable to the understanding of politics they want to retain. That is to say, a notion of politics or the political that concerns collective action to advance or achieve something progressive, a better society. In the case of Connolly this action would involve effort to enhance the pluralistic ethos through the affirmation of differences within it, whereas Bennett advocates for the extension of agency towards 'nonsentient' agents in order to change our perspective on the importance of the natural world around us and serve the ecological agenda.

Nonlinear Logic and the Self

Thus, as I have shown in the previous section, the ontological turn sparked an interest among political theorists in the two most important concepts of this thesis: the self and time. The ontological turn problematized the notion of linear temporality as the neutral background that conditions our experience. Yet, linear temporality has an important corollary that must also be considered when defining it, namely, efficient causality, or the notion that a cause and effect can be distinguished and are logically linked in a relation of causation. Efficient causality provides the foundation for various types of linear temporal logic, for example the notion of time and evolution as being linear progressive,¹⁹ teleological, deterministic and chronological. I will use a variety of these terms throughout this PhD to denote linear temporality as they are used in opposition to nonlinear temporalities by the various authors under discussion. My definition of nonlinear temporality, if possible, is even more undetermined: under nonlinear temporalities I understand all concepts of temporality that operate under alternative logical systems to that of efficient causality.

Indeed, it is the focus of this work to present various distinct interpretations of nonlinearity and to show in which ways each of them problematises the common sense self, understood as an enduring, embodied agent. This assertion provides the first layer to the logical structure of the

¹⁹ Notably, this is different than progress, which merely denotes a development and does not necessarily preclude linearity.

arguments in this thesis; it works on the assumption that changes in our understanding of temporality will affect the concomitant understandings of the self it is capable of supporting. As I stated above, the ontological impact of a change in our perception of temporality has important implications for the parameters of thought: it changes the logical framework. A shift towards greater dynamism and open-endedness in temporal structures is often associated with the rejection of linearity, which understands the movement of time as progression along a single, stable trajectory without – sudden – deviations or changes in direction and as such facilitates efficient causality. Instead, philosophers and political theorists interested in dynamic and fluid ontologies today gravitate towards theories of time that are predicated on nonlinear trajectories. They engage in the promulgation and exploration of temporalities that do not confine themselves to a single direction, but that are open to contingency and change, capable of propelling various processes expressing a multitude of orientations. Most importantly, because of the structural requirement of continuity, these ontologies provide space for contingency and transformation, rejecting efficient causality for alternative logical systems, or dispensing with causal logic altogether. The second layer of the argumentative structure of this thesis is that I not only contend that changes in temporality affect a general change in the logical framework of these discussions, but that different understandings of nonlinear temporality engender different logical frameworks. In addition, because my conception of nonlinearity is exceedingly broad, which reflects the wide variety of theories that develop nonlinear logics, it was necessary to narrow down the field of study. Therefore, I will explore three philosophers who propose their own nonlinear ontologies: Nietzsche, Bergson and Serres. I will show that the variations in their ontologies translate into different logical frameworks and patterns. I will then consider how each of their logical frameworks affects the assumptions that have facilitated stable, linear understandings of the self. This interplay will provide the basis for each of the chapters I will be presenting. Each will set out the nonlinear ontology of the philosopher under consideration and how it provides a different basis for interpreting the self.

The final aspect that rounds out my argument in this PhD is to (re-)introduce some of the political theory that gave rise to this problem. As I have stated above, I was introduced to the problem of difference and the notion that nonlinearity could affect our philosophical and political understanding of the world through Connolly. Though I find Connolly's solution to the problem of difference – which will be discussed in greater detail in the final chapter of this PhD – pragmatic and therefore practically appealing, I also find it ontologically objectionable. Despite his efforts to present a nonlinear ontology as a basis for a more fluid sense of self, I find that he was ultimately unable to do this. By way of Connolly's work, I became interested in the work of Jane Bennett, who uses nonlinearity as a means to propose a different understanding of materiality and agency. As such, I found that, though little of Bennett's work directly engages with identity, her work does discuss the elements of the self that I think many of the political theorists working on identity do not consider. Moreover, her work shows a different understanding of the relations that exist between humanity and its environment, and that an alternative approach and direction can result from engagement with nonlinear logics. However, I find that she too, cannot provide a satisfactory conceptualisation of the self on the basis of nonlinear logics. I will use Connolly's and Bennett's work as a basis to explore the tension between the self and nonlinear logic within the ambit of political theory, and as representatives of political theorists who are engaged in the exploration of difference. Ultimately, I will show that, though nonlinear ontologies place a greater emphasis on difference and change, this comes at the cost of the *ontological* basis for the reality we currently live in. Therefore, though it may yield practical results, their work is ontologically problematic.

Inspired by Connolly's and Bennett's work, I wanted to understand why there is such tension in representations of the self and nonlinearity in order to be able to understand the philosophical and ontological basis for their arguments. I wanted to understand how nonlinear logic influenced notions of self in the works of thinkers that inspired them, and whether there was a more general tension between the nonlinear and the self. I decided to look at Nietzsche, Bergson and Serres. Each of these philosophers show that nonlinearity creates a sense of

becoming, of movement, of process that stands in strong relations of tension with stability, differentiation and - specifically in the case of Nietzsche and Serres - concentrated agency. On close inspection, I found that each provides an understanding of the self that is highly problematic, and that Connolly and Bennett carry these problems over into their own understandings of how the nonlinearity and the self relate to each other. This has led me to conclude that nonlinear logics are incommensurable with the linear logics that constitute the concept of the self. Widder notes that “the idea that identity - along with its associated conceptions of difference, stability, and endurance - is a simulation comes to light by considering ... time’s motion and the structure grounding it” (Widder 2008, 4). In this thesis I will go a step further and argue that nonlinear conceptions of temporality engender logics that not only reveal that identity is a simulation, but that the concept of the self with which it is indelibly linked is untenable as a consequence of the change in logic they entail. For the change in logic engenders a tendency to problematise and even dissolve what were previously understood as solid entities, including the self. Hence, I contend that the concept of self is firmly based in linear logics and it cannot be adapted to conform to nonlinear frameworks, as the latter lack the stability and capacity for differentiation and delineation that establish the self as a distinct entity.

Methodology and Chapter Outline

When undertaking a research project there are a myriad of choices to be made. Some of the most important in a philosophical project, once the subject has been determined, are the selection of thinkers and texts. There are many thinkers who inspired Connolly’s and Bennett’s work, and even a variety of thinkers who are examining questions of nonlinearity, difference and the self. Initially I chose to work on three philosophers alongside Connolly and Bennett as representatives of political theory: Nietzsche, Bergson, and Serres. The choices for Nietzsche and Bergson were simple. Nietzsche is an important influence on Connolly, on top of the fact that he is one of the first nonlinear philosopher’s in Western philosophy. Bergson is widely recognised as one of the

most influential commentators on nonlinear temporality and as such has influenced various political theorists. Finally, I thought that Serres, as a lesser known author in Anglophone philosophy, would provide a chance to come up with novel insights even if his influence on Bennett and Connolly is, arguably, less obvious.

Besides choosing the thinkers to focus on, it was also important to consider how I wanted to approach the question. Philosophy and political theory can overlap in subject matter; however, in political theory there is a tendency toward a more bird's eye view approach. However, in order to come to grips with the ontological nature of nonlinearity and the self, I felt it would be more appropriate to use a deep reading approach. This would allow me to really look into the proverbial nuts and bolts of the arguments under consideration. As a result, I not only restricted the number of philosophers under consideration but limited the texts I wanted to discuss, so that I could examine them in greater detail. Consequently, I tried to select texts from each author that would be most useful in outlining the problem and the answer; that would give me the most thorough understanding of their interpretation of nonlinearity and how that relates to the self. The downside of this approach is that my reading might come across as more idiosyncratic, as not the whole oeuvre is discussed. However, I feel that this was not overly problematic, as even when the whole oeuvre of a thinker is considered, it cannot possibly be represented in its entirety. I am happy with the result of the choices that I made, as I think they have resulted in a clear and coherent argument that can be traced through all four chapters of my PhD.

The structure of my thesis is as follows; the first three dedicated to the philosophers mentioned above and the final chapter will feature Connolly and Bennett's work on nonlinearity in relation to identity and agency respectively. This allows me to show in the first three chapters how the various understandings of nonlinearity, each in their own way, show a tendency to dissolve the common sense notion of the self, but in a way that is unable to provide a credible alternative. I will then use these conclusions in order to examine to what extent similar tendencies can be traced in Connolly and Bennett's work.

Ironically, for a thesis on nonlinear temporality, I decided to organise the first three chapters chronologically. Therefore, this thesis will open with a chapter on Nietzsche titled “The Will to Power, The Eternal Return and the Self”. In it I will show how the concepts of *will to power* and the *eternal return* create a nonlinear ontology, including a nonlinear conceptualisation of temporality. The *will to power* proposes a world composed of various continually interacting forces or drives. The theory of the drives is used by Alexander Nehamas to construct a “Nietzschean self”. I will use Nehamas’ work to show discrepancies between the assumption of the drives as the site of agency and the semblance of unitary agency embodied in a self. In addition, I will show that the theory of the drives complicates the supposition of constancy that is so essential in conceptualisations of the self. Ultimately, this will lead me to conclude that nonlinear logic that establishes the drives as the locus of agency is incompatible with the self as an agentic and enduring unity.

In the second chapter, “Duration as Incompatible with the self” I will focus on Bergson. I will juxtapose his doctoral thesis, *Time and Free Will*, with his magnum opus, *Creative Evolution*. I will show that the latter work aims to reconcile the stark opposition established in Bergson’s early work between materiality and Bergson’s concept of nonlinear time called duration. In the first half of the chapter, I will discuss Bergson’s initial understanding of duration, which informs his understanding of the self as split into two separate psychic registers, and how this is problematic for the self as a unified entity. The second half will focus on Bergson’s attempt to reconcile duration and materiality through the suggestion that they are inverse directions of the same movement. I will show that this does not resolve the tension completely, as Bergson maintains a sense that duration and materiality are subject to different logical frameworks, the former to emergent causality, the latter to efficient causality. Despite the assumption of an inverse relation which creates a continuum in which materiality and duration are mingled, Bergson is unable to create a framework that is able to encompass and amalgamate the two separate logics. Consequently, it is difficult to comprehend how duration and materiality would form hybrid systems

in the way *Creative Evolution* proposes. This problematic logical schema is also translated into the realm of the self, where the two halves of *Time and Free Will* are now understood as being linked through the faculty of intuition. However, like the intermediate states of the inversion of duration and materiality, Bergson does not provide a logical basis that allows intuition to interact with both registers. In addition, the way Bergson extends the role of duration in *Creative Evolution* which undermines the previously unifying influence of matter, making it impossible to reconstruct a coherent sense of self. I will also examine Deleuze's interpretation of Bergson's work, as it offers a contradictory reading of Bergson to my own. I will show that it is based on a creative but sometimes inaccurate reading of Bergson, and one that ultimately both frames Bergson's attempted reconciliation of duration in matter in spatial terms, and remains unable to resolve Bergson's mysticism and his persistent tendency to return to dualist logics. As a result, I will conclude that Bergson's conceptualisation of nonlinearity is incompatible with the self as a unified entity.

In "The Multiple, Chaotic and Undifferentiated Self," I will trace Serres attempts to articulate the "multiple as such". Serres' nonlinear ontology is based on the notion of multiplicity as productive chaos. He tries to expose the excluded middle, the intermediaries that are created through the synthesis of supposed opposites. These are expressed in mixtures of stabilising organisation and productive chaos. Linear rationality has made us predisposed toward perceiving the stabilising tendencies, because it cannot express the processual mobility of multiplicity. Serres tries to approach nonlinear multiplicity through the mixtures, as they show both familiar organisation and unfamiliar chaos. However, I will show that Serres, like Bergson, struggles to provide a consistent nonlinear logic, and instead ends up requiring the familiarity of perceived unities in order to approach the multiple. As a result, Serres often takes recourse in linear strategies of dualism and conceptualisation. One of these conceptualisations is the individual. Serres often implicitly uses individuality to establish his mixtures, for example the notion of the dancer as a mixture of movement and organisation. Yet, he argues that the nonlinear is

characterised by undifferentiation, which is antithetical to delineation, problematizing the concept of the self. In addition, Serres locates agency with the multiplicities that constitute unities, such as the self. Therefore, Serres, like Nietzsche, situates agency below the level of the individual. Ultimately, Serres' account shows that nonlinearity is characterised by innovative movement, whereas concepts, including the self, are predicated on repetitions. As such, he exposes how nonlinearity is incompatible with the self.

In the final chapter of this thesis "Political Explorations of the Nonlinear Self" I will explore the work of political philosophers William Connolly and Jane Bennett, who each use nonlinearity as a basis for their political theory. I will show that their work exhibits strong influences and resonances with the works and theories of Nietzsche, Bergson and Serres, using their intellectual heritage as a basis to create their own nonlinear ontologies. This will allow me to demonstrate how the nonlinear tendencies in their work complicate the notion of the self, but remain incompatible with the concept. Furthermore, I will illustrate how their Connolly's self as co-constitutively composed through identity|difference and Bennett's notion of the self as an expression of vibrant matter replicate problematic tendencies in the works by Nietzsche, Bergson and Serres. I will show that Connolly replicates Bergson's problematic logical system as predicated on two opposing strands through his understanding of the dual coding of time. Consequently, he ultimately bases his conceptualisation of the self in linear logics, which are seen to be irregularly interrupted by new becomings emergent from duration. Bennett, on the other hand, will be shown to replicate the problematic conceptualisation of agency that is present in both Nietzsche's theory of the drives and Serres' turbulent mixtures. As such, her work reveals that conceptualisations of self depend on a sense of stability and delineation that is irreconcilable with nonlinearity.

Thus, I will have shown that the promise of fluidity and motion within linearity that can help destabilise monolithic identities, is the result of a destabilising tendency that, if taken to its extreme cannot support any sense of self as an enduring, embodied agent.

Chapter 1: The Will to Power, the Eternal Return and the Self

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the implications of Friedrich Nietzsche's nonlinear conceptions of time on the possibilities of constructing a sense of self. Nietzsche is one of the most controversial philosophers of the nineteenth century, in particular as a result of the subsequent invocation of his body of thought by extreme right-wing political groups. Despite this legacy, one should not be bogged down in the political uses to which his oeuvre has been - and is still being - put.¹ There are many different aspects to Nietzsche's work, some of which allow for a nonlinear reading and therefore will be the focus of this chapter. There are many ways to understand and interpret most philosophers' works. However, Nietzsche, through his - often aphoristic - style and his rejection of philosophy as the province of universal truth, provides a body of thought that is even more versatile than most. As Tomlinson notes, these tendencies result in a centralization of reflexivity in Nietzsche's work. This has led to various different ways of engaging with Nietzsche, which Tomlinson roughly groups as belonging to either the "traditional" or "reflexive" strategy (Tomlinson 1988, 151). The former consider Nietzsche's thought as fundamentally consistent and therefore open to systematization, whereas the latter argue that understanding Nietzsche "involves showing that, whatever 'truths' and 'fragments for a system' Nietzsche apparently advances, these are always 'taken away' elsewhere, exposed as temporary coagulations in the flux of language" (Tomlinson 1988, 151). The "reflexive strategy" as Tomlinson calls it not only acknowledges that there are different ways in which Nietzsche could be read, but also that Nietzsche is known to contradict himself and that any reading of Nietzsche could easily be considered as anti-Nietzsche

¹ I vehemently dispute for example Beiner's claim that Nietzsche's work is too dangerous and that interesting and creative elements of his work should not be salvaged because such appropriation downplays the problematic strands of thought and normalises Nietzsche's problematic reactionary ideas (Beiner 2018).

by those stressing other elements of his texts. This is not to say that one should not attempt to read or understand Nietzsche, but rather than any such undertaking is, as Nietzsche would say, only an interpretation. Nietzsche's tendency to advance his arguments in often short, isolated aphorisms, have led to a particularly inconsistent body of thought. It is therefore, sometimes, difficult to identify a "Nietzschean" reading of a particular topic or theme. Despite this difficulty I will try to advance an understanding of Nietzsche as a nonlinear thinker first and, second, as a philosopher whose engagement with the concept of the individual or the self is problematic as a result of his commitments to a nonlinear ontology. This will allow me to show that Nietzsche's nonlinear ontology inhibits the possibility of creating a sense of self on the basis of nonlinear logic because the concept of the self is incompatible with it. In order to develop this argument, I will start by proposing my interpretation of Nietzsche as a nonlinear thinker. Central to this reading is an understanding of the world as becoming, which I will explore through Nietzsche's concepts of the will to power and the eternal return² in the first two sections of this chapter. These sections are followed by a section on agency, understood in the nonlinear terms of the will to power and the eternal return as located in the sphere of the drives. This is central to showing the tensions inherent in the "Nietzschean" sense of self as a result of his nonlinear ontology. I will then move on to examining the understanding of the self as emergent from Nietzsche's text with the help of Alexander Nehamas' interpretation put forward in his book *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (1985). Finally, I will dedicate the last section to exploring the tensions that result from Nietzsche's commitments to nonlinear temporality and ontology that thwart the possibility of sustaining a conceptualisation of the self. In particular, I will show that there is a lacuna in Nietzsche's thought

² I will be using the terms return and recurrence interchangeably, unlike Stambaugh who uses the two terms to infer different aspects of eternity. She associates return with its aspect of irreversibility and the permanence of becoming and recurrence with cyclical time and being (Stambaugh 1972, 8-16). She states in a subsequent book that they create a dualism; return is characterised by a suspended moment of decision and recurrence expresses the necessary recurrence of the natural world (Stambaugh 1987, 15). However, I do not find this a useful distinction for my argument, as I reject the notion of the eternal return/recurrence as a cyclical expression of time in the section on the subject. Moreover, Stambaugh herself acknowledges that Nietzsche himself used the two terms interchangeably (Stambaugh 1972, 29).

between the understanding of the individual as consistent of a complex of drives and the various hints that the self might retain some sense of agency independent of the drives. As such, Nietzsche is a prime example of the unresolved - and often neglected - tension in the desired multiplicity and fluidity that results from nonlinear ontologies and the stable unity that is supposed in conceptualisations of the individual.

The Will to Power as Ontological Principle

There are two related concepts that anchor readings of Nietzsche as a nonlinear thinker. The first, which is the subject of this section is the will to power, the second which will be considered in the next section is the eternal recurrence or the eternal return. Both concepts are highly contentious and have been interpreted in a variety of ways. The interpretation of the will to power presented in this section is oriented towards an understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy as an example of nonlinear thought and its implications for the possibility to establish a concept of the self. Because of the former, I will disregard the interpretation proposed by scholars such as Leiter and Kaufman that the will to power should be seen as a biological or psychological doctrine, which explains human behaviour to a certain extent but cannot (or should not) be given greater scope and importance (Leiter 2014, Kaufman 1974). Instead I will advocate a conception of the will to power as an ontological rather than a biological or psychological principle.

Ontological interpretations of the will to power consider it to encompass all efficient force; it is the constitutive component of the world and everything in it (Nietzsche 1968, §1067 cf. Nietzsche 2003a, §36). It understands "[t]he will to power not [as] a being, not a becoming, but a *pathos* – the most elemental fact from which a becoming and effecting first emerge –" (Nietzsche 1968, §635). The significance of the ontological conception of the will to power for interpretations of the Nietzschean self are based in three interconnected premises about the contingent nature of the world in general.

Firstly, the world conceived as will to power is a place of immanent forces, or drives, that are never expended. Rather, they transform themselves endlessly, giving impetus to an endless, eternal abundance of action. The will to power is Nietzsche's term for the sense of intentionality that pervades the multiplicity of forces active in the world; it is the impulse to expend their force. All elements becoming in the world are comprised - patterns of - drives (Nietzsche 1968, §619 and §688). Secondly, the meaning expressed by any configuration of forces is inherently contingent. Though intentional - in the sense that they want to express themselves - there is no predetermined direction to development, as such the concept of the will to power resists linearity. The contingent directionality of the will to power is also relational. The meaning of forces is constituted by the relationships into which forces have entered. Nietzsche's model of the will to power posits that these forces do not exist in a vacuum; rather they exist in ever changing constellations in which forces perpetually interact with one another as they come into contact with other forces that need to expend their power. Through these interactions the world endlessly becomes; comes into "being". Thus, despite appearances to the contrary, the world is forever transient, constantly changing as patterns of forces interact with one another. In the process, they (re)constitute themselves and those around them. Things therefore have no essence independent of these relationships; their characteristics are wholly determined by their interactions with other forces (Nietzsche 1968, §1067; cf. §568). This means that there is no essence to things; there is no thing-in-itself:

The properties of a thing are effects on other "things": if one removes other "things", then a thing has no properties, i.e. there is no thing without other things, i.e. there is no "thing-in-itself. (Nietzsche 1968, §557)

This note from *The Will to Power* indicates one of the most important consequences of the notion of the world as constituted by will to power. The supposed essence of things is rooted in our

perception of certain constellations of forces persisting over time (Nietzsche 1968, §552) and in our need to understand and familiarize the world around us, which is encoded into our language (Nietzsche 1968, §551; §562). The subject is one of the prime examples of a “thing-in-itself” and is just as much a fiction (Nietzsche 1968, §556). Thirdly all the forces are interconnected through an endless “network” of past, present and future interactions. Yet these interactions are not accidental, rather they result from the cumulative history of all the forces involved in the interaction. This could be understood as linearity, but Nietzsche escapes linearity through the notion that the interaction of forces is not necessarily restrained to the perpetuation of a linear path. New directions could emerge when new forces come to the fore. However, even when new directions arise, they are the result of the cumulative history of interactions. Each action that precedes the interaction under consideration was necessary for the eventual emergence of that interaction, but the future direction of actions is not determined, as they arise out of the interaction with other forces the outcome of which is not predetermined. Thus, actions and interactions are always part of a greater whole, the parts of which are hard to distinguish from one another. Moreover, this continual activity expresses the will to power; within each force lies a tendency to perpetuate activity, irrespective of the continued existence of the constellations of power relations - the “things”- it constitutes at that moment (Nietzsche 1968, §672). Nietzsche’s world of becoming as consisting of drives expressing a will to power presents a holistic understanding of forces that are inseparable parts of the whole, each expressing its own intentionality. This intentionality, like the concept of willing, is devoid of human consciousness; it should not be understood as volition, but as directionality. The will to power comprises all worldly elements or “things”; animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic (Nietzsche 1968, §655).³

Thus, the will to power as ontological principle is predicated on the conceptualisation of the interaction between drives. A drive cannot come into contact with another without exerting its

³ Nietzsche even states in this note that the distinction between organic and inorganic is completely arbitrary.

force, creating a relationship that is determined by their relative “strength” as expressed through their wills to power (Nietzsche 1968, §634). For Nietzsche, this relativity is expressed as a difference in quantity; forces that come into contact are differentiated by their quantitative difference in force (Nietzsche 1968, §633). Yet, this is not the extent of the reach of the will to power, for as Nietzsche notes: “we cannot help feeling these differences in quantity as qualities” (Nietzsche 1968, §563).⁴ This connection between quantity and quality is of great importance to Nietzsche, for, whereas the former relates to truth, the latter determines value, which is of paramount importance to Nietzsche’s philosophy of the transvaluation of values (Nietzsche 1996). Thus, through quantitative differences in force, qualitative differences are perceived to arise, consequently a clash or interaction of forces is not restricted to a matter of fact, but also creates meaning. But, as I will explore in more detail below through Richardson’s conception of Nietzschean time, the creation of meaning engenders the interaction of the various tenses. Any interaction results from the patterns of forces that have been created through past interactions. Moreover, in their interchange, new patterns can arise whose characteristics can shift in relation to its precursors. They can either combine certain traits, or some traits can disappear through the dominance of others; their relation to each other changes and with it their capacity to express their will to power. It is in the interaction, the relation between forces, that meaning in the world is constituted (Nietzsche 1968, §635; cf. Nietzsche 2003a, §36). As Small states, the world of becoming as will to power consists of a “continually shifting pattern of conflict and concord”; forces can either enhance or dominate each other (Small 2010, 11). By constituting meaning the will to power moves beyond pure mechanism, which insists on the absolute separation between fact

⁴ As Widder states: The conflict among drives seeking to discharge their force is thus one of quantitative differences in power that engender qualitative valuations, the discharge itself being the impulse to enforce these valuations (2012, 830). This is also the basis for Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (2006) who is the inspiration for Widder’s interpretation in the text cited above. Deleuze argues that qualities are differential expressions of a quantitative difference between constitutive forces, which cannot be reduced to equality. Hence all interactions between forces involve valuations (Deleuze 2006, 40-41). The will to power is central in this understanding because it propels forces into interaction, it is the “genealogical element of force ... the principle of the synthesis of forces” (Deleuze 2006, 46).

(understood as objective) and meaning (subjective), and underwrites a world in which “fact” is indelibly linked to value.

The world of becoming as characterised by will to power is also a world that is inherently multiplicitous. As Nietzsche states:

The greater the impulse toward unity, the more firmly may one conclude that weakness is present; the greater the impulse towards variety, differentiation, inner decay, the more force is present. (1968, §655)

The critical attitude towards unity as a sign of weakness compounded by the rejection of “substances” or the “thing in itself” create the basis for a rejection of the unified, enduring individual that Nietzsche refuses to acknowledge in his philosophy. Throughout his work he habitually insists that the human individual exists as a single agentic entity, particularly in his social commentaries; several of his works he speaks as if the theory of the drives does complicate the understanding of individual agency as a unified entity.⁵ As stated in the introduction it is this tension between the theory of the drives and the difficulties it creates for the conceptualisation of the self as a coherent individual and site of agency. I will now explore the implications of the second of the two major aspects of Nietzsche’s thought that represent a tendency to nonlinearity; his “temporality”, in particular as expressed through the eternal return.

The Eternal Return as Temporal Doctrine

Nietzsche is known to have considered the eternal return as his most important contribution to philosophy in general and as his most important idea about temporality in particular (Small 2010,

⁵ Two examples, which will be discussed in greater detail below are the faculty of forgetting discussed by Nietzsche in the two works “*On the uses and disadvantages of history for life*” (1983) and both the Preface and the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1998); and the capacity for “giving style” to character in *The Gay Science* (2001).

ix; Richardson 2005, 223; Loeb 2006, 171; Loeb 2013, 645). In this section I will focus on various interpretations of the eternal recurrence as a theory about real time, as opposed to those that consider a psychological challenge for those brave enough to contemplate it; though later on I will also explore it in terms of psychological doctrine in relation to understandings of self. Though, as I will show through Richardson's interpretation below, the psychological interpretation is not always understood as completely separate from its temporal aspects, which makes this a particularly compelling understanding of Nietzschean temporality for this thesis and will therefore be considered in more extensive detail. In particular Richardson's interpretation helps to expose the tension that the sub-individual agency of the drives creates for the possibility of constructing a coherent self.⁶

The first temporal interpretation of the eternal recurrence is the cosmological reading. The cosmological reading presents the eternal return as Nietzsche's alternative to traditional, linear temporality, which is based on the harmonious understanding of the world, anchored by a deity. In his rejection of a theological world, Nietzsche also postulates that the teleological temporality it embodies is faulty. Instead, we must take Nietzsche at his word; his suggestions that the eternal return engenders the infinite repetition of the same as the demon in *The Gay Science* suggests:

What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small

⁶ I have therefore chosen not to go into other, equally interesting, interpretations of Nietzsche's nonlinear temporality, such as Deleuze's interpretation of the eternal return as consisting of a double selection dependent on his understanding of the world as composed by active and reactive forces. The double selection is necessary to ensure that only the affirmative forces return (Deleuze 2006). Widder's interpretation of the eternal return in terms of an "untimely" event that brings time out of "joint" and fissures both time and space to create a nondialectical synthesis of disjoining (2002). Or Stambaugh's understanding of momentary time, which disputes the idea that time is continuous. Instead she proposes that there is no sense of difference in the passage of time, but only in the moment (1987).

or great in your life must return to you all in the same succession and sequence ...

The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again and you with it, speck of dust. (Nietzsche 2001 §341)

Instead of the uni-directional linear temporality of Christian teleology, Nietzsche in this aphorism suggests that time is stuck in an invariable cyclical loop. This is also the interpretation that arises from the parable in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where Zarathustra confronts the dwarf with the frightening spectre of the eternal return as two mountain paths stretching out in two directions, at their apex a gateway is situated that is called the "Moment", where past and future offend each other. Both paths run for an eternity, they represent opposing eternities, one stretching out in front of us - the future, the other stretching infinitely behind us - the past. Zarathustra declares that the infinity of the past must, necessarily, contain all possible things that could occur, yet the future, which is also an eternity, must also contain all things that occur. Hence the two eternities must be identical and the present moment too, the gateway must already have occurred and must unavoidably reoccur (Nietzsche 2003b, III §2). The eternal return in its cosmological form opposes the unproblematic conjunction of the two most important aspects of linear temporalities: that time is an unstoppable continuum and that each moment that is contained within it is unique. It suggests the former, because it presents the past and the future as two separate paths disjointedly connected through the moment of the present. Secondly, where linear time insists that each moment in time is unique, the eternal return insists that everything must recur eternally. In linear theories, the moment is unique, the result of a continued journey into the future of the timeline. The present is different from the past and the future will also be different from what we experience now. As such, linear notions of time reject the idea that anything can occur outside of it, time is the necessary background to all events and occurrences. Nietzsche, through the eternal return, however, proposes that the past is infinite, all things that can occur, will already have occurred. Nothing new could happen that has not happened before. Yet, the future is also infinite,

and thus, everything that has happened, which is literally everything, must also happen again. Everything has both already happened and is still to come: everything must recur. The two eternities present a contradiction, for how could there be more than one eternity, if it contains everything. Thus, according to the cosmological reading, it must be an illusion, the past and the future mediated by the moment must, ultimately, be one and the same, creating one eternal cycle that contains every conceivable moment. This understanding therefore suggests that the two central tenets of linear temporality, that it is a perpetual continuum and that each of its moments is unique are irreconcilable. Because of the necessity of time for everyday experience, the notion that all moments are unique is sacrificed in favour of its quality as an unstoppable continuum (Loeb 2013, Krueger 1978).

It is important to note that most cosmological readings do not advocate this understanding of the eternal return of the same as a feasible model of time, but rather use it to show consistency within Nietzsche's philosophy in general.⁷ Yet, even that is problematic, because Nietzsche's project is primarily engaged in overcoming the lamentable state of humanity in late modernity. But the cyclical interpretation would ensure that this overcoming itself is futile, as it must eventually lead back to the repetition of the state Nietzsche so despised. And it would then be exactly that which must be affirmed, the futility of the effort to overcome our current state. But it would even detract from the affirmation itself, because it would imply that I would already have affirmed it, and must continue to affirm it in the future. As such, it creates a sense of inevitability and meaninglessness that derives from the continual repetition of the same and the lack of possibility for innovation and alteration. This contradicts what I consider Nietzsche's main project throughout all his works and why I consider him to be of value to this thesis; to expand the horizon and extend beyond dominant narratives to create new possibilities. The intensification of rigidity and a loss of

⁷ Despite the fact that Nietzsche seems to dispute this reading of the eternal return both in Zarathustra's retort to the dwarf's interpretation of the eternal return as a loop (Nietzsche 2003b, III §2) and in §109 of *The Gay Science* where Nietzsche suggests that a cyclical understanding of time anthropomorphises it (Nietzsche 2001, §109).

possibilities of the new feed into the most important objection to the interpretation of the eternal return as cyclical from this viewpoint.⁸ It is particularly significant in the portrayal of the eternal recurrence in the section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* I have discussed above; that of the pathways separated by the “Moment”. It conveys the imagery of the two pathways as that of two lines. The notion that these lines eventually come together into a single line provides the imagery of a circle consisting of a single line without any breaks. Particularly taking into account that it is impossible to deviate from the path; everything must recur and keep on recurring; the cosmological reading of the eternal return therefore ends up as a variation of the linear reading of time. The line is shaped into a circle, but it is nevertheless a single line, eternally stretching out in both directions, forever creating a closed loop. It is therefore imperative to look towards other interpretations of the eternal return to come to a nonlinear understanding of temporality inspired by Nietzsche’s thought.

Nonlinear conceptions of “Nietzschean temporality” are much more likely to ascribe to the “reflexive” strategy of reading Nietzsche. Starting from the idea that any interpretation of the eternal recurrence in a temporal sense is complicated by the fact that Nietzsche never formulated a coherent “theory of time”⁹ (Richardson 2006; Stambaugh 1972; Small 2010). Thus, the scattered fragments and discussions of temporality that can be found throughout Nietzsche’s work are not

⁸ As Grosz argues: “Nietzsche does not have a circular conception of time: the eternal return is not the return of a seasonal, cyclical rhythmicity (with which it is commonly confused, for it is an imperative for the future, a future that is in continuity, through divergence and elaboration, that is, through difference rather than through any linearity, causal or otherwise, with the present” (Grosz 2004, 157).

⁹ Richardson suggests that the eternal recurrence taken together with various other recurring concepts such as the sense of becoming and his particular understanding of causation can be used to construct a Nietzschean “theory of time” despite the fact that Nietzsche repeatedly contradicts himself on the topic and never discusses it at length or systematically constructs an overall theory from these various topics (Richardson 2006, 208-209). Stambaugh also suggests that Nietzsche did not develop a coherent theory of time (Stambaugh 1987, 10) and elsewhere highlights that Nietzsche’s statements on the eternal recurrence are particularly contradictory because of their vehement nature and the way they reflect his own tentative grasp on the subject (Stambaugh 1972, xi and Stambaugh 1987, 104). Stambaugh notes, in addition, that Nietzsche’s fragments on time do not resemble the majority of Western thought on the subject (Stambaugh 1972, 6). Small even suggests that Nietzsche presents several distinct models of temporality, which befits Nietzsche’s focus on interpretation that necessarily entails competing narratives (Small 2010, 3).

easily integrated into a temporal metanarrative. Interpretations of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence are further complicated by the fact that he is intentionally obscure in his discussions of it;¹⁰ in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and in *The Gay Science* the frightening vision of the eternal recurrence is presented as (part of) a riddle and a thought experiment respectively (Nietzsche 2003b, III §2 and Nietzsche 2001 §341). Notably, as Danto suggests, Nietzsche does not try to provide any proof of the veracity of the eternal return in any of his published works (Danto 2005, 185-186).¹¹ Nevertheless, it is imperative to try to interpret these literary structures, in order to make some sense of the philosophical insight they try to convey.

A starting point for many interpretations of Nietzsche's temporality sees it as being necessarily entwined with Nietzsche's conceptualisation of becoming (Richardson 2006, 208; Small 2010, 3). However, as Small states, one must not confuse the two, for Nietzsche understands becoming as a fact, whereas temporality is formed through interpretation and perspective (Small 2010, 2; cf. Richardson 2006, 210). As such, a reading of Nietzsche's temporality must be understood as a rejection of objective conceptualisations of time. The above also suggests that the concept of becoming in some ways is more central to reality than temporality, which is always caught up with experience. Nietzsche's focus on becoming leads him to reject several central tenets of the western philosophical tradition, most notably the dismissal of substances, stasis, efficient causality and the subject as separate from its act (Richardson 2006, 211; cf. Nietzsche 1968, § 589). Like the other philosophers who are discussed in this thesis, Nietzsche is attempting to revise the focus away from being, stasis and continuity, and

¹⁰ There are only two mentions of the eternal recurrence in the works Nietzsche published during his lifetime, however, there are more mentions of it in his notes that were published posthumously. The two discussed here are from the works published in his lifetime. As Small notes, Nietzsche's discussions of time and becoming are often expressed through parables and metaphors, in particular those published when he was alive. Nietzsche even suggests through *Zarathustra* that the best parables concern time and becoming (Small 2010, 3; cf. Small 2010, 13).

¹¹ Nietzsche's main attempts at proving the eternal return can be found for example in *The Will to Power* §1062-1064 and §1066 (1968) I will not discuss them at length here, because they have already been covered by others, in particular by Danto (2006, 185-191).

instead turn toward becoming, change and development. This is complicated, for Nietzsche, by the fact that the human intellect cannot conceive of becoming (Nietzsche 1968, §517). When confronted with change, the mind juxtaposes a succession of states instead of showing the transformation, and thus it excludes the change itself in favour of a representation of successive stable states. The notion of time as separate from becoming arises from this tension between stasis and dynamism; the continuous backdrop of time that is nevertheless separable into moments provides the mediation that accommodates the shift from one state to another. Thus, there is a sense of permanence to time that does not pertain to becoming which is generally associated with motion. The deficiency of the human mind to understand change is further hampered by the inability of the human senses to detect change: they are only able to detect a small minority of all mobility of the world. Finally, the human understanding of change is hampered through language - in particular Indo-European languages - which presupposes that objects are separable and possess an enduring identity (Small 2010, 4-6). Nietzsche's discussions of temporality therefore should be understood as concerned with effecting a shift from a static and eternal sense of temporality to one that is in line with his philosophy of becoming.

As mentioned above, there is another aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy that is considered important to his understanding of temporality: perspectivism. Nietzsche argues that there is no universal, objective truth and that what is understood as such is merely a fiction: instead, there are only perspectives (i.e. Nietzsche 1998, preface, I §2, §10).¹² Perspectivism is central to Richardson's interpretation of "Nietzsche's temporality". He argues that "Nietzsche's temporality" displays a tension between two sides that are centred on two different aspects of perspectivism, the first being concerned with the temporality expressed in the content of perspectives, whereas the second is associated with their structure. The latter side supports the variations in temporality of the former (Richardson 2006, 210). That is to say, according to Richardson, Nietzsche suggests

¹² These are a few examples in which Nietzsche discusses perspectivism and his rejection of objective truth throughout the first book of *Beyond Good and Evil*, as well as in other works (Nietzsche 1998, I).

that the individual or living organism has a different perception of time to the way it lives it (Richardson 2006, 215).¹³ Richardson first focuses on the temporality that is created through the structure of perspectivity. He states that the time is derived from life through perspectivity, that is to say, through the intentionality that is inherent to the drives and their will to power. The intentionality of the drives generates meaning, which “involves, crucially, certain temporal features - relationships among present, future, and past. And it’s just here, I claim, that he principally locates becoming” (Richardson 2006, 215). Though each perspective might present a different understanding of temporality, the intentionality of the patterns of drives that constitute the individual creates a particular structure to perspectivity in general. In other words, there is a certain logic to the way in which the content of perspectives develop their temporality. Richardson derives this logic from Nietzsche’s theory of the drives, which I discussed in the previous section. He argues that activity creates meaning; a drive strives to express its will to power and towards a goal which creates a relation between the present action and the feasible futures that might be brought about as a result of it. It is an attempt to effect change, to strive towards a different, better future.¹⁴ However, there is no guarantee of success, thus meaning is derived through the drive not just through its aim but also through its capacity to effect the desired outcome (Richardson 2006, 216-217). This anchors the present to the future, but Nietzsche also makes it abundantly clear that the individual’s relationship to the past is at least as important, if not more important, as the relationship between its present and future. An important dimension of the aim towards which the drive strives is derived from its past, through the process of selection that has created the current pattern of drives that are striving to bring their aim to expression. A drive can only be

¹³ Bergson, who will be discussed in the next chapter, actually shares this understanding. He states: “We do not *think* real time. But we *live* it, because life transcends the intellect” (Bergson 1944, 53). Italics in original.

¹⁴ Richardson argues that the drive always strives to better express itself, hence for a better future. This notion is given some credence by Nietzsche’s assertion that a drive’s will to power means that they are dissatisfied with the present (Nietzsche 1968, § 331). Hence it can be construed as aiming toward something better.

understood through the “factors that made it” which requires one to “untangle the layered functions it has been made to serve” (Richardson 2006, 218). Perspectivity derives its meaning through the relationships and actions in which its corresponding drive has been involved in the past to make it strive towards a particular future. The present is not purely momentary, but is always a meeting between the past and the future; processes are not a “succession of self-sufficient moments” but are the result of a continuous interaction between past and future (Richardson 2006, 219). This is the crux to understanding the logical structure of perspectivity for Richardson. The content of perspectives is determined by a different type of temporality, which is the result of an error in the way life experiences time as opposed to the time it lives as a result of structural temporality. Richardson states:

the time it sees is different from the time it lives. Although life makes time by the temporal structure of its willing or striving, it has an equally deep-rooted tendency to mistake or distort this time whenever it brings it into view. Indeed it “serves life” (is of selective value) for life to misunderstand its own time. (2006, 219)

The main source of the error is a problem with the will’s relationship to the past; it generally disregards its past in its totality, because it is unable to act upon it. Therefore, it is predisposed to focus on the future, to which even the present is only of secondary import. The past is only (mis)used as a means to orient its current situation, but in order to do so only small, highly selective elements of the past are useful. The rest must be forgotten as its complexity will overwhelm the individual and as such will be more hindrance than help. In particular, its own becoming is potentially fatal, as it will shatter the semblance of unity, exposing the individual as continually changing, floating along a stream of becoming. Effective action requires forgetting and the supposition of enduring substances subject to efficient causality (Richardson 2006, 219-220). While this troubled relation with the past is common to all organisms, it is particularly problematic

in humans. Richardson argues that this is because of the fact that humans are immersed in complex socialisations which require them to learn certain habits that give them success and status within the social group. The result is that the temporal logic that generates meaning is subjected to another set of selective processes derived from the demands of the social group. These selective processes create habits and practices that allow an individual to thrive within the social group. However, according to Nietzsche, these social habits are rarely conducive to survival and growth in the biological sense.¹⁵ Richardson argues that the addition of the social criterion to the selective processes of the drives creates a particular human temporality that is calibrated “to render us more viable social members, with a deep need to do and value the same as others” (2006, 221). This necessitates a particular kind of memory that allows humans to disregard the instinct of the bodily drives in favour of socially mandated actions. It distorts the human relationship to both past and future, inhibiting certain actions of the drives through guilt and *ressentiment* and setting our sights towards new, socially desired goals respectively.

To overcome this problematic human understanding of temporality, Nietzsche presents the eternal return, which allows us to approach the state of the overman, which Richardson argues is determined by a new temporality which harmonises the temporality of perspectivity’s content with its structure, “so that one views time just as one lives it” (2006, 222-223). In order to achieve this realignment Richardson combines a temporal view of the eternal return with a psychological perspective. He understands it as a psychological test to “will” the eternal return of everything in the world. That is to say, it is not that everything repeats itself indefinitely, nor is it the retrospective view of affirming the self as it is by accepting everything that has occurred to create the present moment which I will show as Nehamas’ interpretation further on. Rather Richardson suggests that this “willing of the eternal return” is an active principle that exhorts us to “live that we *can will* the eternal return. So, his [Nietzsche’s] point is to offer us not primarily a theory, but a certain project

¹⁵ This is the basis for Nietzsche’s critique of human and in particular modern Western society that he sets out most cohesively in the *Genealogy of Morality*. (Nietzsche 1996)

or effort” (2006, 223). So, it has a double aspect. On the one hand, it is a way to evaluate our past actions. On the other hand, it is an incitement to become more involved in the way one sets one’s aims, to engage in actions that ensure greater ease in affirming their return in prospective evaluation. It means to act as if the world eternally recurs and will instantiate “a new way of being in time” (Richardson 2006, 223). That is to say, to ensure that the logic of the drives that determines the structural temporality of perspectivity will also determine its content. In particular, suggests Richardson, this involves the need to shed the social imperatives in favour of the instincts of the bodily drives. It will allow one to dispense with the lies that support the perspectival content and accept the aims and temporality of the drives. In this interpretation the eternal return should partially be taken as a metaphor that, if “undergone”, allows one to accept certain truths that Nietzsche has expounded through the rest of his work. It is a test of strength of character, if one can affirm the eternal return, one can affirm the world of becoming and its temporal structure that indelibly links the past, present and future in an inescapable process of value creation. Richardson presents the engagement with the eternal return and the adoption of the new temporality as a meta-project that will change the way one’s actions are created (2006, 223-224). Thus, it will change the individual itself, who is the result of the interplay of the drives that generate certain patterns of action(s). The intervention in the functioning of the drives must therefore necessarily have an impact on the individual. Richardson’s temporality engenders, therefore, a strong connection between temporality and the self.

However, there are several flaws in Richardson’s conceptualisation of Nietzsche’s temporality. The two most important in relation to this thesis arise in Richardson’s interpretation of the eternal return. The first ensues from Richardson’s attempt to explain the circular imagery presented by the eternal return. He tries to bring a sense of multiplicity to the linearity of the circle, which I have argued is the most important flaw in the cosmological understanding of the eternal return. In arguing that the eternal return is a metaphor to help accept Nietzsche’s philosophy of becoming, which is expressly non-circular, Richardson feels the need to explain why Nietzsche

would use it as the representation of his most crucial idea about time. Richardson argues that the circle represents the relationship between the past, present and future as unbreakable, as a nexus of where the three tenses come together. Moreover, he states, using Nehamas, whose understanding of the self will be an important part of the rest of this chapter, that the circle can represent the fact that the future can change the meaning of the past by changing its significance and interpretation. The circle is thus not representative of causation but of meaning (Richardson 2006, 224). However, the circle is not the only figure that could represent such a connection, nor is it necessarily the best way to show the relationship between the tenses.¹⁶ It is problematic exactly because it opens up the possibility of continued, circular return and the lack of variation that characterises the cosmological interpretation.

The second flaw in Richardson's interpretation results from a tension in Nietzsche's philosophy rather than Richardson's interpretation; the tension between the disparity of the drives and the individual as a unified agent. Richardson's account highlights this tension in his discussion of the supposition that the overman can influence the aims set through the drives. It implies that the individual is capable of such influence, but it is unclear on what this supposition rests. From the discussion of the will to power the sense emerges that the self is constituted by the drives, which determine its actions. It locates agency at the sub-individual level. Therefore, there is a tension between the notion that the self could influence the drives, and the idea that the drives determine the self.¹⁷ The lack of an explanation on the interplay between the drives and the agency of the self is a crucial oversight in Nietzsche's philosophy. In particular because it obscures the fact that nonlinearity complicates and even inhibits the possibility of the self. It all

¹⁶ Serres, for example, uses the figure of the crumpled handkerchief (Serres and Latour 1995, 60) or the field (Serres 1995, 115) to illustrate temporality's vicissitudes and (inter)connection.

¹⁷ This is acknowledged by Widder who states that the traditional subject has come close to dissolution as a result of an emphasis of relationality and contingency. Despite this slippage, the individual remains an important element in political theory. He argues that this tension is often resolved through the simplification and misunderstanding of the agency that allows the retention of a classical sense of subjectivity. Instead he proposes an alternative understanding of agency as an organised multiplicity creating a semblance of unity and subjectivity (Widder 2012, 824-825).

comes down to the question of how the - relatively stable or at least persistent - unity of the self arises from the plurality of the drives, which is the basis of Nietzsche's central feature of becoming. This is a tension which persists throughout Nietzsche's work and is prevalent in interpretations that try to bridge this tension, such as Nehamas' attempt to create a coherent sense of self from Nietzsche's philosophy. A central aspect of this tension is the problem of agency that results from Nietzsche's inconsistent representation of will as either determined through the drives or as under human control, that creates almost a sense of traditional volition.

The Question of Agency

There are two important aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy that influence the problem of agency within it, particularly in relation to a possible concept of self. The first, which I mentioned above, is the tension between the theory of the drives and Nietzsche's repeated supposition of the individual as a coherent agentic entity. The second, which can be understood as related to the theory of the drives, is Nietzsche's insistence that philosophy and logic misunderstand causality and that this has been instrumental in the conception of the "subject as agent", which in actuality is a fiction.

The tension between the theory of the drives and the cogent individual arises from his twin assertions that on the one hand there is no coherent, metaphysically abiding subject (Nietzsche 2003, §12) but rather that it is an analogy that obscures that action is the result of the force of the drives directed through the will to power (Nietzsche 1968, §619).¹⁸ As argued above this dispenses with the notion of substance and of "the thing-in-itself", and that problematises the possibility of supposing a cogent individual in several ways, which will be explored in more detail below. On the other hand, Nietzsche, not only repeatedly asserts that there is an individual that

¹⁸"The ego's persistent appearance and the way the order of rank of drives gives rise to seemingly regular sequences of thoughts and actions lead to the erroneous belief that a coherent "I" is organizing these thoughts and governing these actions" (Widder 2012, 832).

can be distinguished, but he also at times ascribes to the individual a sense of agency that does not appear to be the result of the drives. In *The Gay Science* he argues that the individual can remove, nurture or even create parts of its nature, which in light of his conceptualisation of the drives, must consist of particular patterns of drives (Nietzsche 2001, §290). He thus implies that the individual can consciously affect the patterns of drives that compose it. On the other hand, the individual is rendered indistinguishable because the will to power is expressed in all things, both organic and inorganic, it is action itself. Thus, there is no privileged position for the self with respect to agency; the traditional interpretation of the subject as agent must be rejected. “[T]here is no ‘being’ behind doing, acting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction imposed on the doing – the doing itself is everything” (Nietzsche 1996, I §13; cf. Nietzsche 1998, I §17).¹⁹ This separation of the doer and the deed eventually evolved into the concept of the “subject”, which is considered separate from “object” and “attribute” but these distinctions are contrived (Nietzsche 1968, §547 and 1968, §549).

Nietzsche further supports the notion that the cogent individual is a fiction through his critique of causality. He argues that the notion of the “enduring subject”, as an entity exceeding the actions it is involved in, rather than the “individual” which arises as a pattern of drives that expend themselves through action, has led to the fiction of “free will” or volition. Because the subject is understood to act freely it can be held accountable for its actions. It is considered to be the efficient cause of the events to which it is linked. Nietzsche asserts that “free will” is a Christian concept that legitimates punishment on the basis of culpability, guilt (Nietzsche 1998, I 13 and II 21-22). However, the notion of “free will” is based on a faulty interpretation of causality. In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche sets out four great errors of reason: confusing cause and effect, false

¹⁹ Nietzsche argues that language and logic play an important part in cementing the notion of the agentic subject through the metaphysical - and thus ontological - commitments present in it. Yet, Nietzsche does not urge us to create new - linguistic and logical - systems beholden to different commitments, but merely encourages us to resist the temptation to make “truth”-statements about the world. One must be content with interpretative or perspectivist statements instead (Nietzsche 1998 I §1 and II §24; Nehamas 1985, 94-95; Widder 2012, 832).

causation, imaginary causes, and free will. The inversion of cause and effect is at the root of all morality, we think a virtuous life makes us happy and healthy, while Nietzsche posits that following our instincts or drives makes us happy and healthy, which in turn makes us act in certain necessary ways. Underlying the inversion of cause and effect is our erroneous belief that we understand the relations of causation.

We believed that our acts of will were causally efficacious; we thought that here, at least, we had caught causality *in the act*. Nobody doubted that consciousness was the place to look for all the *antecedentia* of an act, its causes, and that you would be able to *find* these causes there as well – under the rubric of ‘motives’: otherwise the action could hardly be considered free, and nobody could really be held responsible for it.²⁰ (Nietzsche 2005, VI §3)

Thus, we think that there is a will, rooted in our consciousness, which is capable of efficient causation. We imagine that our thoughts, as motivation, precede any action and cause it. However, this is imaginary, we only think that our thoughts are translated into actions, instead we only become conscious of actions after the fact when we assign a motive. The memory perpetrates the deception that our thoughts are actually the cause of the action. This interpretation of efficient causality has become customary, creating the myth of efficient causality and the agentic subject (Nietzsche 2005, VI §4). It conveys a sense of reassurance and control. It also is preferable to the alternative that suggests that we cannot have sufficient knowledge of causality, hence we accept it as the dominant explanation of causation. These errors develop into the error of free will, which, according to Nietzsche, allows moral systems – in particular Christian morality – to assign responsibility to transgressors. In turn their responsibility opens them up to “just”

²⁰ Italics in original.

judgment and punishment and creates the expectation that the transgressor should feel guilty for his amoral behaviour (Nietzsche 2005, VI §7). Thus, the concept of the enduring, responsible subject is a fiction that serves (Christian) moral purposes. Nietzsche rejects this interpretation in favour of the will to power in which there is no privilege regarding agency for human or even animate organisms (Nietzsche 1968, §547). Consequently, Nietzsche displaces the locus of agency from the “subject” to the forces as expression of the will to power. And the displacement of agency to the will to power strips the individual of the capacity of volition. Nietzsche states:

As every drive lacks intelligence, the viewpoint of “utility” cannot exist for it. Every drive, in as much as it is active, sacrifices force and other drives: finally it is checked; otherwise it would destroy everything through its excessiveness. Therefore: the “un-egoistic,” self-sacrificing, imprudent, is nothing special - it is common to all the drives - they do not consider the advantage of the whole ego (because they do not consider at all!), they act contrary to our advantage, against the ego: and often *for* the ego - innocent in both cases! (1968, §372)

Thus, the individual cannot be held accountable for the directions and actions instantiated by the drives that make up its character. Its agency is dissolved relegated to the drives, which do not form a culpable subject, there is no “doer behind the deed”. As such, in a world constituted by the will to power, there should be no agency embodied in the individual that is separate from its drives, but as we shall see below, Nietzsche does imply that it is possible for the individual to act upon the drives. As such, the relationship between the individual and the drive must be more complex than the straightforward supposition that the individual is composed of the drives that strive towards specific actions and that these actions determine the individual’s character. How then should we understand the Nietzschean self?

The Self as a Literary Character

One interpretation that tries to reconcile Nietzsche's multiplicitous world of becoming which is characterised by the drives with the more unitary self that emerges from his critiques of society is proposed by Alexander Nehamas in his book *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (1985). He argues that Nietzsche conceives the world as a text and that therefore many of the more obscure aspects of his philosophy can be better understood if compared to literature as a model for life (Nehamas 1985, 90). In particular, he promulgates the idea that literature is the limiting case that allows the multiplicitous self to be unified.

Nehamas' thesis is founded on Nietzsche's perspectivism, which determines not only how we make sense of the world, but as a result actually constitutes the world. As discussed above, Nietzsche rejects absolute truth and essentialism (Nietzsche 2001, §354) and hence must provide a different basis to understand and act in the world: perspectivism. Nehamas creates a lacuna in his development of perspectivism in relation to the self that echoes Nietzsche's ambiguity on the subject. He states that Nietzsche's ontological understanding of the will to power expresses a relational multiplicity between forces that is the source of unity and identity. He then creates ambiguity in arguing that such relations are necessarily subject to interpretation: "for what there is is always determined from a specific point of view that embodies its particular interests, needs, and values, its own will to power" (Nehamas 1985, 81). He corroborates this with a quote by Nietzsche that argues that essence is both perspectival and predicated on a unity, but that is ultimately determined by self-interest: "what is in it for *me*?" (WP, 556)" (Nehamas 1985, 81). Nehamas translates this into a subjectivity, stating that this allows Nietzsche to assert that different things are good for different people. He thus makes an implicit translation from the level of the drives to a presupposed, but not clearly explained unity of the self.²¹ This is extremely

²¹ This is similar to Smith's argument that the multiplicity of the drives creates the myriad of interpretations that Nietzsche advocates in his perspectivism. Smith uses this to argue that consciousness is only a secondary expression of the drives, which sustains a sense of self as subject to the strongest drive within

problematic in the possibility of creating a sense of self from Nietzsche's nonlinear ontology and I will pick up this argument again below.

Returning to the question of perspectivism, Nehamas also argues that the complexity and interrelatedness of force relations prohibits us from understanding the full picture. Therefore, our interpretation and understanding of the world always remains partial (Nehamas 1985, 80-81). Nevertheless, this does not mean that all interpretations are equal, according to Nietzsche, there are interpretations that are better, mostly in the sense that they provide a "more complete" view of the world; they take into account multiple different interpretations of the relationships in question, thereby creating a better sense of it (Nietzsche 1998, III § 12).²² However, perspectivism does not just help us make sense of things, because there is no essence that is the basis of being, perspectives actually constitute the world. To illustrate this Nehamas falls back on his analogy of Nietzsche's philosophy as literature: "Nietzsche's model for the world, for objects, and for people turns out to be the literary text and its components; his model for our relation to the world turns out to be interpretation" (Nehamas 1985, 90-91). However, this creates a paradox, for unlike literature, in life the "author", the "reader", and the "main character" are indistinguishable. We are "comprehending" our lives as we produce them. Our interpretation adds meaning to a particular relationship of forces, thereby characterizing the relationship in a certain way and the interpretations of relationships determine the character of the relationship. Thus, if an interpretation is changed, Nehamas contends, this change actually significantly changes the objects and events in question themselves (Nehamas 1985, 91).

However, in this understanding too, there is a strong tension between the individual as constituted through the drives and the individual as a coherent, agentic entity. In his suggestion

it (Smith 2007, 69 - 70). Thus, Smith creates an explicit connection between the ego or I and the drives, which Nehamas neglects to produce. Smith's conceptualisation of the self as subject to the drives is taken up by Widder, who uses it to show that this self is illusory. The multiplicity of the drives exceeds the semblance of the ego (Widder 2012, 825-826).

²² Nehamas repeatedly states that this position - no truth but no equality in the value of perspectives - saves Nietzsche from absolute relativism (Nehamas 1985, 36; 45; 72).

of the literary character, Nehamas fails to sufficiently address the fact that this interpretation itself is the result of a struggle between relationships of forces. Any concepts, which are inevitably the result of socialization (Nietzsche 2001, §354), are the site of continual struggle and the outcome of this struggle as well as our interpretation of the event are “merely *signs* indicating that a will to power has mastered something less powerful than itself and impressed the meaning and function upon it in accordance with its own interest” (Nietzsche 1996, II §12). Nehamas expresses this tension to some extent through the paradox of the self as both author, main character and reader. But, in the majority of his discussion of the self as a literary character, Nehamas facilely posits the self as a unified entity engaged in all three roles at once. He uses the paradox to bring out the multiplicitous nature of the object, while the self in this stage of the book is presented as a single agentic entity - albeit with various roles and relations -, sublimated from the drives in an unexplained process. As Nehamas states:

A thing is therefore for Nietzsche not a subject that has effects but simply a collection of interrelated effects, selected from some particular point of view from within a much larger similar set. It is, as he sometimes puts it, a locus of the will to power, a focus of activity within a broader realm, established through the very same activity on the part of *some interpreter*.²³ It cannot remain unchanged as its effects multiply and enter into new interrelations or as other sets of effects undergo such changes. (1985, 92)

But the notion of the perspectivism as an alternative to essentialism is further complicated by the fact that remnants of the latter remain embedded in the former, which also influences the possibility of understanding the self as a multiplicity. Perspectivism is presented through

²³ My emphasis.

language, which determines the character of relationships (Nietzsche 1968, §625). Through the linguistic connection, essentialism persists in perspectivism in two main ways. Firstly, concepts require us to simplify and categorize the object we are studying. A concept will focus on several – supposedly static – characteristics rather than express the complexity of all the relationships that are part of the constellation of forces that constitute this object, and thus language can never do justice to the diversity of the world around us (Nietzsche 1990, IV 1 p. 83, cf. Nietzsche 2001, §354). Secondly, a concept implies that certain characteristics are essential to it, that for the concept to apply “it” must be certain things. Our language is based on the generalisation of supposed essential characteristics and does not implicitly reflect the assertion that a thing is nothing more than a multiplicity of effects; things are generally portrayed as “things-in-themselves.” In other words, our language can only express things as a multiplicity of effects with great difficulty, because of an inherent tendency to essentialism.

The main benefit of the lingering essentialism in language is that it allows us to perceive continuity despite change. The will to power engenders a sense of becoming and stipulates that a force must always work towards enhancing its power. In doing so it will also interact with other forces, which can create new constellations of forces and change the “objects” they are supposed to constitute. The analogy with literature returns here, for Nehamas claims that it is through narrative that we conceive of an “object” as enduring, despite its highly fluid nature. We narrate the “object” as constant throughout its multiple incarnations; concentrating on a contingent grouping of phenomena that we then take to be the “object.” Yet this narrative aspect is not equivalent to fiction. Rather, Nehamas stresses, perceptions of unity and identity are genealogically constructed and therefore subjective and ambiguous, but they do constitute our lived reality (Nehamas 1985, 99-104). These lingering aspects of essentialism must also pertain to the individual or the self, which is as much a concept as any other. As such, it benefits from the narrative continuity at the cost of congruence with the world of becoming of the drives’ will to power.

Nehamas further tries to address the tension between being and becoming in Nietzsche's work by examining the implications of the subtitle to his philosophical biography "*Ecce Homo: How one becomes what one is*". He questions who or what this "one" "is" given Nietzsche's denial of the metaphysical, unified subject (Nehamas 1985, 176)? The ontological conception of the will to power, which assumes an infinite becoming, problematises, as we have discussed through the implications of perspectivism, both the persistence and the unity of the self. Nietzsche, in accordance with his ontology of the drives, states that unity is a fiction we project onto the world in order to make some sense of its endless multiplicity (Nietzsche 1968, §635; cf. Nietzsche 2001, §354).²⁴ The utter contingency and complexity of the world preclude the existence of unity in the metaphysical sense, which Nietzsche replaces with the interpretative groupings of perspectivism according to Nehamas. In the case of the subject, we sustain this fiction with the help of another: that of the subject as the locus of agency. The fiction of agency allows us to assimilate the presumed intentions behind our actions into a supposedly coherent whole, which becomes our "identity." Instead, as I have shown above, Nietzsche suggests the "subject" is the sum of its effects, of the drives or forces that constitute it and generate actions in relation to each other. The drives can either work in accord or express opposing tendencies. Hence, it is possible for our character to manifest different proclivities, though in general particular patterns of behaviour emerge supported by strong patterns or constellations of forces (Nietzsche 1968, §259). It is from this coherence and organization of actions that the Nietzschean subject emerges for Nehamas (Nehamas 1985, 177-180). He argues that self should be understood as a relatively enduring set of tendencies, rather than as a unified entity with conflicting tendencies. He states:

[F]or Nietzsche each "thing" is nothing more, and nothing less, than the sum of all its effects and features. Since it is nothing *more* than that sum, it is not at all clear

²⁴ The notion of a unified self is also sustained by the perceived unity of the body, but this is not as relevant to the discussion at hand. (Nehamas 1985, 181; cf. Nietzsche 2003b, I §4).

that conflicting sets of features are capable of generating a single subject: conflicting features, unless we already have an independent subject whose features we can show them to be, generate distinct things. (...) The unity of the self, which Nietzsche identifies with this [a coherent] collection, is thus seriously undermined. This unity, he seems to believe, is to be found, if it is to be found at all, in the very organization and coherence of the many acts that each organism performs. It is the unity of these acts that gives rise to the unity of the self, and not, as we often think, the fact of a single self that unifies our conflicting tendencies. (Nehamas 1985, 179-180)

The conflicting tendencies within the self reflect the different drives that, as expressions of the will to power, vie for dominance. The more dominant tendencies can create a pattern that is perceived as a character trait, sets of which can be developed into a narrated identity. Nehamas ensures flexibility in the self by positing that shifts in leadership between different drives or traits guarantee the development of our character over time.

[W]e can also see that the process of dominating, and thus creating, the individual, the unity that concerns us, is a matter of incorporating more and more character traits under a constantly expanding and evolving rubric. (Nehamas 1985, 183-184)

Thus, Nietzsche's concept of being, Nehamas claims, is not static; the distinction between being and becoming is not absolute. Because becoming involves a relation of the past to the present through the accumulation of our past actions into particular patterns of force that influence our current force relations, the creation of our identity is an active process in which we try to

assimilate all our past deeds into a sufficiently coherent narrative.²⁵ Therefore, any unity of the self is also durational; it can only be created over time (Nehamas 1985, 185). Nehamas uses this understanding as a basis to make sense of Nietzsche's puzzling pronouncement that "one becomes what one is". He argues that the forging of a "unified" self, in terms of a coherent, narrated multiplicity, is a thoroughly creative endeavour. This line of reasoning follows from Nietzsche's pronouncement that one must "give style" to one's character, which he compares to an artistic endeavour in which we must survey our character traits and organize and reorder them until all of them, both weak and strong, make "artistic sense" and become pleasing. This can only be attained through hard work and practice, and even then, Nietzsche hints, there will be parts of our nature left indeterminate and unshaped, stored within the whole until they can be reused at a later date (Nietzsche 2001, §290). For Nehamas the Nietzschean self - or "becoming what one is" -, then, is dependent on appreciating the multiplicity of and the differences within the self, instead of the delusion of the essential unity of the self that masks multiplicity by repressing difference within the self (Nehamas 1985, 186). Nehamas interpretation rests on the crucial difference between the essential, *a priori* unity and a constructed unity out of the multiplicity of traits created by the drives; it creates a feeling of unity. This Nietzschean self is restricted to a small selection of people, as the majority suffer under the delusion of the unified self. Only a strong will to power is able to construct this coherent multiplicity; the greater the number of conflicting drives one can let flourish within the self, can organise coherently, the more these can be allowed to flourish, the stronger one's will to power. Man, in this vision, becomes a creation of his own making, controlling the different drives at play within him. The realization of this coherent multiplicity of the self is both a discovery and a creation, for we forge the unified self out an existing multiplicity. The ambiguity between discovery and creation maps perfectly onto the ambiguity

²⁵ Richardson would argue that future actions, our goals, though determined by our past and present force relations, would also figure prominently in our narration, as they express our hopes and aims, the person we hope to become. As such, they give a more rounded view of the individual than a focus just on an accumulation of past actions (Richardson 2006).

between being and becoming; being able to become who one is (Nehamas 1985, 186-188). It is important to note here that Nehamas ascribes the efforts of the drives to the agency of the individual, despite the fact that the unity of the self is an illusion. He once again assumes that the diverse complexes of drives translate into an agentic unity through some artistic sense. The source of this artistic sense is presented as a single entity; thus, it presupposes an agentic unity to some extent before it is formed. This tension is also apparent in the suggestion that a single will can emerge from a multiplicity, that a sense of harmony can be created from a thoroughly agonistic portrayal of the drives. What is needed here is an explanation on how these processes are carried out, which elements are ascribed agency and how they relate to one another.

Nehamas' conception of self-creation is rooted in "the development of the ability, or the willingness, to accept responsibility for everything that we have done and to admit what is in any case true: that everything that we have done actually constitutes who each one of us is" (Nehamas 1985, 188). Furthermore, as this is a continuous development, there is no end-state or fully formed self, for each new action constitutes a new part of the self that must be negotiated into the narrative, included to create an adapted coherent multiplicity. The self, as such, is continually renegotiated and reinterpreted; consequently, none of the elements that constitute the self must remain constant. "The final mark of this integration, its limiting case, is provided by nothing other than the test involved in the thought of the eternal recurrence" (Nehamas 1985, 190). This assertion is based on Nehamas reading of the eternal return as a psychological doctrine, which he states is quite independent from assumptions about the physical world (Nehamas 1985, 142). He states:

[Nietzsche] believes that if anything had occurred differently, everything would have had to occur differently; that if anything happened again, everything would have to happen again. He thinks that the history of the whole world, or, in more

modest terms, the history of each person, is totally involved in every moment.

(Nehamas 1985, 149)

Nehamas, thus places great emphasis on the role of contingency and interconnectedness for his reading of the eternal return. He posits the eternal return as a psychological thought experiment, in which the spectre of the eternal return – based in the contingency and interconnectedness of the will to power that presupposes the necessity of all things to be as they were in order for them to be as they are now – demands us to affirm the present and thereby the past and future that are immanent in it. Because of this necessity we cannot lead any other lives than the lives we are living, for to change ourselves is to change everything else, we can only either completely accept or reject ourselves (Nehamas 1985, 153-156). The self is made up of the actions in which it is involved, thus our lives need to occur in the same way. However, Nehamas seeks to break this rigid demand for recurrence of exactly the same through the creative powers of interpretation enabled by Nietzsche's perspectivism; for while the event cannot be undone, the interpretation of the events can change, can be revalued, which, Nehamas argues, actually changes the events as well, as there is no essence to the event that resists this.

Though Nietzsche believes that all our actions are equally important to our nature, he also thinks that how these actions are related to our nature, what nature they actually constitute, is always an open question. (Nehamas 1985, 158)

Thus, the eternal recurrence in Nehamas' reading does not have to mean a rigid recurrence of the same. When an individual engages with the eternal return, they must take all the actions and events of their life into consideration. For the immanence of the will to power stipulates that all

actions are necessary and that there are no insignificant actions.²⁶ Yet, Nehamas resists this assertion by stating that on the psychological level, the significance of an action is determined by our awareness of it. Actions are only significant because we make them so; unfortunately, this means that the things we would most want to change cannot be altered. If we had to relive our lives, our regrets are exactly those things we cannot change. Regrets are psychologically significant exactly because they remain important to us in our current lives; they still influence our future actions, our behaviour. Relinquishing the negative aspects, our resentment of our past, to assuage our guilt and regrets is therefore the greatest challenge of the eternal recurrence according to Nehamas' interpretation (Nehamas 1985, 159-161). To affirm the eternal return, we must integrate our past into our present, in order to affirm ourselves as we are at that moment. In "*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*" Nietzsche offers a possibility of redemption through the will as creator, stating that the eternal return is able to overcome the resentment over the past:

' The will is a creator.'

All 'It was' is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful chance – until the creative will says to it, 'But I willed it thus!'

Until the creative will says to it, 'But I will it thus! Thus shall I will it.' (Nietzsche 2003b, II, §20)

Nehamas understands this as total acceptance, even affirmation of the self. It offers the possibility of redemption by shedding our resentment by changing our lives and perspectives in order to give the past a new, resentment-free meaning. Thus, we can change the past in the sense that altering the narrative of the past actually yields different events. That is to say, their meaning and

²⁶ Even interactions between single forces are necessary parts of the whole, even if their relevance may be below our notice. All (inter-)actions taken together create the world and our existence in it. Hence self-affirmation also involves a statement about the world at large: "If we affirm one single moment, we thus affirm not only ourselves but all existence" (Nietzsche 1968, §1032).

significance is altered. We come to terms with what we always were, we let go of the illusion of unity and accept the multiplicity of the drives, to, in Nietzsche's phrase, become what we are. Nehamas, thus, proposes a theory in which our self-perception is a crucial factor in the constitution of our sense of self and the world at large. Moreover, he perpetuates a tension between the multiplicity of the drives and the unity of the self by suggesting that the more fluid multiple self expresses a sense of agentic unity by accepting the drives' actions as its own, to "take responsibility." This, once again, expresses a confused statement of agency, oscillating between the drives and the individual, the multiplicity and the unity, because Nehamas passes over important steps in the formation of the harmony among the drives that supposedly create a sense of agentic unity.

Tension in the Self as Drives

There are three important strands of tension in the notion of self that emerges - sometimes through Nehamas - from Nietzsche's philosophy. The first two are related to Nehamas' understandings of self-affirmation and self-deception and their relation to each other, which will be explored in two different interpretations, each of which will prove to be problematic. They show extreme tensions and even inconsistencies in the sense of self that Nehamas had built from Nietzsche's philosophy. Finally, I will discuss show that these problems in Nehamas' conception of the self are the result of an incompatibility between Nietzsche's philosophy of agency as established in the drives and the notion of the self as an unified agentic entity, which is particularly evident in a juxtaposition of the theory of drives with Nietzsche's insistence that one can give style to one's character.

Since the eternal return is the total affirmation of the self and the limiting case of the self as a coherent multiplicity, Nehamas asserts, there is grave danger in self-deception. He suggests that self-deception would involve dishonesty in our understanding and evaluation of ourselves, even to the point of a refusal to acknowledge - potentially large - parts of the self. This is

problematic to the eternal return, which in Nehamas' reading depends upon the full affirmation of the self, which might require endless self-examination in order to be able to ascertain the "totality" of our actions (Nehamas 1985, 162-163). The problematization of self-deceit prompts the question how self-deception would arise for Nehamas and what this indicates about the nature of the self. Though Nehamas does not elaborate a great deal on the concept of self-deception, it is possible to tease out an interpretation of it through his account of the difference between falsification and simplification as presented in the chapter, "Untruth as a Condition of Life" (Nehamas 1985). In it, he argues that the world exceeds our capacity for interpretation, repudiating both "essentialism" and "definitive pluralism".²⁷ Though it is plural in the sense that there are multiple, competing interpretations, none of them offers a complete embodiment. The world is of infinite character, and this character is infinitely dense, leaving room for eternal reinterpretation and reevaluation (Nehamas 1985, 64). As stated above, the density necessitates simplification on our part in order to make sense of the world; to select and privilege certain information while disregarding others. However, necessary simplification becomes falsification for Nietzsche, according to Nehamas, when we assume that our simplified version accurately reflects "reality".²⁸ That is to say, the difference between simplification and falsification is dogmatism (Nehamas 1985, 56).

The parallel with self-deception arises because it too rests on accepting as real an edited version of events. That is to say, in the case of self-deception one does not take into account the parts of the self that might be problematic to it, and to the eternal return in particular.

²⁷ With that I mean that the world does not have multiple distinguishable characteristics.

²⁸ But Nietzsche even argues that falsification can be necessary, in particular in relation to the illusion of the self: "it could be useful and important for one's activity to interpret oneself falsely" (Nietzsche 1968, §492). This could be taken as a minor endorsement for the fiction of the unified self as a useful simplification.

I might be willing to repeat my life only because I do not let myself see it for what it is, because I do not allow myself to see in the proper light, or to see at all, large and objectionable parts of it. (...) I might then be exhilarated at the prospect of repeating my life, at being who I am, just because I am attending to a very small part of it and refusing to see myself in my entirety. (Nehamas 1985, 163)

The question of how to understand self-deception now hinges on how one interprets the idea that one can hide pertinent parts from oneself. If one makes a direct parallel between self-deception and falsification, that is to say, if one takes the dogmatic stance on the self as the definition of self-deception, then Nehamas runs into trouble, because one of the most obvious dogmatic stances on the self is captured in the belief in the fiction of the metaphysically abiding subject as an agent. This is problematic for Nehamas, because he suggests that the eternal return is the realisation that the unified self is but a semblance and accepting the fact that what is perceived as the self consists of a multiplicity of drives. Consequently, it must be possible to move from the limited sense of fixed or unified self to a more fluid sense of self that Nehamas advocates as the outcome of the eternal return. Otherwise, the acceptance of the multiplicitous self cannot be the outcome of the eternal return as it is required before one embarks on it. In that case, self-deception is the necessary point of departure, rather than a problem for the eternal return.

Moreover, the notion of self-deception as the problematic exclusion of information is in conflict with Nehamas' own understanding of "untruth as condition for life", where he argues that the world's complexity needs to be reduced to manageable levels. This must necessarily include the individual, which is equally composed of complex patterns of forces. Hence, it would be untenable for self-affirmation to involve full knowledge of the self. Because Nehamas does not take this into account it suddenly becomes necessary to propose a way to distinguish accurate from inaccurate perceptions of self, instead of suggesting that our perception of ourselves is a reflection of the patterns of drives that constitute "us". But even if I were to ignore this

inconsistency and try to determine whether our self-knowledge is the result of a simplification rather than a falsification, Nehamas still falls short. One possibility could be to use the litmus test Nietzsche puts forward as the main argument of “On the uses and disadvantages of history for life”: that a right approach to history is dependent on the type of life it is meant to serve (Nietzsche 1983, IV). Nehamas extends this to argue that a simplification must serve a particular way of life (Nehamas 1985, 56). In that case our self-knowledge should be measured by the extent to which it permits a type of life. However, this too must depend on particular interpretation of the world and the self which are co-constitutive of each other. Hence a particular way of life, as the particular sense of self that emerges from a pattern of drives, must reflect the relations of forces that are active at that time. Once again, a tension emerges from the notion that actions occur that are contrary to the self in a self that is understood to emerge solely from its tendencies. As this evidently shows an inconsistency in Nehamas’ thought, I must try to explore a different option.

An alternative understanding of self-deceit emerges from exploring the underlying necessity of self-knowledge. Nehamas argues that self-affirmation requires a capacity to see oneself completely; to accept responsibility for all actions. Self-knowledge, therefore, must involve memory of all the actions that compose it as those constitute the self. In addition, he clearly states in the quote above that self-deceit rests upon the wilful exclusion of certain aspects of the self. Hence, one must be able to understand the self and to be able to determine whether or not one is actually hiding pertinent parts of oneself from oneself; self-deceit in Nehamas implies the notion of either selective memory or “faux-forgetting”. In other words, one must either be able to only remember some parts at will, or be able to pretend to have forgotten some actions in its past. Once again there is ambiguity in Nehamas’ understanding of agency; there is a sense in which the suppression of memories is understood to rest in a self that is no more than a collection of drives, but Nietzsche argues that all conscious thought is an expression of the drives (Nietzsche 1968, §333). Thought could be understood as a result of the drives, but Nehamas does not use this language. What is the locus of agency here? Do some complexes of drives overpower others

and repress the memory of their actions? Is the will that hides aspects of itself from itself not just an expression of will to power? How would that be problematic? Could it not be vital to the creation of the coherent self, the acceptance of multiplicity. Does not Nietzsche's assertion that some "natures" might be removed be an indication that some things are legitimately excluded (Nietzsche 2001, §290)?

This understanding of self-deceit comes under further pressure if we take Nietzsche's discussions on memory and forgetting in both "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life" (1983) and the both the Preface and the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1998) into account. In the opening of the latter, Nietzsche states that forgetting must not be considered a passive but an active event, an ability (Nietzsche 1998, II §1). It is essential to action, and therefore necessary for life. Excessive memory is "harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing be a man or a people or a culture" (Nietzsche 1983, 62). Thus, there should be a balance between memory and forgetting, but how do we know what is right to remember and what is right to forget? As has emerged in the analysis above, significant events for the individual are those which inform our actions, but do we even know which events these are? This would require a sufficient capacity for self-awareness. But the majority of (inter-)actions take place below our consciousness at the level of the drives (Nietzsche 1968, §676; cf. 2003b I,4). What is more, Nietzsche argues in *The Gay Science* that the main function of consciousness is communication with other individuals. This implies that there is no coherent sense of self involved in forgetting or remembering. Rather, these faculties, like willing, thinking and feeling are expressions of the drives (Nietzsche 1998, 36). As such, it seems problematic that there would be such a thing as self-deceit.

Finally, it becomes clear that Nehamas' conceptualisation of the self is problematic because it employs a slippage among loci of agency, which leaves it undecided whether it is the sub-individual level of the drives or the self that is the agentic entity. This is the result of a problematic lacuna between Nietzsche's conception of the self as constituted through drives and

passages where the self comes across as possessing agency independently of the drives. In order to explore this lacuna and its implications fully, it is necessary to return to the question of agency. In the discussion of agency above, I suggest that according to the theory of the drives, the individual has no agency beyond the forces of the drives. Hence, the subject is completely stripped of independent agency. Ontologically, this is extremely radical, because the subject as agent has been central to our understanding of the world and ourselves in it for centuries. Though Nietzsche rejects the subject as agent in favour of the agency of the drives, a sense of the individual as constituted through drives must emerge from it, as Nietzsche does support the idea of a recognisable individual. This is partially the result of the perceived unity of the body which is “a multiplicity with one sense” (Nietzsche 2003b, I §4). In addition, there is a persistent sense in which Nietzsche suggests that there are some individuals who are capable of claiming independent agency enabling them to affect the drives; this is particularly evident in what he calls “giving style” to one’s character.

One thing is needful. - To ‘give style’ to one’s character - a great and rare art! It is practised by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer and then fit them into an artistic plan until each appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a great mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of first nature removed both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed; there it is reinterpreted into sublimity. Much that is vague and resisted shaping has been saved and employed for distant views - it is supposed to beckon towards the remote and immense. In the end when the work is complete, it becomes clear how it was the force of a single taste that has ruled and shaped everything great and small ... Conversely, it is the weak characters with no power over themselves who *hate* the constraint of style ... For one thing is needful: that human being should

attain satisfaction with himself - be it through this or that poetry or art; only then is a human being at all tolerable to behold!²⁹ (Nietzsche 2001, §290)

There are three main questions that arise from this aphorism: what is the locus of agency? How do semblances of unities arise? And what is the meaning of such a “unity”? Or in other words what does it mean to give style to our character; “who” or “what” provides the single taste that can form a character? If we have no agency at the level of the subject, as Nietzsche so clearly states in *Twilight of the Idols*, how then does giving style to one’s character come about? There is a possibility that the notion of the “single taste” is an allusion to the dominant drives in our character.³⁰ The elimination of first nature could also be explained through the drives, interpreting it as the suppression of conquered drives - even if they had previously constituted a dominant pattern so that they determined our actions to the extent that their expression became a habit. The addition of a second nature refers to Nietzsche’s understanding of habituation through socialisation, it consists of those habits that result from social pressures and demands that inhibit the expression of some drives and encourage others.³¹ They are, as Nietzsche argues in the *Genealogy* “bred” into us; we are encouraged to behave as our peers do in order to ensure social success³² (Nietzsche 1996, II). But even if these second natures derive from the habitual expression of certain drives, then these drives are clearly part of some consolidated “unity”. It implies an individual who participates in society, whose drives act upon and are acted upon by

²⁹ Italics in original.

³⁰ Or, as Widder points out, the “single taste” should be understood as a particular set of relations between drives, or a complex of drives. The semblance of constancy is not provided by a single drive, but through the persistence of a complex of them (Widder 2012, 831).

³¹ These habits are the basis for Richardson’s understanding of human time, which results from the human need to socialise and expresses an overdeveloped relation to the past in the form of the retention of habits which are socially transferred (Richardson 2006, 220-222).

³² This is the basis for the herd mentality Nietzsche so despises, it is therefore notable that he suggests in §290 from *The Gay Science* that it might be desirable to add a second nature. It could be understood as validation for the claim by reflexive readers of Nietzsche that his various writings often appear contradictory.

others. How could this “unity” be composed? In the case of strong wills to power, dominant patterns of drives are strong enough to eliminate and suppress contenders, so that they can ensure a consistent behaviour. But Nietzsche argues that those are rare and that most of us are characterised by weakness, which would indicate that there are continuous changes in leadership so that there are competing or even contradictory drives that determine the actions and consequently the self (Nietzsche 1968, §46). In such situations it would seem that the “unity” might disintegrate completely, for there is not necessarily a force with sufficient will to power to hold the divergent tendencies together. But Nietzsche clearly states that weak wills are constitutive of individuals too. What could be the “unifying” power of these enduring selves? Even the body is understood by Nietzsche as a semblance of unity that obscures a multiplicity.³³

In addition, some of the phrases Nietzsche uses seem to imply that there is something beyond the drives that is active in the art of “giving style” to character. For how can a drive practice and work on “giving style” daily, or rather more accurately, how could a drive not “give style” if it is taken to mean that it exercises its will to power, its need to expend itself? And how would the drives reinterpret those actions and drives that it has so far experienced as negative? As I have shown above, Nietzsche clearly states that the drives are devoid of intelligence: “every drive lacks intelligence ... it is common to all the drives - they do not consider the advantage of the whole ego (because they do not consider at all!), they act” (Nietzsche 1968, §372).³⁴ Then it seems

³³ Deleuze further dismisses the possibility of the body as a basis for “unity”. He argues that the notion that the body could provide a medium through materiality should be rejected as the world only consists of relations of forces. Every body is an expression of a relation of forces (Deleuze 2006, 39-40). This is in direct contrast to Grosz, who argues that the will to power should be understood as the organisational and directional force of materiality (Grosz 2015, 97). She uses the differentiation between the ideational aspect of will to power and the constancy of materiality to create a sense of self that embodies both stable and fluid tendencies. However, she does not provide textual evidence in Nietzsche to corroborate her interpretation of materiality and ideality as differentiated.

³⁴ The drive itself does not show intelligence, but it can be the source of intelligence (Nietzsche 1998, 36). If intelligence is linked to consciousness, Deleuze’s suggestion that consciousness is characterised by reactive forces, like habit and memory. Reactive forces obey the will to power of active forces to which they stand in relation (Deleuze 2006, 40-41). However, I find Deleuze’s interpretation needlessly complex, using a system of differentiations in order to try to bridge the gap between the drives and the individual that relegates all conscious action to reactivity, separating consciousness from true activity. This is a

unlikely that the drives, understood simply as headless agents, could be the source for bringing “style” to character or organising the ego. The lack of intelligence in the drives also problematises the idea that they could attain satisfaction with the self if they were not satisfied before. Interpretation of the self, after all, arises from the same drives that determine the individual’s actions (Nietzsche 1997, §109). Would it even be possible for the drives to be dissatisfied with themselves? It could be understood as a quantitative difference that is translated into a qualitative difference (Nietzsche 1968, §563). That is to say, dissatisfaction can be understood as a relative lack of power, the suppression of one drive’s will by another whose will was strong, the frustration of its expression. Dissatisfaction is then interpreted as an inability to expend itself, but the whole concept of the dominant drive is that it is able to do so, at least to the extent that it dominates the “ego”. Hence it seems incongruous that the self as composed of drives with a will to power strong enough to give style to character would need to *attain* satisfaction, it must be satisfied by virtue of its ascendancy. Thus, dissatisfaction could not be the result of “internal” descent and could only be the result of external forces that exceed those of “one’s” drives frustrating its expression. But this interpretation is incongruous with Nietzsche’s understanding of “good” people, who are socially superior because their actions are not frustrated (Nietzsche 1996, I §1-6). Nietzsche argues that good people do not resent their failures as slavish people do, as their values proceed from their ability to act, unlike the herd who turn their frustrated endeavours into morals that favour weakness (Nietzsche 1996, I § 10-13).³⁵ These conjunctions of Nietzsche’s thought seem to corroborate the assertion by “reflexive” readers that Nietzsche contradicts himself sometimes. Alternatively, it could suggest that a strong will to power cannot be dissatisfied; it can expend its force to the extent of its abilities; hence it does not need to *attain* satisfaction. It would intensify

separation that is similar to Bergson’s problematic separation between duration and space in *Time and Free Will*, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

³⁵ This is the crux of Nietzsche’s critique of *ressentiment*, once one fails, one should accept that failure and move on, instead of obsessing over it, hoping to change it, which turns failure into *ressentiment*, which gives it a - according to Nietzsche - negative creative power (Nietzsche 1996, I §10-12).

the feeling of powerlessness that leads to the *ressentiment* of the herd which is understood as expressing a weak will to power. For, not only are weak wills thwarted externally, they also cannot gain satisfaction from expressing itself because its drives are often inhibited by their competition; as a result, they would also be liable to regret actions perpetrated under the influence of other drives.

An important aphorism concerning the question of agency can be found in *Daybreak*. Nietzsche immediately signals its subject matter: “*Self-mastery and moderation and their ultimate motive*” (Nietzsche 2003a, §109). He opens this aphorism by describing six different methods in which one can control a drive. In the course of this discussion Nietzsche repeatedly implies that there is agency in the self which can be employed to curb drives through different methods, such as delay or indulgence in gratification. As well as the assertion that “[s]ome few will no doubt ... understand how to keep in check the individual drive that wanted to play the master by giving all the other drives he knows of a temporary encouragement” (Nietzsche 2003a, §109). However, towards the end of the aphorism, after discussing these six techniques Nietzsche pivots this implication away from the self as an agentic entity. He states:

that one desires to combat the vehemence of a drive at all, however, does not stand within our own power; nor does the choice of any particular method, nor does the success or failure of this method. What is clearly the case is that in this entire procedure our intellect is only the blind instrument of another drive which is a rival of the drive which is tormenting us ... While ‘we’ believe we are complaining about the vehemence of a drive, at bottom it is one drive which is complaining about another; that is to say: for us to become aware that we are suffering from the vehemence of a drive presupposes the existence of another equally vehement or

even more vehement drive, and that a *struggle* is in prospect in which our intellect is going to have to take sides.³⁶ (Nietzsche 2003a, §109)

This is a complex passage in which Nietzsche plays jump-rope with the locus of agency. The opening clearly implies that there is an agentic entity embodied in the individual, but this is then rolled back in the final third of the passage. Suddenly all the methods Nietzsche lays out before are revealed to be conscious expressions of drives with conflicting wills to power. But again, in the last sentence the ambiguity creeps back in, once more in the form of the intellect, which is supposed to “take sides”; but as I discussed in the previous paragraph, the intellect is itself an expression of drives. The question again arises how the intellect exactly relates to the drives: is it always in line with the dominant drives, in which case it would not need to take sides, it would already be aligned with one of the striving parties. Alternatively, it is the expression of a separate drive, but this seems illogical, as it would require a mechanism of separation, plus it would create a problematic dissonance between the intellect and the activity of the drives.

If this aphorism is taken as true, and any self-mastery is actually an expression of conflicting drives, then there is a clear disjunction between Nietzsche’s theory of the drives and the language he uses that seems to substantiate the belief in the “illusory subject”, that is to say, the self as an agentic entity. In addition, it conflicts with the idea that a drive needs to practice and work hard to attain the level of satisfaction that results from “giving style” to character; a drive’s will to power is either strong enough to give style to a character or not.³⁷ In the same way, the phrasing of the eternal return in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* appears to suggest that there is an I who can take responsibility for the “creative will” if the latter is understood as the drives (Nietzsche

³⁶ Italics in original.

³⁷ Nehamas tries to fix this problem by falling back on the notion of self-deception; he argues that it is impossible to “give style” to a character if one deceives oneself about that character, which the majority of us do (Nehamas 1985, 186). However, as I have argued above, Nehamas’ conception of self-deceit is inconsistent and therefore cannot solve this problem.

2003b, II, §20). The demon in *The Gay Science*, too, proposes that the self might be able to work towards choosing the eternal return and that its acceptance would influence the way one lives one's life (Nietzsche 2001, §341). Elsewhere in the same work, Nietzsche discusses self-control in terms of the self as an agentic agency; as the conscious adoption of a defensive posture (Nietzsche 2001, §305). In one of the passages in *Daybreak* Nietzsche goes a step further and explicitly states that the individual has the agentic capacity to influence the drives:

What we are at liberty to do. - One can dispose of one's drives like a gardener and, though few know it, cultivate the shoots ... as productively and profitably as a beautiful fruit tree on a trellis; one can do it with ... good or bad taste ... one can also let nature rule and only attend to a little embellishment and tidying-up here and there; one can, finally ... let the plants grow up and fight their fight out among themselves ... All this we are at liberty to do: but how many know we are at liberty to do it?³⁸ (2003a, §560)

This distinctly expresses a capacity of agency on the part of the individual that is not only independent of the drives, but is actually capable of exerting influence over them. In particular the notion that one can either actively intervene or let nature take over seems to imply that the self is an agentic entity. Yet, here too, there is no indication of the basis for this agency that endows the individual with the capacity to master the drives and bend them to its will. Thus, though the drives can account to some extent for the individual's capacity for action, there remains a sense of a lacuna, a gap between the individual as being completely determined by the drives, the individual that is completely stripped of agency as Nietzsche presents in *Twilight of the Idols* (Nietzsche 2005, VI; cf. Nietzsche 1968, §786) and the individual that seems capable of affirming the drives,

³⁸ Italics in original.

that is able to choose to practice the art of “giving style” to character. Widder argues that the solution to this lacuna lies in the shift towards a more multiple sense of self as an assemblage:

‘One’ is simply shorthand for a multiplicity – for an assemblage that only as an assemblage can be said both to control its drives and to be determined by the relational component forces that constitute it by virtue of the ascendancy of some of them against various resistances. Agency resides in this dispersed but synthesized assemblage, which is irreducible to any unity, and this agency implies control, but not necessarily choice. (2012, 834)

This depends in the first place on the notion that complexes of drives can become sufficiently stable to create a delineable and recognisable assemblage upon which the semblance of the subject can be placed. This is complicated by the fact that Widder’s assemblage seems highly fluid. It must be assumed that its organisation is sufficient to create stable natures; dominant patterns of drives that transform the actions of the drives into enduring, stable habits. This relies on the idea that the will to power of our assemblage’s patterns of drives is strong enough to establish a unity from disparate forces, which is questionable in light of Nietzsche’s assertion that the majority of modern humans are characterised by weakness. Such stability is also necessary to support any notion of identity as an expression of an assemblage’s nature. Calling this stability into question undermines the possibility of creating a sense of self on the basis of Nietzsche’s nonlinear ontology. Thus, I have shown in this chapter that nonlinearity implies logics that are incompatible with the self as a unified, agentic entity. Moreover, I have also exposed a tension in Nietzsche’s work, where he does presuppose this agentic entity in the form of the gardener in the *Daybreak* aphorism or the “one” that wills the eternal return.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have started out by establishing Nietzsche as a nonlinear thinker by discussing his sense of becoming through the concepts of the will to power and the eternal recurrence. The ontological interpretation of the will to power provides an understanding of the world as composed of contingent patterns of forces. The complexes of forces can interact and move in all directions, exceeding the constraints of linearity. From the theory of the drives a nonlinear sense of temporality can be derived, where Nietzsche's understanding of the self is determined through a discrepancy between the temporal structure of perspectivity and its content. It results in an incongruity where lived time differs from the experience of temporality. Richardson argues that the goal of the eternal return is to solve this discord and realign the experience of temporality with lived temporality so that the self can experience itself as composed of patterns of drives.

In the second half of this chapter I have explored the "Nietzschean self" through the work of Alexander Nehamas. I have shown that there are inconsistencies between the theory of the drives as the locus of agency and persistent allusions to the self as a unitary, agentic entity. Moreover, I have argued that the theory of the drives as proposed by Nietzsche as creating pattern consisting of weaker and stronger wills to power complicates the possibility of establishing the self as an agentic assemblage, because Nietzsche insists that the majority of modern humans display a weak disposition that expresses a weak will to power. The drives as the locus of agency undermine the stability and agency that are foundational in conceptualisations of the self. Thus, Nietzsche's nonlinear ontology is incompatible with notions of the self as a unified, agentic entity. This is problematic as it complicates the notion of political agency that is foundational for our understanding of politics as driven by an effort to effect change in line with our ideational commitments. If the self can no longer be understood as a unified agent, this concept can no longer provide the basis for the notion of the political as driven through individual agency. Nietzsche's work exposes a discrepancy between the multiplicity that emerges from nonlinear

ontologies and the understanding of the individual as a unitary actor. This tendency is pervasive in the thought of various other nonlinear thinkers, including Henri Bergson, whose work is the focus of my discussion in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Duration as Incompatible with the Self

Introduction

Bergson is often considered one of the most important philosophers on the concept of nonlinear time. It is the subject of his doctoral thesis *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, known in English as *Time and Free Will: An essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (2001).¹ The concept of duration, which is Bergson's term for nonlinear time, can be seen as a central theme throughout all of his subsequent works. In fact, there is a clear progression throughout his entire oeuvre that binds all the works together. The later volumes clearly pick up on aspects of the arguments of previous works on which Bergson wanted to expand. This is clear for example from the summary of the main argument from *Time and Free Will* and - more briefly - *Matter and Memory* (1988) at the start of *Creative Evolution* (1944, 3-11). In this chapter I will focus primarily on *Time and Free Will* and *Creative Evolution*, to a large extent bypassing *Matter and Memory*. The latter will only feature in my discussion of Deleuze's interpretation of Bergson at the end of the chapter. I have chosen to omit *Matter and Memory*, because, unlike Deleuze, I do not think that *Matter and Memory* solves the problematic tension between monism and dualism in Bergson. I focus on *Time and Free Will* and *Creative Evolution* as they each present a major evolution in the theory of duration; the former is its first iteration, the latter drastically extends its scope from an internal psychic phenomenon to the source of all life. As such, these two volumes represent the progression which Bergson exhibits throughout his oeuvre, in particular in the form

¹ There is a lot of discussion on the translation of the title of the doctoral thesis. Both Guerlac and Worms state that it is an unfortunate or strange translation of the French respectively (Guerlac 2006, xiii; Worms 2005, 1229). However, as Bergson approved of the English translation as the Translator's preface clearly states, it must have met with his agreement (Bergson 2001, v). As Bergson states in his own preface to the English translation, the chief subject he wants to tackle in *Time and Free Will* is that of free will, calling the preceding two chapters an introduction to the third, where it finally comes to the fore. Muldoon therefore argues that the French title reflects the method of Bergson's thesis, whereas its English translation best reflects its intention (Muldoon 2006, 73).

of a progression of dualities, which generally map onto, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say build on from each other. For example, the argument in *Time and Free Will* (2001) progresses through three stages, each of which is consigned to its own chapter. Each is centred on the exploration of a different duality; intensity/extensity, duration/time, and freedom/determinism. Each of these involves subsidiary dualities, which Bergson uses to further shore up the main concepts under consideration, often these subsidiary concepts are used to tie the different concepts together throughout the *Essai*, such as time/space and quality/quantity.² The series of dualities is used by Bergson to distinguish things which he considers fundamentally different, or in his words, are different in kind, but are nevertheless often confused to such an extent that they are generally considered indistinguishable (Muldoon 2006, 73). The differentiations in *Time and Free Will* set up an alternative methodology and ontology which is characteristic of Bergson's philosophy (Worms 2005, 1226). He creates a completely alternate worldview based on his particular nonlinear understanding of time: duration. Duration engenders not just a change in our understanding of time, but shifts all aspects of our understanding of the world, including that of space and materiality. It is derived from a critique of time as a homogeneous medium, which, according to Bergson, equates chronological time with space.

There are two elements to Bergson's work that have determined the structure of this chapter. The first element, which makes Bergson's philosophy of particular interest to the argument of this thesis, is that he establishes a clear and very intimate link between duration and a corresponding conceptualisation of self. Consequently, to understand Bergson's conceptualisation of the self, one must first understand his nonlinear ontology that is anchored in the concept of duration. This determines the structure of this chapter, setting out first the understanding of duration emergent from a work followed by how it affects the possibility to sustain

² The central duality of each chapter generally encompasses several dualities that characterise them, including quality/quantity, heterogeneous/homogeneous, confused/discrete multiplicity, continuous/discontinuous etc. Nor are the dualities listed here by any means the only dualities Bergson deploys in *Time and Free Will*, let alone throughout his oeuvre.

a notion of self. The second aspect of Bergson's work that affects the structure of this chapter is the fact that there is a clear progression visible in his philosophy that changes his understanding of duration and thereby changes the tensions between his nonlinear ontology and notions of selfhood. I will explore this development through focussing on his two most seminal works on duration; *Time and Free Will* and *Creative Evolution*. I will discuss the two works by tracing the notion of duration that emerges from it and the sense of self that it engenders.

As I will show below, he starts off his career with a very radical understanding of duration and its relation to space, creating an untenable duality between time and space. This duality also inhibits the possibility of the self as a unified entity, which is understood as split between two different kinds of consciousness. This engenders a problematic relationship between the two layers and between the individual and the external world. Some of these problems are remedied by Bergson's subsequent attempts to soften the duality to come to an ontology that is more holistic encompassing all change in the form of creative evolution. However, despite Bergson's insistence that duration and materiality stand in a relation of inversion, he continues to suggest that each is subject to a different logical system, which complicates the notion that there are intermediate states which are subject to both extension and intensity. More important for this thesis, however, is the fact that the change in the understanding of duration affects the bases upon which Bergson had attempted to establish a sense of self. The adaptations to duration produce a different approach to the self; it is no longer primarily considered in terms of psychic states but instead Bergson's register shifts towards a more biological approach and toward a consideration of the individual in relation to its environment. However, despite Bergson's attempts to reconcile the oppositional understanding of duration and materiality put forward in *Time and Free Will* through his expansion of duration and an alteration in its relation from incommensurable to each other's inverse in *Creative Evolution*, he is unable to reconcile the two halves of the self convincingly. This is a consequence of ambiguities in Bergson's understanding of consciousness as expressed through the relation between instinct and intelligence that is mediated through the conscious, yet

durational notion of intuition. This intermediate state of intuition engenders a familiar problematic interstice of logic, where it is unclear how different systems of logic that determine the opposing states of instinct and intelligence mingle to form the state of intuition. Furthermore, the notion of duration as a vital impulse gives it an elevated status as the source of all movement, endowing it with an immense power. Yet, combined with the fact that duration is difficult to approach for the human consciousness, which Bergson does not adequately resolve through intuition, leaves it ephemeral and elusive, almost divine. Therefore, Bergson's nonlinear ontology inhibits the creation of a sense of self. He is unable to sufficiently reverse the split of the self into two types of consciousness, particularly because duration in *Creative Evolution* takes on a mystic quality that conceals how the two separate parts come together. A separation that is made all the more problematic, because he dissolves the certainty of closed systems in *Creative Evolution*, which ensured a sense of unity through embodiment. As a result, duration is put forward as a mystical force capable of uniting and sustaining a self, without evidence or rationale for its capacity.

Finally, I will discuss Deleuze's reading of Bergson, who argues that Bergsonism is characterised by an ontological monism, rather than the dualism that is at the centre of my own interpretation. As such, its implications potentially complicate or even negate my reading of Bergson. Therefore, I will explore the arguments Deleuze uses to advocate for a monist understanding of Bergson; specifically, that Bergson's thought creates a virtual monism that is actualised through differentiated dualisms. Above all, I will argue that Deleuze's understanding of Bergson does not address my principal criticism of Bergson regarding the lack of reconciliation between the different logical frameworks he has created for duration and materiality. Instead, like Bergson, Deleuze does not move beyond the notion that duration and materiality are inverse parts of the same movement. Neither acknowledges that Bergson's extremely complex characterisations of duration and materiality – including engendering different logical systems – and their relation to each other are insufficiently addressed through the simple notion of an inverted movement. In addition, Deleuze retains a sense of mysticism by leaving the translation

between duration and materiality insufficiently explored, which is exacerbated by his insistence that the movement from the materiality of experience into the duration of memory requires an initial leap. Finally, I will argue that Deleuze's interpretation of Bergson often rests upon creative, rather than strict readings of the texts. Though this adds to Deleuze's value as a philosopher in his own right, it does have implications for the validity of his arguments as an accurate interpretation of Bergson's oeuvre. I contend, therefore, that Deleuze's virtual monism does not negate my interpretation of Bergson's *ontological* dualism. This logical dualism problematises the self as a unified – political – entity, which is one of the core attributes of the common sense self. As such, Bergson's nonlinear ontology is incompatible with the self as a unified entity.

Time and Free Will

I will discuss Bergson's nonlinear ontology and its relation to the self primarily through two of his main works, starting with his doctoral thesis *Time and Free Will*. In it he tries to make a case for a different understanding of time, which according to Bergson allows him to settle the debate on free will in its favour. This is the result of the fact that the juxtaposition of a series of dualities, of which the quality/quantity duality is constitutive, allows Bergson to pose problems differently (Lapoujade 2018, 17). The question of free will is mainly significant because it necessitates Bergson to make some problematic moves in his conceptualisation of duration and consequently the self. Specifically, it leads Bergson to create an oppositional duality between duration and space that creates an ontological disjunction between an internal, qualitative world and an external quantitative world. The first few sections detailing Bergson's thought process in *Time and Free Will* will therefore focus on explaining his conceptualisation of duration and critiquing this ontological move. The final section is devoted to showing how this discrepancy is also explicitly translated into a discontinuous self, or rather a self that is supposedly united, but whose two halves appear to be disconnected.

Psychic states: qualitative intensity

As stated in the introduction, Bergson methodically builds his argument in *Time and Free Will* through the exploration of a series of dualities, starting with the duality of intensity/extensity. Several of the problematic aspects of the concept of duration derive from the distinctions engendered in this first duality as it lays the foundations for the dualities which follow. Therefore, it is important to give an overview of Bergson's discussion of the difference between intensity and extensity. He identifies intensity with consciousness, and extensity, which characterises the outside world, with space and any type of materiality. The main goal of this discussion is to show that intensity and extensity are irreconcilable, which is particularly important as the intensity is often subsumed under extensity. This is problematic as, according to Bergson, the former is qualitative and the latter quantitative. Quantity determines how much there is of something, whereas quality describes how we feel about or are affected by something (Guerlac 2006, 45). Thus, the qualitative takes place in consciousness, whereas the quantitative is corporeal (extended) and as such dominates objective reality. The first problem Bergson tackles is the habit of trying to express intensity, which is defined by qualitative difference, through quantitative difference (Bergson 2001, 2). Thus, he states that we often consider intensity to be connected to extensity. There are several reasons why this connection is established, three of which I will discuss below as they help to understand the intensity/extensity duality.

The first reason is that we often seek to quantify our emotions, that is to say, to assimilate the quality of consciousness into a magnitude (Bergson 2001, 2). Generally, this occurs by distinguishing between two types of quantity, extensive and intensive. The first is measurable, but the second is not. This occurs because it allows us to perceive emotions as varying in degree, thereby allowing us to express emotions by comparing them to one another. Quantifying emotions also allows historical comparison, weighing up our current state against previous instances of experiencing a particular emotion, evaluating them in ordinal terms - more or less. Thus, we use

the language of magnitude or quantity. In doing so, we assume that we can express intensity in terms of quantity, which normally pertains to extensity. However, Bergson argues that intensity cannot be quantified because it depends on one's emotions building on each other. The greater number contains the smaller, in the way that the number 3 contains 1 and 2. Yet, there is no such relation of container and contained in the context of quality. When we think that we are angrier now than we have ever been before, there is no matryoshka doll system of emotions that fold into each other. Your anger now is not an accumulation of all the anger you've felt before. Nor is anger - necessarily - the linear escalation of irritation, frustration, dismay, etc. Thus, it makes no sense to imagine (let alone apply) quantitative methods of evaluation to an intensive system independent of extension and, consequently there must be a clear divide between intensity and extensity (Bergson 2001, 2-3).

The second reason that we generally consider intensity and extensity to be connected is because common sense links internal intensity to its external causes, which can be objectively observed and whose magnitude can be assessed. However, Bergson immediately rejects this common sense view, as he argues that in the majority of cases the reverse is true, and we assess the magnitude of the cause on the basis of the intensity of our experience. As Bergson states: "the comparison of two intensities is usually made without the least appreciation of the number of causes, their mode of action or their extent" (2001, 5-6).

Thirdly, part of the reason that we persist in giving in to the intuition that intensity can be expressed in terms of quantity is that we conflate different types of psychic states, some of which are more superficial and therefore more directly linked to the external world (Bergson 2001, 7). In particular, those which Bergson calls affective and representative sensations. Affective sensations include for example pleasure and pain, while representative sensations generally involve data collected by our five senses, such as taste or temperature. These two groups are often found in conjunction and are particularly problematic, for Bergson, as our common sense generally links them to extended causes, contra Bergson's claim that extensity cannot be

translated into intensity. Representative sensations often have an affective character: we feel pain through the sense of touch, can derive pleasure from delicious food or beautiful sights and so on. In the case of representative sensations, we are particularly apt to mistake difference in quality for difference in quantity, for common sense generally links them directly to extended phenomena. Yet the differences in quality, for example different shades of a particular colour, are not differences of degree as they are generally considered, but qualitative differences in kind (Bergson 2001, 39).³

[T]hese differences in quality are at once interpreted as differences of quantity, because of their affective character and the more or less pronounced movements of reaction, pleasure or repugnance, which they suggest to us. Besides even when the sensation remains purely representative, its external cause cannot exceed a certain degree of strength or weakness without inciting us to some movements which enable us to measure it. (Bergson 2001, 39)

Thus, representative sensations lure us into a common sense belief that the quantitative methods of measurement can be applied to the qualitative nature of psychic states, the more so, for they tempt us to inject the effect with its cause, the psychic state with the extended movement (Bergson 2001, 43). However, according to Bergson, there are other, deeper states of consciousness that seem self-sufficient, that is to say, not dependent on external causation. As such they ought to be considered as pure intensity, completely isolated from extensity. However, as they are isolated

³ Grosz notes that one of the responsibilities of philosophy is to correctly differentiate between these two types of difference, in particular because difference in kind is often obscured by difference in degree. In particular because the former express differences in nature. As such the difference between these two types of difference expresses an ontological interstice, which she notes translates into different political strategies; difference in degree requires only the affirmation of suppressed identities, whereas difference in kind orients us towards the affirmation of incomparable differences. The first is oppositional, the latter expresses that certain differences cannot be compared, the differences between the sexes are internal and cannot be expressed in terms of quantified comparisons (Grosz 2004, 159-161).

from extensity, they cannot be demonstrated; for as I shall discuss in more detail below, intensity cannot be expressed in either extension or language. Thus, the existence of purely qualitative psychic states is an assumption that must be accepted on face value alone. As its proponent, Bergson accepts this assertion, despite its lack of proof, and he continues to expand on the notion of psychic states, or qualitative intensity.

The first, and perhaps the most important aspect of psychic states, in part because its consequences are counterintuitive, is that intensity does not consist of separable “units”. The notion of clear and distinct units is engendered in the concept of quantity. Pure quality, the “component” of psychic states, cannot be expressed in extension. Thus, Bergson disputes the commonly held notion that we can “treat psychic phenomena as things which are set side by side” (Bergson 2001, 8-9); in the way that we consider extended things in space to be situated alongside each other.⁴ Instead, psychic states interpenetrate each other. Strong emotion is the result of that psychic state interpenetrating a multitude of simple psychic states, which then take on its colour. It is like the spreading of an oil stain, which slowly infects all your sensations and ideas. This means that it is hard to determine the parameters of a psychic state. Consciousness rebels against this, as it prefers clear distinctions, which automatically inclines it towards extensity, where magnitudes are always pictured as distinct objects set side by side (Bergson 2001, 9). It refuses to deal with the Bergsonian reality of psychic states which are confused, in the literal sense of being melded together;⁵ as such they are intermingled and indistinguishable from one another. Bergson argues that “deep” conscious states are pure intensity and cannot be adequately expressed as magnitude or extension, despite the persistence of the mind to do so. Even metaphor, though frequently used by Bergson, is inadequate to express its nature, for

⁴ This concept is used in experimental psychology, which newly arrived on the scientific scene in Bergson’s time. It is still used by the cognitive sciences today (Guerlac 2006, 20 - 25).

⁵ As Guerlac helpfully notes confused means literally, fused with, fused together (Guerlac 2006, 83). Its Latin root means mingled together, and it is used in this sense, rather than the more conventional, colloquial sense here.

language is indelibly linked to extension as shall be discussed below. Hence, even the image of the oil stain spreading is not actually a good representation of a psychic state gaining intensity, as it projects a concept of the psychic state springing forth from a single origin and extending itself in space, when Bergson describes it as: “successive stages corresponding to qualitative alterations in the whole of our psychic states” (Bergson 2001, 10). That is to say, it is more akin to an increase in pace in particular types of ideas and sensations across the board. I would therefore propose the image of a wave cresting in the sea; it is impossible to separate the origin from the effect and, what is more, there is always a simultaneous multitude of waves cresting of various intensities. In becoming a cresting wave, the sea as a whole changes in quality, not quantity. The wave never “leaves” the sea; it remains a part of it. And like the differing heights of the waves in the sea, we do have a sense that intensity varies, that some feelings are stronger than others. The vastness of the sea already comprises both the waves that have been created in the past as well as those that are still to come, though it is impossible to predict where the water will crest into a wave next and how high the resulting wave will be.

The second characteristic of qualitative psychic states, which cements their difference from the quantitative, extended world outside them, is uniqueness. Building on the dismissal of intensive quantity, Bergson argues that, while number requires sameness for the notion of the container and contained to function, the reason that this does not apply to psychic states is because they are unique.⁶ Psychic states always interpenetrate and thereby create unique constellations of complex and simple psychic states, which relate to one another. As Bergson states, any psychic state is redolent with:

a thousand sensations, feelings or ideas which pervade them: each one is then a state unique of its kind and indefinable, and it seems we should have to re-live the

⁶ The concept of sameness implied in extension will be discussed in more detail later on in relation to the concept of space and its connection to the concepts of number and language.

life of the subject who experiences it if we wished to grasp it in its original complexity. (2001, 17-18)

The most intense emotions are not the result of a greater degree of intensity within a particular psychic state, but attests to the success of a psychic state in intertwining itself into many of the other psychic states to which it is connected. As such, there are no two feelings which are the same, as at any point the psychic states it encounters will vary, as does their receptivity to the new emotion or idea. The interactions cannot reoccur in exactly the same way twice, because their circumstances are conditioned by the lasting imprint of the psychic states that preceded it (Bergson 2001, 18). Hence, repetition for Bergson is not the recurrence of the identical, it is “only formal or nominal, usually a form of similarity or resemblance, a repetition in some respects rather than an identity of recurring states” (Grosz 2004, 195).

Thus, the first chapter of the *Essai* introduces a particular understanding of consciousness as being made up of qualitative states which cannot be subjected to quantitative logic. This supposition has several important implications. The most important of these for Bergson’s argument is the fact that, as I have tried to show above, intensity and extensity are irreconcilable, separating the mind completely from the external world, for even when external effects suggest certain emotions and sensations to us, the emotions that result will take on a particular quality that cannot be directly equated to the magnitude of the extension. This strict division is extremely problematic. It necessitates a leap of faith, because it ensures that pure quality becomes completely removed from the extended world, which includes, as Bergson will argue in *Creative Evolution*, human intelligence (Bergson 1944, 194; cf. 207). This renders it unverifiable, depending on a sense of intuition for its confirmation. And, as will be shown in the next section, it also complicates the concept of duration which develops from it.

Duration: Time extricated from Space

In the second chapter of *Time and Free Will*, Bergson evolves the intensity/extensity duality into the time/space binary in order to fully develop his alternative concept of time as duration. Bergson's main argument is built on the rejection of linear, chronological time,⁷ which, he argues, is actually the projection of the properties of space onto time. He argues that linear or chronological time is not a separate entity at all, but devolves into space. Time as duration, on the other hand, is inherently non-spatial. To substantiate this, Bergson needs to show that, on the one hand, duration functions independently from space, and, on the other hand, that linear time is in actuality an extension of space. He first focuses on the latter, arguing that the concept of counting, which is generally considered temporal, is actually spatial, because it rests on the spatial concept of number. He states that counting in terms of number is "the synthesis of the one and the many" (Bergson 2001, 75). That is to say, when we count any number of things, for example oranges (or, with Bergson, sheep), we assume that each orange is sufficiently similar that they can be put into a series of the same category. As such, it places commonality over difference; in counting we assume each of the unique components of the number to be identical to its fellows. Simultaneously they need to be sufficiently different to not actually be the same, for if they were absolutely the same, there would be just the one. This juxtaposition of the individual members of the number takes place in space. Indeed, there is an association with space whenever we think of number; for even when we are doing abstract mathematics such as algebra, where we only use the symbolic expression of number, its translation into any sort of picture, or any actualisation of it, immediately involves the notion of space (Bergson 2001, 76-78). Yet, we associate counting more with time than with space,

⁷ Bergson generally just calls it time. However, attaching the adjective reinforces the notion that the day to day notion of time is only one of several possible interpretations of temporality, which might help to dislodge its pretension to normality and naturality somewhat.

the question is whether we have counted moments of duration by means of points in space. ... No doubt it is possible to, as we shall show later, to conceive the successive moments of time independently of space; but when we add to the present moment those which have preceded it, as is the case when we are adding up units, we are not dealing with these moments themselves, since they have vanished for ever, but with the lasting traces which they seem to have left in space on their passage through it. ... every clear idea of number implies a visual image in space. (Bergson 2001, 79)

When we associate counting with time by marking the seconds it takes for the repetition to occur - Bergson uses the image of the chiming of a clock - we are actually juxtaposing these occurrences in space, as we hold on to the previous iterations in order to align them with those that follow. We are supposing thereby that all iterations of the series are happening simultaneously, the moment of each one's occurrence having already passed, so that we hold on to its traces in space and juxtapose these next to each other in order to count them. As such, we are not actually counting by measuring the moments of time, which cannot exist simultaneously, but by placing their traces alongside one another in space. Bergson thus argues that counting is about space, rather than time (Bergson 2001, 86-87).

There is a further quality to the spatialisation of number, which Bergson highlights. He points out that the visual image of extended or discrete numbers allows for their divisibility. For when we think of a number it is as a unit, we consider both the elements of the series and the number they amount to as units. Yet, Bergson argues, in both cases we understand unit in a different way. The first type of unit has a sense of finitude, as it is the result of addition, while the second is conditional; it is irreducible, but still able to be subsumed into the greater unity. As such, these two concepts of unit echo the notion that things when counted as part of a series are both unique and identical simultaneously. The ultimate unity of the number is the result of a mental act,

the mind decides to perceive the separate entities in the ultimate number as a “new” unity, despite their unicities. Though a number’s unity feels intuitive, once it is considered in space it is always a composite of a multiplicity (Bergson 2001, 80-81).⁸ The fact that in extension a seemingly united number becomes a multiplicity allows for the possibility of dividing that number into an infinitely variable distribution of parts. The one cake can become as many slices as we like of various proportions, provided we are willing to make do with a mere crumb of cake. A number is, thus, both a unity and provisionally endlessly divisible. However, the act of unifying a multiplicity into a number is itself indivisible. In this process of formation the number is discontinuous, yet, once it is finished, once we have thought it up, we objectify it into space, where it becomes divisible again (Bergson 2001, 82-83).

Thus, there is a tension in counting between the indivisibility of the act of addition through which we arrive at a number and the divisibility of the number once realised. It leads Bergson to argue that there are two different kinds of multiplicity. The first, discrete multiplicity, pertains to extended objects. The second, confused multiplicity, applies to states of consciousness, which cannot be expressed directly, but only through a symbolic representation. As such, the latter resists the notion of number, which requires juxtaposition in space. Bergson further strengthens the claim that number cannot apply to psychic states, for the former implies impenetrability that logic attaches to both number and space; yet psychic states intermingle, and as such do occupy the same space simultaneously. Therefore, we cannot adequately represent psychic states in space, which makes them resistant to the concept of number as a discrete multiplicity. As a corollary, it is impossible to represent emotions in any way. For it must bring them from our immediate consciousness, the unexamined feelings as they happen to us in the moment, to the sphere of reflective consciousness, the understanding of our psychic states after reflecting upon them, which is necessary to fashion a representative symbol. In this process of reflection and

⁸ Six oranges (or sheep) can only be expressed as six entities, even though the grouping of the six feels like a unit to us as well.

representation the psychic state will necessarily take on a new form it did not possess in its immediate state (Bergson 2001, 88-90).⁹

Thus, Bergson claims number is spatial and that psychic states cannot be expressed in space. He is now prepared to take the next step in his argument, stating:

Now, let us notice that when we speak of *time*, we generally think of a homogeneous medium in which our conscious states are ranged alongside one another as in space, so as to form a discrete multiplicity. Would not time, thus understood, be to the multiplicity of our psychic states ... a sign, a symbol, absolutely distinct from true duration?¹⁰ (Bergson 2001, 90)

When we consider time as containing discrete multiplicities, we portray it as a homogeneous medium against the backdrop of which we can set things alongside one another as distinct entities. As these are the same properties as those of space, Bergson concludes that time understood in this way is conflated with space. This in turn reinforces the notion that the way reflective consciousness understands psychic states is dominated by space. Hence, reflective consciousness cannot produce an accurate understanding of mental processes, but also, most importantly, it means that we therefore misunderstand time as it really is, or as Bergson prefers to call it, real duration (*durée réelle*) (Bergson 2001, 91).

⁹ Lapoujade notes that Bergson's immediate consciousness is passive, it receives the immediate data, but does not actively participate in their absorption and inclusion. Rather these are processes of "self-composition or self-organisation" on the part of the immediate data instead of the immediate consciousness. However, it is always contemporaneous and correlated with activity (Lapoujade 2018, 19-20). This is a result of the fact that the confused multiplicity of duration contains the potentiality for a discrete number, though it cannot actualise it. It can only comprehend number qualitatively, hence confusedly; the two kinds of number share a kinship, even if they each express a different notion of number (Lapoujade 2018, 26-27).

¹⁰ Italics in original.

The discussion on the concept of number is used to develop a basis on which to discuss the relation between the concepts of time and space. More specifically Bergson is interested in demonstrating that quality exists independent of quantity. This will allow him to posit that mental states are prior to any physical representation or account of their causation; and that there must be a version of time that does not upon closer examination devolve to space (Bergson 2001, 92). This is important because the dominant understanding of space, as developed by Kant,

consists essentially in the intuition, or rather the conception, of an empty homogeneous medium. For it is scarcely possible to give any other definition of space: space is what enables us to distinguish a number of identical and simultaneous sensations from one another; it is thus a principle of differentiation other than that of qualitative differentiation, and consequently it is a reality with no quality. ... [As a result, the mind] perceives under the form of extensive homogeneity what is given as qualitative homogeneity. (Bergson 2001, 94-95)

Bergson thus argues that the mind intuitively adopts the homogeneous notion of space in order to differentiate between the various experiences it encounters, stripping it from any possible perception of qualitative difference. He points out that the conception of space as a homogeneous medium is a reaction to the heterogeneity of our experiences. Our immediate experience is qualitative and heterogeneous, whereas our reflected consciousness refracts it to fit homogeneous space. This is a move by the human intellect to enable unambiguous differentiation, which facilitates a host of other human functions including counting (Bergson 2001, 97). The corollary of this conception of space is that if it is defined by radical homogeneity, then all homogeneity must be space, as it requires the absence of any quality, otherwise it would be distinguishable and therefore heterogeneous. This is a key move in Bergson's discussion of time and space, for it allows him to show that we generally use time as a homogeneous medium in

which our actions and thoughts can unfold unproblematically. However, as Bergson has just explained, this would mean that time is actually space, for there cannot be two distinct homogeneous media. Time should, therefore, be understood in a different way. It cannot be a homogeneous medium without devolving into space (Bergson 2001, 98).

This leads Bergson to suppose that there are two distinct notions of time, one that is superficial and reducible to space and the other that is pure duration.

Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. For this purpose it need not be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then, on the contrary, it would no longer *endure*. Nor need it forget its former states: it is enough that, in recalling these past states, it does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another.¹¹ (Bergson 2001, 100)

As this quotation intimates, the notion of duration differs from the notion of chronological time in several important, though sometimes nebulous respects. In particular, Bergson's insistence that duration is the temporality in which we truly live is problematic because it is supposedly separate from the extended world around us. This mainly foreshadows Bergson's argument discussed briefly below that only in duration can true freedom be exercised. But the broader question of the meaning of life, when this is characterised by duration, is important to any interpretation of Bergson's work. It requires the consideration of Bergson's major work *Creative Evolution*, which

¹¹ Italics in original.

posits duration as the driving force of all life in the universe (Bergson 1944, 14). I will return to this question later in this chapter.

Nevertheless, it is important to note at this point that duration clearly supports and requires confused multiplicities, which are characterised by an organic melting together. The understanding of states as interpenetrating also changes the comprehension of the tenses; rather than past, present and future being discrete and separable, this quote highlights that in duration past states must *endure*, not as separate entities, but entwined with current and future states.¹² It posits time and the actions that take place within it as a

succession without distinction ... an interconnexion and organization of elements, each one of which represents the whole, and cannot be distinguished or isolated from it except by abstract thought. (Bergson 2001, 101)

As such, the individual within duration is both “ever the same and ever changing” (Bergson 2001, 101); for the *endurance* of previous states will render continuity, while the radical heterogeneity of continued experience will ensure that, simultaneously, development will take place. It pertains to the inner states, which are characterised by pure quality and, therefore, are not expressed in terms of space. Reflective consciousness inserts space into our thoughts, which leads us to attempt to express duration in terms of extensity resulting in the notion of chronological time. It fractures duration into a simple succession of events, which are connected as separate entities but do not interpenetrate. Bergson opposes this type of succession to the “pure” succession which is associated with duration. The latter is characterised by simultaneous succession, where the

¹² “Thinking the passage of time, sympathizing with this passage, is precisely to free oneself up from what is, from what attaches us to beings or to nothingness. Correlatively, it is the reason why one would search in vain in Bergson for a definition of the past as what no longer *is*, or the future as what *is* not yet, even though he sometimes expresses himself in this way” (Lapoujade 2018, 14-15). Italics in original. Lapoujade here suggests that duration - and the nonlinear logic it engenders - dissolves the perception of self as a being, as made of substance, which Lapoujade replaces with a sense of movement as vibration.

anterior and posterior exist in the same moment. It is not delineated by space and is pure intensity. The succession functions through self-organisation, which, like the states of pure duration to which it pertains, Bergson assumes but cannot prove or explain (Bergson 2001 101-103).

In a word, pure duration might well be nothing but a succession of qualitative changes, which melt into and permeate one another, without precise outlines, without any tendency to externalize themselves in relation to one another, without any affiliation with number: it would be pure heterogeneity. (Bergson 2001, 104)

Duration for Bergson, therefore, is directly opposed to the concept of chronological time, the former consists of pure heterogeneity, the latter of pure homogeneity. The former is pure intensity and wholly qualitative, the latter pure extensity and quantitative.

[To get] the image of pure duration; ... I shall have entirely got rid of the idea of a homogeneous medium or a measurable quantity. By carefully examining our consciousness we shall recognize that it proceeds in this way whenever it refrains from representing duration symbolically. (Bergson 2001, 105)

Consciousness, continuously exposed to new experiences, will continually change. As stated in the first chapter of the *Essai*, psychic states only occur once, and we only think we experience the same emotion multiple times because the external causes resemble one another or might even be the same.

But we find it extraordinarily difficult to think of duration in its original purity; this is due, no doubt, to the fact that we do not *endure* alone, external objects, it seems,

endure as we do, and time, regarded from this point of view, has every appearance of a homogeneous medium.¹³ (Bergson 2001, 106-107)

This is probably exacerbated by the perceptions of movement by our senses and by the fact that science uses chronological time because it is quantifiable. This is irreconcilable with duration, which is nothing but the melting together of conscious states, which gradually grow the ego (Bergson 2001, 107). This leads Bergson to the problematic conclusion that succession, i.e. temporal progress, only exists within the psychic states of the individual, whereas the extended, objective world exists as simultaneous, distinguishable things and events (Bergson 2001, 108). He does state that there is some interchange between the two; though this only serves to grant the illusion of homogeneous, chronological time to our psychic states, giving space its fourth dimension: temporality. It also gives the illusion of movement to extension, whereas in actuality, according to Bergson, it is merely the setting side by side of simultaneous positions of a particular object (Bergson 2001, 109-110).

There is a real space, without duration, in which phenomena appear and disappear simultaneously with our states of consciousness. There is real duration, the heterogeneous moments of which permeate one another; each moment, however, can be brought into relation with a state of the external world which is contemporaneous with it, and can be separated from the other moments in consequences of this very process. (Bergson 2001, 110; cf. Bergson 2001, 115)

¹³ Italics in original. Bergson deliberately uses the word *seems* here, for in the final chapter of *Time and Free Will*, he states that matter in the external world has no duration and therefore does not endure. He seems to imply that the world dematerialises and rematerialises from one moment to the next, though he does not have an explanation for why this would occur or how this would work. He merely states that the sense of external duration must derive from our own internal duration (Bergson 2001, 100; cf. 209-210; cf. 227).

Bergson doubles down on this idea that space and duration are mutually irreconcilable by stating that when we think we experience motion, we actually experience the process of motion in duration in our psychic states, which we connect to successive but static positions of the apparently moving body in space. We attribute to motion the divisibility of space, forgetting that an action, as a process, is indivisible. At the same time, we accustom ourselves to projecting the quality of duration of this act into space, creating a line of succession (Bergson 2001, 110-112). This is the way science portrays motion, as an arc of stationary points. Science is chiefly concerned with extension and as such cannot account for movement or duration (Bergson 2001, 115-120). Nevertheless, we have a persistent perception of motion, despite the fact that succession is only attainable for internal, psychic states. This is because, according to Bergson, the reflective consciousness externalises the duration of immediate perception into external, extended events, which bind the past and the present together; it creates the perception of radical differentiation under a homogeneous time. Hence, Bergson implies here that consciousness is pivotal in the interchange between duration and space, the internal and external.

This leads Bergson to reiterate that there are two conceptions of multiplicity, two different ways of distinguishing between same and other; quantitative, discrete multiplicity and qualitative, confused multiplicity. The latter, based on extreme heterogeneity, “makes a qualitative discrimination without any further thought of counting the qualities or even of distinguishing them as *several*” (Bergson 2001, 121).¹⁴ It is a multiplicity without quantity. Unfortunately, we generally conflate the two types of multiplicity, as language predisposes us to link duration to its spatial expression. Therefore, it feels natural to use words that express quantitative multiplicity to express the qualitative multiplicity of psychic states. Though, it is difficult to verbally express the existence and nature of the confused multiplicity of psychic states, we can only conceive of both types through each other. Our immediate experience is expressed in qualitative impressions, which our

¹⁴ Italics in original.

reflective consciousness symbolically translates into quantitative impressions (Bergson 2001, 122-123). Thus, our consciousness connects the internal and external, despite Bergson's insistence elsewhere that the two are irreconcilable. Bergson holds the tendency to symbolically represent the qualitative nature of the immediate data by our consciousness responsible for the persistent perception of time as a homogeneous medium. It is also responsible for the "double aspect" that each term takes on for our intellect: that each term is both generic, in the sense that it is recognisable as one in a series, and particular, in the sense that it has at least one characteristic that is unique to it, which sets it apart. The notion that things are unique and generic simultaneously here seems to function as the link between the quantitative and the qualitative. The concept of motion is central to this, as it seems to substantiate the notion that space can change over time. It exacerbates the tendency to translate duration into space, that is to say to confuse duration with chronological time (Bergson 2001, 124).

The concept of duration that emerges from the second chapter of *Time and Free Will* is both intriguing and problematic. It is interesting because it is characterised by a sense of interconnectedness, a (con)fusion of parts and whole. And because it is based on a qualitative concept of intensity, it posits that each instance of duration is unique, irreducible to the generic. As such it could provide an avenue to explore anti-essentialist understanding of the world. Yet, the division between intensity and extensity immediately prohibits the possibility of the world itself partaking in duration. However, in the *Essai*, matter, which constitutes the world outside of the psyche, is precluded from duration. As such the notion of duration emerging from *Time and Free Will* is exceedingly narrow, pertaining only to the psychic states of the individual. The embodiment of the psyche ensures that there is a bridge between the external and the internal world, though Bergson never overtly states how this impacts the duration/space duality. For it is through the body, in particular the senses, that we are able to engage with the world around us. It is not surprising that Bergson is silent on this matter, as it undermines the distinction between duration and space. Yet this remains problematic. And though Bergson tries in his later works to lessen

the distinction, in particular in *Creative Evolution*, which will be discussed below, he must maintain it to some extent, otherwise the concept of duration itself would collapse. But, because duration is based in pure quality totally divorced from extension, it is infelicitously doomed to remain in a subliminal state, present in the immediate data of consciousness but irreconcilable to conscious understanding of it. As such, duration itself also must be taken as gospel, without any evidence, based on a vague feeling that duration is a more adequate expression of time than chrono-time.

Dynamism: Duration as Irreversible

Once Bergson has established the notion of duration being opposed to space and distinct from chronological time, he uses it as a basis for his own particular understanding of freedom, which is understood as the expression of the true self as shall be briefly discussed below. Nevertheless in developing his notion of freedom, Bergson further reveals aspects of duration which are of interest, in particular the notion of dynamic directionality and irreversibility, and the rejection of efficient causality it engenders.¹⁵ Dynamic directionality emerges in Bergson's work through a comparison between two opposing "systems of nature" which are central to the question of free will: dynamism and mechanism.

The most important difference between the two systems resides in the understanding each holds of the relationship between natural laws and the facts to which they pertain. Dynamic systems presume that facts often elude the rule of law, facts determine reality, which can only sometimes be captured symbolically through laws. Whereas mechanism postulates that all facts are determined by the laws that have bearing on it, thus reality is determined by the laws that govern it. But Bergson tries to strip these definitions back further by arguing that essentially, at the centre of this question, the two hold a different notion of simplicity. Determinism finds those

¹⁵ The new concept of duration is not only destined to resolve a theoretical problem that the partisans of freewill and determinism do not manage to pose; it is duration that effectively makes us free" (Lapoujade 2018, 6).

things which are easy to foresee and calculate to be simple, that is to say the homogeneous is simpler than the heterogeneous. Dynamism counters that it is not about the arrangement of the notions into a clear order, but that simple is that which characterises their real relationship. That is to say, what seems simple is often the result of a complex interplay of forces. Stasis is often seen as the stalemate between several (groups of) forces, whereas spontaneity can be activity in absence of opposition. What is more, from that point of view, there cannot be stasis without action. Dynamism is therefore predisposed to regarding movement as simpler than stasis, in direct opposition to determinism (Bergson 2001, 140-141).

Dynamism also opposes the concept of mechanism, which is often connected to determinism. Mechanism argues that the world obeys natural laws, which decree that the heap of matter of which it consists is divided into clearly distinct particles whose movements and interactions can be experienced by us in a variety of affective sensations. These sensations are transmitted onto the molecules in the brain, which alters the state of the brain. Similarly, the molecular moments of the brain matter can result in extended bodily action. Thus, mechanism regards psychological effects as the result of material movements. This is known as mechanistic humanism (Guerlac 2006, 23-26). All actions are the result of external factors, which obey natural laws, rendering the actions of all material things theoretically calculable if all variables of all actions taking place are known (Bergson 2001, 143-144). Yet, because Bergson disputes a strict correspondence between extension and intensity, laws pertaining to materiality cannot determine psychic states. In general, there is no proof of correspondence, and the few exceptions, such as reflexes, are not determined by psychic states and as such subject to a certain sense of determinism in the first place (Bergson 2001, 147-148).

This is the stepping stone to a more important critique that determinism and the system of natural law it assumes are predicated on the idea that all actions are reversible. This is incompatible with duration (Bergson 2001, 150). The system of natural laws is a-temporal: because it posits that all actions are reversible, they exist outside of time, for they cannot retain

traces of the past if they can return to their former states. As such, the system can only apply to inert matter, which Bergson thinks cannot endure, as it is pure quantity and therefore lacks the quality necessary to partake in duration. Of course, psychic states render human life subject to duration, which is irreversible; this corresponds to our common sense experience, as we feel changed by our history. When we apply the system of natural laws to psychic states it confuses duration with chronological time. The former requires change, whereas the latter could support reversibility (Bergson 2001, 152-155). This is another instance where Bergson posits a radical difference between matter and the psychic states of the individual. His argument that humans forever retain the traces of their past experiences corroborates our common sense. However, as I will discuss in the section on the self, the precise way in which Bergson envisions the retention and impact of the past on the present is more contentious. For now, it is important to point out that the notion that matter cannot retain traces of its past is illogical; a plot of arable land, for example, changes significantly based on the vegetation it has previously sustained. Different types of plants require different nutrients and will extract this from the soil. Though there are ways to restore nutrients to the soil, it is questionable that it would ever contain the exact same ratios of nutrients again. Hence, practically, it seems preposterous that the logic that governs the material world engenders complete reversibility.¹⁶

Simultaneously, Bergson's insistence on the irreversibility of duration partially derives from the idea that any psychic state is unique as it includes the cumulation of all the psychic states that went before it. Together these two notions ensure that Bergson rejects efficient causality in favour of dynamism. Efficient causality, or the law of causality as Bergson calls it, promulgates that the same causes always lead to the same effects (Bergson 2001, 199). This law cannot apply to duration for Bergson, as it is impossible for the same circumstances to occur twice. He states:

¹⁶ Bergson does ameliorate this in *Creative Evolution* by arguing that duration and extension are each other's inverse and as such stand in relation to and can affect each other.

Now, if duration is what we say, deep-seated psychic states are radically heterogeneous to each other, and it is impossible that any two of them should be quite alike, since they are two different moments of a life-story.¹⁷ ... [though the external object does not always bear the marks of change despite passage of time,] duration is something real for the consciousness which preserves the trace of it, and we cannot here speak of identical conditions, because the same moment does not occur twice. ... even the simplest psychic elements possess a personality and a life of their own, however superficial they may be; they are in a constant state of becoming, and the same feeling, by the mere fact of being repeated, is a new feeling. (Bergson 2001, 199-200)

We are tempted to call it the same feeling, either because our analysis, which is the result of the reflective consciousness and as such has been refracted and stripped of its individuality, recognises the two emotions as the same; or, because our external projection of the emotion creates similar actions and attitudes (Bergson 2001, 200). For Bergson this is another instance in which chrono-time gets mistaken for duration. Consequently, the material logic associated with it is applied to intensity. Duration is predicated on radical heterogeneity, which ensures that it is always unique. Chrono-time is spatial, dominated by the homogeneous, which makes it possible to assume that the same events can recur.

¹⁷ The use of the phrase life-story here is problematic in the context of contemporary philosophy, because it seems to imply the understanding of the self as a narrative identity, which I think Bergson would dispute. I disagree here with Muldoon, who juxtaposes Bergson's philosophy with Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur. Muldoon argues that Bergson's problematic relationship inhibits his capacity to create a sense of self. "Bergson failed to see that the human subject is only able to orient and understand itself in the confused world of lived experience through the medium of language. He further failed to grasp that the formation of human awareness about anything, from the physical to the metaphysical depends on a certain metaphorical economy in language" (Muldoon 2006, 106). However, I disagree, Bergson shows awareness of the pivotal role of language in his assertion that it has a mainly social function. The problem in Bergson is that he thereby separates duration from communication.

Moreover, under the principle of efficient causality, a cause or a series of causes is directly responsible for a particular effect. As such, it requires that there is regular succession, one follows the other. However, psychic states, as discussed above, interpenetrate; it is impossible to separate cause from effect, the more as they do not necessarily occur in the order the principle of causality requires (Bergson 2001, 158). Causality implies that the effect is prefigured (to some extent) in the cause; it implies a presence of the effect in its cause. As such it establishes a link between the present and the future, and in order to establish itself firmly in the present it tries to approach the necessary relation of identity. Bergson states:

The principle of identity is the absolute law of our consciousness: it asserts that what is thought is thought at the moment when we think it: and what gives this principle its absolute necessity is that it does not bind the future to the present, but only the present to the present: it expresses the unshakeable confidence that consciousness feels in itself, so long as, faithful to its duty, it confines itself to declaring the apparent present state of mind. But the principle of causality, in so far as it is supposed to bind the future to the present, could never take the form of a necessary principle; for the successive moments of real time are not bound up with one another, and no effort of logic will succeed in proving that what has been will be or will continue to be, that the same antecedents will always give rise to identical consequences. (2001, 207-208)

The principle of identity, as formulated above, expresses the belief that the ability to feel the temporal flow, to become aware or perhaps even a part of duration, is to be fully immersed in the present (Guerlac 2006, 91). Identity can become identified with the experience of the present moment, for, as shall be shown below, the deep-seated feelings can express the whole of the self (Bergson 2001, 135). However, because the principle of identity is based in duration, in order to

be intelligible, it must be transformed into a fixed, extended state, which can support a relation of logical necessity between cause and effect. In doing so we replace the heterogeneity of duration with the homogeneity of space (Bergson 2001, 208-209). Bergson then reveals the depth of his conviction that extensity and intensity are radically separate. He reiterates that individuals cannot be subject to the laws of causality “because I *change*, because I *endure*. But things apart from our perception do not seem to endure” (Bergson 2001, 209).¹⁸ He states that though the things around us, set in extensity, do not endure, we do have the sense of their continuity. The external world cannot be subject to the principle of identity, because it lacks endurance, but it has the appearance of it, thus, the law of causality must instill a sense of endurance that resembles it as closely as possible. Because of the radical distinction between extension and intensity, a law of causality which could pertain to psychic states, cannot be the same as the one that governs matter. It should reinforce the notion that duration endows the human individual with radical uniqueness at every instance, rejecting the assumed recurrence expressed in efficient causality.

Nevertheless, Bergson notes, we are apt to accept efficient causality, in particular in those instances where it is related to effort. Whenever we come up with an idea that requires effort to come into being, we identify a relation of causality. Yet, this is not a relation of “necessary determination”, for any effort can either succeed or fail. It involves a series of mental and physical processes that are so closely connected that they are hard to distinguish and are lumped together in the category of “effort”. All blur into one; sustaining the feeling that the future is prefigured in the present. Even though the prefigured future is merely a possibility, not a certainty or necessity (Bergson 2001, 211). However, in order to connect the idea of the effort with the extended action, we transfer some of the qualitative properties of the idea to the extended object, endowing matter with a certain sense of quality. It gives the world a sense of inner impulse or effort that does not quite match the human will, but is similar to it. This will can be turned into a sense of determinism

¹⁸ Italics in original.

if it is seen to endow the world with a sense of pre-established harmony which ensures that things will - necessarily - work out in a certain way (Bergson 2001, 213-214).

In other words, the dynamic conception of the causal relation ascribes to things a duration absolutely like our own, whatever may be the nature of this duration; to picture in this way the relation of cause to effect is to assume that the future is not more closely bound up with the present in the external world than it is in our own inner life. (Bergson 2001, 214-215)

Thus, Bergson identifies two types of causality that involve opposing notions of duration; either the internal and external world endure in the same way, partake of the same duration bound together through effort, which binds the present to the future. Or the inner world experiences duration, whereas the outer world does not and as such is subject to mathematical abstraction and prediction (Bergson 2001, 215). Yet, despite this contradiction the two concepts of causality are generally taken together, because the former is “more flattering to our imagination and the other is more favourable to mathematical reasoning” (Bergson 2001, 216). The result is the idea that effort is not understood as the result of spontaneous movement, but as mechanically determined force that is directed with necessity of natural law.

The Two Aspects of the Self

Up to this point I have set out Bergson's interpretation of nonlinearity through his theory of duration. This is necessary to be able to understand Bergson's conceptualisation of self as duration is central to it, and, in the concept of self that emerges from *Time and Free Will*, there is a strong duality that results from the oppositions that establish Bergson's concept of duration. In particular the changes to the understanding of the psychic states, the change from a discrete to a confused multiplicity as well as the separation of the psychic states from extension, alter the

way the self can be understood. Bergson sets his understanding of the self against the backdrop of the self determined by distinct psychic states. Our common sense experience is that psychic states change from one to the other for simple reasons, generally because the first has caused the second. However, Bergson parries that the sequences of feelings bound together by simple reasons are no more than *ex post facto* rationalisations. It is our reflective consciousness trying to make sense of new feelings and ideas; thus, we associate them with previous ones. Moreover, Bergson states, it is difficult to defend the idea that all action is wholly determined by its motive, or that our conscious states completely determine one another. For example, sometimes, what we perceive as the effect actually precedes the cause, or the psychic states may relate to each other in ways that transcend the laws of associationism, meaning that they cannot be associated on the basis of contiguity or logic (Bergson 2001, 156-158; 136). But the main problem with this understanding of the psyche is the flawed conception of self on which they are predicated. It understands the self as “a collection of psychic states, the strongest of which exerts a prevailing influence and carries the others with it. This doctrine thus sharply distinguishes co-existing psychic phenomena from one another” (Bergson 2001, 159). It applies the logic of quantity to qualitative phenomena. The different states experienced by the self can be easily distinguished and named; it is even possible to identify separate and competing parts of the self. It is almost as if the emotions have a life of their own, independent of the individual. This conception of self is predominant in most philosophy and science. Yet, this understanding of the self mainly reflects the inability of linguistic structures to express the delicate interconnection of psychic states (Bergson 2001, 159-160). Associationism considers an idea or emotion to be the same in essence, its character is unchanged, and it is only the relation of association it has to other factors, for example ends and means, that adds extra layers to it. For example, there is an essence to the emotion of anger, and the way in which it manifests is circumstantial. However, Bergson argues that these relations change the quality of the psychic states themselves, which associationism overlooks. He states:

The mistake of associationism is that it first did away with the qualitative element in the act to be performed and retained only the geometrical and impersonal element:¹⁹ with the idea of this act, thus rendered colourless, it was then necessary to associate some specific difference to distinguish it from many other acts. (Bergson 2001, 161)

This quote reveals that associationism not only uses the method of sequential storytelling to rationalise or explain the actions of the self, but also finds it necessary to rescue a person's actions from becoming utterly generic and indistinguishable from other events. The sequence is not an expression of the experience as the immediate data of consciousness have delivered it to us, but the result of analysis by the reflective consciousness; an almost external analysis of the psyche. It is the projection into space (or chronological time) through the refraction of a confused multiplicity into a discrete multiplicity in order for the reflective consciousness to process the experience. It is the process of formulating a symbolic representation of our states of consciousness; often in verbal form (Bergson 2001, 161-163).

He argues that the artificial separation of states through the refraction into a discrete multiplicity requires us to later reunite them in an equally artificial way in order to preserve the "unity" they form. The bond is furnished through the assumption of a particular concept of self:

a formless *ego*, indifferent and unchangeable, on which it threads the psychic states which it has set up as independent entities. Instead of a flux of fleeting shades merging into each other, it perceives distinct and so to speak, *solid* colors,

¹⁹ That is to say, the positioning of a movement as a result of the intention to move and the goal or method, which can be described in language and clearly distinguished from one another, which makes them impersonal.

set side by side like the beads of a necklace; it must perform then suppose a thread, also itself solid, to hold the beads together. (Bergson 1944, 5-6)

Yet, this thread, the ego itself, in its unchangeable solidity, cannot contain any characteristics of its own. It is an empty backdrop that forms a constant contrast for the psychic states, on which they cannot leave a lasting impression. The substratum is merely a symbol, meant to support the fiction of discrete conscious states, but has no reality in and of itself. It is merely the imaginary constancy that replaces the unfolding continuity of psychic states in an eternal state of becoming (Bergson 1944, 6).

If our existence were composed of separate states with an impassive ego to unite them, for us there would be no duration. For an ego which does not change does not *endure*, and a psychic state which remains the same so long as it is not replaced by the following state does not *endure* either. (Bergson 1944, 6)

Bergson thus argues that traditional understandings of the self suppose it to be an empty homogeneous medium, like space, which can be filled with clearly defined character traits, which the self can assume, without altering the basic nature of the self.

Against this he proposes a concept of self steeped in duration, which is always unique and ever changing, without its interpenetrating states ever passing away into nothing. Because Bergson rejects the self as constituted through reflective consciousness, he proposes a different conception of the self based on the interrelation of mental states in duration. In *Time and Free Will*, the strict opposition between the intensive quality of the mental states and the quantity of extension needs to be bridged by the self, which is embodied and as such must mediate this divide. In order to create this link, he treats the individual as two halves that unite into one. One half is immersed in duration, the other provides the connection between intensity and extensity,

which is located on the surface of individual consciousness in the form of the superficial self. He states that “superficial psychic life” is characterised by sensations which retain some of the externality of their objective causes. As a result, it is easier to translate these surface emotions into extended symbols. The superficial ego functions as a bridge between the external world and the states of pure intensity. The latter reside in

the deep-seated self, which ponders and decides, which heats and blazes up, [it] is a self whose states and changes permeate one another and undergo a deep alteration as soon as we separate them from one another in order to set them out in space. But as this deeper self forms one and the same person with the superficial ego, the two seem to *endure* in the same way. (Bergson 2001, 125-126; cf. Bergson 2001, 128)

Bergson, this quote indicates, considers the self to consist of connected layers which are more or less influenced by extensity. Their connection ensures that they are characterised by one single thrust of duration, which makes them into a single individual.²⁰ Though it is interesting that even here Bergson cannot give up on separating extension and intensity, saying that the superficial and the deep self only *seem* to endure in the same way. Having established a sense of separation through the deep and superficial layers of the self, Bergson then argues that the dominance of the superficial self has important ramifications. The recurring interaction with phenomena in the objective world allows the logic of externality to dominate the psychic states. It results in the

²⁰ Grosz emphasises the fact that it is the qualitative nature of the deep self that ensures the continuity of the “self” over time: “Qualitative differences are internal differences, differences constitutive of the particularity of events: differences in kind always immerse themselves and are invested in the movement of duration itself, which is that very movement of differing from itself, the movement that ensures that nothing retains absolute self-identity over time, even if it may ... retain a measure of self-resemblance and cohesion” (Grosz 2004, 159).

misconception that the self consists of separable psychic states. That is to say, that the psychic states become understood as

parts external to one another, the moments which are thus determined determine in their turn distinct segments in the dynamic and undivided progress of our more personal conscious states. Thus, the mutual externality which material objects gain from their juxtaposition in homogeneous space reverberates and spreads into the depths of consciousness: little by little our sensations are distinguished from one another like the external causes which gave rise to them, and our feelings or ideas come to be separated like the sensations with which they are contemporaneous. (Bergson 2001, 126)

What Bergson attempts to show here is the logic through which the extended comes to colonise the inner psychic states, until it becomes unexceptional to consider psychic states as mutually external feelings that can be clearly distinguished and categorised. In other words, he shows “the gradual incursion of space into the domain of pure consciousness” (Bergson 2001, 126). This incursion also further accounts for our substitution of duration with chronological time. One of the few times that we experience true duration under these conditions is in dreams, where we are unconcerned with quantity, and instead the immediate experience dominates, steeping us in qualitative sensations. In a similar way, we can lose track of chronological time when we are preoccupied in any fashion, enhancing the durational aspect of the experience; we are no longer preoccupied with the measurability and passage of time, too focused on other matters (Bergson 2001, 126-127). On average, however, we are not inclined to try to root ourselves in duration, preferring the chronological time of the superficial self to the pure self:

we are generally content ... with the shadow of the self projected into homogeneous space. Consciousness, goaded by an insatiable desire to separate, substitutes the symbol for the reality, or perceives the reality only through the symbol. (Bergson 2001, 128)

Why would we satisfy ourselves with merely the representation of the real, rather than try to connect to our deeper self? Bergson suggests that the superficial self is much better suited to “the requirements of social life in general and language in particular” (Bergson 2001, 128). Though the deeper self might provide us with a more intense and immediate experience, it seems to require a certain detachment or self-containment that is unsuited to socialising. Both examples of durational experiences emerging from a consciousness dominated by the logic of chronological time, dreams and preoccupation, are hardly conducive to social interaction. This is why we choose to “gradually lose sight of the fundamental self” (Bergson 2001, 128).

How could we then be rid of the dominance of chronological time, so as to once again get reacquainted with our more fundamental selves? Bergson states that it is necessary to engage in

a vigorous effort of analysis ... , which will isolate the fluid inner stages from their image, first refracted and then solidified in homogeneous space. In other words, our perceptions, sensations, emotions and ideas occur under two aspects: the one clear and precise, but impersonal; the other confused, ever changing, and inexpressible, because language cannot get hold of it without arresting its mobility or fit it into its common-place forms without making it into public property. (Bergson 2001, 129)

Ultimately, what Bergson is trying to convey is that we can tap into either the aspect of any psychic state that is characterised by quantity and discrete multiplicity, the state in which our reflective

consciousness projects it; or the aspect that is suffused by quality and confused multiplicity, the state in which it is initially produced. However, adopting the latter as the preferred *modus operandi* is quite difficult, as we are inclined to consolidate our impressions to be able to express them in language. In doing so, we replace the feeling, which is transient, always in a process of becoming, with a permanent object, in particular in the form of the word which expresses this object. It arrests the mobility of duration, pretending it is in stasis (Bergson 2001, 130). Language abstracts variability out of experience. When we use a particular word to describe multiple sensations, we engage in the illusion that the feeling we experience is the same both times. The homogeneity of space and the communicable requirements of language depersonalise the hyper-personal, heterogeneous and interlaced individual experience in order to fit their homogeneous and generic media.

Associationism thus makes the mistake of constantly replacing the concrete phenomenon which takes place in the mind by the artificial reconstruction of it given by philosophy, and thus confusing the explanation of the fact with the fact itself. (Bergson 2001, 163)

Moreover, we fix the sensation into an object by naming it, thereby obscuring the fact that it is not an object at all but part of an ongoing process, which cannot be captured. By trying to express inner states through language, we alter their nature. This is problematic. Bergson states:

This influence of language on sensation is deeper than originally thought. Not only does language make us believe in the unchangeableness of our sensations, but it will sometimes deceive us as to the nature of the sensation felt. (2001, 131)

Words are inherently generic and impersonal, as they are supposed to apply to a multitude of “objects” in a variety of situations. This is necessary for vocabulary to be useful and functional. If we made up unique words that could only be used once, we would not be able to speak to one another, but would just be making noises that no one else could understand. However, that does mean that words cannot capture the unique nature of the sensation we are experiencing; let alone the feeling’s transience or the process in which it participates. Thus, in relation to duration, language is problematic, though it serves a wider purpose in socialisation. Nevertheless, as a proponent of duration, Bergson displays a generally dismissive attitude towards language.

But it is not just the requirements of social interaction which incline us to fix the data of our immediate consciousness through language and extensity. A second motivation is provided by the sheer intensity and “quantity” of the feelings and emotions that assault us at any given moment. In particular “violent” feelings, which suffuse the whole of the deeper self and dissolve and permeate one another and the “numerous” simpler psychic states present, can be overwhelming to the psyche (Bergson 2001, 132). When we name and analyse a feeling, distorting it rather than allowing it to remain fluid and complex,

we have really replaced it by a juxtaposition of lifeless states which can be translated into words, and each of which constitutes the common element, the impersonal residue, of the impressions felt in a given case by the whole of society.
(Bergson 2001, 133)

Despite this sacrifice of the true nature of a feeling, we are tempted to reduce it from its state in pure duration to the of simplified, chronological time, because of its convenience to us and to its role in communication.

Nevertheless, we can still appreciate it when art is able to suggest to us the deeper feelings, stripping away the simplification for the “infinite permeation of a thousand different

impressions” (Bergson 2001, 133). Bergson uses the metaphor of graceful dancing as an example of the expression of pure quality. The movements seamlessly flow into one another as if the second is already comprised in the first. In its expression of regularity and emotion it is able to establish a form of communication, it evokes a sense of mobile sympathy; though it often contains a message that is difficult to capture in words (Bergson 2001, 12-13). Art of any form is a deliberate act designed

to put to sleep the active or rather resistant powers of our personality, and thus to bring us into a state of perfect responsiveness, in which we realize the idea that is suggested to us and sympathize with the feeling that is expressed. (Bergson 2001, 14)

Bergson argues that art does not derive its power to affect our emotions from nature, as is often presumed, for “nature confines itself to expressing feelings, whereas ... [art] suggests them to us” (Bergson 2001, 15). Bergson’s conscious use of suggestion, rather than implying a direct cause, could be seen to denote a separation between the extended art “object” and the intensity of the pure state it suggests.²¹ Bergson further notes that the suggestion can be taken up in varying degrees, which results in differing kinds of psychic state in our consciousness.

Sometimes the feeling which is suggested scarcely makes a break in the compact texture of psychic phenomena of which our history consists; sometimes it draws our attention from them, but not so that they become lost to sight; sometimes,

²¹ Moreover, the open-ended nature of the meaning of the word “suggestion” also fits in well with the wide variety of emotions which can be associated with works of art and the various ways in which they can affect people.

finally, it puts itself in their place, engrosses us and completely monopolizes our soul. (Bergson 2001, 17)

Whether a suggestion is taken up, however, is not a matter of the degree to which an emotion is present (its quantity), but of kind (its quality) (Bergson 2001, 17). Whether a work of art moves us thus depends in large part on the psychological states in our consciousness at the moment we engage with it. It depends on the way in which the emotions already present within our psyche at the time, determined by our past experience, are affected by it. Art fills an important function for Bergson as it is an attempt to communicate the incommunicable, the unique emotions and feelings of the artist in spite of the fact that one could only understand his exact state of mind if one had lived his life and experienced it along with the artist. In a way, Bergson states, the artist tries to break down the barrier imposed by time and space between his consciousness and our own (Bergson 2001, 18). As such, art is an important bridge for Bergson between extension and duration; it increases our capacity to experience duration. Through art, it is possible to experience a connection to the deeper self, to experience the transience and interpenetration of emotions, for the experience of the same work of art will differ every time. However, though art, even verbal art, can suggest psychic states to us, we cannot capture it without devolving it to its reduced state under the guise of space. Nor should we try to fabricate intensity out of extensity; whenever we try, we will “fall into the mistakes of associationism” (Bergson 2001, 134). Thus, Bergson, of necessity working in a verbal medium, will never be able to express the true nature of duration or of the deep psychic states and the deep self that are imbued with it. Therefore, he can never do more than give us a glimpse at the shadow of what he considers true emotion. Even, the communication of art is untranslatable into words or conscious thought. Here, once again, Bergson requires a leap of faith, because the pure, or “true” self is steeped in duration, in intensity, he cannot demonstrate its existence. We must believe that there is a deeper consciousness, beyond the verbal consciousness we are familiar with in everyday life.

It is problematic that the true self is expressed in feelings that are impossible to access rationally. Yet, according to Bergson they do express themselves in the decisions that we make based on intuition. Rather than as an intuitive expression of rational logic, which is often applied *ex post facto* to explain our actions, intuition should be understood, according to Bergson, as the result of an accord with the deep-seated feelings that permeate our psyche, having interlaced with a vast “amount” of the psychic states present. Because they are the result of a dominant “pure” emotion of intensity, it is often the most difficult to explain the decisions we take most decisively. It is these decisions which reflect our deepest, “true” self. The feelings and emotions at the core of the “true” self both affect and are affected by everything with which they come into contact, “an idea which is truly ours fills the whole of the self” (Bergson 2001, 135). Yet, this only pertains to few of our ideas, the majority remain floating on the surface, without ever becoming incorporated into the depths of our psychic states. The surface ideas are often closest to externality and never become part of our “true” selves.

If, in proportion as we get away from the deeper strata of the self, our conscious states tend more and more to assume the form of a numerical multiplicity, and to spread out in a homogeneous space, it is just because these conscious states tend to become more and more lifeless, more and more impersonal. Hence, we need not be surprised if only those ideas which least belong to us can be adequately expressed in words. (Bergson 2001, 136)

These surface ideas most easily correspond to words, as they reflect little of the complex interlacing of our innermost thoughts. Hence, the “true” self rarely breaks through to the surface populated by superficial ideas to express itself, that is to say, the superficial self dominates the “true” self. This is particularly problematic for two reasons. The first is that it is difficult to determine the motive behind acts - whether it was a rational decision or an intuitive act - and hence whether

an act is the result of the “true” or the superficial self. As Bergson himself argues, we misunderstand causality, which is much more complex and interwoven than we imagine. As such, it might be difficult to determine after the fact which acts actually express our true self and which are guided by reflective consciousness as our perception of all acts is subjected to rationalisation. The second problem arises from the fact that Bergson considers only those - intuitive - acts that express the true self as expressions of free will. Free acts, which are “outward manifestation[s] of ... inner state[s]”, always express the self in its entirety²² (Bergson 2001, 165-166). That is to say, they express the full accumulation of all the psychic states the self has experienced in the past. However, even those who are able to propel the whole of the self into expression through action do not necessarily gain this capacity in perpetuity. It depends on the suspension of rationalisation in favour of, what he will call in *Creative Evolution* intuition. It is possible to create a pattern of intuitive, free act, but it requires a continued defiance of the dominant paradigm of rational thought as the basis for action (Bergson 2001, 170). Moreover, only few are ever able to cultivate a self that is completely integrated, as generally the surface is inconsonant with the “true” self, which prohibits the individual from acting freely.²³ Hence, it is extremely problematic that the majority of us are dominated by the surface self.²⁴

²² “It is only in and by duration that one experiences its freedom, just as one ceases to be free when one lives in submission to logics without temporality [i.e. linear logics] ... Similarly, it is by insertion into duration that one makes the “fundamental self” live again” (Lapoujade 2018, 6).

²³ This is very similar to Nietzsche’s interpretation of “giving style to character” of which only an elevated few are capable, which I have explored at length in the previous chapter.

²⁴ Lapoujade notes a further complication in the exercise of freedom in Bergson. He argues that the source of the power that allows the deeper self to burst through to the surface is unexplained by Bergson. He shows that Bergson, at several points suggests that it requires a significant accumulation of “spiritual energy”, but that this energy cannot be ascribed to the *élan vital*, because it would function, as I will argue below it does in more ways in relation to the self, as a *deus ex machina*. Instead it must be understood as the result of the force of memory, as that is the source of spiritual energy. But it does not correspond to the two notions of memory, Bergson proposes in *Matter and Memory* (1988). Lapoujade suggests that it could be resolved through the addition of a new type of memory, which is added to the ontological, inactive contraction-memory and the active psychological recollection-memory; the memory of the future (Lapoujade 2018, 10-12). “Parallel to the past that is always already past of recollection-memory, parallel to the incessant becoming present of contraction-memory, there is in the depths still another present that does not pass - and that doesn’t stop growing because it accumulates energy, this energy that Bergson calls “spiritual” and that is still so difficult to understand. It is a spirit-memory. ... It is the memory of what we are and what we have never stopped being, even if we have no knowledge of it. It is what provides the

Thus, for Bergson, the self is split in two: “conscious life displays two aspects according as we perceive it directly or by refraction through space” (Bergson 2001, 137) with the former corresponding to deep states of pure quality, which exist in a confused multiplicity and cannot be examined without changing their nature. The latter is quantitative and is directly linked to the notion of space as a homogeneous medium. He further argues that we would always be tempted to translate our experiences in duration into chronological time, as it simplifies their complexity to make them more manageable. Moreover, it allows us to communicate and socialise. The strength of a society corresponds to the extent to which we have become accustomed to externalising our thoughts and emotions. The stronger the society, the less we are able to experience duration rather than the representation of emotions as set against the backdrop of time as a homogeneous medium. As a result, individuals produce a second, superficial self, which obscures the deeper self. The superficial self is understood to obey the logic of extension; its emotions seem separate and are thought to be articulable through the medium of words. As such, the superficial, refracted self is better suited to respond to the requirements of society. Nevertheless, this second self can only exist tethered to the deeper self, which it masks. Therefore, we cannot know the whole of ourselves without exploring the deeper self.

Ultimately, Bergson’s dualities, which furnish the structure of his argument in *Time and Free Will* and give rise to his concept of duration, also deeply influence his conceptualisation of the self. It is in the concept of the self that the first attempt at reconciling the opposition between extensity and intensity is presented. Intriguingly, it is through the supposition that there is one element in the world that can operate both in duration and in space; consciousness is the locus

figure for time, which opens or closes the future. ... [I]t is a matter here of something that has been present, that has been sense, but that has not been acted, something that thus keeps itself in reserve” (Lapoujade 2018, 12-13). It is notable however, that this too comes across as inaccessible, it is an untapped source, exactly by virtue of the fact that we have been unable to translate it into action. However, for Lapoujade, the durational emotion of vibration is correlated with the discrete emotions of the surface self. They each depend on a different idea of emotion, in the way that qualitative and quantitative numbers depend on different but related conceptualisations of number. “The free act is the integral of the whole history of the person - the integral of its sentiments, its thoughts and its aspirations” (Lapoujade 2018, 29).

of two types of self that express these opposing tendencies. Though it is important to note that the organisation of this connection is not examined or explained. Or, alternatively, there are two different types of consciousness that are not actually the same “substance”; but in that case their connection into a single human as well as their exchange of information would problematise exponentially. Bergson merely states that the various strata are connected, but because this is ambiguous, the nature of this connection is obscure. It is similarly unclear how many strata there are and whether there is a sense of a continuum, where strata can express a nearly infinite variation in distributions of intensity and extensity, or whether the strata are dominated by one. Extrapolating from Bergson’s discussion of the way reflective consciousness and language refract the emotions of the “true” self to become intelligible to the superficial self, it appears that there must be a radical break, there does not seem to be space in the theory put forward in *Time and Free Will* for thoughts and emotions that are somewhat refracted. Either one is consciously aware of an emotion, but then that emotion is refracted and as such, not the “true” emotion at all, or one is infused with an emotion it cannot name and of which it is not consciously aware. Hence, Bergson creates a sense of self that is either distorted or largely inaccessible to us. As such, the self as a fractured unity is not very appealing, as either we become isolated in duration or we are cut off from our “true” self and are capable of functioning socially. Though Bergson’s adjustments to the self as a result of the rapprochement between the dualities in *Creative Evolution* makes it easier to suppose the individual as a unified self, it does not necessarily solve the problem that the most “true” self is expressed in duration, which is inaccessible to reflective consciousness and beyond the scope of language. As such, it is important to explore the ways in which Bergson adjusts his conceptualisation of duration and how this translates into a modification of his understanding of the self.

Creative Evolution

Bergson's late works suggest a dissatisfaction with the polar oppositions he establishes in *Time and Free Will*, and perhaps an awareness of their being problematic and ultimately untenable. It leaves the world split between dynamic individuals and static matter. And, as I have shown above, it even divides the individual, creating a shattered sense of self of which the most important parts - at least according to Bergson, as there would be those who would argue in favour of the capacity to function socially over such a deep-seated "true" self - are largely inaccessible to us. As a result, Bergson tries to reduce the extremity of his original position - the *Essai* was his doctoral thesis after all - to avoid some of the pitfalls and salvage the concept of duration, which is crucial to understanding motion correctly, instead of as static points strung together through the homogeneous medium of an empty chronological time that Bergson has argued is actually reducible to space.²⁵ In *Creative Evolution*, the concept of duration becomes the centre of all movement, of evolution and of very life itself. Hence, Bergson has raised the stakes involved in his attempt to salvage duration from the problematic oppositions which he used to establish it. It allows him to recant the separation between the internal duration of the individual and the extended world, while holding on to the rejection of determinism and the advocacy for - a sense of - spontaneous movement. This is embodied in the concept of *élan vital*, the impulse of life, which animates all materiality into movement. The concept of creative evolution requires an extension of the notion of duration beyond the human psyche. In order to accomplish this, he tries to roll back the strict separation between intensity and extensity through the insistence that they are actually inverse directions of the same movement. However, I will show that this is problematic, because Bergson is unable to reconcile the two opposing logical systems engendered in the two poles into a single amalgamated logical framework.

²⁵ Though I think that the binary between intensity and extensity that it helps to further validate is problematic, I do find Bergson's logical assertion that there cannot be two different, yet both completely homogeneous substances convincing.

Duration as Creative Evolution

As a result of this effort, one of the most important differences between the two accounts of duration Bergson provides in *Time and Free Will* and *Creative Evolution* is the relationship between extension and intensity that emerges from each. While the latter never formally addresses the changes it proposes in the interpretation of this relation, it is clear from the outset that it is a different understanding. By proposing a rapprochement between the two poles of the duality, Bergson is able to extend the concept of duration outside of the human individual. Yet, having painstakingly created the concept of duration on the basis of pure intensity, it depends on the continued separation of the two terms of the duality. Thus, Bergson has to balance the demands of the main innovation of *Creative Evolution*, the extension of duration beyond the human psyche, with the previously asserted understanding of duration as limited to the human psyche.

It is therefore logical that Bergson uses the certainty of human individuality in its own existence as the grounding principle to enable him to extrapolate from there about the existence of the world and its nature. He argues that we are most assured of our own existence, because we have the immediate data of our own consciousness to corroborate it, whereas of all other things and life-forms, we only have external and therefore superficial knowledge. This assertion implies a continued separation between intensive mental states and extension and continues the supposition self as composed of a “pure” deep layer and a superficial layer that is more amenable to extension. As I have discussed in detail above, the central characteristics of experience for Bergson are engendered in duration, which represents eternal becoming. This is also at the heart of Bergson’s concept of existence, granting change and evolution a pivotal role. He argues that there is absolutely no constancy, for the inner mental states are always in flux. Yet, we are generally unaware of this, for we usually approach our consciousness through the refraction taking place under contemplation and linguistic pressure, where we transform the pure

heterogeneity of psychic states into a static homogeneity and the different mental states are seen as distinctly separable. Rather than an uninterrupted stream of confused states, we impose the picture of constant, clearly defined states which succeed one another in a more or less orderly fashion. The picture that the latter forms is one of stasis interspersed with rapid changes, whereas in reality, there is ceaseless change among states which are inseparable from one another (Bergson 1944, 3-4).

This amounts to saying that there is no essential difference between passing from one state to another and persisting in the same state. If the state which “remains the same” is more varied than we think, on the other hand the passing from one state to another resembles, more than we imagine, a single state being prolonged; the transition is continuous. (Bergson 1944, 4)

The state of change is continuous, and, therefore, our perception of change from one state to another resembles more closely the perception of a “critical mass of change” that has formed already. This perception of a change-over between distinct elements hides the continuous flow of change (Bergson 1944, 4-5). This is particularly problematic, for Bergson states that it is impossible to express movement through a series of static moments. It can never be more than a pale imitation of movement and therefore of life (Bergson 1944, 6; cf. 1913, 110-115). The preference for stasis as the representation of life is born out of the requirements of logic and language, which persist at the cost of the experience of duration. However, as duration anchors our experience, there is persistent push back against the simultaneity imposed by space. In spite of its insistence on the empty substratum where only the present impression stands out, we persistently experience the past extending into the present, we experience development and change; in short, we experience concrete duration (Bergson 1944, 6).

Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances. And as the past grows without ceasing, so also there is no limit to its preservation. ... the past is preserved by itself, automatically. In its entirety probably, it follows us at every instant; all that we have felt, thought and willed from our earliest infancy is there, leaning over the present which is about to join it, pressing against the portals of consciousness that would fain leave it outside. (Bergson 1944, 7)

Every instance is a unique unfolding of events, which blends with the events and experiences that have gone before it. That is to say, for any "conscious being, to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly" (Bergson 1944, 10).

Initially Bergson appears to repeat the strict division of *Time and Free Will*. Having - again - established duration as the essence of lived experience, Bergson now turns to matter, which is once more characterised as static. But Bergson quickly mediates this division. Matter is now shown as alterable under influence of an external force. Though this is a displacement, materiality can be reduced to parts, which can be integrated into something else even while the parts themselves do not change. They stay in the same static formation; the only change is that they now become part of a different configuration of matter than that to which they belonged previously. Because the essence of the material does not change, composite parts can be assembled, destroyed and reassembled. Any "change" imposed on matter is reversible and therefore cannot truly be understood as change. However, Bergson now reveals that this is the interpretation of the world as proposed through science, which is a product of the intellect that can only express extension. As such, it can only present matter as inert, only able to follow trajectories it is propelled along. In scientific doctrines, matter cannot engage in initiation of a movement, in any form of creation, except as a passive fixture. It only features in the sense that it is being acted on by creative forces. These qualities render matter calculable, predictable, which is necessary for

scientific inquiry. However, the intellectual representation of matter is incorrect, because, Bergson now argues, even matter is subject to duration (Bergson 1944, 10-12).²⁶ The scientific method rests on the supposition of matter occurring in a closed system, which does not reflect reality. However, in order to attest that extension, which tends towards regularity, inertia and calculability, constitutes reality in conjunction with duration, Bergson argues that matter is characterised by a tendency towards isolation. Thus, the completely isolated systems of science should be understood as the exaggeration of materiality's actual tendency towards isolation, which is useful for the purpose of scientific inquiry. Yet, it is important to note that by arguing that matter is characterised by a tendency toward isolation, in conjunction with the fact that Bergson contends that therefore the intellectual disposition to differentiate between elements reflects an actual inclination in nature, the implication is that the logics of linearity have some validity. Though Bergson now clearly argues that in all scientific study the durational processes are eliminated, he does argue that science allows us to gain some sense of knowledge of the world. Hence, he does, to some extent, reaffirm the notion that matter is subject to its own logical framework.²⁷

As a result, matter is no longer considered to be completely detached from duration, thereby starting off Bergson's concerted effort to reconcile the duration/matter binary. Instead matter is understood to participate in an infinite series of ever more extensive systems that are all open, at least to some extent. Each of these open systems participates in movements, which are

²⁶ Bergson uses the example of sugar dissolving in water, which requires a "measure" of duration; Grosz notes that rhythm of dissolution creates a temporality which corresponds to one's own sense of duration evoked by the waiting period. Though the durationality of the dissolving sugar is related to our own lived duration, Bergson here clearly disposes with the idea that only a semblance of duration is created by virtue of one's own duration which is transposed onto the world (Bergson 2001, 106-110). Instead there are processes which occur within the world.

²⁷ This becomes evident in Bergson's discussion of instinct and intelligence, which express the two different types of knowledge. He tries to unite these divergent types of knowledge through intuition that partakes in aspects of both types of knowledge, but this, as I will show below, is ultimately unsatisfactory in reconciling the tensions (Bergson 1944, 149-167).

transmitted down to the smallest particle of the world in which we live the duration immanent to the whole universe.

The universe *endures*. The more we study the nature of time, the more we shall comprehend that duration means invention, the creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new. (Bergson 1944, 14)

Though only the living organisms *endure* essentially, Bergson now states that they can transmit the energy and rhythm they generate to materiality, so long as they are ultimately able to (re)integrate into one overarching Whole. This is an important departure from the strict separation in *Time and Free Will*. For, now there appears to be a natural connection between the material world determined by space and the “living” world determined by duration. Suddenly duration is not limited to the human psyche but extends to all things. In addition, Bergson uses this notion of the enduring universe to foreshadow the idea that matter and duration are related through inverse directionality, which I will discuss in more detail below.

In this Bergsonian universe, living organisms have a privileged position among other material things. The living body is central to the rapprochement between duration and space. The body consists of matter, but exceeds the limitations of materiality, as it also expresses duration and can participate in action. In its material capacity, it is subject to the same laws that govern materiality. Yet, unlike material systems, living organisms are separated from non-organic matter through their capacity for self-organisation. This creates an entity that is composed of a variety of parts that work in concert with each other. It is able to perform functions together that the separate elements would not be able to perform. It forms an individual (Bergson 1944, 14-15). However, unlike the concept of the self in *Time and Free Will* which is characterised as unique and self-contained in its duration, the idea of the individual in *Creative Evolution* is much more open and is clearly set in relation to other forms of life. Bergson states:

We shall see that individuality admits of any number of degrees, and that is not fully realized anywhere, even in man. But that is no reason for thinking that it is not a characteristic property of life. ... A perfect definition applies only to a *completed* reality; now, vital properties are never entirely realized, though always on the way to become so; they are not so much *states* as *tendencies*.²⁸ (1944, 16)

Thus, the living organism is at the intersection of duration and materiality, its need to endure is always in competition with its tendency to isolation. Bergson uses the idea that living organisms consist of competing tendencies to maintain a balance between the inverse directions of materiality and duration; both tendencies are represented as continually thwarting the other. “In particular, it may be said of individuality that, while the tendency to individuate is everywhere present in the organized world, it is everywhere opposed by the tendency toward reproduction” (Bergson 1944, 16). The tendency towards individuation here represents materiality’s tendency towards isolation, thus reproduction represents the continuity of duration. Bergson notes that this balance is often overlooked, because the scientific representation of the intellect represents individuality as pure materiality. As a result, it is perceived as subject to efficient causality, which is not applicable to the unimpeded, qualitative change of duration. Efficient causality would reduce procreation to identical repetition, whereas under the emergent causality of becoming the whole can be produced “anew”, with variation and creativity. Although the tendency to individuality generally limits this creativity, decreasing the likelihood that extreme changes, such as the reorganisation of organising systems occurs. Thus, the notion of individuality put forward here advances Bergson’s effort to reconcile duration and materiality; it is characterised by the necessity to negotiate the tension between the opposing tendencies of isolation and perpetuation, extension and intensity. However, it also sustains a tension between the intellectual logic of efficient

²⁸ Italics in original.

causality, which is applicable to the material tendency to repetition and the emergent causality that is inherent in creative processes of endurance.

Bergson then goes on to emphasise that the defining feature of living organisms is organisation, something which we only associate with matter on its grandest scale, that is to say, we only assume that matter is (self-)organising when understood in the context of the universe. Hence, in order to approach an understanding of duration as expressed in life, one must focus on its capacity for organisation that ensures the endurance of life forms. However, life is always mediated through matter. In organisms, duration is translated into actualised and perceivable changes of the body, such as aging and infirmity. Though there are near infinite variations through which the orientation toward organisation and endurance come into expression. Through the notion of endurance Bergson then attacks the intellectual, mechanistic representation of time as reversible and of change as reducible to a composition of separable parts that allow the progression of time to be charted through distinct epochs (Bergson 1944, 19-21). Against this he sets an understanding of the progression of life through duration; as an “insensible, infinitely graduated, continuance of the change of form” (Bergson 1944, 23). It extricates life from the reductionism of intellectual representation and instead aligns it with organic creation.

Consequently, Bergson establishes an important connection between duration and life, characterising both as eternal becoming, uninterrupted change. As such, it is a natural basis for evolution. As creativity and change itself, duration is the essence of Bergson’s concept of evolution. Creating this indelible link between duration and evolution allows him to augment and elevate the concept of duration on a grander scale through the concept of evolution. Whereas in the *Essai*, Bergson still speaks of time as a force in and of itself with a certain hesitancy, here, taken in the broader concept of evolution, it can more easily take on this role. The notion of evolution as the source of enduring transformation of all life endows it with a limitless scale and capacity; which is now attributed to duration. What is at stake increases from the possibility of

free will in man to the understanding of “life in general”, united in a common current of life (Bergson 1944, 31-32). It allows him to imbue all living things with a similar life-force, which produces a:

continuous progress indefinitely pursued, an invisible progress, on which each visible organism rides during the short interval of time given it to live. Now, the more we fix our attention on this continuity of life, the more we see that organic evolution resembles the evolution of a consciousness, in which the past presses against the present and causes the upspringing of a new form of consciousness, incommensurable with its antecedents.²⁹ (Bergson 1944, 32)

Here, Bergson implicitly reinforces the link between duration and evolution by likening the evolution of species to the evolution of psychic states, which are expressed in duration. Like the psychic states, the creations to which evolution gives rise are always unique, as the antecedents which preceded their creation are always different. The antecedents always amount to a new total as the accumulation of moments that preceded their origin have added to the sum of the Whole. Hence any creation that is the result of evolution is unrepeatable and hence unpredictable. It is born out of “an original situation, which imparts something of its own originality to its elements” (Bergson 1944, 33).

But against this idea of the absolute originality and unforeseeability of forms our whole intellect rises in revolt. The essential function of our intellect, as the evolution of life has fashioned it ... is to make ready for our action on things, to foresee, for a given situation, the events, favorable or unfavorable, which may follow thereupon. Intellect therefore instinctively selects in a given situation whatever is

²⁹ Italics in original.

like something already known; it seeks this out, in order that it may apply its principle that 'like produces like'. (Bergson 1944, 34)

The unpredictability of duration and the unicity of psychic states is incongruent with the desire of the intellect, and by extension science, to apply the predictability of extension to the pure quality of duration. In essence, Bergson states that our minds are predisposed to project the past into the future as the only possible method of prediction. And logically it makes sense, for how can you expect to foretell something unique, which by definition is something you have never encountered before? It means there is no experience from which you could draw: when we expect a child we know to expect the birth of a human, but it is only its general characteristics we can predict and even those, the superficial external attributes such as hair colour or facial shape, we cannot always foreshadow with much accuracy, let alone the psychical character of the child, which is its most unique and most complex feature, its expression of the self, its own pure, unique quality. Thus, the unpredictable and irreversible does not come naturally to the intellect. Bergson states that it is the function of philosophy to help the intellect to grasp things that run counter to its nature, chief of which of course is duration. Therefore, he proposes a type of holism centred on organised matter, or life; seen as an indivisible continuity, which can only be provisionally divided. What is more, the partial views to which our mind is limited cannot reconstruct the whole in its entirety (Bergson 1944, 34-36).

Bergson's undertaking to reconcile life's duration and materiality, particularly as expressed through intellectual representationalism, is characterised by an unresolved tension between a sense of holism and of atomism that becomes evident in *Creative Evolution* as a result of the ambiguous relation between intensity and extensity. Bergson's concept of duration as the essence of life exudes a strong sense of holism. It is at the heart of all living things, binding them together in a perpetual evolutionary movement, even if the direction of that movement is not unified. Duration is developed into the driving force behind evolution, which touches on all living

organisms. Though it is not a holism in the sense of radical finalism, which supposes perfect harmony among all the parts of creation, it is a harmony of principle, that is to say, all the parts are harmonious in the sense that they share the same basic principle of vital propulsion at their centre. The harmony can be found in the past, at the start of the vital impulse, the *élan vital*, not in the future. The first, single vital impulse has developed in infinitely diverse ways. Thus, creative evolution inverts finalism, arguing that we come from a common past which flows into an infinitely diverse future, rather than flowing towards a single end or telos. It would be impossible for evolution to have a *telos*, as it cannot end its movement. But, more importantly, though there is directionality, it is spontaneous rather than pre-ordained, it can only be made intelligible retrospectively (Bergson 1944, 57-58). And even then, the intellect will project a rational explanation onto a unified and uninterrupted movement, which distorts its true nature. The intellect cannot help but misconstrue duration, as it is of a different order, a different nature (Bergson 1944, 100).³⁰ Thus, it is necessary to understand duration and to place it at the centre of our philosophy. Only then can we see that all evolution is the result of a vital impetus, which, as it is rooted in duration, is of a spiritual nature, which drives physical evolution (Bergson 1944, 63-66 and 86). Any development or process

is really effected in virtue of the original impetus of life; it is implied in this movement itself, and that is just why it is found in independent lines of evolution. ... life is, more than anything else, a tendency to act on inert matter. The direction of this action is not predetermined; ... [it] always presents, to some extent, the character of contingency. (Bergson 1944, 107)

³⁰ For Bergson this also requires a change in the way we understand philosophy itself. It must try to reject the intellectual tendencies in favour of those of duration and intuition. It must focus on unitary processes (Bergson 1944, 103-107).

Moreover, Bergson states, the direction of the impetus of life, of creative evolution, is not linear, but should be understood as a series of explosions. After each explosion the remains scattered, each scattered effect containing the further capacity to explode itself. Hence, progress is not the attainment of a common goal, but the continuation of development (Bergson 1944, 116). The direction of development

depends ... on two series of causes: the resistance life meets from inert matter, and the explosive force - due to an unstable balance of tendencies - which life bears within itself. (Bergson 1944, 109)

The fact that there is life on earth at all is a testament to the ability of life to overcome both problems. It develops slowly, from simplicity to complexity; the single-cell organism to the complex vertebrate. The increase in complexity depends on the development of a division of labour, without which the vital impetus would not be able to incorporate an ever-increasing number of elements into an individual. Thus, there is an inherent tendency in life to divide in order for things to remain united (Bergson 1944, 110). And, though we can only approximate the movement by adding all the parts, combining the differing tendencies³¹ together is a way to get a rough understanding of the vital impetus, to get to grips with the “hypothesis of an original impetus, ... an internal push that has carried life, by more and more complex forms, to higher and higher destinies” (Bergson 1944, 113).

³¹ It is interesting to note that like psychic states, which are also subject to duration, evolutionary tendencies interpenetrate and blend together. They partake of one another, thus in expression of evolutionary spark the whole range of tendencies are present. (Bergson 1944, 131)

[E]volution is a creation unceasingly renewed, it creates, as it goes on, not only the forms of life, but the ideas that will enable the intellect to understand it ... that is to say that its future overflows its present. (Bergson 1944, 114)

[T]he portals of the future remain wide open. It is a creation that goes on forever in virtue of an initial movement. This movement constitutes the unity of the organized world - a prolific unity, of an infinite richness. (Bergson 1944, 116)

The function of life is to infuse matter with spontaneity and richness. To develop in ways previously unknown and unforeseen (Bergson 1944, 139-140). Yet, the vital impulse is not unlimited. It must, of necessity, act on materiality, which limits its capacity to act as it will. Materiality has the tendency to mechanistic automatism which contests the impulse's inclination to spontaneity. Moreover, the tendency to stasis of materiality generally obscures the movement inherent in the impulse.

Life in general is mobility itself ... It is always going ahead ... Evolution in general would fain go on in a straight line; each special evolution is a kind of circle. Like eddies of dust raised by the wind as it passes, the living turn upon themselves, born up by the great blast of life. They are therefore relatively stable, and counterfeit immobility so well that we treat each of them as a *thing* rather than as a *progress*, forgetting that the very permanence of their form is only the outline of movement. At times, however, in a fleeting vision, the invisible breath that bears them is materialized before our eyes. ... [It is visible in maternal] love, in which some have seen the great mystery of life, [it] may possibly deliver us life's secret. It shows us each generation leaning over the generation that shall follow. It allows

us a glimpse of the fact that the living being is a thoroughfare, and that the essence of life is in the movement by which it is transmitted. (Bergson 1944, 141-142)

Hence, Bergson argues that the disparate parts of life are whole in the principle of their movement. That what seems to be separate, is actually united in the principle of life, in *élan vital*.

In order to create an explicit and unassailable relation between duration and materiality, Bergson argues that intensity and extensity - or in this case the new duality of psychics and physics - are connected because they are each others' inverse. The two have opposing directionalities. He contends that the spirituality of duration can transform into the materiality of intellectuality through inversion, changing the directionality to coincide with its opposite, transforming it into the other. To facilitate this new rapprochement, Bergson now indicates that both duration and materiality admit of degrees, creating a sense of a continuum where the two poles reach in inverse directions. Duration moves towards extension through *detension*; by letting itself go, relaxing, it can take on the properties of materiality (Bergson 1944, 218-221). Instead of being completely irreconcilable, Bergson now presents duration and materiality as mutually constitutive; they are "mutually engendered by the reciprocal action and reaction of two terms which are essentially the same, but which move each in the direction inverse of the other" (Bergson 1944, 222). In order to sustain this understanding, Bergson precludes the possibility of pure spatiality, arguing that pure space would require complete externality, but that this is impossible because matter always is in contact with and acts on other materiality. As such, he rejects the notion of closed systems, though he does allow that matter can be separated into relatively independent systems without doing gross injustice to reality.³² Hence, he posits now that extension is not fully extended, but that it contains a sense of interpenetration and therefore,

³² At least, so long as the intellect and science acknowledge that they cannot represent the true nature of the universe but only an adequate approximation of it and as such are always prepared to amend their judgments and theories (Bergson 1944, 226).

a sense of duration. He further strengthens the relation between time and space by arguing that the intellect, which is a special function of the mind is turned specifically toward matter. This congruence has arisen through mutual adaptation of both matter and duration and is possible because the two are the inverse of each other (Bergson 1944, 222-227). However, there is a lingering sense that Bergson privileges duration over materiality. This is not only because he understands duration as *élan vital* and thereby as the engine of all movement, thus animating materiality. But also, because he holds that materiality originates in duration, the latter being the source of all positivity (Bergson 1944, 228).

Presented in this way, duration is vitality itself, which both needs and is hampered in its capacity to express itself by materiality. It is eternally struggling to affect matter and drag it along in its direction, while it keeps trying to move in the opposite direction, which in this case must be understood as a tendency toward stasis. It is a perpetual battle, which, on balance, must be won by duration, as Bergson suggests an ontology of becoming, that is to say of perpetual, if generally imperceptible, movement. Bergson has come some way to reconcile the binary of intensity and extension by relinquishing the idea that they are incommensurable and instead proposes a sense of a continuum, where the two are connected as each others' inverse. If this is the case, however, the question arises how duration gains its moment in the sun. For, if duration devolves into materiality through detension, then there must be a sense in which it can regain its tension, otherwise the vital impetus could slowly die out. There must be either a system that allows duration to re-energise, or for materiality to become energised. However, Bergson provides neither of these possibilities, his creative evolution depends on transmission of the vital impulse from progenitors to their offspring. This does not appear to diminish the impulse, its capacity for formation is renewed in each individual it is transferred to. How then, do the different degrees of activity come into being? And is the spark once lost, lost forever? Is that the reason that Bergson argues that certain lines of evolution are more successful than others - which seems to depend mainly on the level of complexity they are able to sustain? It all hinges on the question how

detension comes about, and whether this process is reversible, which is ironic, because one of the main aspects of duration is its irreversibility, which becomes questionable once the line between duration and materiality becomes less distinct. If, as we have seen above, duration enjoys some dominance in relation to materiality, then it appears more likely that the process of detension is irreversible. Yet, if detension allows for duration to descend into materiality, then it might be subject to reversibility. In any case, the new relation between intensity and extension creates new problems that Bergson does not adequately address. Thus, in my opinion, Bergson's solution of inverted direction as a solution to unsustainable tension between duration and materiality is problematic. Though it can be made plausible that stasis and movement are opposite directions of the same capacity for movement, it becomes much more complex if it is proposed as a way to reconcile pure movement with utter stasis. What it comes down to is the fact that Bergson, even when he tries to mediate the tension between duration and materiality, cannot relinquish the notion that each expresses different tendencies which, ultimately, should be understood as subject to different logical frameworks, that of emergent and efficient causality. Because Bergson does not demonstrate how these two logics can be reconciled into a single intermediary logical framework, he is unable to resolve the tension between duration and materiality. What results is an underdeveloped understanding of an assumed function that supposedly allows the amalgamation of two opposites. This crucial lacuna in Bergson's understanding of the reconciliation of two separate systems of logic has important implications for Bergson's supposition of the self as composed of a double aspect.

Self in Creative Evolution

The notion of the self that emerges from Bergson's *Creative Evolution* is quite different from that which emerges from *Time and Free Will*. His project to reconcile duration with materiality has important implications for the conceptualisation of the self. First, I will discuss the fact that the extension of duration creates a different register that is incongruent with the psychological self of

Time and Free Will. Second, the integration of materiality and duration has important implications for the unity of the self through the introduction of open systems and the consequent problematization of individuality. Finally, I will discuss how Bergson's discussion of consciousness in terms of intelligence, intuition and instinct replicates the problematic logic of inversion discussed above.

The main change in the conception of the self that results from Bergson's changes to duration in its new guise as the vital impulse is the fact that the register shifts toward the grander scale of evolution of the world at large. In *Creative Evolution*, duration is extended from the purely internal aspect of human mental states to the source of all change as *élan vital*. As a result, the self, in the sense of the internal aspects that constitute the individual, hardly features at all. In this wider context, the self is no longer seen as separated into two - presumably connected - aspects, but as a single unit. The self becomes part of a wider movement, the development of life in general. It is reflected in a linguistic change: Bergson barely speaks of the self but, predominantly, of the individual. Though the words are generally used interchangeably, and I often use them in such a way, I venture that for Bergson the concept of the self is more introverted, whereas the individual is turned outward. At least, Bergson's sense of self definitely showcases an interior complexity that the individual tries to obscure. That is to say, whereas in *Time and Free Will*, Bergson is chiefly concerned with illustrating duration as the nature of the self, he accepts this as given in *Creative Evolution* and instead focuses on the ways in which duration affects the individual and how it binds it to its environment. Whereas the former work focuses on the self as a psychic entity, the latter tries to situate this psychological self within a biological reality of persistent change. The individual is, then, understood as one of the myriad loci of *élan vital* that allows it to participate in and express tendencies towards creative evolution.

In the opening pages of *Creative Evolution*, Bergson introduces duration through the internal psychic states, establishing his understanding of the self as enduring, as proposed in *Time and Free Will* (Bergson 1944, 1-10). However, there are small changes which express the

change in register. For example, Bergson summarises the self as the sedimentation of our past as follows:

What are we, in fact what is our *character*, if not the condensation of the history that we have lived from our birth - nay before our birth, since we bring with us prenatal dispositions? Doubtless we think with only a small part of our past, but it is with our entire past, including the original bent of our soul, that we desire, will and act. Our past, then, as a whole, is made manifest to us in its impulse; it is felt in the form of tendency, although a small part of it only is known in the form of idea.³³ (Bergson 1944, 8)

Bergson here places the self not as being a self-contained composition of psychic states, but as being specifically connected to its progenitors. The deepest, “true” self is not just the accumulation of psychic states from birth but is extended beyond it. What is more, it even appears that some of our most fundamental aspects, including “the original bend of our soul,” are not produced internally, but are the result of the transmitted *élan vital*. The very development of the self is no longer seen as an internal project, but is affected by and mirrored on the evolutionary tendencies in which it is immersed.³⁴ Therefore, Bergson shows the development of the self now as being comparable to evolution, both being nonlinear and often containing - partially dormant - contradictory proclivities (Bergson 1944, 111).

The changes in the conceptualisation of the self under the influence of the vital impulse which connects it to its environs trigger Bergson to reconsider the self-sufficiency of the individual he implied in *Time and Free Will*. Because he suggests that all systems are at least partially open

³³ Italics in original.

³⁴ Grosz uses this to argue that our self-identity is more determined by the continuation of evolutionary tendencies than through the self’s experiences and psychic states, even though these predominate our immediate perception and thought (Grosz 2004, 196).

so that they can interact with other systems, he must consider how the individual can be seen as separate from the external world. Whereas in the *Essai*, Bergson facetiously states that the fractured self is united through the body, now the integrity of the body itself is questioned. He does a complete turn-about: rather than the materiality of the body keeping the durational, fractured mind together, the body itself is now understood as united through duration. As Lapoujade succinctly notes:

We know that to grasp duration, Bergson's famous duration, it is necessary to feel it flowing in us. ... The "immediate givens of consciousness" are above all emotions; they are the effect that the flowing of time produces on sensibility. [But it is not superficial emotion.] ... More profoundly, there is an emotion that derives from the passage of time itself, from the fact of feeling time flow in us and of "vibrating internally." It is duration itself that is emotion in us. Inversely, it is only through the emotions that we are beings who endure, or rather that we stop considering ourselves as beings so as to become durations, like a sound, which exists or endures through its vibrating, and nothing else. In depth, we aren't "beings" any longer but vibration, resonance effects, "tonalities" at different levels. And the universe itself comes to be dematerialized, to become duration, a plurality of rhythms of duration that are also arranged in depth according to distinct levels of tension. (2018, 1-2)

The open, enduring systems of *Creative Evolution* to some extent dematerialise the self, which is no longer the sole conduit of vibration. Instead vibration seems to replace materiality as the constitutive "substance" of the universe.

Duration is no longer the privileged domain of the human individual but it is constitutive of all systems. Systems are open and thus disposed towards interaction, and as suffused with

duration capable of transmitting variation in reiteration. This creates a sense of continuity in the development of individuality. Consequently, Bergson suggests that individuality admits of degrees and that a sense of it is shared by all living organisms. Though in none of them is individuality fully realised, because that would require a completed state, a fully formed individual. This is impossible, because the individual is always imbued with the vital impulse which propels it forward, ensuring its perpetual development, it is always becoming. In consequence of Bergson's support of *élan vital*, the living organism, which combines materiality and duration, has a privileged position. And it is separated from non-organic matter by its organisation. Though, because of its embodiment, it is part of the "Whole" of matter - and as such subject to the same physical laws - it is also independent from it as it is composed of disparate parts that are complementary; particularly in the sense that they perform complementary functions. The individual emerges from its organisation; that is to say from the capacity to organise various functions into a - somewhat closed off - whole. The capacity for organisation is, of course, produced by duration. Its propensity for organisation is thwarted by the tendency towards reproduction, the former produces unique development, whereas the latter is geared towards replication (Bergson 1944, 15-16). However, Bergson's individual is an open system and it requires inert matter to act upon. Thus, life tends towards individuation and separates itself from inorganic matter through its capacity for organisation and the relations it establishes between the past, present and future through its unceasing development. Yet, even here, Bergson states that the relation is not just established through the unceasing change of the individual, but also through its capacity to transmit its organisational systems to its offspring (Bergson 1944, 17). And, notably, nowhere does Bergson mention that the interrelations between past, present and future relate to the mental states interior to the individual.

However, Bergson introduces two further qualifications in his assertion that individuality admits of degrees that need to be addressed: the fact that individuality is never completely finished nor completely separated. He states:

in nature, there is neither purely internal finality nor absolutely distinct individuality. The organized elements composing the individual have themselves a certain individuality, and each will claim its vital principle if the individual pretends to have its own. But, on the other hand, the individual itself is not sufficiently independent, not sufficiently cut off from other things, for us to allow it a “vital principle” of its own. (1944, 49)

This, for example, could be understood as the notion that every individual is an aggregate of several individuals animating materiality in separate, yet concerted efforts. It can also be understood more abstractly as various forms of organisation occurring within a more extensive organising system. The important implication for Bergson is that elements cannot always just serve themselves, as they also contribute towards the aggregate. This allows him to explore a tension between the unity of life as a “whole” and that which admits of individuality in degree through variations, inconsistencies and lacunae; it “co-ordinates not only the parts of an organism with the organism itself [individuality], but also each living being with the collective whole of all others” (Bergson 1944, 50). So here too, the individual is explicitly understood in its relation to the world at large, and the focus on the individual is as a biological composition rather than as a mental composition.

Thus, the individual is approached differently in *Creative Evolution*: there is less attention to the mental interiority of the self, which is shifted towards the physical aspect of being an open system and being part of a greater whole. The closest Bergson comes to the mental aspect of the self is his discussion of consciousness in terms of intelligence, instinct and intuition. Bergson approaches consciousness initially through the duality of instinct/intelligence, the terms of which correspond to the duration/materiality duality. Bergson first notes that both are expressions of psychic states and display complementary and antagonistic tendencies that facilitate action in

different ways. Moreover, they remain intertwined and cannot be completely separated because of their common origin, hence Bergson argues that all animals have both tendencies in differing degrees (Bergson 1944, 149-151). Intelligence is attuned to materiality and the use of tools to enable action, whereas instinct allows us to express our internal vital impulse and to use the organising systems of our bodies effectively (Bergson 1944, 153-155). They are each methods of acting on the material world and as such present different ways of tackling problems and as a result engender different kinds of knowledge. Where instinct is predominantly expressed subconsciously, intelligence can only be expressed consciously. However, Bergson specifically states that the distinction here is one of degree not of kind. (Bergson 1944, 158-160) In addition, instinct is mainly concerned with the matter of knowledge, the unfiltered sensory information; the intellect on the other hand is concerned with the form of knowledge, the relations between materials that create a systematic understanding of the world, which requires separability - or, as Bergson calls it here, discontinuity. As a result, it categorises and ossifies fluidity and organisation using the mould of inorganic materiality and is unable to think and represent real processes and mobility; that is to say creative evolution (Bergson 1944, 164-170, 178). Instinct, on the other hand, is attuned to vital processes as it is "molded on the very form of life" (Bergson 1944, 182). It extends the tendencies of the organisational structure provided by the vital impulse beyond the body; instinct cannot be differentiated from organisation. "The most essential of the primary instincts are really, therefore, vital processes" (Bergson 1944, 182). Instinct and intelligence are therefore considered disparate evolutionary tendencies developed from the same principle, but

which in the one case remains within itself, in the other steps out of itself and becomes absorbed in the utilization of inert matter. This gradual divergence testifies to a radical incompatibility, and points to the fact that it is impossible for intelligence to re-absorb instinct. That which is instinctive in instinct cannot be

expressed in terms of intelligence, nor, consequently, can it be analyzed. (Bergson 1944, 184-185)

It is striking that Bergson here replicates in the distinction between instinct and intelligence the same incommensurability that he supposed between the deep and the superficial self. This is particularly notable, since in the preceding discussion of the instinct/intelligence binary, Bergson appears to create the sense that the two tendencies are complementary, and because they stem from the same source there seemed an inherent connection. However, now instinct appears to be more closely aligned with the deep self, though there are two important differences: the fact that instinct may be conscious and that it is more turned outward as a method of action - another example of the trend in *Creative Evolution* towards externalisation. This opposition is only temporary, because Bergson quickly re-establishes a connection arguing that only the essence of instinct is inaccessible to intelligence, because the two are “always already mingled” which allows intelligence to get a sense of instinct (Bergson 1944, 192). Despite this supposed rapprochement, Bergson then goes on to stress that the directionalities of instinct and intelligence lead in opposing directions: instinct is oriented towards life, which Bergson now argues is internal, and intellect towards representation and matter which are external. Once more, Bergson suggests that the two kinds of knowledge can complement each other (Bergson 1944, 192-195). He, thus, seems to oscillate between asserting that they are - in essence at least - opposites and that they are complementary if antagonistic evolutionary trajectories.

Once Bergson has established the binary/complementarity between instinct and intellect, he continues to elaborate on the relation between life and consciousness. He now moves on to intuition,³⁵ and initially appears to create a binary between intelligence and intuition in which the latter is predicated on instinct. He states:

³⁵ The most extensive exposition of Bergson’s understanding of intuition is to be found in the opening of the second introduction to *The Creative Mind* (2007) 18-72, in which Bergson creates a stronger sense of

Intelligence, by means of science, which is its work, will deliver up to us more and more completely the secret of physical operations; of life it brings us, and moreover only claims to bring us, a translation in terms of inertia. It goes all round life, taking from outside the greatest possible number of views of it, drawing it to itself instead of entering into it. But it is to the very inwardness of life that *intuition* leads us - by intuition I mean instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely. (1944, 194)

Thus, intuition is a certain type of internalisation of instinct, which as I had noted above was clearly turned outwards. Bergson likens it to “an aesthetic faculty” which is able to perceive the “intention of life”, to perceive movement in the discontinuous features suggested by external perception of intelligence. It is this quality that the artist tries to express in his art and that he can approach through a “a kind of sympathy” that allows him to break through “the barrier that space put up between him and his model” (Bergson 1944, 194). Intuition and intellect are here shown as working in concert, each able to hone in on divergent aspects of the world that cannot be translated into the register of the other. Intuition can allow the intellect to realise that life exceeds its categories and methods of interpretation.

Then by the sympathetic communication which it establishes between us and the rest of the living, by the expansion of our consciousness which it brings about, it introduces us into life’s own domain, which is reciprocal interpenetration, endlessly continued creation. But though it thereby transcends intelligence, it is from

opposition between intelligence and intuition than is apparent here, where he is so focused on reconciling duration and materiality.

intelligence that has come the push that has made it rise to the point it has reached, without intelligence, it would have remained in the form of instinct, riveted to the special object of its practical interest, and turned outward by it into movements of locomotion. (Bergson 1944, 195)

This expresses a relation between the intelligence and intuition that moves it beyond a binary. Rather, Bergson relies on an assertion he made previously about divergent attributes instinct and intelligence to reconcile intuition and instinct as complementary through the notion he suggested earlier in *Creative Evolution* that intelligence inclines towards asking questions it does not have the means to answer, these means are within the ambit of instinct, but instinct would never be inclined to ask the question (Bergson 1944, 167). However, where intuition seems to absorb instinct in its entirety, it still requires intelligence to provide the inquisitiveness, the speculation that allows intuition to provide answers. The crucial difference, it quickly becomes clear, between instinct and intuition is that the latter is related to consciousness, whereas the former was characterised as predominantly subconscious. As Bergson puts it: “if consciousness has thus split up into intuition and intelligence, it is because the need it had to apply itself to matter at the same time as it had to follow the stream of life” (1944, 196). The duality of consciousness replicates the duality of reality in its poles of extension and duration and the duality of the self that Bergson had established in *Time and Free Will*. As such, it must be through intuition that we can approach the deeper self, which expresses the vitality of life. This seems all the more plausible if we turn back to Bergson’s phrase that intuition evolved from instinct through self-consciousness and reflection. It implies a certain awareness of itself, that could possibly be translated into awareness of *oneself*.

The notion of consciousness also resurfaces in Bergson’s conceptualisation of extensity and intensity as each others’ inverse which I have discussed above. In this process, he reiterates the assertion that the “true” self consists in pure duration:

Let us seek, in the depths of our experience, the point where we feel ourselves most intimately within our own life. It is into pure duration that we then plunge back, a duration in which the past, always moving on, is swelling unceasingly with a present that is absolutely new. But, at the same time, we feel the spring of our will strained to its utmost limit. We must, by a strong recoil of our personality on itself, gather up our past which is slipping away, in order to thrust it, compact and undivided, into a present which it will create by entering. Rare indeed are the moments when we are self-possessed to this extent: it is then that our actions are truly free. And even at these moments we do not completely possess ourselves. Our feeling of duration, I should say the actual coinciding of ourself with itself, admits of degrees. (Bergson 1944, 218-219)

This section invokes Bergson's argument in *Time and Free Will* that only some actions of the self are truly free and that in these actions we are able to express our whole self. It also, once again appears to show the self as layered - admitting of degrees - which display opposing tendencies, otherwise it would not be able to recoil on itself. What is more, the conceptualisation of duration and extension as each others' inverse does help to create a sense of self that is more comfortable with extension (Bergson 1944, 221). It is important to note here that Bergson implies that it is possible to purposely come into contact with duration. The faculty that must be capable of effecting this purposive submersion into duration must then be the intuitive capacity of our consciousness. Intuition now appears to be the linchpin that allows a cognitive experience of duration. It allows us to be aware of our progress in duration (Bergson 1944, 220), and states later that it is possible for the individual to shift between the various registers of duration and materiality. Both these two capacities are ascribed to self-consciousness, which allows for the immersion in duration (Bergson 1944, 227). Clearly it is a self-consciously reflected instinct, that is to say, intuition that establishes the route for consciousness to engage in duration. However,

Bergson does not explain how instinct can evolve to become disinterested, self-conscious, and reflective. As Bergson argued in *Time and Free Will*, reflective consciousness is unable to grasp duration as it is always reflected through representation and language. Bergson's example of intuition, that of the artist trying to express the duration they were able to glimpse through the sympathy that broke down the barrier of space, does not give any indication how intuition enters consciousness. If anything, it appears to create a liminal space in between consciousness and action, where one acts with intention, but perhaps not quite conscious thought. But does this allow us to "seek" the depths of our experience, which evokes the sense of a purely intellectual - and thus more intelligent than intuitive - endeavour? If intuition allows us to shift between registers it must be able to express itself both in terms of extension as well as intensity, but nowhere does Bergson state this outright, nor does he elaborate what this might entail. That is to say, ultimately what Bergson does not explain is how intuition is able to inhabit two separate logical frameworks at once, or rather how the two opposing logical frameworks come together in a single framework that allows intuition to shift between the two registers. As such the supposed conscious faculty of intuition exposes the lacuna between extension and intensity. In both cases Bergson states the reality of the interrelation or continuum between two opposing poles (intensity/extension and instinct/intelligence) without explaining the logical basis for interaction.

This is exacerbated by repeated assertions that the essence of the durational side of each of the two poles is inaccessible to its extended opposite. Intuition is clearly meant to unite the two sides of the self, to allow the superficial self to ascend to the pure self and for the pure self to be expressed in extension. But if the essence of duration is still considered beyond the reach of extension then there must be part of the "true" self that remains separate. What is more, it must then also be questionable whether this deepest, purest sense of self could be expressed in extension, if all of the self could be expressed in the free, intuitive act? But even if there is no such inaccessible essence of pure duration in the self, then the self no longer consists of a definable double aspect, but is composed of layers of mental states which create a consciousness in which

the inversely related intuition and intellect are intertwined in varying degrees (Bergson 1944, 221). This would still leave the question of how one can come to sufficient self-control to ascend to the “true” self of duration and come to the rare self-possession that allows us to thrust our past into the future. Or, in other words, how can one consciously cultivate intuition, how can one induce instinct to become disinterested, conscious and reflective? If intuition is crucial to connecting with and expressing our internal duration, then it is crucial to understand how consciousness, which tends to intelligence can be rerouted toward intuition.

In addition, Bergson’s reimagination of duration elicits its own problems, in particular the fact that duration gains almost mystical qualities. The new stature of duration as *élan vital* changes the relationship of his theory with essentialism. In *Time and Free Will*, he relegates essentialism - things-in-themselves with definitive properties - to the realm of materiality, and duration is ephemeral, unique and anti-essentialist. In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson extends this anti-essentialism to almost all things,³⁶ because all systems are open and are interlocked, hence everything is connected to duration in some sense. It allows Bergson to infuse the world in its entirety with a sense of becoming, with creative evolution. However, as a result, duration is now understood as the centre of all life - and possibly all matter too. As such, he introduces an anti-essentialist essence at the core of nature. It could be understood as the replacement of the linguistic categories of essentialism with an essence of a more ephemeral quality. A source of power that is sufficiently undetermined and powerful that it can create infinite change and possibility. However, simultaneously it comes across as an unnameable and largely unknowable essence. The unifying power behind the throne, a *deus ex machina*, of which the effects can be felt but which cannot be fully understood or predicted. It begs the question whether, in exchanging chronological time for duration, we are not exchanging the knowable essence for an unknowable but essential “anti-essence”, whether Bergson, in his understanding of duration does not merely

³⁶ As I have shown above, Bergson tries to maintain a distinction between the organic and inorganic world, which becomes difficult to maintain in the face of his insistence on open systems.

repeat a theological move that places the possibility of knowing the nature of the world and our own essence beyond us. For despite his attempts to reconcile the intensity|extensity binary, he does not succeed in ameliorating all its negative effects, in particular its contentious relationship with language and reflective consciousness that are extremely problematic to self-knowledge. In an effort to understand the whole of the world as engaged in an eternal becoming, Bergson unfurls the boundaries that sustained the unity of the body, which was supposed to hold together the interconnected layers of the psychic states. The unity must now be provided by duration itself, which becomes a formidable force. However, despite its closer entanglement with materiality it has not lost its ephemeral character. Rather, because of its increase in capacity its mystique has grown. Duration is now a source that is both inescapable and elusive; that must be believed without evidence of its existence. Its character has become almost divine, though it is an immanent divinity.

Refutation of Deleuze's "Bergsonian" Monism

In the face of my arguments that Bergson is unable to reconcile the dualist tensions in his theory of duration, it is important to consider the interpretation of his work by Gilles Deleuze, who famously claims that Bergsonism is characterised primarily by a dualism of its method but a monism of its ontology. However, I will argue that Deleuze's understanding of monism depends on two concepts which are at best creative interpretations based on inflating the importance of concepts that for Bergson himself are relatively minor, and at worst are simply Deleuze's own invention. The latter is not necessarily problematic for Deleuze as a philosopher, as creative thinking is an indispensable asset to any theorist. Yet it does diminish their influence if one is trying to ascertain Bergson's thought rather than creatively impressive interpretations. In addition, this monism is problematic and perhaps even antithetical to Bergson's own thought because it invokes a spatial image in order to integrate duration and matter into a single continuum. Most importantly for my purposes, Deleuze's portrayal of Bergson's monism is not able to redress my

critique that Bergson cannot provide a clear bridge between what remain even with the assumption of this monism separate logics of duration and matter, and this ultimately scuppers his attempt to attribute to Bergson a true monism. Rather, Deleuze replicates the leap of faith that Bergson's thought requires, retaining the sense of inaccessibility and mysticism associated with it.

In order to properly set up my own argument regarding Deleuze's interpretation of Bergson, it is important to note that Deleuze frames his interpretation of Bergson in *Bergsonism* (1988) through the notion that it passes through three stages related to his three major works: duration from *Time and Free Will*, memory from *Matter and Memory*, and the *élan vital* from *Creative Evolution*. These are bound together through the notion of intuition, which Deleuze, following Bergson's writings in the second introduction to the *Creative Mind*, considers to be a philosophical method rather than a faculty. In fact, Deleuze dedicates the whole first chapter of his book on Bergson to explicating intuition as Bergsonism's central method. He argues that Bergson uses the method of intuition to avoid the pitfalls of Western philosophy and metaphysics in particular, which reduce reality to materiality and are unable to incorporate real time. Deleuze condenses Bergson's writings on the method of intuition to three rules. The first rule is to avoid false problems, or avoiding problems based on known ideas, as it is impossible to discover the new from the known (Deleuze 1988, 15; cf. Bergson 2007, 102-106). False problems are brought about by the failure to properly analyse composites, and specifically treating composites as being composed of elements that differ in degree rather than kind (Deleuze 1988, 17-21). The second rule concerns shattering illusions, in particular through rediscovering differences in kind (Deleuze 1988, 21). Finally, and crucial to my rejection of Deleuze's interpretation, is the third rule which states that problems must be stated and solved "in terms of time rather than of space" (Deleuze 1988, 31). In the following, I will build up to showing that Deleuze himself is unable to live up to this final edict of the method of intuition in his reading of Bergson. This is problematic, for as Deleuze himself states, the third rule "gives the "fundamental meaning of intuition ... it consists in

thinking in terms of duration.” (Deleuze 1988, 31) As such, the method of intuition ultimately works in concert with what I would call the faculty of intuition, that is to say, the notion of intuition that comes to the fore in *Creative Evolution* as a means to consciously access duration.

Deleuze’s discussion of the first stage of Bergsonism, duration, is rather short and does not conflict in the main with my own understanding of this concept set forth in this chapter. In order to approach duration, it is necessary to engage in the first rule of the method of intuition and separate the composite mixture of experience into the pure states of duration and matter. In addition, it is important to note that Deleuze introduces the notion of the virtual here as strongly connected to duration. This is notable because it is characteristic of Deleuze’s understanding of Bergson. It crops up in his discussion of the two types of multiplicity, discussed at length in the section on duration in *Time and Free Will*. For Deleuze, in this chapter, the heterogeneous multiplicity of duration is virtual, which is presented as deeper layers beyond the surface, that which gives duration its depth and is intimately connected to its capacity for differentiation and production of movement and change (Deleuze 1988, 40-43). The notion of the virtual, as Deleuze immediately hints, comes really into its own in Bergson’s work on memory and is most developed, in his opinion, in *Matter and Memory*. It is therefore to his discussion on this work, which does not feature heavily in my own account of Bergson, that I now turn.

The stage of memory is particularly important to Deleuze. *Matter and Memory* provides some of the passage that provide the basis for several of the most important aspects for Deleuze’s reading of Bergson. Deleuze starts his chapter on *Matter and Memory* with the claim that:

Duration is essentially memory, consciousness and freedom. It is consciousness and freedom because it is primarily memory. (1988, 51)

This immediately catapults memory into a position of eminence, not in the least because the notion that memory facilitates consciousness and freedom validates Bergson’s argument in *Time*

and Free Will. But vitally, as must have become abundantly obvious by now, memory's association with duration makes it central to the cornerstone of Bergson's philosophy. This assertion hinges on the notion that for Bergson, according to Deleuze, the hallmark of duration is the continuation of the past in the present (Deleuze 1988, 51). These two tenses are considered to be simultaneously distinct and interrelated. They are distinct because they are different in kind, but related because they are part of the same whole, part of a continuous, heterogeneous multiplicity. They differ in kind because whereas both are real, they express different types of reality. Both are present but in different ways: the present is becoming, it is actual, while the past, which inheres and endures, expresses being, it is no longer on the way to becoming, as it has already passed that stage (Lundy 2018, 75-77). As we have seen above, the past is still present, despite it having passed. The main vehicle of the past's persistence in the present is memory. Its durational nature incorporates memories into a continuous, heterogeneous, and multiplicitous Whole. Memory is durational because it consists of temporal contractions; it contracts "a number of external moments into a single internal moment" (Bergson 1988, 34). Reality becomes condensed into heterogeneous multiplicities. This contraction can result in various types of memories, which are all integrated into a general past (Deleuze 1988, 56). Bergson uses the imagery of an inverted cone connected to a square that represents present to describe how the various types of memories are organised and accessible to us. The cone of memory consists of an infinity of planes that each contain the totality of memories in more or less detailed or clear forms; each one represents a level or degree of contracted memory. The most contracted part of the inverted cone is connected to our present, which is infinitely relaxed as matter (Deleuze 1988, 88). Therefore, both the whole of the cone as well as each tranche represents the whole of our memory. The cone represents the whole of our memory in every possible level of detail and contraction, whereas each level represents the whole of your memory in a particular level of detail. The more detailed the memory, the more contracted it is. However, the more detailed and particularized the memory is, the harder it can be to generalise and abstract its experience to use

to inform our everyday action. We enhance our capacity to act by drawing upon our experience “stored” durationally in the form of the cone of memory. Yet, in order for our memory to be useful to our present, two important and interrelated steps must happen. First, the virtuality of the past must be actualised to have bearing on the present (Deleuze 1988, 60-62; Bergson 1988, 160-163). Second, we must be able to locate and extract the correct, that is to say relevant, part of our memory for actualisation.

Deleuze expands a little on how this actualisation comes about. He states that the first step involves a leap into the past, moving from the plane of actualisation to the cone of memory. This is followed by the dual movements of translation and rotation.³⁷ Translation is a form of contraction that matches the level of contraction of the past – in the cone of memory – to what is necessary for the action/situation required. According to Deleuze, the contraction involved in translation is related to, but not the same as, the contraction of memory that shapes the cone. However, he states openly that Bergson appears to give the impression that these two contractions are identical. Deleuze changes his interpretation to better fit with his own notion that memory is virtual and must be actualised in order to affect the present. The contraction of the cone is then understood as movement between various levels of the virtual sphere that is the cone, whereas the translation-contraction is part of the process of actualisation. Yet, beyond stating that the movement of translation actualises a virtual memory, Deleuze provides no further explanation of how actualisation comes about or what aspects of this apparent variation of contraction allows it to affect this translation from the virtual to the actual (Deleuze 1988, 63-64). Indeed, Deleuze further deepens the mystery surrounding the mechanics of translation by arguing that there is a difference in kind between the present and the past. He states:

³⁷ I will focus mainly on translation as Deleuze implies that it is instrumental in the transition of the virtual into the actual. Rotation is of lesser importance to both Bergson (who only mentions it once) and Deleuze, whose discussion is very short and only indicates that rotation is necessary to locate the useful information within a specific level of the cone of memory. However, Deleuze’s focus on both translation and rotation as crucial to an understanding of memory as virtual that can be actualized are examples of his rather free interpretation of Bergson’s work.

There is contraction because recollection-becoming-image enters into a “coalescence” with the present. It therefore passes through “planes of consciousness” that put it into effect. (Deleuze 1988, 65)

But it is not clear how the actualisation is effected. What occurs during the passage through the planes of consciousness that the virtual to evolve into the actual? More importantly, how is the durational able to be translated into a register that is amenable to the plane of consciousness, which must operate on a material or spatial logic? Ultimately the question is, even if these two types of contraction differ, are these differences of degree or of kind? If we follow Bergson that these movements are actually the same, then it must be the former. That begs the question of how are they able to translate the virtual to the actual, how can movements that are of the same kind translate one kind of knowledge into the register of the other kind? If they differ in kind, then one runs into the problem of their communication, how can movements that differ in kind correlate and coordinate into one fluid movement that actualises the virtual? This is further exacerbated by his reliance upon the notion of “planes of consciousness,” a term which only appears four times, and then only in the *Summary and Conclusion* chapter of *Matter and Memory* (Bergson 1988, 239, 241, 242). The use of the word consciousness suggests the involvement of intellect, which is conscious and, as Bergson argues in *Creative Evolution* and *The Creative Mind*, can only concern itself with materiality. Yet, in *Matter and Memory* Bergson implies that these planes are part of memory (planes on the cone of memory) and Deleuze suggests that they are in some way instrumental in the translation process. However, it is not clear how the plane of *consciousness*, if consciousness is associated with the intellect and its capacity to work upon materiality, can be used in the translation of the virtual into the actual. This problem arises because neither writer elaborates on the nature of these planes, thereby omitting to explain their exact nature and, in Deleuze’s case, their relation to mechanisms of translation. Therefore, it appears so far that

Deleuze repeats Bergson's mistake in the sense that he too is unable to articulate how the virtual becomes actual, how duration is translated into conscious action upon matter.

In the above discussion of Deleuze's interpretation of *Matter and Memory* I illustrate the way in which Deleuze is unable to solve the question of how duration is translated into materiality, or as he would call it, how the virtual is actualised. However, the main purpose of this discussion is to introduce the notions of the actual, the virtual and Deleuze's understanding of contraction and the cone of memory. These are vital, because they play an integral role in his argument that Bergsonism is characterised by monism rather than dualism, though Deleuze explicitly states at the start of the chapter "*One or Many Durations?*" that it contains tendencies towards both (Deleuze 1988, 73). The dualisms I have made abundantly clear throughout this chapter and include for example the opposition of differences in degree and kind, duration and matter, space and time, etc. Deleuze claims, however, that these opposing tendencies eventually converge into a "new monism" (Deleuze 1988, 73). Deleuze builds this assertion on the notion, which I have already discussed above in relation to *Creative Evolution*, that materiality and duration are at the extremes of the same movement of contraction and relaxation. Duration/memory is the most contracted state, whereas materiality is the most relaxed state. By incorporating duration and materiality onto a single scale of contraction these two differences in kind are now brought together into a single system: "the notion of contraction (or of tension) allows us to go beyond the duality of homogeneous quantity and heterogeneous quality, and to pass from one to the other in a continuous movement" (Deleuze 1988, 74). The extension that Bergson first opposed to intensity in *Time and Free Will* is now seen as part of the same movement of contraction. This, for Deleuze, is the great innovation of *Matter and Memory*: it provides the grounds for materiality to partake in duration by putting them on the same continuum.³⁸ Notably, this continuum can never

³⁸ This is the same argument that I have explored through its reiteration *Creative Evolution* and dismissed as unable to reconcile the two separate logical systems ascribed to duration and materiality. I will show in the following that despite his efforts, Deleuze does not reconcile this tension.

be taken to its extremes in actuality, the extended can never become pure space, it always retains a modicum of contraction whereby it partakes in duration. Similarly, duration must be somewhat relaxed or extended in order to be operational (Deleuze 1988, 87-88).³⁹

According to Deleuze, the resolution of the dualism into a continuum is in line with the idea, proposed in *Matter and Memory*, that there are multiple rhythms of duration, of which psychological interiority of the human individual as portrayed in *Time and Free Will* is only one instance. Our own duration, however, is still considered significant, because it allows us to intuitively grasp both our own durational nature as well as the durational nature of life in general, which consists of an infinite number of durations. As becomes clear in *Creative Evolution*, it is the faculty of intuition that allows us to grasp our own duration, in order to recognise its varied iterations, all partaking in life. Yet, it is exactly this understanding, the notion that all durations partake in a greater Whole, in the *élan vital*, that provides Deleuze a basis for the claim that ultimately the multiplicity of durations creates a limited pluralism, as they are ultimately part of an overarching monism (Deleuze 1988, 77). He states:

There is only one time (monism), although there is an infinity of actual fluxes (generalised pluralism) that necessarily participate in the same virtual whole (limited pluralism). Bergson in no way gives up the idea of a difference in kind between actual fluxes; any more than he gives up the idea of differences of relaxation (*détente*) or contraction in the virtuality that encompasses them and is actualized in them. But he considers that these two certainties do not exclude, but

³⁹ Deleuze follows this with a surprising argument that the intellect combines the capacity to engage in both matter and duration, the former providing its form, the latter its sense. And that it is through its participation in duration that it can master matter. However, the form of the intellect separates it from its sense which must be rediscovered through intuition (Deleuze 1988, 88). This is a rather questionable understanding of the intellect, for as I have shown above, Bergson remains steadfast that the intellect is only capable of dealing with matter, and that only the intuition can help us come into contact with our internal (and thereby external forms of) duration. As such, it does not provide solid evidence that Bergsonism is characterised by monism rather than dualism.

on the contrary imply, a single time. In short: Not only do virtual multiplicities imply a single time, but duration as virtual multiplicity is this single and same Time. (Deleuze 1988, 82-83)

Thus, Deleuze integrates the discrete multiplicity of matter through the notion that the generalised pluralism of fluxes is actualised in matter, but that these fluxes are ultimately united in a virtual Whole.

Deleuze further fleshes out this argument in the final chapter, which is centred on *Creative Evolution*. He argues that having shown that duration ultimately creates a virtual monism, this does not conflict with the various dualisms or the focus on differences in kind that is ubiquitous in Bergson's work. In order to complete this task, Deleuze uses a trick, which in my opinion amounts to a misreading of Bergson. He argues that Bergson's critique of intensive quantity, which underpins the first essential dualism he creates between the duration of intensive and unquantifiable conscious states on the one hand and extensive and quantifiable matter on the other hand, only applies specifically to the psychic states that Bergson discusses in *Time and Free Will*. Thus, Deleuze tries to rescue or reconstruct a notion of quantitative intensity: the idea that a form of number can apply to intensity, quality and duration (Deleuze 1988, 91-92). Deleuze here holds that while differences of degree pertain to extensive quantity, intensive quantity can be expressed in terms of degrees of difference that do not spatially separate the different durations to which they apply (Deleuze 1988, 93). However, Bergson never states that the contradiction between duration and number is only applicable to the psychic states. If anything, his continued use of duration, which is introduced through the dismissal of number, suggests that this must be applicable to all elements that partake in duration. It is also notable that in these crucial pages of *Bergsonism*, Deleuze does not provide a single reference where Bergson says anything otherwise. If we dismiss this creative reading of Bergson by Deleuze as problematic then he is unable to create a system in which difference in kind (duration) can also be expressed

quantitatively in terms of internal degrees of difference (various forms of duration which differ in their level of contraction) without invoking space or extensity. This is central to his ultimate overview of Bergsonism, which consists of four stages. The first – “pure dualism” – consists of the separation of the composites of experience into the two pure tendencies (difference in degree/space and difference in kind/duration). The second moment occurs once the “pure dualism” has been reached, which leaves them each with differences within their pure state and where “there is therefore no longer any difference in kind between two tendencies, but a difference *between* the differences in kind that correspond to one tendency and the differences in degree that refer back to the other tendency. This is the moment of neutralized, balanced dualism” (Deleuze 1988, 93). The third brings these two types of difference together into a single continuum by arguing that “between the two there are all the *degrees of difference* or, in other words, the *nature of difference*. Duration is only the most contracted degree of matter and matter the most expanded (*détendu*) degree of duration. ... Differences in degree are the lowest degree of Difference; difference in kind (*nature*) are the highest nature of difference. There is no longer any dualism between nature and degrees” (Deleuze 1988, 93).⁴⁰ The nature of difference in general is now understood to be One, which can be expressed either in terms of difference in kind or degree of difference. Crucially, this is not an actual unity. “The coexistence of all the degrees, of all the levels is virtual, only virtual” (Deleuze 1988, 93). The unification itself is virtual, the moment of monism in Bergson is therefore, for Deleuze, purely virtual and ontological, not actual. This integrates dualism and monism into Bergsonism for Deleuze. However, it cannot remain purely virtual. Deleuze associates this pure virtuality with the *élan vital*, the essence of life itself, which drives all movement and development. However, as is clear from Bergson’s discussion of the *élan vital* in *Creative Evolution*, it must express itself by working upon materiality. Or in Deleuze’s terms, it is necessary for the virtual to become actualised (matter being already actualised

⁴⁰ Italics in original. Bergson never uses the term degrees of difference. Deleuze requires this term to reconcile his “new monism” with the dualism in Bergson’s oeuvre.

duration). Therefore, Deleuze's discussion of Bergsonism requires a fourth and final movement that rediscovers dualism on the actualised plane; matter driven by duration. It completes the cycle of the movement, which taken from the actual composite to the virtual must return again to the actual. It depends on the need of the virtual to become actualised, for *élan vital* to express itself in evolutionary movement. Through its return to the actual plane, the virtuality of duration and duration itself can be inserted back into materiality to create the composite of our experience, it creates life. *Élan vital* necessitates movement and Deleuze argues that this movement necessarily consists of differentiation. Therefore, Deleuze calls the final moment the process of differentiation, which characterises the process of actualisation (Deleuze 1988, 94-97).⁴¹ Deleuze associates these two related processes with creation and evolution, emphasising, like Bergson, their proclivity for generating new and unforeseen developments.

Yet, like Bergson, Deleuze neglects to explain the mechanics of actualisation. The processes that allow for the virtual, which is associated with duration, to become actualised into matter infused by – guided by – duration. It merely is described as a necessity, something that must occur; as I have already discussed above, *élan vital* must express itself. In Deleuze's words it must become actualised. But neither Deleuze nor Bergson acknowledge that the latter has created a separate kind of reality with its own sense of logic: they both downplay how the point of the cone, as the most contracted moment of duration, must not only be continuous with the whole of the cone but also open onto a heterogeneous logic of space and extensity, with the chasm between them that this implies. Therefore, Deleuze does not address the fact that it is unclear how to types of logic are reconciled or can be converted from one into the other. Unsurprisingly, there is a sense of mysticism that remains attached to Deleuze's Bergsonism. One has to take it

⁴¹ It is significant here to note that for Deleuze *élan vital* specifically denotes the process of differentiation and therefore should not be equated with duration (which he equates with memory), as it only represents its actualisation (Lundy 2018, 123). This is clearly one of Deleuze's creative interpretations of Bergson's work, who, as I have argued, fully develops his notion of duration through its connotation as *élan vital*, instead of using it as a further stage or specific aspect of duration.

on faith that the two types of difference, and specifically their logics, are reconcilable and can be translated from one into the other. Deleuze actually highlights this unconsciously in his discussion of the interrelation and interaction between past and present through the cone of memory. He clearly states that in order to move into the realms of the past from the present one must leap. How this leap is undertaken is unclear, but it underscores the sense that there is a gap between the duration of the past and the materiality of the present. This is repeated in his discussion on translation, which I relayed above, where Deleuze is unable to explain in any detail how this process is able to transform or actualise the durational past to become intelligible and informative to the materiality of the present. This is exacerbated by the fact that Deleuze follows Bergson in the use of spatial metaphors to explain duration. The notion of contraction, especially when placed alongside the figure of the cone of memory creates an inherently spatial portrayal of a concept that according to its exposition cannot be captured in extension. Though, like Bergson, Deleuze appears to be aware of the fact that he is using spatial imagery to capture duration, it leaves him open to the danger of creating a temporal monism that ultimately devolves into space: monism presented in the figure of the cone. As such, Deleuze is unable to stick to the final edict of the method of intuition: he is unable to state and solve his problem purely in terms of duration. However, this cannot be completely his fault, especially considering Bergson's own acknowledgement of the problematic relation between duration and representation whether in terms of imagery or language. As such it is difficult to imagine what this final rule of the method of intuition would entail exactly. Nevertheless, the combination of a creative interpretation of Bergson's work, the lapse into mysticism and the lack of explanation concerning the mechanism of "translation", that is to say the way in which duration can be translated or differentiated into materiality, Deleuze is not able to convince me that Bergson's work is ultimately characterised by monism rather than dualism.

Conclusion

Bergson's nonlinear ontology based in time as duration is, in the first instance, established through a polar opposition between duration and space. The intended consequence is that time should be understood as complex and interpenetrating, endowed with a power of its own. Moreover, it has yielded the intriguing insight that chronological time can be devolved into space, because of its assumption of pure homogeneity. On the other hand, Bergson's reliance on duality is problematic for the possibility of a united and understandable self. Pure duration, which constitutes the "true" self, cannot be made intelligible to the self, as reflective consciousness depends on the logic of extension that does not apply to duration. The insistence on duration as the centre of the self is further problematised by the fact that, according to Bergson, the majority of human beings are dominated by the superficial self. The "true" self lies dormant within them, unable to rise to the surface to express itself. This also precludes them from engaging in free acts. As such, there are several problems that stem from the conceptualisation of duration as diametrically opposed to materiality.

Therefore, Bergson's attempt to remedy this flaw in his conceptualisation of duration is particularly important. In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson extends duration beyond the self; it becomes the driving force of all life, the vital impulse that is responsible for all change and movement. I have shown that Bergson tries to remedy the intensity\extensity duality in several ways: the first is through the adaption of several new dualities, each of which is designed to bridge the original gap by placing the two opposites in interacting relations of inversion. This creates an understanding of the world as composed of open systems which ensure that all things are in contact with other elements, and which allow for the transmission of *élan vital*. However, I have shown that the relations of inversion retain a sense of tension because Bergson is unable to conciliate the competing systems of logic that he had established in *Time and Free Will* as

characteristic of duration and materiality. He does not synthesise these contentious frameworks of understanding and interpretation into a single set of logical principles.

The adaptations in *Creative Evolution* have an impact on Bergson's conceptualisation of the self. The first is a change in register from the internal, mental states of the self to the individual as an element in a wider environment. The broadening scope of duration reduces the unicity of the individual. Whereas in *Time and Free Will*, the characteristic element of the self, its durational psychic states, were unique to it and the self was separated from the world in the form of the body, in *Creative Evolution* duration is understood to suffuse all organisms, which are no longer self-contained, but stand in constant relation and communication with each other. The open, enduring systems of *Creative Evolution* to some extent dematerialise the self, centralising duration, which replaces matter as the constitutive "substance" of the universe, because the focus shifts from modes of being to modes of becoming, from structure to organisation. As such, the previously presupposed unity of the self through embodiment is undermined,

Moreover, the continuation of problematic duality of logical frameworks at the heart of the pinnacle of Bergson's attempt to effect a rapprochement between materiality and duration through the suggestion of inverted directions of movement has important implications for Bergson's notion of the self. As I have shown, Bergson attempts to establish a connection between the opposing "deep" and superficial self through the notion of intuition, which as a hybrid of intelligence and instinct is supposedly able to function in both the material and durational register. However, Bergson does not explain how intuition is able to synthesise the two logical frameworks into a single framework that would endow it with this dual capacity. Finally, I have argued that Bergson's mysticism becomes prevalent in his understanding of duration, which is elevated to an immense status of power, but, because of the two logical paradigms remains inaccessible to our intellect and intuition which supposedly would allow for the conscious experience of duration has been shown to be problematic in exactly its capacity to translate the register of duration into the logic of the intellect. Hence, Bergson's engagement with nonlinear logic dissolves the unity of the self

in various ways and is unable to establish a coherent alternative. As such, Bergson's nonlinear ontology is incompatible with the self as a unified entity, which is necessary to provide a political agent. Therefore, Bergson's work suggests that the introduction of greater contingency and difference into the self can be problematic for the notion of politics as collective action undertaken by a multitude of coherent individuals.

Chapter 3: The Multiple, Chaotic and Undifferentiated Self

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the nonlinear ontology proposed by Michel Serres. I will focus on his work *Genesis* (1995) because, as Assad argues, this book plays a pivotal role in Serres' work, denoting a shift in his approach both in terms of style and subject as a result of a more general turn in the sciences towards postmodernity (Assad 1999, 2).¹ This is mainly expressed in an attempt to dissolve the one into the multiple, to consider, as Serres himself states, "the multiple as such" (Serres 1995, 4). In addition, it contains a clear attempt to propose an ontology based on nonlinear conceptualisations of time. It results from an engagement with the multiple as such, which faces continued opposition from the tendency to reduce multiplicity into unity. Serres proposes that the ontologies that are centred on unity are based on an illusion, which is adopted to facilitate systematisation. However, these unities obscure multiplicities that constitute them. In fact, Serres proposes an ontology that is inherently founded on multiplicity; to this end he proposes a new understanding of multiplicity as pure possibility and positive chaos and embodied in the revival of the old French concept of *noise*. Throughout this chapter I will show that Serres ontology of the multiple tries to undermine the dominance of unities. In the course of this exploration of the multiple, Serres exposes various tendencies of nonlinearity that are incommensurable with linear, stable conceptualisations of the self. This results primarily from the fact that such a self presumes the unicity that Serres aims to undermine. However, like Bergson, Serres struggles to create a nonlinear logic that is completely independent from linear logics. As a result, Serres' account also displays tensions between linear conceptualisations of the world as

¹ She further notes that in the opening of the book, Serres repudiates his previous work as too dependent on unity.

dominated by the one and the alternative narrative of the multiple he is striving to create. Consequently, he is not always able to maintain the openness of the multiple and falls back into linear strategies of duality and unicity.

I will start off my exploration of Serres' inquiry into pure multiplicity by discussing his aims in *Genesis*, which exhibits tension between the multiple and the linguistic necessity to express it in concepts, which are manifestations of unity. Then, I will trace Serres' conceptualisation of the multiple as such through the concept of *noise*, which is central to his effort to develop a concept of multiplicity as positive chaos and pure possibility. In an attempt to approach this abstract concept, Serres uses, what he calls the excluded middle, the intermediary between the poles of a duality, to convey a sense of that which is inexpressible: the nonlinear. I will trace this technique through the notions of dance, language and movement. However, I will also show that this technique is liable to result in the use of linear logic of dualities and that Serres sometimes contradicts himself in the attempt to find "space" for chaos.

In the second part of the chapter I will explore how Serres creates a world of turbulent mixtures, the idea that everything contains both organisation and multiplicity through the introduction of redundancy into innovative movements. These mixtures combine movement and stasis into chreodic forms of organisation, which means that stasis is an illusion that obscures the movement produced through constituent multiplicities. However, I will also explore the problematic logical system that Serres depends on to establish the notion of chaos, because it is founded on an intermediary between nonlinearity and linearity, which leaves it liable to be dominated by linearity.

Finally, I will show that Serres reveals that the world consists of intermediary forms which are negotiated out of time and space. Consequently, he ultimately creates a continuum which is very similar to Bergson, though Serres never establishes the world as expressing either pure linearity or pure nonlinearity, thereby avoiding the greatest of Bergson's pitfalls. However, like Bergson, Serres is unable to produce a nonlinear logic that is comprehensible, thereby

problematizing the capacity to reinterpret the world in terms of a mixture of nonlinearity and linearity as the former is underdeveloped and largely dependent on the mediation of the certainties of the latter. In the process, I will show that linearity establishes the concept of the self, which cannot be sustained on the opposing logics of nonlinearity. Insofar as we can understand how these logics function, they are shown to complicate delineation, agency and organisation and the self.

Multiple as Such

In the opening of his work, *Genesis*, helpfully titled, “The Object of This Book”, Michel Serres states that he wants to open up a new vista for philosophy: the multiple. He argues that most of Western philosophy is primarily focused on unities because of their amenity to the possibilities of sum and division. Such unities answer our need for “principle, system, integration.” (Serres 1995, 2) Thus we project these onto the world, we actively produce them, to suit our needs. By contrast, we reject the multiple, the aggregate, as irrational, but, as Serres points out, the unit is no more certain than multiplicities; indeed, on closer inspection, unities turn out to be composites. What is more, the focus on unity has led to a belief in the existence of a global unity, a true sense of universality, which seems ridiculous to Serres, particularly in light of the fact that all unities belie multiplicities. This is reinforced by the fact that “[r]eason makes use of concepts, under whose unities are sheltered multiplicities that are most often highly dispersed” (Serres 1995, 3). Thus, we should pursue the multiple instead of the one. This produces an obstacle for Serres, who states:

I never attempted to conceive of the multiple as such, directly, without ever allowing unification to come to its aid. I am trying here to raise the brackets and parentheses, syntheses, whereby we shove multiplicities under unities. That is the

object of this book: the multiple. Can I possibly speak of multiplicity itself without ever availing myself of the *concept*?² (Serres 1995, 4)

Serres describes this process as an exercise in re-discovery, the eradication of our tactics that keep it shut away, so that we can increase our ability to accept and understand it. Yet, it is also fraught, as in this effort, we are sure to be faced with uproar and chaos. These two concepts, among others, will become central to the understanding of the multiple which Serres has developed. Though it fits better than the word *concept*, even the suggestion that Serres has developed a singular understanding of the multiple is problematic. According to Serres, the “multiple as such” is “undefined by elements or boundaries. ... It is not an aggregate;³ it is not discrete. It’s a bit viscous perhaps” (Serres 1995, 4-5). Understood in this way, it cannot be captured in the traditional sense as it is fluidity itself. Serres, like Bergson, runs into the problem of trying to explore a notion through language, which cannot capture it. The fluidity of the multiple overflows linguistic concepts and thereby it exceeds our experience, our understanding. Yet, traces of it can be found at some of the fringes of our experience, background noise, time itself, the sea. But we can never gain more than an incomplete awareness of the multiple, its

² Italics in original. Assad notes that one of the main ways in which Serres attempts to avoid the unity of the concept through the use of adjectives, adverbs and prepositions in the place of nouns and verbs. The former are better able to reflect the “inventive possibilities of the multiple” (Assad 1999, 27). She particularly mentions the example of the *Belle Noiseuse* - noiseuse being the self-invented neological adjective of *noise*. She states: “He chooses the adjectival form in full awareness of its tangential status; it has no substance, and, more importantly, it does not exist in the French language and never did, even when “noise” [Assad’s denotation of *noise*] itself was a current term. ... [It] reflects linguistically the fluctuating, fuzzy, viscous somewhat that is pre-phenomenological and formless” (Assad 1999, 28). Unfortunately for English language speakers this creative usage of substantivisation of other grammatical functions is not well facilitated in English (Assad 1999, 27).

³ This is confusing because Serres characterises the multiple as an aggregate multiple times including a few pages earlier and the appropriate logic as we shall see below as aggregate thinking. It is possible that Serres here is referring to the Leibnizean aggregate he alludes to in the opening paragraph of the “The Object of This Book” chapter, in which he characterises these aggregates as sets of objects, composed of discrete elements. This is at odds with the multiplicity he is trying to establish as “viscous” and undelineated. In the English translation Serres continuously uses aggregate to denote his “viscous” multiplicity, though he sometimes uses the adjective “sumless” (For example: Serres 1995, 103, 109, 116). He even calls the logic appropriate to it “aggregate thinking” (Serres 1995, 106, 113).

unpredictable movements never permit us to catch more than a glimpse. This also makes us uncomfortable and drives us to focus on the unitary, whose internal logic of stability and cogence determines that our knowledge of it is either null or complete. Under unitary logic one can either know something or not know it at all. Yet this does not adequately reflect our situation, as generally we have partial rather than complete knowledge.

We are confronted with or absorbed by the multiple where more than three fourths of our knowledge and actions are concerned. Without any principle of individuation, without any simple or easy integration, without any distinguishable concept, without any well-defined boundary between observer and observed, I can only define here an ordinary piece of information, of a given size in some way or another finite and subject to change; I will write once more, neither null nor total. When it's total or null, then unity appears. (Serres 1995, 5)

The partial knowledge of the multiple corresponds to our everyday experience; we usually know some, but certainly not all the information, and thus do not have the sense that we have absolutely no knowledge of the situation in which we find ourselves.⁴ Serres' observation that there are no boundaries without the principle of individuation, which is the core of the logic of unity in the preceding quote, is a particularly important aspect of the problem he faces in trying to understand the multiple as such. Consequently, as I will show in this chapter, Serres' logic of the multiple is incompatible with the notion of the self, which provides one of the most elementary experiences of unity. In the logic of the multiple there is no inside or outside, no observer or observed, no

⁴ Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that even in situations where we are completely ignorant of the information that bombards our senses, we will understand these signals in such a way that they become somewhat intelligible to us, sufficient enough for us to feel that we can act. Both Bergson and Nietzsche share similar interpretations of the intellect, though Nietzsche stresses that it imparts a sense of security, rather than facilitates action which he locates at the level of the drives (Bergson 1944, 168-170, 177; Nietzsche 2001, §355).

subject or object. We literally cannot see the forest for the trees, for in any situation we have become part of the forest and its ecology. We cannot master it, but instead we can only partake in it, we must let it overflow us; we have no choice, it already suffuses and surrounds us. It is impossible to escape. It swirls around us; it is fluid and cannot be captured. Serres is trying to approach the multiple without “arresting it through unity”, which requires a new way of thinking (Serres 1995, 6).⁵ He indicates the difficulty through the example of our ideas of time, and states:

I’m attempting to think time. I’m well aware that time has no unity, no moment, no instant, no beginning, no end, and that I have no knowledge of its eternal completeness. For all the times that I’ve been able to tell, all of them were unities. I am now attempting to rethink time as a pure multiplicity. (Serres 1995, 6)

Our habit is to consider time as made up of units; seconds, months, eras. Yet, when considered in more depth, as we have seen with Bergson, we are also aware that there are aspects of time that escape us. For Serres they are limitless, unbounded, as all multiplicities inhabit the universe and everything it contains. Like time, we misunderstand the history that it forms, a history which is also a multiplicity and which is not the straightforward narrative we generally consider it to be:

Thus [by rethinking time], perhaps, history can be born. History is in the midst of these hazy midsts, commonly lived, uneasily thought, it is, as it happens, information neither total nor null, without a clear-cut boundary between the observer and the observed. ... The multiple is the object of this book and history its goal. (Serres 1995, 6-7)

⁵ Serres shares this with Nietzsche and Bergson, who each require a new way of thinking to engage in the transvaluation of values and the immersion in duration respectively.

History, as the multiple, has nothing to do with narration and is rather a particular expression of experience that, as a multiplicity, can hardly be thought in terms of the unitary. Like Bergson's concept of duration, Serres' multiplicity cannot be captured in concepts, which makes it resistant to language. The notion of the multiple, therefore, must be approached through different media. Serres, prefers sound as the main medium through which to access that which escapes the verbal. Yet, unlike Bergson, who also uses sound as a metaphor, Serres does not consider music as the primary expression of the multiple, but rather what I would call the sounds of the universe, the background noise that hovers at the edges of our experience. It is "the ground of our perception, absolutely uninterrupted, it is our perennial sustenance, the element of the software of all our logic" (Serres 1995, 7). It is particularly important to our experience as it is our only continuous sense, it never switches off, even when our brains deactivate.⁶ It introduces the sound and the fury. Sound, background noise and fury will become central to the understanding of the multiple that Serres develops throughout *Genesis*. They each embody aspects of the positive chaos that is the source of possibility and creativity, which Serres denotes through the archaic French word *noise*. Because it is central to Serres' philosophy it will be explored at length in the following section. Unfortunately, the term *noise* makes for a confusing read in the English translation - and could also create difficulty in this chapter - as one of the main ways in which we experience it is through (background) noise, that is to say, through sound.⁷ Therefore I will follow the translator's example in using cursive script to denote the archaic French and will use regular script to indicate sound.

⁶ I think Serres is incorrect in this assertion, sight is the only sense that is switched off. All the others remain active at all times. Serres' argument is mainly turned against the sense of sight, which currently dominates our way of conceptualizing experience and enhances the sense that the world is made up of individuated forms. This is a valid criticism, though the form of the argument is poorly posed.

⁷ This problem is further intensified by the fact that at times in *Genesis*, I felt that Serres was describing *noise* when using noise and vice versa - it almost seems to be used interchangeably -, a confusion which might be translated into this chapter, as I have followed nomenclature of the original text in my exposition. However, as the French word for noise is bruit and therefore nothing like *noise*, I must assume that the translation is correct in using either the regular script or the cursive.

Noise: Chaos and Blankness

The concept of *noise* is complex and remains somewhat vague throughout Serres' work, deliberately because the multiple resists clear definition and delineation. Literally, in ancient French, it means "noise, uproar, wrangling", but it can also imply a sense of an ado or contention. To Serres' displeasure the word has fallen out of use in contemporary French, a fact which he tries to remedy (Serres 1995, 12). Its main function in Serres' work is to provide the basis for pure possibility. As I will show in this section, noise is expressed either in chaos or in blankness, but in both cases it provides the foundation for possibility to emerge, for new things to come into being.

Serres first explores *noise* in its chaotic forms. He states that *noise* evokes a sense of nausea and the nautical; the rushing of the sea is one of the most invasive forms of background noise. However, even when we do not perceive it, background noise is constant, it permeates all space. It conveys the sense of restlessness that hovers at the edge of our consciousness, somewhere in between discernible signals and silence, between motion and rest, it is a disturbance. Background noise is ubiquitous, it is "limitless, continuous, unending," as is the *noise* from which it emerges (Serres 1995, 13). It is not a phenomenon, which by definition is something distinct and discernible, but it is inherent to being itself, "it is part of the in-itself, part of the for-itself... noise is metaphysical" (Serres 1995, 13). *Noise* engenders a sense of pluripotentiality, it is the basis for everything. It can take on any shape and is present in all actualisations; it is everything, possibly even at once. *Noise* is the possible, chaos, background noise from which everything stems. Consequently all "things" are also always in a state of becoming, but it is as yet unclear how the transitions are affected, it offers no "relationship between chaos and form" (Serres 1995, 14).

Noise, because of its ubiquity and omnipresence, provides an epistemology that is both global and local or specific; it provides the bigger picture and the minute details it contains. What is more important for Serres, however, is the fact that it contains all information but reveals none

of it. That is to say, the relevant information is hidden within a deluge and it is impossible for us to distinguish the information we require from the rest. Thus, the answer is present, but absent too, because it is beyond our reach. The general impulse in response is to try to tame and streamline it so that we feel in control. The main method of mastery for humans is through rationality, which functions through distinctions. We spend our childhood striving to master the world through rationality. Yet, once we are older, doubt can creep in and create an expanding network of bifurcations. Serres equates the former with a downstream flow of a river, the passing of mortal time, the rational with its syntheses and unities which provide the illusion of the universal, whereas the latter is an upstream labour, the route to the “unknown secret of life” (Serres 1995, 17).⁸ The former, evolved from the latter, determines our everyday experience, whereas the latter is unknowable. It vibrates and oscillates; it is possibility itself, both full and empty simultaneously. It is a chaos, a background noise from which perceivable forms emerge. The known is brought forth by the unknown. It is of course the latter, the unknown, which Serres is trying to approach (Serres 1995, 18).

Thus, *noise* cannot be found in representations themselves in the sense that we can distinguish the *noise* from the form. It is the ontological origin from which all forms emerge. Yet, Serres states, we are tied to the forms, to the scenographies they create and linguistic systems we create to determine them, we lack the ability to apprehend the *noise* from which they emerge. The character of this ensemble is neither rational nor harmonious, as Leibniz thought, rather it is strife, false harmony and hatred. *Noise* is not peaceful but a *belle noiseuse*, a “beautiful troublemaker” (Serres 1995, 20-21). Despite our difficulties in perceiving it, the *noise* does persist and pervades both our local and global environment. In order to approach the *noise* we must not - try to - limit its struggle and discord, but be open to it. That requires us to open up our senses to

⁸ The sense of doubt that Serres considers to be the way to the “unknown secret of life” is not the rational doubt of Descartes nor a route to the certainty of Hegel. Their reliance on rationality sets it on the path towards unity and synthesis (Serres 1995, 17-18).

chaos, which we are bodily conditioned to filter it out. Furthermore, we need to separate ourselves from rationality, as it tends towards suppression of chaos. It removes the universal from the local by setting it on a higher plane of pure harmony. The negative connotation of chaos is the result of its problematic relationship with rationality, which uses it and a range of synonyms as binary oppositions to a set connected to reason. The dominance of reason has edged out the chaotic multiple in society; politics, economics, religion etc. all work to tamp it down. Society struggles with and tries to assert control over time, to drive it to unification and synthesis. It simplifies in order to create a sense of stability. Thus, it is necessary for philosophy to guard and reintroduce multiplicity (Serres 1995, 25). Serres requires the use of *noise* to reinstate a sense of chaos that is not negative, even though it might feel threatening or overwhelming to us. (Serres 1995, 20-21) *Noise* is the multiple itself, it is possibility itself. "It is a set of possible things, it may be *the* set of possible things" (Serres 1995, 22). It is open-endedness, capaciousness, rather than potential. What shall come of it is contingent, unknowable.

We cannot predict what will be born from it. We cannot know what is in it, here or there. No one knows, no one has ever known, no one will ever know, how a possible coexists with a possible, and perhaps it coexists through a relationship of possibility. The set is criss-crossed by possible relationships. (Serres 1995, 22)

It is the task of the philosopher to seek out and guard the multiplicity of the possible, to abandon the rational search for "truth" in favour of the opening up of bifurcations and possibilities.⁹ *Noise* is the ontological origin, it is the perennial source of all things coming into being. It is not about seeking *the* origin, the original multiplicity from which everything sprung. Serres expresses doubt that such a beginning could even exist let alone be found. Instead, one must look for the concurrent

⁹ This echoes Nietzsche's critique of rationality, who condemns the search for definitive "truth" and urges us to be content with the partial knowledge of perspectivism.

multiplicity of the possible, contained within time and space. It is the basis of and persists in all representations, all states come from chaos (Serres 1995, 23-24).¹⁰ Later in this chapter I will discuss how things emerge from *noise*, for now it is sufficient to establish that things can emerge from it.

This is crucial, because Serres uses the notion of already established, differentiated forms as the basis for his elaboration of *noise* as blankness. He approaches it through the notion of the uniqueness of form. He argues that humans prefer the generic over the truly unique, because commonality enables communication. Thus, generalisation has an important social function, which is why public persona thrive on universality and must be stripped from singularity as much as possible. The public face is oriented towards mimicry, the unique individual endeavours to become an “expressionless public body, invested with conventionality, stereotype, he is a concept, he is a class, he is a quasi-object” (Serres 1995, 28). There are strong similarities between Serres’ notion of the public persona, Bergson’s writings on the superficial self and Nietzsche’s assertions concerning the masks which grow around profound spirits.¹¹ In particular, Bergson and Serres are similar in their assertions that the public persona is related to commonality and communication and both insist that the superficial self and the public persona cannot provide a complete sense of self or completely reflect the individual. As Serres calls it, they create an “infra-subject”, a subject that has fallen below the threshold of uniqueness which qualifies it as a full subject (Serres 1995, 28).¹² It is a requirement of the social space, argues Serres, that we don a social mask to reduce our singularity. Interestingly, and completely contrary to Bergson and Nietzsche, the adoption of the mask and the transformation into the quasi-object

¹⁰ I will discuss the way in which things emerge from *noise* below, here I will focus on the establishment of that concept.

¹¹ Bergson 2001, 129-139; Nietzsche 1998 II §40. Though Nietzsche actually asserts that the blankness of the mask - in Serres’ terms - is the result of the misunderstanding of profound spirits by mundane people, rather than something we should strive for.

¹² For Serres the infra-subject runs parallel to the super-subject, a subject which displays hyper-individuality and which, in our current society, is generally rejected and often banished to the confines of the asylum (Serres 1995, 28).

provides a second path towards the multiple, which can also be found in the “pure abstract phantom that every viewer thinks he recognizes” (Serres 1995, 29). The reduction of individuality increases the ability of the objectified person to form relationships with others. Determination on the other hand excludes; it sets up criteria that forms might not match. The higher the degree of indetermination the more others can recognise some of themselves in it.

Here on this smooth face is the capacity of the multiple that can be called the possible. There is the complex and noisy possible, there is the blank virtual. There is chaos by a superabundance of presence, there is chaos by blank absence. (Serres 1995, 29-30)

The blank chaos can cash in all checks, it has the capacity to become anything, to follow any direction and swerve with a change in the direction of the breeze. The blank *noise* is also associated for Serres with the general act of thinking - that is to say, not the act of thinking something, in which case one becomes the object or subject under consideration, disappearing in its determination.

I think in general, I am a capacity to think something, and I am virtual. I think in general, I can think anything. I think, therefore I am indeterminate. ... The I is nobody in particular, it is not a singularity, it has no contours, it is the blankness of all colors and all nuances, an open and translucent welcome of a multiplicity of thoughts, it is therefore the possible. ... A pure capacity. There is nothing more abstract. (Serres 1995, 31)

Through the angle of thought, Serres comes to a different approach to the individual. Rather than thought determining the character of the individual, in the way that Descartes understood it,

thought ensures the individual's plurality. Instead of being the central ontological unit, the individual is imbued with a sense of diversity, "[d]iverse like the multiple, fluctuating like capacity. ... This self depicted is the sum of the others and of nothing" (Serres 1995, 31). The individual is not a central unity, but infused with the multiple. However, Serres does not take notice of the tension inherent in this understanding of the self. For the blank and indeterminate I, the I that can be all things at once, strains the concept of the self as unified and delineated. This is Serres' intent. Yet, he does not acknowledge that a possible consequence of this supposition is the annihilation of the I; it can become dispersed in the multiplicity. How can we speak of an I, if it is both everything and nothing at once? What does it consist of? How is it held together? What delineates an I, if it is indeterminate, indistinguishable?

Hence, the multiple leads to a sense of indeterminacy, which is necessary to allow for any kind of possibility. It exists in two "types"; chaos and blankness (Serres 1995, 31). For Serres both the beginning and the end are characterised by chaos and/or blankness, by *noise*,¹³ and it would be a mistake to characterise these two "types" of *noise* as opposites. They each are possibilities (Serres 1995, 36-37). Serres is trying to dissolve the "one" of the individual into a multiple. It can either move towards blankness or chaos and, probably because Serres has noted that the social function of the individual tends toward blankness, he argues that it is desirable for the individual to increase its indeterminacy, to strive toward blankness. Serres uses the term *gymnastics* to describe such attempts to increase our metaphorical nakedness. It requires one to

dismiss every opinion, from one's mind, every idea, every hate, ... to level off the contours of opinionated determination, it is to find the bare and barren plain. ... Opinion is stable, it is singular, it defines someone through hates. ... Inventive thinking is unstable, it is undetermined, it is un-differentiated. (Serres 1995, 34)

¹³ Everything both emerges from and dissolves into *noise*.

Dance, Movement, Language

Unfortunately, Serres is not very specific about the way in which we can un-differentiate ourselves. We need to become a naked faculty, the general possibility of doing something, a general capacity. He seems to imply that we ourselves must become like our capacity for thinking in general; unspecified by a subject or object, undifferentiated. However, we become automatically differentiated through the trail our body ambles along over time. In its increasing differentiation it loses freedom by taking certain paths and forgoing others. Gymnastics thus must be the exercise to regain this freedom. It is the attempt to recover blankness, nakedness. "It is a practice for going back in time. It un-differentiates the body ... It turns the body into a faculty. It turns it into a capacity. It turns it into a possibility" (Serres 1995, 35). It turns us into nothing, nobody, abstract blankness. But this has brought us no closer to an understanding of how we might achieve such blankness, nor what to do when we achieve it in particular because action appears to lead to differentiation through the closing off of possibilities. If anything, it seems to become more abstract, more unattainable. Turning back time seems impossible. Of what, then, does gymnastics consist? In the first place, it seems to be related to physical exercise. In particular, like Nietzsche and Bergson, Serres seems to have reserved a particular significance for the act of dancing. Bergson's dancer is a metaphor for the experience of duration, and for Nietzsche dancing is an important expression of his prized Dionysian spirit.¹⁴ Serres too focuses on dance as an avenue into the experience of the multiple as such. It stands in relation to a second motif as a symbol of the edge of the multiple, which like background noise is discernible but hints at indistinct multiplicity: the foot(print). He elaborates on that theme, stating that the foot can emerge out of blankness or chaos through dance:

¹⁴ Bergson 2001, 11-13; Nietzsche 2003b.

There is the nought, there is the multiple, and both are possibles. The dance is born out of blankness, bareness, or, on the contrary, out of clamors. ... The foot looms here, alive and exquisite, dancing, at the crest of a surge, a strange fluctuation midst the fury and the sound of the *belle noiseuse*, drowned in the chaos of multiplicities. (Serres 1995, 36)

There is a lot at stake in the attempts to become un-differentiated, to find the multiple. Like Bergson's connection between duration and freedom, Serres has wrought a connection between the abandonment of nudity and the foreclosing of the possible, of origin and, hence, of freedom.

Yet, while the stakes rise, the question of engaging in gymnastics, of becoming un-differentiated, becomes even more complicated. For, like *noise* itself, the un-differentiated is invisible, unthinkable. We can only perceive the differentiated, such as the foot(print). This reinforces the notion that the multiple is, to a large extent, inaccessible to us. Only once it can be translated into a unity, the foot(print), does it become intelligible to us. But, Serres does not provide in the discussion of dance an account of, as he put it earlier, the transition from chaos into form. The pure multiplicity translates into dance, which becomes observable through the foot(print), but the transitions remain obscured. It even seems to take on a metaphorical quality, because Serres states that the dance is performed by a djinn, a spirit. Should it then be understood as a metaphor for general movement, rather than taken in the literal context of the (human) body, performing movements. The notion of dance as metaphor is reinforced by Serres suggestion that the dancer's body is like the unknown quantity in calculus, which can assume any and all values. The unknown quantity, in this interpretation, is another expression of the possible. What is more, Serres, further confuses the matter when he goes on to imply that only the undifferentiated *can* dance, that the undifferentiated, always must join the dance (Serres 1995,

38; 43). But, if that were the case, of what then does gymnastics consist? How can we turn back time and become un-differentiated?

In the discussion of the dancer as the undifferentiated and dance as the means to become blank, Serres is ambiguous about whether the dancer dances because he is blank or whether dance is the means to becoming blank. He states:

He who dances is a numeral and a sign ... his body in the abstract, naked and null, is the general equivalent. ... The dancer is bereft of meaning, he has all meanings. He is blank and polysemous. (Serres 1995, 39)

Further on, Serres again implies that one already needs to be headed down the path of blankness before one can dance, that one must have started to take off their meaning, before one can dance. In addition, Serres suddenly implies that it can be taught, but besides creating the problem of infinite regress, this does not bring us closer to understanding how one actually becomes blank. Serres, thus, seems unable to settle the question of dance as either the method to or the result of blankness. Nor is it clear whether it is a metaphor or a prescription for beneficial practice - if it is the latter it is lacking. He is shown to oscillate continuously along the continuum "binding" these two poles.

The difficult technique of returning to zero. A path toward nakedness, indetermination, non-existence. The more I think the less I am me. If I think something, I am that something. If I simply think, I am no longer anyone. ... The more I dance, the more I am naked, absent, a calculation, a number. Dance is to the body proper what exercise of thought is to the subject known as I. The more I dance, the less I am me. ... When I dance I am only the blank body of the sign. The sign is a transparency that tends toward its designation. The dancer, like the

thinker, is an arrow pointing elsewhere. He shows something else, he makes it exist, he makes an absent world descend into presence. He thus makes himself be absent. The body of the dancer is the body of the possible, blank, naked, nonexistent. ... The ... dancer has given himself a faculty-body, a pure possibility of doing. Nakedness here is ... the height of abstraction, the abstract as such, or the possible actualized ... It becomes, then, capable of every meaning, every sign, every designation ... the prop of all possible meanings. It can say everything without language. The body's articulations are broken in order to flee articulate language. (Serres 1995, 39-40)

Serres here expresses a similar position to Bergson and Nietzsche, inasmuch as they all note the discriminatory nature of language. That is to say, the way in which words and concepts place arbitrary boundaries that impose the pretence of stasis on the fluidity of nature. I will discuss the relation between linguistic representation and the multiple in more detail later. For now, I want to point out that it is part of the reason why Bergson, Nietzsche and Serres gravitate toward non-verbal forms of expression, and to dance in particular. It allows us to escape the oversaturation of the world with vocabulary, and to connect to its true meaning, which is fluid and fleeting. For Serres, both thinking itself, without subject or object, and dancing can render the body naked. We can strip it from singularities and qualities (Serres 1995, 40-41). However, the idea of dance as a method of inarticulate communication does return it to a "regular" understanding of dance. To some extent it mirrors the notion propagated by Bergson that art as a form of nonverbal communication can tap into aspects of experience inaccessible to the ratio, though it does not strip it of the high expectations Serres has of dance as a means to transport the singular into the multiple. Again, Serres seems to oscillate between the ordinary and extraordinary. The motif of dance functions a comprehensible way to approach the incomprehensible but through Serres' interpretation it becomes inaccessible and unintelligible itself.

Serres then moves to combine the two motifs he established as indicative of *noise*. He states that dance does not exist in a vacuum, but requires music linking dance to noise. It appears music enhances a dancer's capacity to tap into the multiple through blankness. He states:

One can dance only to music.¹⁵ Music transports the universal before meaning. Music has only a blank meaning. It is the universal language, nearly undetermined. Music is an un-differentiated language. The body of indifference bathes in undetermined sonority. The rhythm beats, reversible, the struggle against irreversible time. Music plays just shy of any singular meaning. The dancer moves his sign-body, in the space occupied by signals before the sign. (Serres 1995, 41; cf. Serres 1995, 46)

The dancer appears to derive some of his abstraction from the universality of music, the nonverbal language of rhythm and notes. Dance is then understood as a means to translate *noise* into a more accessible medium, physical movement, one that even admits of communication. It can help to *evoke the sense* of the un-differentiated, it is not pure differentiation itself. It is an attempt to approach the multiple through the routes he considers most accessible, sound and now, movement, specifically dance. However, it can never be more than an approximation, because both music and dance are dependent on organisation. It is music's organisation that is the basis of its differentiation from background noise. Dance too is dependent on an organised sense of movement, otherwise we experience it as flailing about.¹⁶ As we shall see below, it is the very notion of disorganisation that is the aspect of *noise* that sets it apart from the forms that emerge

¹⁵ Perhaps it would be more accurate to say it needs rhythm, Serres mentions rhythm as a source of reversibility and flow (1995, 41; 43).

¹⁶ Though the line between the two is fluid, bad dancers can be described as flailing about and some dances seek to invoke this impression purposefully.

from it. Therefore, both dance and music must represent an intermediary¹⁷ stage between the pure disorganisation of *noise* and organised forms that conveys a sense of fluidity and possibility.

Hence, dance cannot bring us to pure blankness, but it can create a sense of absence, which can bring forth another presence. The dancer and the thinker of general thought can become “nobody in order to become only an attention to every novelty, in order only to be an attention and to attend every unexpected arrival ... [they] make nonexistent idealities visible, to make them exist” (Serres 1995, 45). Together with the teacher they form the corps the ballet; those who are steeped in blankness in order to bring the new into existence, they become blank in order to indicate the possible, though Serres also suggests that this is often resolved into differentiation, into other things that can annihilate the blankness.

Dance is meant to evoke a more general sense of movement and placement, in particular the notion of taking and giving up space. Serres states:

The blank dances with the multiple, and the multiple dances with the one. Each takes a place and gives up his place. The subject without character, the subject without quality, fragile, trembling, suspended, proliferates, vanishes, flickers at the edge of existence. A space where each gives up his place to all, a sum space of all places given up. The *noise* is the sum of all the places taken. (1995, 42)

Noise, the chaos and blankness, is movement itself. It concerns the transfer of information in space. Only the dancer can become completely naked, all other bodies retain some meaning, some articulation. He continually takes and gives up space, he always moves rendering him “totally abstract, without existence and without recourse” (Serres 1995, 46), the dancer makes no

¹⁷ The intermediary state is characteristic of Serres’ style. He prefers a comparative methodology over analysis, because it is more predisposed to express the “creative principle in nature” (Clayton 2012, 33).

mark. He leaves no imprint or trace, because of its absence, it can call forth another presence. This is what creates movement.

Whoever is nothing, whoever has nothing, passes and steps aside. ... Thus is movement born, thus, perhaps, is born time. Not to touch the ground with one's force, not to leave any trace of one's weight, to leave no mark, to leave nothing, to yield, to step aside. ... I believe that man is blank and un-differentiated. Man has no instinct, man is not determined, man is free, man is possible ... capable of anything. And man is nothing. He is naked. (Serres 1995, 47)

However, Serres does not concede that this problematizes the notion of the individual. In his quest to explore multiplicity, he slowly chips away at the foundations that establish the individual as an entity. The figure of the dancer is ambivalent, at times it takes on a mythical character in the form of the djinn, at other times it appears to be a regular mortal, and at times it seems to disappear altogether. In addition, the properties that the dance is supposed to bestow on the individual are far beyond the normal capacities of the individual and even seem to disassemble the body, stripping it down to a sign. It appears that the goal of dancing is for the individual to disappear altogether, become nonexistent. When the individual becomes blank, when it approaches pure possibility, it can become anything and therefore consists of nothing. If it is characterised by absence, which allows it to bring forth another presence, then it is nothing in and of itself. Without distinction it becomes possible, but it also becomes indistinguishable. There needs to be a sense of distinction for the dancer to be recognised as such, to stand out from the crowd, to be identified. As a source of movement, a nomad, the dancer is ephemeral, flighty; it is literally untraceable for Serres. Yet, Serres does not acknowledge that there is a tension between his assumption of the individual as a dancer that can then disappear nor that it disassembles the individual - or self - as an entity.

The notion of the intermediary state, which is characterised by the tension between presence and absence, is also present in Serres third motif to approach *noise*: language, in particular narrative. In the first instance this approach seems unlikely. Like Bergson, Serres is sceptical of language's capacity to reflect reality, in particular to express the fluidity of nonlinear time, whether understood as *noise* or duration.¹⁸ But, Serres argues that though the notion of language can be arresting, it is a lot more complex and has a variety of capacities and limitations. It is not merely a limiting force, though it is true that it has a strong tendency to define and confine things. When words are strung together, when they become a narrative, they gain some capacity to show the fluidity and versatility of things. In any story, Serres argues, the elements and characters transform, they undergo endless metamorphoses, become first one thing and then another. This is often the easiest to trace for the main character, because it is seen from various angles, in multiple situations, and in different guises: as a hero, an ordinary person, a tortured soul, a genial friend. Yet, all these metamorphoses are presented as already present aspects of the same person. Each is seen as an extension of the single unit, rather than understood as a transformation of the unit - to some extent - into something else. Thus, the versatility of things hides in plain sight in stories (Serres 1995, 50). As Serres states: a story "reveals, by hiding it, the totality of the possible. ... The sum of space of the narrative is the sum of the places, either taken or given up" (Serres 1995, 50). As such, any work of art can possess a measure of freedom, of blankness. Thus, it appears that Serres awards a greater sense of fluidity to text and thus ultimately to language. It is in the midst of the story, then, that we can sometimes find traces of *noise*. If we pay close attention, we can find vestiges of movement, of places given up and taken. We can detect some remnants of the *noise*, but not the *noise* itself, rather, the text can present

¹⁸ Bergson predominantly argues that language must necessarily arrest duration and only belongs to the realm of superficiality, dismissing it as a means to engage with duration (Bergson 2001, 237). There is some leeway here, as Bergson does seem to allow that verbal artistic expressions can touch upon the nature of duration, in particular poetry is seen to stem from intuition (Bergson 2007, 85). For an extensive discussion of Bergson's ambivalent relationship with language see Muldoon 2006, 102-115.

merely a flat projection of it. The concept of the flat projection could, perfunctorily, be understood as a parallel to Bergson's superficial reflection of duration through language. However, to argue that these two concepts are identical is to forget that for Bergson duration cannot be expressed adequately in terms of space, to which language belongs. Serres suggests that all narratives are useful, because they always provide coherence though, usually, only within a particular system and from a specific perspective. However, both Serres and Bergson argue that texts of creative writing come closer to representing *noise* and duration respectively, than supposedly truthful, scientific texts (Serres 1995, 50-52; Bergson 2007, 42).¹⁹ It strengthens the suggestion that art can be useful in tracing the flat projection of *noise*.²⁰

Indeed, throughout his work, Serres makes it plain that *noise* is approachable to us, it is part of our experience, though not necessarily in its entirety, nor is it certain that it is intelligible for us, at least not to our current *ontological* framework.²¹ Therefore, it is imperative that we change that framework to increase sensitivity towards *noise*. The fluidity of the characters in a narrative mirror the mercuriality of the dancer whose capacity to change his shape translates into blankness (Serres 1995, 48). This is not positivity as we are accustomed to it, for this equates it with a sense of certainty, organisation and differentiation. Thus, the first step in creating a new framework is to accept chaos as a positive concept, as constructive, rather than destructive. It generates the fury, the battle that produces history through movement. It is embodied in the taking and giving up of spaces.

¹⁹ Serres makes an exception for some types of historical narrative. However, it is not entirely clear which historical narratives show glimpses of *noise* and which do not. Serres implies that some narratives are dominated by the subject, which interferes with their representation of the object. Yet, it is not clear how to tell objective from subjective historical narratives (Serres 1995, 51-52).

²⁰ One of the main metaphors or motifs in *Genesis* is a discussion of Balzac's *The Unknown Masterpiece* (1831), which centres on three artists. For Serres the work by one of them titled "*The Unknown Masterpiece*" is an expression of *noise*. Maria Assad discusses this motif at length in *Reading with Michel Serres* (1999, 30-35).

²¹ This strongly resonates with Bergson's idea that we experience duration but cannot represent it.

The cause and goal of a squabble are the taking of a place, and noise occupies space. The whole point is to hold, occupy or take a place. ... *Noise against noise*.
(Serres 1995, 52)

Noise is central in staking the fury's claim. It can take up spaces faster than almost anything, most importantly faster than most physical manifestations, in particular faster than weapons.²² For Serres, both material and immaterial elements can hold space, because both are actualisations of *noise*, whether fighting or sound, the taking of places is a clash of actualised instances of the violence of *noise*. It results in an endless struggle, a continual taking and giving up of space which creates not just a movement, but ultimately a universe. It is made up of an endless series of taking places, of footholds, footprints, what the Greeks called thesis (Serres 1995, 52-53).

Thesis is the action of putting something in a place. What is important is the place, and only then the manner of occupying it. Of taking it, holding it, setting oneself up there. Setting one's foot on it. The foot, here, is the trace of a thesis, and the wall of colors, the *noise*, is at once battle and racket, the two strategies - material and logical, hardware and software - of taking place and getting a foot in the door. ... The antithesis immediately begins the battle, it is contemporaneous with the thesis, the *noise*, is henceforth installed, stable, on the spot. (Serres 1995, 53)

The fury, the fighting belongs to multiplicities, it is a collective passion. It requires external factors to be generated. It is the multitude which covers the space, takes it up and holds it. Fury often generates noise, the multitude produces a primitive chaos-noise, which can communicate without

²² It is often faster to verbally stake a claim than to physically occupy a position.

text or language, it often transmits emotion. It is the background noise that is the first source, the first object of history (Serres 1995, 54-55).

In exploring the concept of history Serres returns to the idea that motion is the result of ceding and acceding to spaces. He argues that there are no empty places, that space is saturated with taken places. It is therefore also filled with those that have taken up the space, which are restless in their continued struggle to maintain or increase their place. It ensures that space is filled with noise and clamour. The *noise* cannot be tamed, it can merely be monopolised. It is parasitic, and can either be joined or fled, according to Serres, though I wonder how one can flee without needing to take up a different space, which would necessarily involve parasitic behaviour. For the struggle for space, which determines each place, like *noise*, is parasitic. Through the movement that results from taking and giving up spaces history is made. However, in the struggle over spaces a lot of noise and violence is created that can obscure the true movement of the exchange of space. Thus, not all struggle creates actual movement and the cacophony it creates can draw our attention away from the exchange of space (Serres 1995, 76). Some of the movement involved in struggle thus merely covers up the *noise* of history with its own interfering noise. In fact, Serres indicates that the majority of models used to describe historical development, such as polemics and dialectics, in actuality merely portray the distractions instead. They portray development as a stable process made up of stable elements, whereas real development is fluid. It depends primarily on those who give up their place. They are the source of the movement, whereas the taking of the place is generally - relatively - stabilising. "Those who take the places stabilize them and drown them in *noise*" (Serres 1995, 77). The giving up of space, however, starts the movement. All movement is initiated by a step aside and every step aside is a cession of ground that leaves space for accession by others. Those stepping aside are blankness and it appears that once one has stepped aside, one must always step aside, one must keep moving on. Once they have vacated a space it is immediately rushed and invaded by

“clamorous noisemakers”, which draw the attention away from the blank ones who have stepped aside (Serres 1995, 77).

There is no blank white place, there are only blank white ones who step aside ...
there is only a blank step, the step of giving up a place, there is only a trace of a
step, that white foot, exquisite, alive, in the midst of the *noise*. (Serres 1995, 78)

Serres once more considers the two aspects of *noise*, the blankness and the chaos. Now it is shown that they are not opposites but function in conjunction. The blankness is the aspect of the step aside, whereas the chaos is that which rushes forth and inundates it. The chaos appears to draw away the focus from the real movement; it contains all information because it obscures the answer to our questions. The blankness is then the excluded third, the one who steps aside, who is forgotten in the synthesis of the dialectic; escapes it, ephemeral, too fluid to be caught. It is the blankness that Serres is trying to approach, but it requires the chaos to rush forth to inundate the space. In stepping aside, one is cast out and is left to roam around. It is in the exodus, the meandering that history, that is to say, transformative movement,²³ is made.

The meander leaves the *noise*. Meandering always gets out of *noise*. *Noise* is the sign of places. The more places there are, the more *noise* there is; the more *noise* there is, the more places there are. ... Sound and fury are the masters of places, consequently, they are the bleak iteration of the same thesis, its equilibrium returning, conserved. The excluded ... leaves the *noise*, is always trying to. ... [It] seeks a completely blank space, finds it on rare occasions. (Serres 1995, 79)

²³ At the start of the book the concept of history remains vague, though Serres at points alludes that history is not the structured narrative we usually associate with it (Serres 1995, 51-53). And in the section under discussion he implies that not all movement leads to historical development. Toward the end of the book, Serres suggests that history is actually transformative movement (Serres 1995, 100).

The blankness is trying to escape redundancy,²⁴ it is trying to start an inventive movement. However, Serres contradicts himself on two fronts here, the first is immediately apparent. In this quote Serres argues that the excluded searches for the blank space, where just a page before he had stated, as I showed in the quote preceding it, that there are no blank spaces, merely blank steps aside. Considering that I have argued above that the question of becoming blank is problematic, it would be less problematic to imagine the exiled searching for the blank space. But the notion of the blank space is problematic too, in particular if it is something that is within reach, for as I tried to show throughout this chapter so far, Serres is mainly involved in creating a sense of intermediary states, where movement and redundancy are intertwined. Throughout *Genesis* Serres tries to resist the notion of anything real as completely pure. Only *noise* as the source from which actualised things spring is pure, but this is the basis of its inaccessibility. There are two further ways in which this final characterisation of movement contradicts Serres normal pattern; first it presents blankness and chaos as a duality, one cannot occupy the same space as the other, they each appear as the other's negation. Second, there are two contradictions in the notion that blankness flees the *noise*, for Serres had clearly set blankness up as one of the expressions of *noise*, as such it would be an attempt to flee itself. Unless it is an attempt to flee the chaotic *noise*, but this contradicts Serres' assertion that they are not opposites, but each are possibilities, sources (Serres 1995, 37). But even supposing it would want to flee itself, or its non-opposite, it would not be possible to do so, for Serres clearly states that *noise* has no antithesis, there is no externality to it, hence it cannot be fled (Serres 1995, 61-62). Serres is thus unable to portray the struggle over space in completely coherent terms, and even appears to be falling back into binary structures of representation.

²⁴ Redundancy as a term also conveys the notion that chaos contains all information but that the relevant information is drowned in the chaos. It stems from information theory and "refers to the difference in the number of bits of actual information in a transmitted message and the total number of bits that were used to make the transmission" (Clayton 2012, 34-35).

Surge: One and Multiple

It is in the stepping aside, flawed though it is as a theory, that Serres locates the development of entities that come into being. He argues that the relationship between the chaos and form, the transition from the multiple and the one is initiated through a soft sound produced by the chaotic *noise*.²⁵ It is an indicator of novelty, of the new coming into being.

The soft sound that moves and starts up is like a swallow ... it skims over the ground with its dovetail, it shows the bifurcation. ... In the beginning it is the crossroads. The murmur is nothing, is practically nothing, the murmur selects.

It is nought or it increases. ... At each crossroads, it breaks up or grows further. ... it follows the logic of the parasite,²⁶ a very tiny thing, an insufficient reason, a cause without consequence at times, which may vanish to the left of the dovetail, which may increase and magnify to the right of the instauration. This soft sound which has just begun, which is now impinging on our ears, we have forgotten that it might well have died. It never stops being unstable, left or right, immense or nonexistent, new music or silence.

... The work of the parasite changes systems, it mithridatizes them, or else the work of this parasitic interference is nought. Skims along the ground, soars, goes from dovetail to dovetail.

... As it goes: you will never again see the carrier, the factor. Even the opportunity is erased, the vector vanishes. The cause passes, the effect remains.

²⁵ This contradicts the directly preceding argument that it is the blankness that steps aside that initiates movement. Unless things coming into being is not considered to be a transformative movement.

²⁶ The parasite refers to Serres' earlier eponymous work: *The Parasite*. (1982) In it the parasite is presented as the excluded third, the middle position that is not expressed in and cannot conform to binary logic and hence must be expelled. However, the notion of the parasite, like various concepts found in his earlier works, were deemed by Serres as too dependent on the logic of the singular, though it functions in the same way as *noise* because it is seen there as a way to reduce the power of order and stasis.

... The parasitic logic follows a vectorial space, a space through which pass vectors that do not remain.

... Parasite logic never stops. ... Bifurcation is the law, a ford or a dovetail, a feathered arrow, a vector. (Serres 1995, 57-58)

For Serres, thus, all things start out inconsequential, beneath the threshold of our notice. They are the stirrings of murmur, of inaudible sound floating on the wind. At each moment it can either surge or wither; thus, Serres portrays the development of the universe as the perennial escalation of an infinity of inconsequentialities, which through an endless series of crossroads can grow or die.²⁷ For Serres, each time a surge grows, it must occupy more space, and slowly, increase by increase, dovetail by dovetail, it overruns it. Yet, this does not mean that the trajectory is smooth. It is more like a game of Chinese whispers than a consistent murmur, each time a message is passed along from person to person, or dovetail to dovetail, it could have died, it could have gone completely unheard, the fact that some of the information is transmitted ensures its survival. It needs to change in order to survive, it cannot be constant. Thus, Serres states that murmur must turn into a rumour, which is more versatile (Serres 1995, 58). If the murmur would stay the same it would become redundant, as all straight paths are. Serres states:

Methodology, a straight path, is, in general, redundant. Rules, criteria, insurances, dying knowledge. Redundancy is needed of course, for the maintenance of groups and the establishment of institutions. (1995, 58)

Serres' attitude towards redundancy shows a difference in his stance on evolution with respect to Bergson. They share the idea that life develops from the smallest of impulses, whether murmur

²⁷ This model of the new coming into being through dovetails, or bifurcations, is adopted by Connolly for his politics of becoming, as shall be shown in the next chapter.

or *élan vital*. But, where for Bergson this develops along similar lines of development, in particular species development along particular patterns, Serres puts more emphasis on the unique. Though redundancy has its place, the primary course of evolution runs through original occurrences. Or rather, as we shall see below, it runs from the unique, from basic time, to redundancy, that is to say to space. The main difference between Serres and Bergson is that the latter originally introduces duration and materiality as opposite, which creates the two different logical systems as I have shown in the previous chapter. In contrast, Serres proposes a single system in which the stable forms emerge from possibility through redundancy, but as we shall see below, is always a mixture of possibility and redundancy. However, as I have begun to show through the discussion on undifferentiation, this logical system is problematic in part because it places so much emphasis on the multiple, the nonlinear. Nevertheless, it is able to sustain a comprehensible trajectory of development of the one out of the multiple. Such development:

is both a vector and a parasite, an opportunity that is erased and a tiny little cause, which, making its way through the intersections, tries its luck at living ... From the sometimes brief, sometimes middling, and sometimes very long series of those chances, a path is delineated, not a thread, ... [but] intricate and subtle ... The path of *noise* is a meandering.

Quite unpredictable and yet predictable. The path occupies space, no one knows where it goes. Intricate, unpredictable, and thus saturated with information, new. Invading the place by successive arborescences, it is predictable, known, redundant. ...

We have never known what a general will was, we have never known its subject, never known its intentions, truly. But we have often heard its chorus. It is the final chord of this meandering in the multiple.

... [It] is a turbulence, it is order and disorder at the same time, order revolving on itself through repetition and redundancy, disorder through chance occurrences ... through the global meandering, unpredictable and crazy. (Serres 1995, 59)

There is a lot to unpack in this quote, for it gives several important insights into Serres' understanding of developmental trajectories that lead to the becoming of organised systems such as individuals. It starts where we left off, development as a series of dovetails that must be manoeuvred in order to survive. Its ability to manoeuvre these dovetails determines the length of the surge's life. Because of its nature as a series of dovetails, the path of development necessarily meanders, it is unpredictable. It must move this way then that. In this sense it is both predictable and unpredictable simultaneously. It is certain that it will meander, yet the direction of this wandering is unknown, and is unlikely to be known. The known fact of meandering, the necessary trail of successive dovetails, can be interpreted as a sense of general will, which, in the first instance, is similar to Nietzsche's will to power and Bergson's *élan vital*; all three describe a drive, a direction of force, which is not pre-determined and therefore both known and unknown simultaneously. All three organise movement without requiring a fixed direction that the action will take. In Serres' language; the trajectory of development allows the rumour to slowly blossom, moving from dovetail to dovetail, increasingly taking up more and more space. But it is not rooted to the spot; it fluctuates and can change its position. Moreover, its speed and scope are variable; there is no telling how it will develop, which spaces it will occupy or how it will come through the dovetails that are presented to it, when it will accelerate or slow down (Serres 1995, 59-60). However, Serres' understanding of the relation between the multiple and the "one" as the outcome of the surge differs significantly from Bergson. Serres' general is meant to convey the persistence of disorganisation in systems we perceive as organised. Bergson, in contrast, completely

disregards disorder, stating that it is merely a system of organisation that we do not recognise as such (Bergson 1944, 241-242).²⁸

The centrality of disorder is inscribed in the ubiquitous and pervasive character of *noise* as positive chaos.

There is noise in being and in appearing. It crosses the most prominent divisions of philosophy and makes a mockery of its criteria. It is in being and in knowing. It is in the real, and in the sign, already.

Noise has no contradictory. The contradiction of a noise is a noise. The *noise* has no contrary. The space of a *noise* has no complementary, no outside. Logic is drowned in the *noise*. (Serres 1995, 61-62)

Noise pervades all things and renders all divisions untenable. For Serres it literally dispenses with all logic. Although it might be more accurate to say that it disposes of our current parameters of logic, and would, in all likelihood, imply its own nonlinear, logical framework – one of mixtures of organisation and chaos. Such a framework must be holistic, “united” in *noise*’s multiplicity. It must be a deep holism, for Serres says that *noise* has no outside, no contradictory; everything is not just connected, it is both one and multiple. It is the general will and the smallest localised element (Serres 1995, 60). Noise is everywhere, it is *in* everything. It is both permanent and perennial:²⁹ “it is the ground of the world, the backdrop of the universe, the background of being, maybe” (Serres 1995, 62). It is pervasive and operates on all levels, infusing everything with vibrancy, a

²⁸ There is a less direct correlation with Nietzsche who does not discuss the question of order, but whose theory of the drive will be considered to create a disorganised ontology. However, because the will to power functions as an organising principle - it is the will to power that drives forces to confront each other, which can create stable patterns - Nietzsche appears to occupy a middle position between Bergson and Serres.

²⁹ The former conveys a sense of inescapability, whereas the latter expresses a sense of movement and recurrence.

readiness to spring into action, to grow or dissolve. The surge is not the agent, for Serres, it does not control its mobility. Its vibrancy and directionality are the result of the flux. Serres provides minimal information on the flux. He represents it through the background noise, the waves, the wind. It is understood to provide orientation to a form, it can guide it in any direction, though the form can only move in one direction at a time. The flux, thus, comes across as an organised and organising vitality.

The background noise is always there, the signal claps like a flash of lightning, *rumor* rushes forth. The signal is a unit, pandemonium is undefined, rumor is a plurality. The ruckus fluctuates, like choppy waters lapping, the signal is a fluctuation, the rumor's noise is the flux, or the totality of fluxions. It increases, decreases, globally, locally it is multiple, various, variegated.

*... The differential of the flux is fluxion.... Be advised, flux is a multiplicity of fluctuations. So flux is unintegrable, it is not a sum, the path from the global to the local and back can be cut. I am praying for a completely new calculus for fluctuations, a different rationality remains to be conceived.*³⁰ (Serres 1995, 65)

The flux appears to be the greater whole, a combination of all the different noises, the fluxions. Although the fluxions are part of this greater whole they are not integrated, they do not sum up in the way that we would normally think they are combined together. Serres still attempts to create the multiple that does not consist of distinct entities; it requires a different rationality, a new kind of logic that can express Serres' nonlinear ontology.

Thus, we have seen so far that things come into being as a result of the persistent surge, that faces the continual challenge of the dovetail. They stand out from the chaotic background.

³⁰ Italics in original.

Yet, because it is never completely separate from the *noise* that surrounds and suffuses it, there is always a relationship between the one and the multiple. Serres elaborates on this relationship between the individual and the world which surrounds it. The latter is dominated by the crowd, which rushes towards the individual. It swirls around and disturbs it. It produces a plethora of noise.

The noises of space, the colors of the world are coming toward me. I am plunged here and now in colors and noises to the point of dizziness. Here and now means that a flux of noises and colors is coming at me. I am a semiconductor ... I pull among the multiplicity of directions the direction that, from some upstream, comes at me.

This crowd comes at me, it threatens to knock me down, to trample me, to throw me under it. Then and only then am I a subject. I am thrown under the multiple. Prostrate beneath the waves of noise, I am a castaway of perception. I am swallowed up in space, drowned in its murmuring, the multiple always overflows me. I am a subject only when I am on the verge of fainting, dying. (Serres 1995, 66)

It appears that the individual can only exist in the middle of the multiple, when it threatens to overwhelm it. Not just in the middle of the multiple, because that conjures up the image of a clearly delineated self, separate from the rest, separable from others. But Serres instead uses the imagery of trampling and drowning, of being overrun by the world rushing around it. For Serres, being overrun is necessary for the subject to be a possibility at all. It is suggestive of the *noise* that swirls around and through the surge, that can grant it independence. But the surge and the self are not like a formation of geese or a school of fish, we do not follow the crowd, we “pull” our own direction. Serres’ individual, then, must consist of an open system, a form of organisation

that can be influenced by the flux, one that requires the multiple to exist, to be, as we shall see below, the semblance of the “one”, a more or less organised mixture.

Because of our “individual” direction, our specific modes of orientation and organisation through the flux, we feel threatened by the multiple. It inspires fear. The subject necessarily faces death at the hands of the flux; the possible withering of the failed dovetail. The fear can increase, it multiplies, it can threaten to overwhelm us. We try to battle the fear and subdue the flood through concepts, which allow us to subsume the multiple under the “pure generality of the one. The concept is reassuring at first, it represses the press of the crowd. Rationality was born of this terror” (Serres 1995, 67). Thus, Serres presents conceptualisation itself as a way to keep the crowd at bay, to force the confines of the one on the multiple.³¹ The concept, the generality of the one, is a selective reduction of the multiple. It disregards, and is even incapable of noticing, the plain of nothingness in which the background noise is settled. It is unable to recognise that from nothingness a ripple, a stirring, is born, which can turn into a signal. At the start it is hardly differentiated from the plain of nothingness. The first stirring from nothingness is a dance, the crest of a surge, it is a fluctuation. It is, as Bergson would call it, a qualitative multiplicity, irreducible to discrete numbers. The one-multiple surge must pass through a series of dovetails. The outcome of each bifurcation is determined by the inclination of the fluctuation that passes through it. Following Lucretian physics, Serres’ world is steeped in inclination, which is present in all its aspects, all its multiplicities and fluctuations (Serres 1995, 68).³² Yet, though inclination is everywhere, its workings are mysterious.

³¹ It is unclear whether, in Serres’ opinion, this is a necessary coping mechanism as Bergson and Nietzsche at times suggest, or whether this does irreparable damage to our capacity to understand the nature of the world.

³² This section contains several allusions to Serres’ earlier work *The Birth of Physics* (2018), in which Serres sets out an alternative understanding of physics from its traditional Newtonian incarnation based on Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*. As Motte notes, Serres favours a literalist reading of Lucretius, seeing it as a genuinely materialist model, rather than as merely useful metaphorically (Motte 1986, 276-277). It sets out an alternative conception of mathematics that tries to separate form from number, proposes emergent movements as eddies, swerves induced by the *clinamen*, the minimal declination from laminar flow that creates turbulence. However, Lucretius’ physics is ultimately atomistic, and as such too dependent on the multiple. Though Serres continues to use various of the terms from *The Birth of Physics*

The expansive fizzle of sea noise is broken up into fluctuations. A given one of them, dwarfish, singular begins gathering followers. Why? We do not know. A thousand, a hundred thousand, unique, have started out, no doubt, and then collapsed into the stillness of the noise, washed out by the *noise*. A thousand, a hundred thousand, others having made two or three dovetails, returned to the gray deep and the breeze. So many little flashes fading rapidly away, so many whisperings rising, I thought I heard a call in the uproar, a signal amid the pandemonium, the wave, heaving up a moment, falls again. Why is that one, that unique one, not lost? Answer: why were the others, those unique ones, lost?

... Is the background noise a welter of aborted beginnings? Is it messages only half spoken? The clinking cacophonous collision of unaddressed bottles in the sea? Hear multiply how the immense things that our pretension calls history commence. Conceive conceptionless how time can begin. (Serres 1995, 68-69)

All things in existence must start as the smallest surge, emerging from the blankness and chaos of *noise*, from the background noise. The vast majority of stirrings falls by the wayside, back into the *noise*, before they come within range of human perception. It is also important to point out that the stirring of the multiple harbours the conception(s) of time. Time, thus, is inseparable from movement, but their exact relation is not yet revealed. Serres is clear however, that movement still follows the Lucretian pattern: it is the inclination that initiates the spiral of the vortex. However, it is not perpetuated by unique movements, but through repetition and redundancy. They emerge from *noise* to create "the first forms of order: redundancy, repetition, echo, imitation. ... No circle

in *Genesis*. Serres literal approach to Lucretian physics allows him to both critique modern science, notably aspects of what I have called linear logic such as efficient causality, and its political dimension, particularly in relation to conceptualisations of freedom.

without the return of the same” (Serres 1995, 69). This repetition often settles into a rhythm or cadence, and makes the irreversible turn back upon itself. Serres now associates language and dance with cadence, they can only be established through rhythm and redundancy.

The introduction of redundancy markedly alters Serres’ conception of the surge. It is not just the series of dovetails that create something unique. Somewhere in the midst of the unique there must reside repetition and redundancy. Thus, redundancy is not something that belongs only to the straight path. It is still associated with order, but here, the order exceeds redundancy, irrelevance. It provides a contrast with Bergson’s work, who had forged such a strong opposition that he is unable to fully reconcile the two into one continuum. Serres on the other hand never suppose that pure chaos can be part of our experience in the way that pure duration determines the deep self for Bergson in *Time and Free Will*. The figures of language and dance, first used to establish chaos, now also appear in relation to redundancy. First its movement is used to stress fluidity and chaos, now the regularity of the rhythm involved in the movements of dance is shown to be indicative of organisation. It reinforces the notion that language and dance are intermediaries, or as Serres will call them later, mixtures of organisation and chaos. They carry both movement and redundancy. Thus, the surge as the creation of a rhythm or cadence opens the door to some sense of stability, without needing to arrest the movement completely. It creates a spectrum between motion and rest, where everything can partake in endlessly varied assemblages of the two. Serres can create a sense of circles that can express pure repetition, or spiral away, creating a variation on a theme. Though it seems more likely that Serres imagines the latter rather than the former, he states: “Reflection, at whatever level, is a loop, sameness and different” (Serres 1995, 70). Most importantly, though, Serres interpretation of movement, time and language creates a continuum of order and disorder, which will be explored in more detail in the final section.

Serres now builds on the initial notion of the surge. He suggests a particular understanding of the type of semi-stable assemblage that can arise from the surge. It is aimed at creating a

notion of stability that is always infused with disorder, an example of the new nonlinear logic he proposes. The surge develops into a specific kind of chain:

Here then is the chain: white sea or white plain, background noise, surge, fluctuation of the surge, bifurcation, repetition, rhythm or cadence, vortex. The great turbulence is constituted, it fades away, it breaks. And disappears as it came.

*This chain is breaking, it is breaking at every point, it may always break, its characteristic is to snap. It is fragile, unstable.*³³ (Serres 1995, 71)

The chain is woven together from the various stages necessary for the form to emerge out of the fog of chaos. Because it keeps going through bifurcations, it is inherently fragile, it must always maintain its intention to survive. The chain can break at any point, at any moment. Most often it will simply fade away, frequently before it has had a real chance to establish itself. Serres sets his chain against what he calls the rational chain, which is only weak at one particular point where it can break. The rest of the chain is strong and predictable, it has a surplus of power, which keeps it stable. Yet, the stability of this chain is more imagined than real, as it expresses rationalists' desire for domination. It inflates the importance of the local and fills the space with redundancy. It paves the way for the dominance of order. It tries to dominate through the pretence to universality, which, ultimately, is nothing more than repetition (Serres 1995, 71-73). Serres' chain, on the other hand, can break at any point. It is not joined together, its links do not interlock, as the rationalists' chains, but merely touch each other. They are not interconnected, but are adjacent; this makes Serres' chain inherently contingent. Its connections depend on an accidental touch, a slide over one another, sometimes looped or stacked upon each other. Each touch produces a little moment of friction, which can create a local pull, a local direction. Very rarely, these small

³³ Italics in original.

local stirrings can have a greater effect and change the global movement as well. Through the contingent quasi-chain Serres reaffirms his commitment to a balance of redundancy and movement, sometimes repetitious, sometimes suddenly veering off on a tangent.

It is the chain of genesis. ... A fragile and soft chain, easily cut, fragments easily replaced, a chain almost always broken, almost everywhere and always decreasing, here and there increasing slightly, increasing here suddenly crazily, it invades space, it occupies, it covers the place, but only temporarily. It is the chain of life. ...

*It is a little bit of the secret thrust of our awakenings, and the timid and green advance of the new. Look at it: it is the dance of time, which is dormant in our habitual behavior.*³⁴ (Serres 1995, 71-72)

It paints all things, including the self, as inherently fragile and unstable; as loosely connected in assemblages that can easily shift. The surge can be inventive, but must also resort to redundancy to establish itself and ensure its survival.

Yet, the final line of the section above is rather curious, in particular the last subsentence. It implies that time is not always active, but can be dormant. Habitual behaviour is that which is settled, as Serres calls it, repetitive and redundant. It is necessary, but perhaps it does not partake in the dance of time. But this itself is problematic, for it leaves two options. First, it could be that time always dances and habit is placed outside of time altogether. This seems nonsensical, for even repetition is movement and, as stated above, movement is time itself. Alternatively, time might move in other ways than through dance and throughout the book Serres states multiple times that there are multiple temporalities (Serres 1995, 24, 99-100, 102, 108). This would

³⁴ Italics in original.

indicate that habit involves the bare minimum of movement. This interpretation is more in line with Serres' interpretation of temporality as will emerge from the final section of this chapter "Time as Continuum". Nevertheless, it is unfortunate that Serres' phrasing here seems to suggest a binary of movement and inertia, as *Genesis*' aim is to move beyond such binaries which sustain unities. He is unable to completely extricate his account from the tendency to fall back into binaries.

Systems as Self-organising Chaos

Because the surge needs redundancy for its survival, it is imperative for Serres to establish how redundancy creates unity and stability through organisation. For Serres any "unity" hides a collective, therefore every "unit" is actually a complex system. It is a multiplicity hidden within a unity. As a multiplicity it is a collective, which is characterised by fury. Though systems have reduced the free-flowing fury of *noise* through organisation. Organisation is not presented as a single perfect state, but as a continuum of more and less organised systems, which corresponds to the comparative ratio of creativity and redundancy. All perceptible things, for Serres, consist of ratios of organisation and disorder, or as he calls them mixtures or turbulences (Serres 1995, 95, 101).³⁵ It is interesting to note here that Serres focuses this discussion of stability and organisation on societies instead of the individuals that constitute them. Presumably, individuals are themselves systems of organisation and human individuals should certainly classify as complex systems of organisation as Bergson attests. The individual could be understood as a method of organisation to withstand fury. It might be the reason that it is continually under threat, that it can only be found amidst the chaos, as we saw Serres state above. The idea that the individual is differentiated, is seen to be capable of organised movement in the form of dance, certainly points towards its organisation. Moreover, the fact, which Bergson points out, that human individuals are part of a species that passes on certain modes of organisation, would classify them as organised

³⁵ "Turbulence is a multiplicity of local unities and of pure multiplicities ... the basis of this form ... [is] a chaotic multiplicity of orderly or unitary multiplicities and chaotic multiplicities" (Serres 1995, 110).

systems. Therefore, it is important to consider Serres' notion of organisation, as its aspects could pertain to the self.

Serres singles out classification as the primary form of organisation. It functions to bring the individual under the protection of the group. It forces the multiple into the one. For Serres, classification is an effort to engage and control violence, not the source of violence, as Marx argued (Serres 1995, 81- 87). All temporary systems differ in their execution, but organisation always aims to stabilise, to slow down the revolutions of time, the susceptibility to interference of disorder. The semi-stable system organises a structure that reduces violence, according to Serres, but he does not seem to include any kind of systemic or structural violence inherent in organisation. The very organisation of society, the values and differentiations it espouses, oppress some and elevate others, and because it establishes society, the violence associated with such differentiations feels natural to the organised collective. Instead Serres focuses on the notion that societies generally stay mobile, their paths describing asymmetrical sequences. Such a sequence requires a current, a circulation to function, that is to say it needs a source of movement. It ensures that society is not an equilibrium, always returning to a particular point of stasis. Rather, it is a chreod: a system that does not return to an equilibrium, but to a particular trajectory, it follows a particular flowing pattern (Serres 1995, 92). Strictly speaking, a chreod denotes a linear trajectory. This reflects the idea that organisation reduces the interference of contingency. But I think that society should be modelled on the notion of the surge, which must itself be a form of organisation, and which is a combination of redundancy and innovation. Thus, the surge's meandering path should be used to denote the trajectory of the chreod, which can then be used to express Serres' philosophy of development in a single word.

Serres creates an ontology of turbulences adrift in the sea of chaotic *noise*. Hence the *universe*³⁶ is portrayed as disordered more than organised. As a result, he argues that organisation can never completely eradicate disorder, classification cannot provide a permanent fix. It will eventually be overcome by disorder and fury. Classification is an attempt to arrest change and, if it is adhered to rigidly enough, it is possible to bring the social developments to a virtual standstill, but it cannot eradicate the chaos. Nevertheless, if a social order crystallises the existing system of classes entirely, it can leave behind

time, change, evolution, for invariance. ... [C]lassification is the optimal solution, if the goal is to stand still. Classing remains a static act: either it is the result of dynamism becoming exhausted or it is the most effective obstruction against a strong flux. ... Perhaps we must choose, perhaps, blindly, societies do the choosing. Either classing or history; either eternity or time, either the static or dynamism. (Serres 1995, 93)

It is interesting that Serres once again presents a binary here, instead of a continuum. Societies have a choice: they can follow the flow of the flux, or abandon it for rigid classification. The latter option stifles innovation and movement; by holding on to particular forms of organisation, onto certain traditions too tightly, a society denies the possibility of change. It attempts to stem the tide of evolution by refusing to acknowledge it, assuming that the social configurations that organise it are eternally valid. It thus steps outside of time. Theoretically, this is possible, because time is not defined in the linear sense of the passage of units of time, the minutes and seconds we see ticking away on the clock, but as movement itself. The former conception is relentless, the other

³⁶Serres resists the term *universe* because its root *uni-* implies the dominion of the unitary. As such, it is inimical to the diverse and, by extension, to multiplicity. Nevertheless, he continues to use it, with the italics to denote his protest. However, he could just as easily have called it a *pluriverse*.

can be arrested, if only temporarily. Classing should be seen as a complex array of dams, an effort

to slow momentum be it creative or destructive... classing is formed by violence and the disorderly course of its flux, violence ... structures it, makes it, it loses some of its virulence along the circuitous route of its products. The gravel comes to a standstill in the flux and, in return, the flux comes to a standstill amidst gravel. Violence makes the classes and the classes unmake violence. (Serres 1995, 94)

Classification is thus both a result of and a solution to violence. It slows down the fervour of the flux that was its origin. It is important to change our perspective in situations of stagnation and decide to step back into time, to join movement once again. This is necessary, because Serres, like Bergson, suggests that the flux *might* be life itself, though his statement lacks Bergson's certainty and conviction (Serres 1995, 95). Where Bergson repeatedly definitively states that *élan vital* and the evolution it generates are life itself, Serres suggests, only this once, that it might be the case. The important upshot of Serres' implication and possibly the source of his uncertainty concerning the relation of flux to life, is that in Serres' understanding of flux and the possibility of hampering its flow, it is not only possible to step outside of time, but possibly outside of life, without dying. It might be better to frame this as an unconscious rejection, a negation of life, though its source is the same as that of life: the flux.

Life, invention, violence, in all three instances, a processual flux codes a classing. We can try to pinpoint this classing, it always comes under combinative art. A method, a certain kind of rationality, analytical intellection unmake, remake, this combinatory manifold, as a tapestry is unwoven and woven. But we can attempt to describe the flux and its way of coding, we can also try our luck in following the

processual, to see how it slows down everything surrounding its codes. I speak once more in the language of history, processual time and its multiple circumstances pass through the cramped network of their own monuments. All at once, I am speaking of time, of physical time, and the flux is no longer a metaphor, I am speaking of the flux, the laminar flow that is sown, here and there, with turbulence, in which, perhaps, the things of nature are born. ... I speak of the multiple fluctuations in the flux, I am speaking of pure process now. It is the time of worlds and things, the time of life, of history, of the group and of knowledge, and in every instance, it weaves combinations either that it undoes, or that slow it down. (Serres 1995, 95-96)

The flux and its products are inherently multiple. It is relentless and will undo what it has previously produced, sometimes before it can gain sufficient ground to be noticed. It will always overflow the remnants of its previous creations, which will either stand up in the onslaught, persisting, forcing the flux to carve a berth around it, or they will be swept away. The flux is not a steady stream, but is sprinkled with disturbances and turbulences, which alter its course or precipitate a change in intention. But the flux and the processes it engenders do not follow linear trajectories, they are chaotic. As such, even the systems of organisation they give rise to are unique, after all they express specific ratios of invention and redundancy (Serres 1995, 97).³⁷ They are the result of chaos that enters into redundancy and as a result starts delineating, differentiating. It creates systems out of its contingent multiplicity.

As a result, Serres argues that all multiplicities, including systems in various degrees of organisation continue to harbour disorder, for all multiplicities derive from pure multiplicity, which

³⁷ This assertion creates a potential problem for Serres in terms of transmission of organised systems, for example the likeness between members of a species. However, every individual is unique, but nevertheless, Serres requires a mechanism of transmission like Bergson's *élan vital*.

consists of pure disorder. This is significant, because it entails that a system, or “unity”, gets “its power” from the obscured multiplicities which retain potentialities (Serres 1995, 106). Because the multiple is not tightly regulated, not strictly organised into patterns, possibilities can emerge from it. The power of the unit is then not its organisation but its disorder. This seems to suggest, in combination with Serres’ notion of the flux, that agency is not contained in organisation, but in its constitutive multiplicities. This creates a structure of agency that is remarkably similar to Nietzsche’s theory of the drives, which also proposes that unities conceal multiplicities of agentic forces. As I have explored extensively in Nietzsche, this configuration problematizes the self as a site of agency. However, unlike Nietzsche, Serres also argues that turbulent mixtures are characterised by tatters. The loose organisation of multiplicities creates lacunae and exceptions. It is badly stitched together, full of openings and holes (Serres 1995, 111; cf. 115). Such openings would allow for movement, after all the taking up of a space is movement and it requires empty space. But this assertion contradicts some of the arguments he made previously in developing the concept of the multiple. For where previously all space was taken up, now there also appear to be unoccupied spaces. This would allow a possibility for settlement of the movement; those who have given up their space might find an as yet unoccupied space in which to settle. It provides, clearly, the opportunity for stasis; filling the spaces would mean full organisation and loss of potentiality. However, creating the notion of open spaces to facilitate the notion that movement is inherent in all systems and as such derive their potentiality from the multiple, also reduces the inescapability of movement. When all spaces are taken up, one must move to try to grow, when spaces are open, one can rest, possibly indefinitely. It conflicts with the figure of the nomad, who is the source of movement and therefore he cannot be allowed to settle down. The perpetual wandering now is replaced with intermittence, the sense that movement must always reappear, but for a time can cease. The movement can coalesce into a particular - solid - state. Yet, even stasis is not permanent, it always has to contend with the resurgence of movement (Serres 1995, 111-112). It does recalibrate the balance, implying that movement is inherent and

perennial, but possibly no longer permanent. The stasis of the system can - temporarily - overcome the power of the potential movement of its inherent multiplicity.

The dominance of the multiple and its tendency to movement is also undermined by Serres' insistence that, despite the fact that they owe their power to the underlying multiplicities, organised systems are usually ignorant or even dismissive³⁸ of the potency of the underlying chaos. They insist on reducing the multiple to the semblance of the one in order to negate its potentiality. Consequently, Serres turns the logic of efficient causality on its head: indeterminacy is possibility, creative, productive; determination negates (Serres 1995, 98). The rationality efficient causality engenders depends on determined concepts and is unable to grasp productive chaos. It immediately seeks to reduce and categorise chaos' multiplicitous and multidirectional aspects. As rational beings, humans cannot consider a boundless, omni-directional flux. Instead we focus on its tendency to redundancy, oblivious to the reality and possibility of movement. Serres suggests that in order to reduce our tendency to perceive the semblance of unity rather than the multiplicities it hides it is necessary to reorient towards, what he calls, aggregate thinking, that is to say, thinking in terms of multiplicities. This provides a clear parallel to Bergson's focus on movement and process over stasis and his assertion that intelligence cannot reflect processual movement. In both cases it requires a different approach to life in general, and to time in particular; to move away from the fixed categories of rationality and to move toward the possibility of transition, metamorphosis. Both Bergson and Serres suggest that it requires a different logic, a new way to understand things, but both struggle to provide clear indications of what this would entail and how could be adopted, considering our propensity for rational thought.

The first step toward "aggregate thinking" appears to be disobedience to the rules that establish the hierarchy within a particular structure of domination. However, even disobedience

³⁸ Going back to our earlier discussion of the individual, which is portrayed by Serres as overwhelmed and threatened by the oncoming rush of chaos, (Serres 1995, 66-67), as well as the notion of organisation as inherently conservative (Serres 1995, 101), it might not just merely be ignorant, but even hostile to the dynamic potentiality of chaos.

is already part of the rule itself, which is confirmed in the struggle over its perpetuation. “This struggle creates the classes and the classes create it. Whoever throws himself into the battle therefore obeys transcendently” (Serres 1995, 96). Thus, it is actually not joining the battle, but having a willingness to end it that presents the way to independence from violence. It is found in the inclination towards peace. Yet, it is not clear how it is possible to remain outside of violence altogether. As stated above, the logic of taking a place in a space replete with occupied spaces requires that another’s place must be taken if one is to give up one’s place, if one gives up the fight and flees. Hence, one would stay out of the fight. The only possible alternative is a nomadic life, that of the eternal wanderer and even the wanderer must temporarily take up space, even if (s)he is always on the move. That aside, the pressing question is whether the nomadic life is possible, particularly in view of Serres’ soft quasi-chain, which includes repetition and cadence, the former of which at least seems to imply staying, or rather moving, in place. Wandering is characterised by fluidity, movement and fleeing, but some of the stages of the chain, which are necessary for its validation, seem to imply that, at least temporarily, a particular space is taken up. Serres, here, displays a familiar tension between fluidity and solidity that I have demonstrated to persist in the works of Bergson and Nietzsche. Each recognises the need to shift towards more free-flowing ontologies, which is in conflict with dominant ontologies based on static unities. Most likely it is impossible to completely dispense with such tension, because our understanding of the world includes both persistence and movement, permanence and change. Even the elements of movement, like the dancer, are presented as coherent entities, as elements that are both blank potentiality and delineated individuals. This sense of unity must engender an element of consolidation, it must contain some sense of repetition. Stasis is particularly difficult to abandon for, as Serres, Bergson and Nietzsche acknowledge, language itself tends towards static unity and as such makes it difficult to express fluidity. Nevertheless, it is important to keep exploring these tensions when they appear, for it is in the moments where fluidity seems the least likely, where there is most resistance to its gain of influence there is the most to gain from changing

towards a fluid ontology. It is therefore notable that Serres does not directly address one of the most important sites of consolidation in this discussion on the emergence of stable systems, the individual. It would be one of the sites where fluidity would have a great impact, especially as current conceptualisations of individuality only admit of minimal flexibility. Especially as he clearly supposes the individual as a constituent element in his theory so far; the sites of both consolidation and fluidity presume the individual as a basis. The dancer, the creation of blankness, necessitates a differentiated individual as a basis and must maintain some semblance of unity for it not to fall back into the background *noise*.

Thus, though Serres tries to create an ontology of the multiple, it is haunted by the spectre, the semblance of the one. He is unable to escape rationality and show by example the new logic of “aggregate thinking”. However, towards the end of the book it suddenly appears that Serres is not trying to escape it altogether. He repeatedly uses the binary and rational other rational modes of thinking and expression because, he argues that in order to approach the “unthinkable” - the *noise*, the multiple - one must negotiate it. And the best way to accomplish this is to attempt

to think within the concept and outside of it, we are now thinking an aggregate, it is nothing but pure multiplicity, but it is an aggregate, but it is riddled with holes, lacunary, sporadic and thus multiplicatory, but it is a unity of local unities and of scattered multiplicities ... what I mean by this, is that we must think on the side of the thinkable, that we must tack toward science, toward the same, toward the one and stability, but that we must then be ready to think the unthinkable, that we must then change our tack, toward the pure multiple, we are continually tacking back and forth, the method being a fractal meander, to one side for safety, to the other for freedom. (Serres 1995, 113-114)

It has thus become clear that Serres inclusion of the stable, the static, is a deliberate attempt to set out the parameters for a continual back and forth in the hopes of creating in the process a mixture of the thinkable and the unthinkable, which provides a way forward. It gives us a glimpse of a world where “unity winks with multiplicity, in the elements as much as in the work itself and in the discourse that articulates this work” (Serres 1995, 114). This is evident in Serres’ conception of the *universe* as a turbulent mixture. It clearly tries to negotiate the chaos that exceeds our experience with the problematic “unitary” that dominates it. He shows that the universe is always “an intermediary, it is a mix of order and disorder” (Serres 1995, 107). However, Serres’ new ontology faces resistance as a result of the dominance of harmonious cosmology that suggests the world is inherently ordered. It has created a weighted set of binaries where order is associated with security and disorder with fear. It has made us apprehensive of disorder and unpredictability, that is to say, we are frightened of multiplicities, the multiple as such. It leads us to reject the agency of the multiple, commit to the self as a site of agency and induces us to reduce the multiple to the unitary.

A concept is a multiple reduced to the unitary. A representation is a multiple reduced to the unitary. Any power is a multiple reduced to the unitary. (Serres 1995, 108)

But it has an even more important structural flaw, that rests on the use of concepts in general and the tendency towards dualities in particular. Any time, Serres uses a known concept, it contains a tendency to obscure its constitutive multiplicity. This means that Serres’ strategy of approaching the unknown through the known is very risky; it depends on our comfortable habit to organise the world to be overruled by disorder, even while we still use the method of organisation. It is especially problematic, because Serres hints, like Bergson, that rational logic cannot express the multiple, that it harbours a tendency to overlook process and movement. Yet, Serres thinks that

we can use the known to approach the unknown, that we can resist the tendency to ignore chaos and movement and instead reject that which quells our fears and doubts. As Clayton notes: “by constantly being aware of the open, dynamic and multiple nature of any existent, we may be able to experience, become aware of the process whereby the relations that allowed for the emergence of the “count-as-one” came about” (2012, 38). However, being aware of openness is a difficult technique, the tendency toward unity is difficult to resist. Serres has even shown that concepts endow us with a sense of power, a sense which is intensified through binaries with their weighted, unequal variation. Yet, the strategy of tacking back and forth appears to resemble the binary quite closely. What else, for example, is the turbulent mixture of order/disorder than an intermediary state produced out of a binary? I have shown multiple instances where Serres technique leads him to instate a sense of the binary. As such, Serres’ technique of aggregate thinking has a tendency to create a sense of unequal valuation, which is unlikely to come out in favour of the chaotic, as the binary itself is a technique to suppress it, to create order from the chaos. Serres can do no more than advocating that we overcome the impulse to impose a sense of organisation and to liberate the multiple from the pretence of unity, to augment disorder instead of trying to impose order on it. However, he does not provide a comprehensive method to accomplish this task,³⁹ because even the mixture is a combination of the known and unknown, which will allow us to gravitate toward that which is easy and familiar and resist what is threatening and queer. However, this, unfortunately means that Serres, to a significant extent, falls into the same trap as Bergson. He is trying to create a new, nonlinear logic, but is unwilling and unable to dismiss the familiar tendencies of linear logic. Though he tries to create the intermediary state of mixture as

³⁹ Instead of proffering his own suggestion Serres rejects Bergson’s effort to come to a more fluid ontology by supplanting space with duration. He argues that both space and duration are various iterations of mixtures of fluidity and solidity and as such “one” cannot supplant the “other: to create a more fluid ontology (Serres 1995, 108). As I have shown that duration and materiality each correspond to different logical systems I disagree with this assessment, however I agree that Bergson’s attempts at reconciliation between the two opposites do suppose a sense of intermingling that would validate Serres’ claim if this reconciliation was not predicated on a problematic combination of two logical systems.

the dominant factor in his ontology, it has a tendency to separate into a duality of organisation and chaos. As such, it is an unsuccessful strategy to create a nonlinear logic.

Time as Continuum

In the final pages of *Genesis*, Serres tries to create a constitutive framework that is supposed to support our understanding of the world as a turbulent mixture. It is an attempt to show that the world does not consist of dualities, but of the excluded third, the in-between, the mixture. The main focus of this attempt is centred on the relation between time and space. Serres creates a continuum of disorder-organisation, which, despite his critical attitude towards Bergson,⁴⁰ is translated into the concepts of time and space. Moreover, Serres suggestion of mixtures, creates a similar sense of intermingling between time and space as Bergson suggests, when he argues that time and space are inverse directions of the same movement (Bergson 1944, 218-228). Serres' continuum also sees mixtures as sites where innovative movement (time) and redundancy meet and mediate each other. As a result, multiplicitous, innovative time and organised space negotiate a specific ratio of motion and rest, creating specific, often intricate patterns. For Serres, the whole of our experience is determined by the excluded third, as long as we are willing to forego the tendency to only perceive organisation, we become aware that all perceivable processes embody both organisation and disorder. However, the pure states at the end of each pole are outside of our reach, are pure abstraction.

On the one hand there is the ultimate form of space; an abstract, totally ordered form of Euclidean space that is completely homogeneous and isotropic (Serres 1995, 116-117). It does not exist in actuality, only in extraction. But the same is true for pure time, which is *noise*. However, this too, is purely abstract. Actualised time starts at the threshold between disorder and redundancy, it is the multiplicity next to chaos and prior to all spatialities. It is the first injection of

⁴⁰ See previous footnote. Plus, it must not have helped that Bergson dismisses disorder as a misunderstood form of order (Bergson 1944, 241-242).

redundancy into a pure multiplicity” (Serres 1995, 117). Serres calls this temporality which only admits the bare minimum of redundancy “basic time”. It is the limiting case between pure chaos and the intermediary states of the continuum. It embodies the instance time becomes spatialised through the introduction of redundancy.

Basic time is a tatter, a patchwork or a mosaic, it is a distribution, through which, at times, redundancy passes. A multiplicity marks and shows some redundancy, it becomes spatial when this repetition increases. Should it greatly decrease, then time appears.

... It [time] solidifies like a crystal or vanishes like a vapor. It is an unintegrable multiplicity, endowed, here and there, with unities, there and here deprived of snapshot moments. It is not a flux that can be differentiated into tiny little fluxions, although it can become one and then become fringed in differentials, it is, for the most part, a sumless aggregate, a bundle of dispersed fluctuations. It is not a set, although it can become one, it goes in bursts. (Serres 1995, 116)

Like Bergson’s “continuum” the directionality clearly comes from time, the pure state of chaos admits of redundancy to let things come into being. All processes, all forms start with the movement of time and establish themselves through inertia. The surge is located in basic time, it is the result of the first introduction of redundancy into pure chaos, from there it can either increase its organisation, repeat itself, or fall back into chaos. The redundancy of the surge is the echo which “is the minimum of redundancy, then, sown in pure multiplicity. Time is born with the echo, the echo is from birth to make time begin” (Serres 1995, 119). The echo is the mimetic attempt to replicate the fluctuating movement. It is the principle of identity. As such, identity is understood as the first act of establishment, a tentative assertion of independence, of perceivable difference: the echo. Serres’ notion of identity is therefore not unique to humans, but it is common to all forms;

it is what distinguishes anything from nothingness.⁴¹ Because of its relation to repetition or redundancy it is necessarily related to stability and organisation. Identity embodies the movement that initiates the crystallisation of systems; an indispensable part in each form's effort to combat the threat that chaos will reclaim its flickering surge for its own. But it can always only be temporarily successful in this endeavour, eventually the stable system will decay and the "elements" of the form will return to *noise*. All things come from and return to *noise*. "[I]t will enter representation, it will enter into the sequence of spaces. It will enter redundancy. For the moment, it manifests time" (Serres 1995, 117). Manifestation requires organisation, because time, as pure possibility, cannot select or create boundaries, it contains everything at once, every possible determination, all contradictions and opposites.

Time is the positive infinitude of possible determinations. It is the omnitude of novelties.

Time is not, as a rule, a line, although it may become one, and then start selecting, sorting, eliminating, getting all at once bushier and bushier with bifurcations: another time on top of time, appears; time, nonlinear, is, most often, a sheet or a field. (Serres 1995, 115)

Pure time cannot be a line, a line is delineated, Serres grasps what defendants of Nietzsche's cosmological eternal return cannot: eternity which contains all possibility must be infinite itself. It must have infinite dimensions; it cannot be reduced to geometric shapes. Linearity can only arise through redundancy and organisation, which differentiate, select. It is the hallmark of stability. The

⁴¹ Both Nietzsche and Bergson's conceptualisation of identity as the accumulation of actions - through the drives or duration - could apply to any life-form and are therefore also not necessarily exclusive to human individuals. However, Serres' - and Nietzsche's - concept(s) of identity also - potentially - stretches to inorganic substances. Bennett and Connolly note that "in Serres' typology of things the human-non-human divide is very smudged" (Bennett and Connolly 2012, 158).

imagery Serres uses here is extremely informative, the line, the string only covers a narrow space, it can grow in circumference, grow “bushier”, but it will still incorporate a mere fraction of the limitless plane that Serres envisions as a spatial representation for time. Multiplicity undermines order, its trajectories can move whichever way it desires, it could even cross itself, doubling back on a road already travelled. Yet, it is at least equally if not more likely to carve out a new path. The notion that a path can cross itself marks Serres as more invested in nonlinearity than Bergson, whose duration ultimately depends on continued organisation, which establishes the problematic “unity of the self”.⁴² Serres on the other hand, continuously stresses the fact that things ultimately lose their organisation and fall back into chaos. Moreover, this is a positive and desirable outcome, as it opens the way to possibility. It is the goal of becoming blank, which allows us to turn back time, to reduce our redundancies (Serres 1995, 34-35; 17). The goal for Serres is always to struggle against the semblance of unity, to do away with delineations and be open to chaotic possibilities. Capaciousness is inherent in contingency; we must aspire to the inventive movement. This is why Serres’ conceptualisation of tacking back and forth, of continued dependence on established concepts is so problematic. But it has been present from the start, all his efforts to create a sense of movement, to approach the multiple as such were actually mixtures. The process of becoming blank is so foreign and incomprehensible to us, because it tries to convey the unknown. Unfortunately, it is also the epitome of Serres’ failure: the process of becoming blank remains a mystery. As I have argued at length at the start of this chapter, Serres is unable to set out the nonlinear tendencies convincingly, precisely because he requires nonlinear concepts and mixtures for intelligibility. It is much easier to understand the establishment of the surge from the chain, to understand how things come into being, how they become linear, than it is to become nothing. We do not know how to become less differentiated, because we express our experience of ourself in linguistic terms of differentiation. Hence, Serres

⁴² This is the result of Bergson’s attachment to organisation and the problematic duality of logic that he is unable to resolve into a pure continuum.

is unable to express a nonlinear logic that is capable of expressing chaos, but what he does indicate is that the nonlinear is chaotic and undelineated. It is not a self, it cannot form a self, it tries to move away from those delineations and determinations that would support its distinguishability, its very conceptualisation. The self, requires identity, in the sense that it needs organisation. It is a semblance of unity. Therefore, Serres' invocations of the individual must belong to the linear logic of the strategy that tacks back and forth, but the goal is to move away from it. To do away with the concepts, such as the self, to embrace nonlinearity and disorder.

Conclusion

In his attempt to create a sense of nonlinearity Serres exposes that nonlinear logic is incommensurable with the self. The self is a concept, an attempt to suppress the multiplicity that is emblematic for nonlinearity. However, from the account also emerges the uncomfortable notion that nonlinearity is beyond our grasp. Where Bergson ultimately tries to hide the fact that he is unable to produce a truly nonlinear logic in the notion of inversion, Serres openly admits that the nonlinear cannot be thought. We can only experience a glimpse of it at the edges of our organised and ordered world. A world which consists of turbulent mixtures, of the multiple imperceptibly active within "unities", creating movement that sometimes registers at the borders of our perception. The dancer, the main character of the story, can help to point toward the multiple, if we are willing to work to set aside the focus on organisation and look for the processes that sustain them. The main problem with Serres' work is that there is no mechanism to engage in this subversive perception. Even the method of aggregate thinking is liable to dissolve into organisation and because the nonlinear cannot be expressed, Serres cannot express it either. The chaotic *noise* fights an uphill battle against the established organisation, but its weapons are easily appropriated by its "opponent", because the "opponent" is not an "opponent" at all, it is co-constitutive, it is always a partner in the creation of the mixtures that occupy the world with tatters. In trying to create the logic of nonlinearity, Serres tries to literally create something that is

ubiquitous and hence must escape itself in order to become perceivable in the mixtures that it constitutes.

This seems an impossible task, perhaps it appears impossible, because my logic too is the logic of linearity, of the delineated, but until we are able come to terms with nonlinearity in a productive way, until we are capable of actually approaching the unknown through the knowable, it remains a source of discomfort and fear. The nonlinear requires us to attempt to give up what we know, to become less than we are, to become undifferentiated. Serres pictures us trying to break down ourselves, break down the walls that hold us in, and in that sense, it appears as an attractive technique to escape the confines of the overly defined identity, the identity that, in the next chapter, is shown to create patterns of exclusion. It creates a sense of freedom, to be capable of becoming something else, or someone else is attractive to most people. To regain the sense that all avenues are open to us, to become un-differentiated, capacious, open to options, is desirable. The cost of this aim is the reduction of certainty and organisation, to become less of a self; to resign our agency to the flux, relinquish our “unity” to the multiple, to forgo the familiar in favour of the unknown. Ultimately, it forfeits identity, it abandons the repetitions that constitute us. In its pure form nonlinearity is irreconcilable with the self. Perhaps then, the lesson in Serres is to be found in the intermediary of the mixture. It points towards the notion that the nonlinear cannot be approached ontologically and has predominantly practical value. In the sense that the periodical reminder of the contingency and potentiality of the nonlinear nature that is part of the mixture of our existence could help us be more open towards novelty. It also points us to the fact that it is necessary to negotiate freedom and organisation, and not – automatically - privilege the latter over the former. Serres, correctly in my opinion, advocates a greater attunement to chaos, but in order to achieve this, a better mechanism than tacking back and forth must be found.

Chapter 4: Political Explorations of the Nonlinear Self

Introduction

This chapter will turn toward a consideration of two political theorists or philosophers William Connolly and Jane Bennett, who each try, in different ways, to incorporate nonlinearity into their political philosophies that engage with notions of selfhood. I will show that Bennett and Connolly actively try to incorporate nonlinearity into their ontologies, based on the works of Nietzsche, Bergson and Serres. I will demonstrate that the nonlinear tendencies in their work complicate the notion of the self that emerges from it. In addition, I will argue that their work ultimately fails to create a nonlinear sense of self, because they replicate problematic tendencies in the works on nonlinearity from which they draw their inspiration.

First, I will focus on William Connolly's work, in particular on his work regarding the intersection between identity, difference and time. As a result I will primarily discuss two of his works that deal with these themes in great detail: *Identity|Difference* (1991) and *Pluralism* (2005); with a more minor focus on *Neuropolitics* (2002), which anticipates the ideas of non-linear time developed in later works, such as *Pluralism* and *A World of Becoming* (2011).¹ I will use the first two to show points of tension in Connolly's interrelation of the self, based on the co-constitutive aspects of identity|difference, and nonlinear time, and from there to show that Connolly is ultimately unable to base his concept of self predominantly in nonlinear temporality. Connolly's work is different from the others under consideration in one specific way that is relevant to this thesis: unlike the others, Connolly suggests a conceptualisation of self before he considers nonlinear conceptualisations of time. However, his conceptualisation of the self as emerging from

¹ I have chosen not to focus on *The Ethos of Pluralization* in detail, because the arguments it advances that are relevant to my thesis are sufficiently covered in the works I will focus on in this chapter.

Identity|Difference already shows a tendency towards nonlinearity in the sense that it tries to dislodge a particularly persistent consequence of linear thinking by insisting it must come to terms with an ontological sense of becoming; he attempts to remedy the tendency to define things through a monolithic essentialism through the introduction of fluidity and a capacity for change. Connolly's work in this volume proposes an alternative in response to the exclusionary tendencies resulting from the monolithic treatment of identities. Connolly offers an interpretation of identity and difference as mutually constituted, which allows him to create a sense of fluidity and flexibility in the notion of identity that can be used to help resist the tendency to exclude those who are perceived as "other". This move echoes the fluidity that Nietzsche, Bergson and Serres seek to create through their nonlinear ontologies. Connolly's intent to extend the monolithic self into a multi-faceted self capable of incorporating difference resonates with Serres' venture to dissolve unity into multiplicity, but also shows similarities with Nietzsche's concept of self as determined through complexes of drives and Bergson's interlaced mental states characteristic of duration.

In addition, the problem of monolithic identities is taken up - though in the context of society at large, whereas *Identity|Difference* also focuses on the internal self - in *Pluralism*, where Connolly pays specific attention to the notion of nonlinear time. As Connolly states in the Prelude: "while I have paid attention in the past to the acceleration of pace in modern life and its intensification of the "politics of becoming," I have not previously attended closely to the relation between ... pluralism and the experience of time. Time has now become a central object of inquiry" (Connolly 2005, 5-6). The exploration of time allows Connolly to further nuance the interrelation between identity and difference and the way it can inspire civic virtues as the basis for a respectfully agonistic society centred on deep pluralism. I will show that Connolly tries to amend traditional understandings of identity, underwritten by linear progressive temporality and efficient causality through the use of nonlinear logics in the form of emergent causality, which stresses the role of contingency and vicissitude in the unfolding of events. However, I contend that Connolly is unable to provide a sense of self that is predominantly based on nonlinear logic, as a result of

the formalisation of linear logics and temporality in his dual conceptualisation of time. I will show that these are the dominant factors in his understanding of both the individual and society and enable Connolly to fall back on more a traditional understanding of the self that allows only limited fluidity to ensure that it can support the self as a unified entity. I will then explore nonlinear conceptualisations of agency, first through Connolly's work in *A World of Becoming*, which shows that an increased engagement with nonlinearity puts further pressure on the conceptualisation of the unified self he had previously established.

After examining Connolly's work, I will move on to the work of Jane Bennett, showing several of the stages in her exploration of a nonlinear sense of agency. As a proponent of New Materialism, she rejects the mechanistic notion of materialism as inert and subject to efficient causality. Instead, she proposes an ontology of becoming, which she explores in various ways. I will particularly focus on her attempts to increase a sense of fluidity in identity through the notions of crossings in *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (2001): processes in which the individual exceeds the perceived boundaries of its identity in an attempt to become other. However, in exploring the self-hybridity and self-experimentation, Bennett shows that the emergent contingency of nonlinearity destabilises identity. I will then engage with her discussion of vitalism as a means to infuse materiality with agency in "A Vitalist Stopover on the way to a New Materialism" (2010b), where Bennett ultimately rejects vitalism because it supposes a separation between matter and the life force that animates it, even if they are indelibly linked in the sense that they cannot express themselves independently of each other. This finally leads her to suggest a sense of vibrant materiality in *Vibrant Matter* (2010a), which endows all matter with an inherent degree of agency. I will show that this move allows her to express an ontological nonlinearity, but that, in the process, she also shows that nonlinearity engenders a logic that is irreconcilable with the concept of self.

The first section of this chapter will focus on the conception of self that emerges from Connolly's interrelation of identity|difference and is derived mainly from his work of that name. It

will set out the “second problem of evil” generated by monolithic conceptions of identity and will show Connolly’s response to this problem by suggesting incorporation of difference into the notion of the self, which necessarily leads to a multifaceted understanding of self. In the second section I move on to the ways in which this conception allows Connolly to develop a pluralist ethos appropriate to combat the tendency to exclusion of monolithic identities. I will then explain how Connolly develops two modalities of temporality - chrono-time and duration - which in an attempt to intertwine the concomitant logics of efficient and emergent causality to co-constitute our ontology. This will allow me to show how Connolly’s modalities are based on sets of correlated binaries, in particular identity|difference and chrono-time|duration. Having explained Connolly’s position, I will be able to show how he attempts to incorporate nonlinearity into his ontology through the two themes of self-identity and temporality, but ultimately remains predominantly beholden to linear logics, because Connolly is unable to create a truly hybrid logical system. Central to this effort is my analysis concerning the problematic formalisation of linearity and nonlinearity into a dual coding of time for the possibility of dynamism. I will argue that the incorporation of nonlinearity is limited by his tendency to place chronological time - with its concomitant linear logic and efficient causality - over his nonlinear conception of time as becoming,² which results in something I call self-identity as dynamic essentialism. Ultimately, this means that Connolly is unable to provide a sense of self that is predominantly based in nonlinearity. This is underscored in Connolly’s attempt to save the possibility of self-identity from the equalising force of distributive agency, which is the subject of the final section on his work. I will then move on to Bennett’s engagement of nonlinearity in *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, focusing on her still somewhat tentative expressions of a nonlinear ontology in the form of an engagement with complexity theory. In this section, I will also examine her attempts to explore fluidity in identity through the concept of crossings. From this I will show through the next two

² As we will see, time as becoming is Connolly’s version of duration and is based directly on Bergson’s philosophy.

sections that she becomes more confident in her affirmation of nonlinearity, rejecting the remnants of dualism in vitalism in favour of the inherent agentic capacity of vibrant matter, which is predicated on nonlinear logics that preclude the possibility of a coherent self. Throughout these three sections I will show that Bennett falls into several of the same tensions as Bergson and Nietzsche, upon whose work she draws.

Identity|Difference

As stated in the introduction, Connolly's most explicit engagements with nonlinearity succeeds his previous writings on identity, in particular *Identity|Difference*, by almost a decade. Nevertheless, even in this early work, he expresses an intent to open up monolithic identity to fluidity and multiplicity that closely resembles the aims of the three philosophers discussed in the preceding chapters. Moreover, as I will show in the coming sections, the logic underlying the conceptualisation of the self in *Identity|Difference* corresponds to that of the dual coding of time proposed in *Pluralism*. In part, this is a consequence of the fact that Connolly often deploys a balancing act in order to arrive at what I have called a strong middle position, which is emblematic of his style. In *Identity|Difference* it is deployed in order to create space for variability, change and creativity within identity without dispensing completely with the kinds of certainties that essentialist conceptions promise. Starting from the understanding that modern society harbours an irreducible plurality of moral (and political) views, Connolly endeavours to celebrate this pluralism.³ This leads

³ In this regard Connolly takes the opposite position to communitarian theorists like Alastair MacIntyre (2007), who see the plurality of moral positions as the main problem of modern morality. MacIntyre advocates the eradication of moral pluralism, proposing the reconstitution of shared understandings of practices, virtues, and cultural narratives of human telos that may not recreate the unity of a pre-modern social system but can nonetheless create sufficient moral cohesion to allow moral debate to occur, as it would provide a frame of reference to which all participants could adhere, a sense of moral truth.

Connolly also distinguishes himself from the liberal tradition, in particular in its Rawlsian form, (Rawls 1999) which separates rationality from identity. It poses rationality as the basis for political consensus, which is disputed by Connolly, who regards political opinion to be strongly influenced by identitarian commitments. These commitments, as will be discussed below, are by necessity contradictory and therefore cannot provide a basis for consensus.

Connolly to embrace a sense of variability that is better served by the introduction of a nonlinear ontology, as will become evident in *Pluralism*.

In order to come up with an account of identity that can accommodate moral and political pluralism, Connolly, in *Identity|Difference*, examines the nuanced ways that identity and difference can be seen as co-constitutive. In addition to the external relations that obtain between actualized identities and differences, he proposes an understanding of identity that is also internally constituted through difference, which leads him to posit identity|difference as opposed to identity proper. The possibility for the internalisation of difference within identity flows from Connolly's insistence that identities are not monolithic wholes, but always consist of multiple, often competing and sometimes even incommensurable strands (Connolly 1991, 3-4; 64-66; 158). "[T]he human is not predesigned to coalesce smoothly with any single, coherent set of identities" (Connolly 1991, 65). The notion of identity as a monolithic whole is the background problem for both *Identity|Difference* and *Pluralism*, as it leads, according to Connolly to two interconnected, "problems of evil". The problems of evil are directly linked to the Christian theo-philosophical tradition for Connolly, in particular to the work of Augustine. Augustine tried to reconcile the paradox between the understanding of God as both omnipotent and wholly good with the persistence of evil in the world. The persistence of evil could denote either that God is not wholly good or that he is incapable of defeating evil (and therefore not omnipotent). In order to resolve this problem, Augustine rooted the seed of evil within the human will. Since the eviction from Eden, humans are not only able to understand the difference between good and evil, but as a result are capable of wilfully choosing to do evil. As a result, the responsibility for evil is placed with human agency, and evil resulting from human actions can (and should) be punished appropriately (Connolly 1991,1-3; cf. 2005, 14-15). The first problem of evil is the persistence of evil in the world and its embodiment in the human will, which opens up the possibility to classify humans as either good or evil. This binary of good and evil also enters into the question of identity

(Connolly 1991, 2-3). It is exacerbated by the understanding of identity as monolithic and is marked by the endeavour to

protect the purity and certainty of a hegemonic identity by defining as independent sites of evil (or one of its many surrogates) those differences that pose the greatest threat to the integrity and certainty of that identity. (Connolly 1991, ix)

The first problem creates the second problem, which manifests in those tactics of exclusion that are meant to remove doubts about and consolidate the unity and goodness of an identity by “the constitution of an other against which that identity may define itself” (Connolly 1991, x). Connolly singles out the perception of identity as a monolithic whole as one of the main sources of the problems of evil. For each faith⁴ underpinning an identity contains concepts and ideas that are both problematic and considered essential to it. Nevertheless, Connolly notes, some faiths are better at withstanding doubt than others, for some have a notion of doubt built into their faith. The incorporation of doubt into faith increases its robustness, decreasing its tendency to feel threatened by competing faiths. The Western aspiration to universality, which derives from Christianity and is retained in the Enlightenment tradition, requires impossible standards of certainty that make Western identities particularly sensitive to the challenge of alternative faiths. Crucially for Connolly, we are tempted to resolve this insecurity by vilifying those with divergent views and faiths in order to shore up ourselves against our own insecurities. This leads to the second problem of evil, where we deploy a scala of (passive) aggressive tactics to diminish those who bring out uncertainty in our identities, in the hope that by bringing them down we can shore up ourselves (Connolly 1991, 4-8).

⁴ Faith here is taken by Connolly in the broad sense, denoting both theistic and nontheistic faiths (Connolly 2005, 22).

This is the status quo that Connolly tries to address, ultimately aiming to adapt Western⁵ attitudes towards identity in order to mitigate their propensity to use exclusionary strategies to combat internal tension.⁶ To this end, his notion of identity|difference becomes the basis to encourage an inverse impulse. Instead of transforming insecurity into hostility, he tries to come up with a coherent understanding that gives us an opportunity to become able to convert hatred into agonistic respect. Underlying this understanding is the assumption that “[t]he definition of difference is built into the logic of identity, and the construction of otherness is a temptation that readily insinuates itself into that logic” (Connolly 1991, 9). The construction of otherness is predicated on the understanding of the other as lesser or even evil; it allows us to treat the

⁵ Connolly here disagrees with Hans Blumenberg’s interpretation of modernity as a qualitatively different era than its antecedents. In his magnum opus *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Blumenberg attacks the idea that modern notions of progress are merely a secularized continuation of pre-modern Christian eschatology. However, Blumenberg does admit that the remnants of Christian eschatology have saddled modernity with expectations it is not geared up to fulfil. In particular, it requires the modern age to provide an adequate answer to a question of legitimacy it is not equipped to solve because it is a carryover from its pre-modern precursors. The result is that modernity’s narratives of progress are seen by its critics as a replacement for the demise of the Christian faith in salvation as the ultimate goal of a human life. Thus, the modern project is seen to be infected by remnants of defunct doxa. This casts doubt on the legitimacy of modernity, for modernity defines itself as a break from its irrational past, yet it finds itself carrying this past in a new form. Blumenberg’s response tries to salvage the legitimacy of modernity partially by highlighting this disjunction between the question asked and the modern means available to provide answers and partially by portraying modernity as an ongoing and as yet unfinished project of transformation by reason. The latter in particular allows him to maintain the belief that the modern age redeems itself not by proving the truth of its rational and scientific methods but simply by showing their viability in the absence of premodern metaphysical guarantees and the usefulness of their technological solutions to modern problems (Blumenberg 1985). Connolly’s acceptance of the continued influence of Augustinian problematics on the politics of identity puts him in opposition to Blumenberg.

⁶ There are some similarities between Connolly’s and Serres’ understanding of identity. Serres states that mimesis is the principle of identity. Identity depends for both on recognisable similarity (Serres 1995, 119-120). However, whereas for Connolly identity is established socially and is therefore a human attribute, for Serres identity is primarily solitary, it is the first act of establishment, a tentative assertion of independence, of perceivable difference: the echo. It is not unique to humans, but it is common to being, it is what distinguishes anything from nothingness, and as such it belongs more, as I will show in the next chapter, to Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter* (2010) than to *Identity|Difference* (1991). Yet, in both cases, identity is associated with stability, for that is ultimately what redundancy can provide for Serres. But whereas this is a positive for Connolly, it is problematic for Serres. This is also evident from his discussion of (un-)differentiation, where Serres moves towards dismantling identity. He states: “[o]pinion is stable, it is singular, it defines someone through hates” (Serres 1995, 34). Connolly, on the other hand, argues that identity is determined through difference instead of repetition and is established through the conversion of difference into opposition or otherness. The latter can be experienced as threatening in which it can be construed as an evil other deserving of derision and even hatred. Thus, hatred is not the inescapable consequence of differentiation for Connolly, though it is an undesirable possibility. What is more, he explicitly rejects extensive un-differentiation, choosing instead to increase fluidity only sufficiently to limit the negative corollaries of the co-constitutive identity|difference binary.

perceived other accordingly. As a result, it is necessary to resist this temptation in order to do away with, or at the very least, mitigate the negative effects of the exclusionary aspects of identity politics.

In order to make the relationship between identity|difference and otherness more intelligible, Connolly recounts particularly intense or provocative encounters with otherness, in particular the discovery of the Americas by Columbus. Connolly uses Tzvetan Todorov's *The Conquest of America: the Question of the Other* (1984) to explore this encounter. He uses Todorov's term "the enigma of otherness" to explore an elusive sense of difference that cannot be approached, which resonates for me with Bergson's *élan vital* and Serres' *noise*.⁷ I think that from Connolly's account of the enigma of otherness an unacknowledged sense of a deeper, underlying *Otherness*⁸ emerges that is enigmatic and elusive, not reducible to the kind of evil other that consolidates an identity in opposition. Like *élan vital* and *noise*, *Otherness* always remains - somewhat - out of reach, though Connolly argues that some of its effects can be felt in our actual encounters with identities that express otherness to our own.⁹ In such encounters we

⁷ Connolly's engagement with otherness, if framed in terms of my enigmatic *Otherness* provides a link to these nonlinear concepts I have discussed in the previous chapters in the sense that it provides an enigmatic and irreducible source of variance and by extrapolation change. As such, it bears some kinship to *élan vital* and *noise*, as I have stated above, though both of those terms carry a sense of agency and activity that Connolly does not necessarily associate with otherness, though it does function as a source for constitutive action like the other two.

⁸ *Otherness* is seen by several political theorists as an expression of ontological difference that is meant to convey a "type of constitutive difference [which] relates the subject not to others who are also identified through the relation, but to a second-order difference or Otherness that is enigmatic and indefinite, and that is thereby unable to serve as an anchoring point that would define the subject's identity through contradistinction" (Widder 2012, 12). Theorists have used the notion of Otherness primarily in two ways. Some see Otherness as a threat to our identity, since its unknowability will inevitably mean that the self is also always partially unknown and unknowable. In this scheme, by acknowledging the notion of *Otherness*, we lose ourselves - or at least the confidence in our ability to know or to identify ourselves. Others see in *Otherness* the culmination of creativity, possibility and contingency that "keeps propelling new things into being ... [and] point to its potentiality when it comes to the empowerment of alternative modes of life" (Tønder and Thomassen 2005, 7). Instead of negation and lack, it centres on the creativity and undefinability of becoming. Otherness is an infinite source of plurality and difference; it does not circumscribe a co-constitutive negative relation between identity and difference but shows how this co-constitution cannot be settled. Yet one should not attempt to overcome the differences it creates, even if it leaves identity and difference unsettled and unknowable, for its boundless propensity for dynamism is the ground for an affirmation of difference that goes beyond toleration.

⁹ These encounters should then be understood as Connolly's counterpart to the experience of dance in both Bergson and Serres.

are confronted by the limits of our own standards and interpretations. Connolly makes this visible by focusing on the interaction of textuality and language with identity. For in encounters of acute difference a moment of intertextuality arises, where the other can only be understood in terms of the standards, “presumptions, concepts, expectations, and demands” of one’s own identity; on the basis of one’s own constitutive texts (Connolly 1991, 38).¹⁰ This occurrence is not one-sided, but takes place on both sides of the encounter. What is more, its specific appearance and representation will vary across bearers of an identity; groups, sub-groups, individuals, all of which draw on and bring to the encounter particular, contingent and unique perspectives. Thus, the complexity of the resultant textualization exceeds our capacity for understanding. Such encounters contain *Otherness*, which simultaneously exceeds it and can never completely be captured and represented. Nevertheless, *Otherness*, though irreducible, is present in the subordinate dimensions of any text. The encounter with others merely brings it closer to the surface.

Taking this analogy further, Connolly suggests that the way we treat the difference we encounter depends on the way in which we textualize the relationship between the self and the other. Connolly uses Todorov’s work to deepen his exploration of otherness and how it can threaten our sense of identity. He follows Todorov in positing two types of identitarian response: conquest or conversion. Both responses are based on an assumption of universalism. In particular the universal applicability of one’s identity, hence it is considered superior to all others. In the case of conquest, one assumes the other’s identity inferior to one’s own which legitimises subjugation. In the case of conversion, one recognises the other’s identity as essentially the same as the self’s, which allows for those belonging to it to be converted. In both cases interest in the other’s identity is only used to prepare the way for either conquest or conversion. Finally, Connolly presents a third option: tolerance. However, he states that tolerance can only ever be a “detour

¹⁰ This should be understood as an expression of the rigidity of language that creates its problematic relationship with change as is noted in the works of Nietzsche, Bergson, and Serres.

on the way to conversion”, for inherent in tolerance is a belief that the other is inferior. Tolerance only is an option when the self finds within the other’s identity redeeming characteristics that, in time and with careful nurturing, could be turned into characteristics of the self. As such, tolerance is merely a precursor to conversion, rather than a long-term strategy of coexistence on their own respective terms (Connolly 1991, 43).

These three strategies all reflect a sense of condescension and contempt on the part of the self in its relation to difference. This attitude prohibits a sense of presumptive equality and dialogue, which is necessary to engage the enigma of otherness. It requires openness and respect, which one does not accord to those one deems inferior. However, this assumption of inferiority reflects a perception of the other as a threat to self-identity. The stance that Connolly advocates, which allows the engagement with the “enigma of otherness”, requires us to allow our brush with difference to cast the certainty and validity of our self-identity into doubt (Connolly 1991, 45). In this process the lines of differentiation between self and other become blurred. Openness provides an opportunity to see aspects of our identity resonate with aspects of an other’s. Openness is proposed as the gateway to engage the “enigma of otherness”. But how does otherness relate to identity|difference and its concomitant notion of otherness as vilified exclusion of difference? On closer inspection, it appears that the function of the “enigma of otherness” is more related to a sense of similarity between the concepts of identity and difference than the otherness as the vilified and excluded actualisation of difference. That is to say, rather than considering difference as flowing naturally into the vilified other, the “enigma of otherness” shows that any identity is made up as much - if not more - of difference than self-identity. It leads us to conclude that not only can we not assume that our self-identity is valid, we should also consider that the understanding of this identity is only shared on a superficial level. The complexity of textuality and intertextuality arising from the myriad of building blocks, experiences and encounters that constitute a human life, or the development of a (group-)identity results in a

complex web of similarity and difference that constitutes any instance of identity.¹¹ As such, it forces us to come to terms with the fact that our identity is not that monolithic and secure as is often presented; moreover, it hints at a sense of elusiveness in the basis of any identity that is indicative of the distant relation to *Otherness*. However, Connolly doesn't explain why the "enigma of otherness" is generally actualised into the identity|difference duality, as opposed to another (non-identitarian) understanding of ourselves. The very qualities that characterise *Otherness*, its unknowability and enigmaticness, do not lend themselves to identification and therefore sit uncomfortably in a theory that still posits identity|difference as defined through a sense of otherness that could be understood as derived from *Otherness*. This is also its appeal, for by association with the "enigma of otherness" the difference within identity becomes exposed, leaving the exclusion of others groundless and unacceptable. Openness supposedly allows us to tap into the *Otherness* that is present in any formation of identity|difference. If *Otherness* is understood in my enigmatic way as a source of both identity and difference, then it becomes crucial in establishing their relation, as it is omnipresent and hence pervades both sides of the co-constitutive duality. Consequently, it is from the commonality of *Otherness* that resonances emerge, it serves as a conduit.

The nature of these resonances can be extremely diverse. What matters, however, is that through such resonance we can recognise aspects of self in the other and vice versa. This creates an ambiguity within our identity that can express itself along two axes, breadth and depth. The breadth of our identity can vary widely by including or excluding (sub-)groups in one's perception of self.¹² Thus, the breadth of our identity depends on our ability to recognise the self within (what

¹¹ There is some similarity to Bergson's understanding of the self as composed of mental states in duration, in the sense that the experience of the individual is unique and creates a distinctive self, which, for Connolly, is expressed in terms of identity.

¹² For example, Christianity can be understood to include all denominations that include the figure of Jesus Christ as the saviour of humanity, such as Roman Catholicism, Calvinism, Russian Orthodoxy and so on. It can also be used to denote a subgroup: i.e. Protestantism (which, too, can be broken down further into endless strands, such as Calvinism, Lutheranism etc).

was previously considered) otherness to the extent that we would include them into our identity. When encountering otherness, we can either opt for inclusion or exclusion. The second axis of depth is related to the ontology underlying our identity. Connolly here advocates a notion of weak ontology,¹³ which allows for contingency and ambiguity to infuse faith; hence we are cognisant of the fact that identity is necessary to us, but are also aware of the (often disconcerting) fact that our identity is not the “one true identity”; “because it treats as true the proposition that no identity reflects being as such; no identity is the true identity because every identity is particular, constructed and relational” (Connolly 1991, 46). Hence it is built on the understanding of ourselves and the world as relational, contingent and ambiguous, no matter how natural and truthful our views and ways of life may appear to us. This means that identity and difference are mutually constitutive and interdependent concepts. For if identity cannot reflect the truth of being as such, then there must always be competing interpretations and identities. There is no way to determine the “right” identity, as there is no right identity.¹⁴ This is why, for Connolly, the easiest solution to the first problem of difference, the consolidation of a monolithic identity, is not an option. Moreover, it leads him to understand that each identity will always contain competing strands and interpretations, it will always contain difference, it cannot exist without it. Identity/difference is a necessary result of his weak ontology. As such it also rejects essentialist notions of identity as fixed and expressing the truth about the self, what the self really is, in the sense that there can be no conclusive answer to the sense and meaning of an identity. Instead it is continually being produced and reproduced out of the differences we encounter. This means that there is no single

¹³ In his book *Sustaining Affirmation: the strengths of weak ontology in political theory* (2000), Stephen White differentiates between three families of ontological positions: strong ontology, “antimetaphysical or postmodern views” and weak ontology (White 2000, 7-8). Antimetaphysical positions encompass for White positions of radical contestability and perspectivism, in which nothing can be stated with any certainty. Strong ontologies on the other hand are characterized by a dogmatic ontological certainty, they claim to portray the “reality” of how the world is. Weak ontologies occupy the middle position; they recognize the necessity for ontological commitments, but simultaneously consider such commitments to be inherently contestable (White 2000).

¹⁴ The question of truth in identity can be expressed both in terms of ideology as well as praxis.

notion of what it means to subscribe to any given identity, for each will have come together contingently over time, creating variations or even inconsistencies - so-called divergent strands - along the way. As such, identity contains tensions and clashing characteristics: "identity is a site of interdependence and strife between incipient formations/presentations of self and intersubjectively constituted modes of identification" (Connolly 1991, 175). Variations within an identity can lead to struggles over the dominant interpretation within a community of members. Identities as operationalized in the world are reductions of infinite complexity and ambiguity, they often only reflect certain selected aspects of all the possible variations. They represent particular textualizations that can never capture the *Otherness* embodied within it. Nevertheless, these competing strands within identities necessarily create persistent internal tensions within them, which lead to insecurities. What is at stake for Connolly is not only to gain recognition for his understanding of identity as indelibly linked to difference, but also to formulate a response to difference that is more appropriate to his understanding. Connolly thus tries to combat the problem of difference by granting it a central place in his political theory, indissolubly linking it to the notion of identity. He understands the relationship between identity|difference as constitutive of the self, particularly in its socio-political environment.

This understanding of identity as complex, unstable and infused with difference operates for Connolly as a lynchpin that scripts any encounter with a concrete manifestation of difference as a moment of both self-reflection and dialogue. It allows resonance to emerge. Connolly pays particular attention to the capacity of self-reflection to recognize (aspects of) the other in the self, which could bring us closer to the "enigma of otherness" that can never be grasped but is at the heart of the identity|difference co-constitutive binary.¹⁵

¹⁵ Again, it is not entirely clear how resonances between self and other are produced. Whether it is the case that through self-reflection we find the unknowable in ourselves, which corresponds to a similar quality in other, or that *Otherness* as a source of contingency encourages self-doubt.

One is implicated ethically with others, first, through sharing an identity with some of them, second, through the stirrings of unpursued possibilities in oneself that exceed one's identity, and third, through engagement with pressures to resent obdurate features of the human condition. Reflection on these connections can also encourage one to reflect on how life overflows the boundaries of identity. (Connolly 1991, 166)

Such recognition can create strong resonances and opens up possibilities to explore otherwise hidden affinities and complementarities between other and self. This in turn can be the basis for a possibility of coexistence, devoid of lingering notions of superiority|inferiority. Appreciation of contingency is crucial to the success of this strategy, which he further develops in *Pluralism* and will be discussed in more detail below, for, as Connolly states, the need for certainty in our identity “flows from the demand to attain a self-reassurance deep enough to fend off the vicissitudes of life” (Connolly 1991, 165). However, this demand is based on the notion that identity should be stable, whereas, if one perceives the world as ever fluctuating around us, then adopting a contingent and adaptable self-identity and concomitant ontological commitments is seen as a valid strategy to cope with this transience. If one recognizes the contingency and instability inherent in one's identity and accepts that other ontological commitments might be required to cope with the ever fluctuating world around us, we might be more equipped to seek strands of otherness either within our own or in identities surrounding us, that are better able to deal with issues that have arisen unexpectedly.

Identity and Pluralist Ethics

The flexibility and adaptability of identity, as opposed to identity as a monolithic whole, has another important corollary, namely that we are constantly required to reproduce and reaffirm our identities. This creates a particularly important relationship between self-identity and society. For

identity is not created in a vacuum. Arising contingently as described above, also means that it perpetually interacts with the environment surrounding it. If our identity is crafted through a complex and drawn out process of self-realization, this can only come about in conjunction with similarly complex socio-cultural processes surrounding us. This allows us to fit into the society we inhabit. However, Connolly notes that under the increased speed of late-modernity both structures and processes have become more volatile. This volatility is detrimental to the parallel reproduction of individual identity and the society it inhabits; the synchronicity these processes previously enjoyed deteriorates, they are increasingly out of sync. This creates resentment, for, after having toiled to realize one's identity, one can find that the social structures it is meant to inhabit have vanished (Connolly 1991, 20-22). Instead of facing the contingency that produces this disjointment, it is being pushed more firmly to the side, buried under a discourse of human mastery over the universe (Connolly 1991, 28). Simultaneously, the co-constitution of identity and society serves an important disciplinary purpose. For inscribed in social institutions are those "standards of self-responsibility, self-discipline, and freedom" concomitant with the historically contingent development of society and identity up until that point (Connolly 1991, 20). The values bound up with dominant identities in society determine what ideas, behaviours, etc. are permitted within society and set disciplinary measures to correct those who are unwilling or unable to conform to the norm. Otherness evokes correction. However, under late-modern circumstances, the disciplinary measures inherent in the social institutions feel increasingly arbitrary as their legitimacy is swept away on the tide of contingency.¹⁶ Hence the resentment only grows, creating a vicious cycle. As the disjointment between society and the individual increases, an increasing number of identities become seen as other or divergent. These divergent identities are seen as

¹⁶ When the production processes are in tandem, the disciplining measures of society feel natural to the individual as they are in line with the values and interpretation of the individual's identity, because society and individual identity reflect each other. When society and the individual no longer develop along similar pathways, the legitimacy society derived from its reflection of the individual's values breaks down (Connolly 1991, 22).

threats and concomitantly subjected to disciplinary measures. Thus, in order to shore up the self-certainty of late-modern identity a vicious circle is created in which we perpetually seek to come up with a definition of our “true” identity. This then requires that we apply this purification of our faith to the members of the group sharing this identity, so that only those who subscribe to this new “pure” identity are part of it, expelling the others. However, inevitably, the disjunction between society and identity will mark an ever growing number of identities as other, requiring further cycles of purification, creating ever-growing resentment.¹⁷ What is necessary to solve this problem is to gain a new appreciation of contingency, which will allow us to come to an understanding of identity that embraces difference rather than rejects it.

In *Pluralism*, Connolly further engages the subject of the relation between identity and society. He centres this book on the second problem of evil within the politics of identity/difference, which is recast as the “temptation to evil within faith” (Connolly 2005, 18). This temptation increases drastically under conditions of pluralism within a society, which facilitates a continued series of encounters with otherness in the form of a variety of identities. This continually presents the danger to the self by presenting rival viewpoints, which could sow seeds of doubt that one’s faith does not express “the essence of being” (Connolly 2005, 27). Some theorists, for example

¹⁷ Connolly’s analysis is comparable to Taylor’s discussion of the growing resentment as the result of the quest for freedom, which binds the individual to society in the modern condition. Taylor posits that in pre-modernity the bonds between society and the individual were secured through a common belief in the pre-ordained cosmological order of Christianity. This breaks down under pressure of the Enlightenment, leaving a gap in the understanding of the relation between the individual and society, which is exacerbated by the rise of the conception of the modern subject as an autonomous agent (Taylor 1979, 15). The latter leads to a demand for radical freedom, as the individual needs freedom in order to exercise its autonomy, as a result the facilitation of individual autonomy becomes the prime reason to accept social organisation. This has an important caveat according to Taylor, for radical freedom requires that anyone can exercise their autonomy to the fullest extent of their wishes. The boundaries that a society places on individual behaviour are therefore only in accordance with radical freedom if the individual agrees that this behaviour should be prohibited (Taylor 1979, 11). This requires an extremely high level of homogeneity among the citizens that make up a socio-political community. Minority traditions and dissent are a threat to radical freedom and as such must be either eradicated or assimilated. Expressing difference fractures the general consensus imperative for radical freedom and undermines the bonds that tie a society made up of distinct, self-realizing individuals together. “Participation of all is only possible if there is a ground of agreement, or of underlying common purpose. Radical participation cannot create this; it presupposes it” (Taylor 1979, 115). As a result, Taylor envisions a vicious cycle of the emergence of dissension and difference, followed by attempts at eradication and assimilation.

MacIntyre (2007),¹⁸ try to escape this pluralism and its temptation by proposing what Connolly calls unitarianism, the idea that homogeneity within communities can be sustained within a distinct spatial or temporal entity. However, according to Connolly, unitarianism increases the tendency to evil within faith, as it is based in the notion that homogeneity is not only attainable but necessary. As such, unitarianism gives license to condemn and even exile all those who exhibit any degree of difference. “The relentless pursuit of territorial unitarianism therefore spawns persecution, forced conversions ... It spawns evil, even when its proponents do not directly seek evil” (Connolly 2005, 29). An alternative solution, the rejection of faith altogether, is also dismissed by Connolly, despite the temptation to “evil within faith”. Faith, by expressing our understanding of the world, is necessary to our ability to function (Connolly 2005, 30).

Having rejected both unitarianism and faithlessness, Connolly therefore argues for what he calls “deep” or multidimensional pluralism. Multidimensional pluralism engages the problem of “evil within faith” along two axes: the horizontal axis, which constitutes the relations between different faiths, and the vertical axis, which constitutes the relations between members of the same belief system and often play out as a conflict over ideological/confessional purity (Connolly 2005, 25-26).¹⁹ It can be expressed in many different ways along a continuum stretching from visceral violence to methods of derision, exclusion and neglect. Thus, whatever solution is sought for the problem of “evil within faith” it must be able to create an appreciation both between and within a single belief system(s). The first step, according to Connolly, is to develop a “bicameral orientation” (Connolly 2005, 30). A bicameral orientation is based in one’s own faith and it “*involves acceptance of some risk to the stability of your own identity*” (Connolly 2005, 31).²⁰ Thus,

¹⁸ MacIntyre’s opposition to pluralism can be seen, in some ways, as a manifestation of this temptation. According to MacIntyre moral pluralism is the hallmark of the collapse of morality. This collapse is the result of moral relativism, which makes it impossible to definitively settle moral disputes. He advocates a return to a unitary system, where a society shares a single foundation for moral debate. Yet, in order to leave some space for shifts in morality, MacIntyre proposes that this unitary morality can develop over time.

¹⁹ These axes are the same as those described earlier in *Identity|Difference* (1991, 46).

²⁰ Italics in original.

contrary to moral relativism, which can lead to apathy, a bicameral orientation requires you to maintain your own faith. However, despite your affirmation of your own faith, the bicameral orientation requires you to recognize that there are other equally credible faiths beside your own, which you cannot dismiss, despite your affirmation of your own faith. Thus, it creates an ambiguity between the need to maintain your own faith and the notion that it may in fact not *express the essence of being*. (Connolly 2005, 32) At the centre of the bicameral orientation there is an epistemological belief that we cannot know which, if any, of the belief systems currently active in the world represents the “true” essence of being and that therefore all belief systems have a potentially valid claim to the “truth”. Therefore, you are willing to consider that your faith may seem “opaque and profoundly contestable to many who do not participate in it; and you struggle against the tendency to resent this very state of affairs” (Connolly 2005, 4). What it comes down to is that you see your own state of affairs as normal, but instead of seeing other states as abnormal, you come to the understanding that normality is a contestable claim, as many states can make feasible claims to it. For example, in the West we are very proud of the developments that have taken place in the last century and a half concerning gender equality. However, this pride often translates into derision and exclusion of societies with alternate gender practices. A bicameral orientation towards life requires you to rejoice in your own state, but simultaneously try to respect agonistically those societies with different belief systems.

This outlook is neither easy nor without compromise, for it means giving up a sense of certainty in your own belief and thereby exposes your identity to possible instability. Yet, it does not require you to treat your identity as fragile: on the contrary, it is robust in the sense that it should be able to withstand some doubt. However, it does require fragility in the sense that it demands that you take doubts seriously. Moreover, it calls for you to accord respect to the faiths and standpoints of others. In essence, Connolly asks us to modify our identities to accommodate their inherent ambiguity and thus embrace a bicameral orientation towards life. Such a modification is difficult to effect, for it means that we need to fight the claim, inherent in (almost)

all faiths that it does express the true essence of being. The first step to attain this is to gain exposure to other faiths. Secondly, you have to try and understand that your faith is as strange to those of other faiths as their faith is to you. Finally, you need to try and overcome the “existential resentment of this persistent condition of human being” (Connolly 2005, 33). Yet, why should we accept and even welcome this risk to our own identity? According to Connolly:

The motive to pursue such a path grows in part out of that moment of rupture within your own faith, in part out of the hospitality toward other that forms part of your faith, in part out of the desire to avoid being a victim of persecution yourself, and in part out of appreciation of the contemporary condition in which a variety of faiths coexist on the same politically organized territory. These multiple sources, at their best, feed each other, amplifying each other. (2005, 33)

Unfortunately, the process of self-modification is complex and difficult to such a degree that it can never be fully attained. Connolly’s presentation of self-identity is such that it is in continual state of development. Moreover, it requires us to always be ready to initiate processes of micropolitical management in an attempt to modify it consciously, for challenges to our openness and to our identity can arise at any time as we go about our daily lives; we perennially come into contact with new people and new faiths. In order to ensure that this way of life is acceptable to multiple faiths, Connolly proposes to incorporate difference by creating a specifically civic²¹ *ethos* of pluralism, rather than proposing a shared *telos*.

For the bicameral orientation does not spring into being spontaneously. Its cultivation requires in turn the cultivation of two crucial civic virtues: agonistic respect and critical responsiveness. Each virtue embodies one side of the bicameral orientation. Agonistic respect is

²¹ In order to stress its separation from the realm of “faith”, Connolly stresses that his *ethos* of pluralisation is situated in the civic realm, emphasising its shared quality (Connolly 2005, 33).

rooted in the ontology of abundance²² and rejects antagonism (friend/enemy opposition) in favour of agonism (an open but still contentious and friction-laced engagement). It requires you to accept that each faith has the same status as your own despite the insecurity this engenders in your own faith and identity; for each is built on inherently contingent assumptions creating differences of opinion that can never be conclusively arbitrated. Each faith is valuable to its adherents, yet when considered from the perspective of those following other faiths it is inherently contestable. Agonistic respect further depends on a moment of recognition and resonance between your faith and that of others, as discussed above (Connolly 1991, 166-167). The source of agonistic respect is not constant and can come from different sources in different faiths, but its expression should be similar (though not identical) horizontally across the different faiths. Critical responsiveness on the other hand “takes the form of *careful listening and presumptive generosity* to constituencies struggling to move from an obscure or degraded subsistence below the field of recognition, justice, obligation, rights, or legitimacy to a place on one or more of those registers” (Connolly 2005, 126).²³ It is the adjustment of standards and social structures to accommodate the beliefs and rights of that faith. This does not mean that it always involves a total overhaul of the established society or that one should always be generous (hence it is a *critical* responsiveness), even if the new faith is hostile. However, it does require a welcoming attitude as the primary response, a willingness to negotiate acceptable adjustments on all sides, whether to existent moral positions or to social structures. Connolly argues that in conjunction these virtues create a basis for negation both horizontally, across faiths as well as vertically, within a faith. This basis is the common understanding that there is a measure of ambiguity and uncertainty in our faiths that

²² Ontologies of abundance understand *Otherness* as a force that “keeps propelling new things into being ... [and] point to its potentiality when it comes to the empowerment of alternative modes of life” (Tønder and Thomassen 2005, 7). Through its rejection of oppositional constitutive difference, it moves beyond antagonism into agonism (whereas the latter indicates a general reactivity, the former imbues this reaction with a negative (oppositional) character). Instead of negation, an ontology of abundance centres on the creativity and undivinity of becoming. As such it construes *Otherness* as an infinite source of plurality and difference.

²³ Italics in original.

creates insecurity in our identity and resentment towards those who bring this uncertainty to the fore. Thus, all parties start from a position of both vulnerability and strength. Strength because one is not required to relinquish one's faith, which creates some sense of security, and vulnerability due to the ambiguity inherent in that faith. What is more, by stressing the vertical dimension of faith, Connolly imparts a greater plurality to his account by stressing that even within a faith there is a variegation of beliefs due to a variety of reasons, including the individuality of each believer, the role faith plays in each life, the variety of doctrines that are or are not endorsed, and the expressions of faith, which can all differ endlessly.²⁴ It is this insight that brings Connolly closest to a true appreciation of difference by trying to find a way to negotiate the chaos of difference. The inclusion of the vertical axis of faith brings greater risk to the stability of the identity, particularly if faith is expressed to a considerable extent through intersubjective rituals and shared beliefs, meaning that the resultant identity is considered the result of intersubjective relations. However, this notion of difference within a faith can be potentially fatal to it, if the differences are considered so great that the perceived unity among the believers is broken. This is further exacerbated by the notion that an individual can inhabit multiple faiths and traditions at once (Connolly 1991, 158). Thus, Connolly must balance the uncertainty and ambiguity in his account to ensure a measure of stability as well. I have shown in the first three chapters, that this is a tension that is often the result of the introduction of nonlinear ontologies to the conceptualisation of the self. The contingency that is a corollary of such ontologies expresses itself in a fluidity that, though desirable, clashes with a need for stability that Connolly specifically indicates as desirable as well. It provides a sense of certainty and predictability to the conceptualisation of the self that, as Serres argued, is associated with security. From Connolly's notion of self as co-constituted through identity|difference, this tension is formalised into internal and external struggles to

²⁴ Through his interpretation of diversity within faith, Connolly challenges the perception prevalent in Western society that it consists of a majority and satellite minority groups. Instead there are endlessly diverse groups (Connolly 2005, 61 - 63). This conceptualisation of the individual as a unique constellation of beliefs and experiences is again remarkably similar to Bergson's self.

negotiate the pressure to shore up the security of one's own faith by demonising an other's. As a result, Connolly's sense of self is dual, not just because it is the result of a co-constitutive binary, but also as a result of the fact that it operates both internally and externally. The capacity to embrace other faiths as equal in their claim to truth must be obtained both within the individual itself - perhaps particularly within the individual, if it is understood as always already a site of multiple identities - and in the society it inhabits, in order to transform an antagonistic into an agonistic society.

The Double Coding of Time

As stated in the introduction, the primary reason for my discussion of Connolly in this thesis is his attempt to reconcile identity politics with a notion of nonlinear time, or at least a notion of time that is not wholly linear. Connolly's interest in temporality is first expressed in terms of speed, endorsing the notion that later modernity is characterised by (social) acceleration. This is particularly visible in his work *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Connolly 2002), which discusses the variable speeds at which components of the universe operate (Connolly 2002, 53). Several aspects of Connolly's account of nonlinear time, as discussed below, are already nascently present in this earlier work. For example, it contains an exploration of Prigogine's work, which underlies complexity theory, an important source of inspiration for Connolly's understanding of time as becoming (Connolly 2002, Chapter 3). Connolly uses Prigogine's interpretation of nonlinear time to shed light on a political dilemma: the variance in speed among different aspects of the world as proposed by complexity theory, has led, in the late-modern condition to a problematic difference in tempo, where the speed of politics, according to Connolly, who takes this from Wolin, is significantly slower than that of the fastest moving social spheres, in particular economics and culture. This undermines the capacity for political, in particular democratic, deliberation, to keep up with the necessary decision making, in order to maintain control over the other spheres (Connolly 2002, 141-143).

The acceleration of the fastest zones - and the consequent accentuation of difference in tempo between fast and slow processes - forms a constitutive dimension of the late-modern condition. The question for me, then, is not how to slow the world down, but how to work with and against a world moving faster than heretofore to promote a positive ethos of pluralism. (Connolly 2002, 143)

The discussion of the increased pace of life in late-modernity, thus, is important because it challenges our perception of our life. Moreover, Connolly sees Wolin's reactionary call to slow the world down as counterproductive, as it is unlikely that the pace of economics and culture can be slowed down, even assuming this would be desirable in the first place. Connolly shows ambivalence towards this, indicating that the increase in speed has both potential and danger. (Connolly 2002, 144). Instead of fighting this pace, we need to come to terms with it, try to understand it, and harness it to "fight the good fight", which for Connolly is, as always, the fortification of an ethos of pluralisation. He states:

When Wolin's presentation of the acceleration of pace in several zones of life is juxtaposed to my portrayal of the rift in time,²⁵ a different picture of the contemporary condition emerges. Uneven pace across zones helps to reveal more poignantly what has always been in operation, a rift between past and future that

²⁵ "In every moment, the pressures of the past enter into a dissonant conjunction with uncertain possibilities of the future. The fugitive present is both constituted by this dissonant conjunction between past and present and rendered uncertain in its direction by it. Often enough that uncertainty is resolved through continuity; but below the threshold of human attention indiscernible shifts and changes have accumulated, sometimes finding expression in small mutations and sometimes in large events. So occasionally time forks in new and surprising directions. A rift in time, engendered by the dissonant conjunction between complex systems with some capacity for self-organization and unexpected events not smoothly assimilable by them. A rift through which at any moment a surprising fork *may* emerge, ushering ... shifts into an open future unsusceptible to full coverage by a smooth narrative, sufficient set of rules, or tight causal explanation" (Connolly 2002, 145).

helps to constitute the essence of time and to enter into the constitution of politics itself. It now becomes possible to come to terms with this condition in a more affirmative way. (Connolly 2002, 148)

Thus, an alternative understanding of temporality is seen by Connolly as an opportunity to propose a concomitant understanding of politics. The most comprehensive and sustained system for the interrelation between time and politics and the possibility to deal with it in terms of positive affirmation is set forth in *Pluralism*.

In *Pluralism*, Connolly uses his particular interpretation of temporality to manage the tension between unity and plurality without falling into a radically chaotic state of difference. He advances a thesis on what he calls “a double coding of time,” which seeks both to account for the everyday linear conception of time and to make room for the experience of a radically different form. The double coding of time splits temporality into the divergent forms of chrono-time and time as duration, this division being indebted to Bergson’s philosophy of time, which I have discussed in chapter two. Here I will focus on Connolly’s interpretation of Bergson. He states that, for Bergson, linear conceptions of time are useful for action,²⁶ but inadequate in understanding the fullness of lived experience, because they do not recognize how the past remains embedded in the present and provides the force that compels time and the subject existing in time into an always open future. Linear conceptions of time accord with a scientific and mechanistic understanding of the world changing predictably by way of fixed laws of cause and effect. In contrast, duration treats the future as being dependent on the past but never determined by it.

For Connolly, chrono-time involves a clear distinction between the past, present and future. Durational time, on the other hand, undermines these divisions and their linear order. It becomes visible in those moments where time’s dimensions intersect, where the past and future

²⁶ Though they are actually reducible to space and therefore not temporal at all.

become once more/already part of our lived experience. Time as duration, for Connolly, offers the experience of a sense of becoming, a “mobility of being ... [which] exceeds our participation in it” (Connolly 2005, 103). Through duration, a sense of multiplicity and versatility is expressed that extends beyond the individual. It is predicated on an understanding of the world as complex and inherently interconnected, coming into being through the interaction of partially open living systems, each with its own “pace” of duration. The human experience is only a small part of this world. Duration in its versatility harbours the possibility for unforeseeable change due to the way these different durational systems interact. The complexity of the world and the open systems in it harbour diverse and endless becomings. However, these becomings are generally beyond human comprehension and explanation, particularly in those instances where previously unconnected open systems meet. For Connolly, such meetings can be the source of inexplicable change as well as exciting moments of opportunity where “new things might flow, bubble, or burst into being, for good or ill” (Connolly 2005, 103).²⁷ It engenders, through the capacity of self-organisation of open systems, the capacity for creative evolution. It allows for the emergence of new states and (often unexpected) changes in directionality and provides the basis for a sense of creative indeterminism. The actualisations of any set of forces active in a self-organising open system is uncertain, it emerges from a set of possibilities, yet which will come to fruition cannot be known in advance (Connolly 2005, 83-88). As such, time as duration is responsible for the new and unexpected directions that life can take, what Connolly calls forks, or bifurcations, in time (Connolly 2011, 18-19).²⁸ However, these interventions by durational time are not under human

²⁷ These moments of emergence are the moments when critical responsiveness should be used as will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

²⁸ Whereas the majority of Connolly’s durational temporality is reminiscent of Bergson, the interpretation of emergence as a series of bifurcations evokes Serres’ dovetails that challenge the surge’s emergence from noise. Serres, too, considers things to be quietly - generally even imperceptibly - developing in the background, before they burst forth and can trigger the need for a response in the form of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness. But Serres concept is more encompassing, because it establishes all distinguishable forms and temporalities, whereas Connolly’s dual coding limits the scope of his time as duration. However, the concept of development through dovetail and the type of path it traces are very similar.

control, though humans can sometimes influence aspects of it. The world in this interpretation is beyond our complete comprehension, let alone our control. It reduces the importance of human agency from the centre stage position it takes in the Enlightenment tradition with its focus on autonomy and scientific/technological mastery. Moreover, it diminishes the capacity of humans to act upon the world in all situations. This is partially due to the understanding that, while a world of becoming harbours infinite possibility, it is also resistant to efficient causality, which often harbour anthropocentric tendencies and suggest the human will as a primary cause of change. Instead, time as duration and its sense of becoming create a notion of emergent causality that is (generally) out of our control. Thus, Connolly uses time as duration to capture the diversity, possibility and ambiguity of his account.

This durational world, however, is balanced in Connolly's account by a progressive and linear chrono-time, which sustains conventional notions of causality, morality, ethics, tradition, history etc (Connolly 2005, 112-114). Chrono-time also maintains a distinction between the tenses and connects them in a conventional sense of the past that flows into the present, which in turn flows into the future. It portrays time as progressive and supports efficient causality where the past determines the present, for only if the past and the present are clearly and intelligibly linked can we understand how the human agent could affect change. This allows chrono-time to be of use, particularly in our ability to run our day to day lives, whereas efficient causality provides an interpretation of the world that is easier to comprehend and to act on (Connolly 2005, 97-99). It reduces the overwhelming complexity of duration to a level more manageable for human comprehension and provides a sense that our actions are of importance as this understanding of time and causality accords human agency a high measure of efficacy. Yet it is not sheer convenience that moves Connolly to advocate a place for chrono-time within his ontology of time. It is specifically because chrono-time retains an element of predictability and stability that Connolly considers it to be a necessary part of our perception of the world. He states:

I do not seek to *replace* a punctual image of time with time as creative evolution. I seek rather, to complicate the experience of time, drawing upon each modality at different moments. The first is the image of time through which everyday perception is organized, reinforced by the disciplines of clock time through which much of modern life is coordinated: the politics of being. The second is the experience of time out of joint as we dwell in duration to focus on the politics of becoming.²⁹ (2005, 128-129)

Time as duration represents the emergence of new and unpredictable events, whereas chrono-time's efficient causation allows us to make sense of the relative homeostasis of everyday life and allows us to make plans. From this he forms an understanding of the world as generally occurring in a way that accords with chrono-time, with time as duration intervening at infrequent and uneven intervals. Connolly thus much more openly advocates retaining a sense of temporality that is anchored in linearity. He uses Bergson's notion that linearity is practical for action, but extends it to a formal and recognised concept of time, which Bergson clearly refuses to do. Even when Bergson implies that duration and space are inverse directions of the same movement, he does not use this to formally legitimise linear conceptions of time, but to increase the ontological power of duration, infusing all matter with duration as the source of eternal change. Linear chronological treatments of time distort change and are incapable of grasping it. Connolly subscribes to this notion by suggesting time as duration is the province of becoming, but he clearly does not want to repudiate the benefits of chrono-time entirely. This is not surprising, because, as Serres notes, these benefits establish politics itself, which is at the heart of Connolly's thought. It also stabilises, as I will show later, Connolly's conception of self.

²⁹ Italics in original.

Pluralism, Identity and the Double Coding of Time

The double coding of time is crucial to understanding the development of Connolly's interpretation of the way in which a social context characterised by deep plurality interacts with the tendency to "evil within faith". What is more, I will contend that from this notion of the way in which fluid individual identity operates in and relates to such a plural social context, an understanding can be extrapolated of the way in which collective identities are formed and function in the same context.

As the focus in *Pluralism* rests on the formulation of guidelines for relations of agonistic but respectful interaction between multiple identities in a plural society, the thrust of Connolly's argument here is to link the double coding of time to his ethical project. He states that dominant understandings of morality are underpinned by linear progressive understandings of time, hence changes to the understanding of temporality have repercussions to concomitant notions of morality and ethics. Connolly singles out Kant's deontological notion of morality as particularly indebted to linear progressive time and as a specific example that shows how this perception of time underpins morality. Kant's morality depends on time as behaving with similar, law-like regularity to the laws he considers to be guiding moral behaviour. Moreover, we, as humans must be able to comprehend this regularity in order to use it as a basis for our own moral maxims (Connolly 2005, 114-115). Time as duration complicates these underpinnings of morality, therefore the adoption of a double coding of time helps Connolly to justify his abandonment of Kantian morality. He focuses his critique of Kant on the possibility of a universal law-like basis for morality. Turning back to Bergson, he states that there are two dimensions to Bergson's morality.³⁰ First, within a particular society, a set of fixed obligations is necessary to ensure any sense of solidarity among its members. However, these obligations are contingent on and connected to evolutionary instinct. Connolly states: "The only universal is the obligation to have obligations. The source and content of obligations is social pressure as it is contracted in habit

³⁰ Connolly bases this discussion on Bergson's *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1935).

and disposition” (Connolly 2005, 116). The evolutionary antecedents, however, are further modified through human intelligence,³¹ making the set of obligations particular to the society one inhabits. Connolly suggests that this aspect of Bergson’s morality is dependent on progressive time. The second aspect of morality, on the other hand, allows for change in circumstances to occur and as such is set up as being (more) in tune with durational time. This facet is embodied by charismatic figures who, through their inspiration and intuitive connection to the energy of duration, are able to expand the moral codes. As Connolly puts it, “[the moral code] *is thereby capable of becoming responsive to unexpected shifts and turns in the flow of time*” (Connolly 2005, 117).³² These sources of morality are indelibly linked together in “tension and interdependence” (Connolly 2005, 118). The second is particularly important, as it also embodies, through the possibility of change, the “impetus to ethical action” (Connolly 2005, 119). Connolly’s own argument would be better served here by making a distinction between transformative and reproductive action, each enabled by its own particular temporality.³³ However, for Bergson, who does not refer to a double coding of time, static morality is a consolidation of dynamic morality. Yet, there seems to be an implicit parallel, the perpetuation of any belief system, including moral codes, is effected through constant reproductive action on the part of its followers; it depends on chrono-time for the expectation of continuity that enables such reproductive action. Connolly’s ethical action here is the action of adaptation and transformation, not of reproduction. It is this distinction that becomes crucial in his understanding of the link between time, ethics and politics. The two modalities of time harness different types of action and therefore require distinct ethical guidelines.

³¹ It is this adaptation by human intelligence that leads to the interpretation of moral laws as divine or objective and universal.

³² Italics in original.

³³ This suits Connolly’s explicitly dualist argument, whereas I have shown it to be problematic for Serres’ more holistic approach.

Connolly's account of ethics feeds directly into his interpretation of politics as a field of action that is (or should be) regulated through particular ethico-political maxims. Like time and ethics, politics is subdivided in two: the politics of being is characterised by stability and endurance and provides the standards and points of reference for judgment and action; the politics of becoming, much like time as duration, is characterised by mobility and the emergence of the new and unforeseen. This link between time and politics directly feeds back into identity. The politics of being represent the periods where social stability allows us to feel secure in our identity, which can exist relatively unproblematically in the space it has carved out for itself in the social sphere. Whereas the politics of becoming represents those moments where the emergence of challenges to our identity require us to actively consider, question and possibly modify our identity. Connolly effectively creates two sets of alignments of time, ethics and politics; each of which is split into two modalities that are perpetually linked in relations of "tension and interdependence". On the one hand, there is chrono-time, agonistic respect and the politics of being. On the other hand, one finds time as duration, critical responsiveness and the politics of becoming. The value of agonistic respect is connected to chrono-time; it represents a continual and relatively stable understanding of the world as containing an existing plurality that needs to be accommodated. The value of critical responsiveness becomes important in the ruptures of time as duration, when becomings clash and new situations emerge. From this he forms an understanding of the world as generally occurring in chrono-time, with time as duration intervening at infrequent and uneven intervals. It allows him to sustain a notion of identity that is predominantly stable as long as it is infused with the civic virtues of agonistic respect, to ensure that it can resist the tendency to 'evil within faith'. Only when confronted with the politics of becoming, as in the emergence of the radically new in society, are we required to review our own identity and if necessary, modify it to ensure that the radically new can take its newly created space in society (Connolly 2005, 121-130). In creating the two sets of modalities, Connolly attempts to strike a balance between continuity and spontaneity, each making up for the other's deficiencies.

Chrono-time, Duration and Dynamic Essentialism

The main focus of this section is on the ways in which the dual coding of time affects Connolly's understanding of the self. I will show that Connolly is reluctant to embrace the full effects of nonlinear logics. He seeks to introduce them in order to loosen the rigidity of linear logic, but shrinks back from setting it at the centre of his work. The fluidity and contingency at the heart of nonlinearity would pose too great a challenge to both his conceptualisation of politics and of the individual in terms of identity. Consequently, Connolly strikes a series of balances in order to reap the benefits of both linear and nonlinear logics. However, like Bergson, Connolly is unable to integrate these two logics successfully into a hybrid logical framework. I will further argue that the extent to which Connolly preserves the set of modalities related to chrono-time ultimately stifles the possibilities he tries to create through the introduction of the counter-modalities of duration. What is more, in trying to balance the two modalities, he exposes the problems inherent in them which are not completely cancelled out when amalgamated with their inverse. In splitting time into these two modes, Connolly exposes that, despite their possible complementarity and interaction, each is subject to its own rules and logics. I will particularly focus on the fact that Connolly is careful to limit the scope of contingency and change admitted through duration into the consolidated world of chrono-time. Hence, ultimately, Connolly is unable to create a sense of self on the basis of nonlinear logics, instead he establishes a stable, linear sense of self that is required at irregular intervals to incorporate the change resulting from the contingency of the external world in the moments it is dominated by duration.

In the *Prelude to A World of Becoming*, Connolly emphasises the necessity of adopting both registers of temporality:

We participate in at least two registers of temporal experience, action-oriented perception and the slower experience of the past folding into the present and

both flowing toward the future. The first is necessary to life; the second is indispensable to its richness. It is the possible interactions between the two modes that need to be underlined. (2011, 4-5)

It is clearly the aim of Connolly's discussions of time to show the complementarity and interaction between the two modes of time. It also displays a sense of primacy for chrono-time, which is called necessary to life, the latter merely to its richness. This echoes Bergson's dual self, where duration provides the unique experience and the superficial self a capacity to function in the world. Yet, where for Bergson the genuine experience of life lies in the former, Connolly seems to imply that the functionality of the latter is necessary, whereas the former only enhances that experience. Connolly states that chrono-time allows us to

come up with images of space, cause, time, morality and politics that work reasonably well in dealing with stable relations set in persisting contexts. But ... functions poorly in a setting pluralized by significant differences of collective memory or an unexpected conjunction of events that turns the flow of time in a novel direction. (Connolly 2005, 98-99)

In order to make up for this rigidity, Connolly uses the complementary modality of duration. Nevertheless, he clearly states that chrono-time "forms a critical part of lived time" (Connolly 2005, 97). In particular, using Bergson's work on time, he links clock time to action:

[T]he ubiquity of clock time, the particular shape of our embodied motility, and the interested character of action combine to organize perception in action-oriented ways. Everyday perception does not represent the world as it is before we encounter it. It organizes experience in the interests of potential modes of

action. Perception *subtracts* and *contracts* the abundant material flooding the senses until a conduct-oriented snapshot has been set in a homogenous image of space and time. Such a practice of perception, Bergson says over and over, is indispensable to life. But it provides an impoverished basis from which to plunge into the tacit experience of duration also available to us, or to do philosophy. (Connolly 2005, 98)

If chrono-time is formed through “everyday perception” that organises time “in the interests of potential modes of action” then it is clear that this modality is explicitly anthropocentric. This lends Connolly’s overall account of time a more anthropocentric note than he is willing to admit (Connolly 2011, 6). It is the world reduced to the levels of our understanding. The perceived continuity and regularity are for our benefit, rather than an expression of “the world as it is before we encounter it.” The modality of becoming on the other hand explicitly exceeds human experience:

Duration, says Bergson, is “the very mobility of being.”³⁴ The mobility of being ... exceeds our participation in it ... Any relatively open system with significant capacities of self-organization participates to some degree in durational time ... becoming is time in an open cosmos. It is through becoming that the new surges into being. Separate trajectories of becoming, set on different scales of clock time, periodically collide, clash, collude, and melt into each other, issuing in unpredictable changes. (Connolly 2005, 103)³⁵

³⁴ Bergson 1998, 339, *Creative Evolution*, trans A. Mitchell (New York: Dover)

³⁵ Cf. Connolly 2011, 33.

The contrast is significant. Instead of human perception, becoming is attributed to ‘any relatively open system with significant capacities of self-organisation’. It is through this shift away from the human experience that it accounts for those things that cannot be predicted. The understanding of time as duration as acting upon and in accordance with a variety of agents is crucial to the logics underpinning it; by exceeding the narrow definition of agency as specifically human, as is often the case in logics indebted to chrono-time, duration is able to account for a much broader range of factors that influence the outcome of any given situation. As such, it significantly impacts the logics appropriate to it. As Connolly puts it: “[t]o find a way to join the artifice of punctual time to time as becoming and out of joint it is necessary to rethink the ideas of cause and meaning too” (2005, 114). Whereas chrono-time supports the law-like logics of efficient causality, time as duration through its focus on contingency and complexity instead supports what Connolly calls emergent causality. Whereas efficient causality understands each action and occasion to be the direct result of generally deliberate - i.e. human - agency, emergent causality instead focuses on the emergence of something new through a series of interactions between disparate elements or through the interaction of at least two open systems. The novel occurrence “could not have been predicted before it came into being and may set the stage for other unpredictable emergents in the future. Emergent causation participates in creative evolution rather than mechanical evolution” (Connolly 2005, 88).³⁶ Emergent causation is one of the attributes of duration that allow for the flexibility that, when the two modalities of time are put in conjunction, saves chrono-time from a

³⁶ “Emergent causality is most pertinent when a previously stabilized force-field enters a period of heightened instability. Emergent causality is *causal* - rather than reducible to a mere web of definitional relations - in that a movement in one force-field helps to induce changes in others. But it is also *emergent* in that: first, some of the turbulence introduced into the second field is not always knowable in detail in itself before it arrives darkly through the effects that emerge; second, the new forces may become *infused* to some degree into the very organization of the emergent phenomenon so that the causal factor is not entirely separate from the latter field; third, some of these forces also continue to impinge from the outside on the emerging formation; fourth, the new infusions and impingements may trigger novel capacities of *self-organization* or *autopoiesis* within one of the two systems that had not been spurred into motion before; and fifth, a series of resonances may now roll back and forth across two partially separated and partially conjoined force-fields - sometimes generating a new stabilization and sometimes intensifying disequilibrium” (Connolly 2011, 171; italics in original).

stifling rigidity that leaves it unable to accommodate change. Thus, the appeal of the dual modality of time is clear. It opens up space for contingency and creativity without destroying linearity in its entirety, so that it leaves intact many of the logics that underpin our standard ontological assumptions, giving shape to our concepts and structure to our thoughts. In this way, it seems that Connolly scales down some of the more far reaching consequences that the introduction of duration and emergent causality entail, particularly the difficulty they create for the unproblematic supposition of consolidated - and, in the case of Serres, enduring - unities. And this seems to be a conscious move, for, while Connolly explicitly calls chrono-time an "*artifice*" (2005, 114, italics in original), he nevertheless repeatedly states that chrono-time and the interpretation of efficient causality it endorses are indispensable to various important aspects of human life, in particular action: "We would lose our ability to act with efficacy, confidence, and fervor in the world. For action requires simplified perception to inform it" (Connolly 2011, 2). This is reflected by the fact that Connolly seems to use a different approach to agency when discussing time as duration, shifting the locus of agency from the human individual to other sites. Typically, the "agents"³⁷ active in time as duration are almost exclusively denoted in non-anthropocentric terms such as an open system, pattern or forcefield (Connolly 2011, 5; cf. Connolly 2005, 103).³⁸ The connection between chrono-time and action further underscores its anthropocentrism and thereby helps to sustain a particular understanding of the self as standing apart from and operating without reference to the world's durational time, despite the fact that duration is responsible for the individual's capacity to change too. Like Bergson, Connolly argues that the human individual is an important site connecting the two registers. It creates a similar duality to Bergson's two aspects of the self, where chrono-time is applied to everyday, action-oriented perception, though for

³⁷ In the sense of the active element under consideration, the open systems etc. can include, but almost invariably exceed the human individual. "Agents" here is used in the sense of distributive agency which Connolly develops in *A World of Becoming* and that extends agency beyond human and animal individuals, which will be discussed in more detail below.

³⁸ Connolly even uses it to posit that if our mind is not limited to linear causality then it must follow that the rest of the world must also be capable of non-linear patterns (2005, 105).

Connolly this is suspended for the richness of duration (Connolly 2011, 38). Yet Connolly adapts his understanding of the human psyche as a site of duration from Bergson's original conceptualisation. He suggests that experiences of duration interrupt chrono-time perceptions, whereas Bergson explicitly argues that they stand in a relation of source and expression where the latter are a poor translation of the former. As a result, he does not replicate the problematic understanding of duration as inaccessible to reflective consciousness and language, arguing that the past can burst into the present in noticeable ways. Both in *Pluralism* and *A World of Becoming*, Connolly uses examples of human thought (portrayed as affecting human speech and/or action) as a site of duration and complexity (2011, 105; cf. 2005, 99-100). As duration finds expression in creativity, this must also include the creativity of mind. Yet, it is also the site of the simplification of the world and the filtering of perception through efficient causation. For Connolly this is an indication how we as humans are able to exist at the junction where both modes of temporality intersect, just as Bergson suggests.³⁹ However, I contend that rather than expressing the way in which humanity straddles the two temporalities, it exposes the way in which humans have created an understanding of temporality that suits their limited capacity for comprehension. Connolly is open to this criticism because of the fact that he formalises chronological time and expresses its importance for life, whereas Bergson's emphasis tends towards duration. Both of Connolly's examples of the necessity of chrono-time, whether the need for stability or the need to facilitate a sufficient drive to action, are necessary only by the standards underpinned in chrono-time. No doubt, it would require significant changes to our thinking if our notions of "space, cause, time, morality and politics" were uprooted. It underpins two of the most important sites of purpose in Western modern life: our sense of self in form of our identity and our sense of agency that allows us to feel that we can contribute to the world. In changing our understanding of temporality towards duration, we would risk losing these things, as well as the sense of comfort and security

³⁹ Though as I have shown above, there are important differences in how this interaction takes shape.

that they bring. Ultimately this is what Connolly is fighting so hard to protect, and it is at risk in undermining chrono-time logics. It also contributes to the fact that creating a sense of self on the basis of nonlinear time has proven impossible, as the previous three chapters have shown. Hence, Connolly consolidates his sense of self by basing it predominantly in linearity.

However, what Connolly does not consider in his defence of the need for two complementary modes of temporality is that it is exactly the logics of chrono-time that lock us into the ontologies and thought patterns that give rise to the problem of difference in the first place. That is to say, difference and contingent change only pose a problem from a perspective linked to chrono-time. Hence, Connolly tries to change our understanding of self, to broaden identity to become more fluid so that it can incorporate change more easily - for that is ultimately what his solution of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness aims to provide, to allow the construction of identity to catch up with the accelerated pace of social change. In order to do that, it is necessary to lessen the rigidity of self-identity so that it can more easily accommodate the emergence of new viewpoints. However, this is hampered by Connolly's insistence that chronological time is of such importance to human life. For despite the fact that he posits linearity as co-foundational with nonlinearity, the double coding of time hides the moment where difference and change are displaced in Connolly's theory. By this I mean that despite his attempt to centralise difference, Connolly's theory at several "moments" lets it drift to the periphery, rather than retain it at the heart of his organizing principles.

One important instance is his theorization of the interaction between chrono-time and duration. It creates a specific temporal "space" for difference that interrupts our hum-drum life, which is dominated by chrono-time. Connolly uses his previous interest in social acceleration, which he considers to be one of the defining characteristics of the late modern period, as stated above, to bring a more equitable balance between the weight of stable chrono-time and interrupting duration. The notion of acceleration is presented as creating a more frequent interference of duration, portrayed as an increase in the interruptions and disruptions to chrono-

time (Connolly 1991, 22; cf. 2011, 2; cf. 2005, 122). In spite of this notion of acceleration, the deck is still stacked in chrono-time's favour. There are multiple indications of the dominance of chrono-time discernible in the way in which Connolly portrays the fight for acceptance by emerging identities in his discussion of the politics of becoming. He states:

The new demand is not derived from a thick set of principles containing it implicitly all along. If it eventually acquires a sedimented place in the order of things, it will be pressed and negotiated into being by an assemblage of insurgents who demand it ... The politics of becoming ... emerges out of historically specific suffering, previously untapped energies, and emerging lines of possibility eluding the attention of dominant constituencies. In successful instances the politics of becoming moves from a netherworld below the register of positive acceptance, identity, legitimacy or justice onto one or more of those registers. To cross that threshold is to shake up something in the established world. (Connolly 2005, 121-122)

This explanation of the process of acceptance of emergent identities shows the dominance of chrono-time over duration in two important ways. First, it highlights the complexity of the interplay between the vast array of forces active in the world and the extent to which we are unable to grasp this complexity, for the success of the demand relies on the lack of attention of those already established, of the already crystallised, stabilised formations. It emerges by compromising the ability of the dominant constituencies to ignore its existence, in other words, by undermining the filters that currently sustain a particular understanding of the world and what should be considered worthy of notice. As such, as stated above, it confirms the human perception as narrow, determined by the confines of the crystallised identities, which depend on the continuity provided by chrono-time for their status. In addition, the image of the dual coding of time is that of a linear

trajectory interrupted by emergent identities as expressions of duration. It suggests that the emergence is resolved through an incorporation of the new identity into the linear timeline. That is to say, it is a pattern of disruption and normalisation. If identity politics is about the setting the standards for normality, then Connolly's balance still implies that normality is found in the stability of chrono-time and though more frequent interruptions of it are becoming more normal, its interruptions retain in some sense an outsider status, exactly because they are seen as disruptions, as moments where the definition of "normal" can be adjusted. Hence, it limits the affirmation of difference and agonistic respect to the specific way in which differences are incorporated into the contemporary reductive filter of chrono-time.

The separation of time into the two modalities of duration and chrono-time is problematic, moreover, because it leads to a temporal displacement of the problem of difference in two ways. First, Connolly effectively creates a specific temporality of difference and contingency that to some extent both removes it from and incorporates it into our everyday experience. It creates a duality in our conception of the world: under chrono-time it behaves regularly and in relatively lawlike ways, but from time to time duration intervenes and creates its own "extraordinary circumstances" under which radical difference and creativity can come out to play.⁴⁰ It temporarily suspends the logics of efficient causality for those of emergent causality; the two logical frameworks are still considered to be separate, though interacting. Connolly states: "Often the line of continuity exceeds the pressure of variation. But sometimes a swerve disrupts previous equilibrium, sending things off in a direction different enough from that extrapolated. ... Duration is alteration within

⁴⁰ Eugene Holland explains this through a helpful analogy to a chemical interaction, which, if the same chemicals are in supply will run continually. However, the addition of other chemicals into the mix will have different results depending on the chemical composition of the new mix. Some additives can function as catalysts and increase the reaction speed of the process, whereas others can upset the balance to the extent that the previous reaction ceases and is either replaced by another reaction or all reactions are stifled (Holland 2012, 19-20). Duration in this analogy functions as the addition of chemicals to the existing reaction. Possibly changing its composition in notable ways. Because of the logic of emergent causality associated with duration, we cannot predict when, how or why additions will take place, nor can we know in advance (or always accurately afterwards) how any addition will affect any given situation.

continuity” (2005, 112).⁴¹ It places difference in an ambiguous space that is at once both removed from and part of our experience. Effectively, chrono-time dominates our experience; it is the baseline for our everyday experience and facilitates action. This thrusts duration into an uncomfortable role of difference as an expression of otherness, in the sense that it is often unacknowledged in everyday life, despite its necessity as co-constitutive of our world-view with chrono-time. By keeping the two logics separate, where one is seen as the basis for life and the other is seen as a sometimes uncomfortable, impractical but also enriching addition, which only applies to special circumstances, then the latter will remain in a subservient position to the former. It portrays difference as something that we only need to concern ourselves with under specific circumstances, rather than as something that should always be at the centre of both ontology and praxis. Connolly’s refusal to give duration more scope must be construed as a result of its destabilising tendency and its foundational role in establishing the concepts of politics and identity; instead, he hopes to combine the certainty and familiarity of linearity with the possibility for change and creativity of duration. However, this capacity is stifled as its scope is so limited.

The second moment of displacement of difference that occurs through the double coding of time is directly related to Connolly’s notion of identity as what I will call dynamic essentialism. As explained above, the thesis of identity’s plurality in *Identity|Difference* is coupled closely to Connolly’s later interpretation of temporality described above in his book *Pluralism*. As explained above, Connolly’s engagement with temporality stems from a concern over the asymmetry of

⁴¹ This is a reversal of Serres’ approach, before he suggests the notion of time as a continuum, he suggests that temporality can be split in two, as climatic and chronological time. The former engenders the contingency of Connolly’s time as duration, whereas the latter affects linear predictable movement; they facilitate change and stability respectively (Serres 1995, 109-110). This echoes Serres’ conception of linear chreodic systems compared to transformative chreodic systems. Yet where Connolly stresses stability, Serres accentuates the dynamism of multiplicity. Hence, if Serres were to endorse a “dual coding” of time, it would invert Connolly’s design: linear movement would interrupt the capricious movement of climatic temporality. Such an inversion would align supposed implied dual coding with Serres’ call for a change in mindset; it proposes a dominance for distribution (multiplicity) instead of gatherings (unity) and focuses on productive capacity of chaos. However, unlike Connolly, Serres does not provide a clear distinction between states to which each type of temporality would apply. The turbulent mixture is always that, a mixture; therefore, Serres ultimately evolves his conceptualisation of time into a continuum.

speed and the acceleration of some aspects that undermine the effectiveness of democratic deliberation. An important factor impacted by the asymmetry is identity (Connolly 2002, 141). He states: "Such a nonlinear conception of time in nature enables cultural theorists ... to fold nature, biology and human embodiment back into their conceptions of thinking, culture, *identity*, judgment, and becoming" (Connolly 2002, 146).⁴² The dual coding of time becomes part of the process of identity formation through difference and otherness and it creates the second moment of displacement of difference through what I call dynamic essentialism. Chrono-time represents stability within identity, the periods of time in which we feel secure in our identity and can use it unquestioningly. Time as duration represents encounters with otherness. Connolly makes these links implicitly through his discussion of the civic virtues of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness. Each of these virtues is linked to a particular type of politics, of being or becoming, which in turn are linked to chrono-time and time as duration.⁴³ Agonistic respect is linked to those periods of relative stability, of the "persistent crystallizations" of the politics of being (Connolly 2005, 121). In times of stability, we still need to be mindful to remain respectful towards those of other faiths sharing our society, but if this respect is built into our faith, then there is no need for further negotiation of our own identity beyond that which is consistent with chrono-time.⁴⁴ The politics of becoming, on the other hand, is characterised by the emergence of the new and spontaneous. When new issues come to the fore, the established identities in society often must adjust their own identity to ensure that any identities related to it can be accommodated in society. Critical responsiveness is dependent on a willingness to open one's own identity to possibly

⁴² Emphasis added.

⁴³ The link between linear progressive time and stable identities is also discussed in *Identity|Difference*, where Connolly states: "[I]ndividual and collective life in the present and projections of future prospects for both, presume, first, a close alignment between the identity the self seeks to realize and socially available possibilities of self-formation and, second, a shared sense of confidence in the world we are building, a confidence that links the present to the future through effort and anticipation at one time and memory and appreciation at another" (1991, 19-20).

⁴⁴ That is to say, that the changes which occur in our own identity over time still need to be accommodated, but that our identity in such instances is not undergoing the strain of trying to accommodate the demands of an other's identity.

destabilising self-reflection; to reconsider our own beliefs to the extent that we suppress the instinct to reject another's beliefs which clash with our own and replace it with an openness to a fair hearing and the readiness to adjust our belief at least to the extent that an other's beliefs are accepted as equally valid to our own. This occurs in conjunction with social engineering, in the sense that social structures, beliefs concerning justice and good praxis are adjusted to accommodate a new belief (2005, 121-129; cf. 1991, 47).⁴⁵ These encounters activate the insecurity and tension inherent in our identity and require self-reflection to resolve it. It is this turn to the central feature of the traditional subject - self-reflection - that marks Connolly's continued reliance on traditional ideas of politics and agency, particularly insofar as self-reflection presupposes a stability of the self that Connolly affirms by endorsing the necessity of chrono-time and positioning duration as its occasional, if necessary, interruption. Connolly's maintenance and leading motif of chrono-time is necessary to sustain what is ultimately an identitarian orientation in his politics of becoming. Even as the site of conflicting identities, Connolly's implicit notion of selfhood, as tied to an enduring human agent expressed in a predominantly stable identity, allows it to function as a relatively stable focal point of this multiplicity.

It seems even less possible to live with difference outside the space of identity, even if the identity one lives were to become pluralized, that is, even if the self were to become the locus of competing identities. Even if a "way of life" without identity turned out to be possible, it would still be undesirable. I would not be,

⁴⁵ For example, in the case of "the" homosexual identity, the fight over acceptance of this identity which is still being waged. It was first formalised into the right to same-sex marriage, which required a social and legal extension of the accepted boundaries of the concept of marriage. However, critical responsiveness also involves a revision of beliefs by the individuals in societies that are engaged in this transition. As well as a change in various social structures, laws and conceptualisations of justice. The acceptance of the homosexual identity extends beyond legalisation of same-sex marriage to questions of granting homosexuals equal rights to be parents, to express their love in public, to require business owners to respect their sexuality etc.

do or achieve anything. ... Identity, in some modality or other, is an indispensable feature of human life. (Connolly 1991, 158)

The need for linear chrono-time is directly related to his commitment to identity based on what is now a dynamic essentialism, but a kind of essentialism nonetheless, a strong persistence of continuity - possibly even stasis - as the defining element of the self. By dynamic essentialism I mean that while the characteristics of an identity are contested and may change depending on the spatio-temporal situation, the notion of identity itself is still predicated on the idea that it requires some characteristics or aspects which are considered at any particular time and space as essential to it, which therefore must be relatively stable (Connolly 1991, 3; cf. 1991, 158; cf. 2005, 25). This dynamic essentialism is directly linked to possibilities of endurance and change that are inherent in the logics of the dual coding of time. The dominance of chrono-time is necessary to ensure the stability of the self. Perhaps because Connolly recognises that the contingency and fluidity of duration create problems for the unity of the self. Whatever the motivation, I must conclude that Connolly is unable to provide a sense of self that is centred on becoming; change is still something which must be accommodated by a stable self, rather than the dominant facet of self-identity.

Nonlinear Agency and the Self

The fact that self-identity for Connolly is closely connected to chrono-time is reflected in a change in linguistic register when he intensifies his engagement with nonlinear time. The focus now shifts to conceptualisations of agency, a focus which is reminiscent of both Nietzsche's theory of the drives and Serres' engagement with multiplicity. Connolly's interest in nonlinear notions of time, in particular time as duration, is connected to an engagement with complexity theory. "Complexity theory surmounts reductionism. It advances several distinctive themes that touch received theories of explanation, interpretation, agency, ethics, and time in the human sciences" (Connolly

2011, 17). The world is seen as composed of endlessly interlocking and fluid open systems. These open systems are composed of myriad forces that are continually in movement, which creates ceaseless interactions among them. These forces can coalesce into assemblages with the capacity for self-organisation. The forces in any constellation are so numerous that we cannot keep track of all their movements, and that is not factoring in any forces that are free flowing or in neighbouring constellations, which could be moved into collision at any time. This understanding of the world has multiple important implications, the first is that any semblance of stability cannot be more than a semblance, as Connolly states:

Because every spatio-temporal system constituting the universe is open to some degree, and because each regularly maintains connections with other heterogeneous systems and periodically forms connections to others, another source of potential disequilibrium stalks stable systems. (2011, 19)

This creates the possibility for uncertainty and spontaneity that is so central to Connolly's notion of time as duration (Connolly 2013, 8). However, Connolly here implies if not a dominance, then at least a more equal footing for contingency and constancy, complicating his previous insistence that chrono-time rightfully dominates experience cementing the stability of the self, over the interruptions of duration. It expresses the attempt in *A World of Becoming* to extend agency beyond the human individual, trying to balance the anthropocentric nature of politics - including his own political theory until that point - with the holistic view of nonlinearity, which questions human exceptionalism.⁴⁶ The world is now understood as made up of patterns of forces that can interact, in such a scheme humans are at best merely a particular type of constellation of forces,

⁴⁶ In the previous three chapters I have shown that Nietzsche, Bergson and Serres all place agency at a sub-individual level, complicating the assumption that human agency is an exceptional feat of evolution and qualitatively different from other types of agency, though Bergson in particular tries to maintain a sense of human exceptionalism.

but cannot, at base, be distinguished from anything else in the universe. Nevertheless, Connolly tries to retain a sense of unicity for humans through the notion of “distributive agency.” Effectively it creates a sliding scale of agency that extends beyond humans, but still puts humanity at the culmination of the pyramid.⁴⁷ He tries to evade the charge of anthropomorphism by creating a sort of reverse anthropomorphism, where non-human forms of agency are ontologically prior to human agency, what he calls “proto-agency” (Connolly 2011, 23). Agency is described as the “intersection of intention, value, meaning and action” (Connolly 2011, 24). However, intent is not related to consciousness in this interpretation, but rather to the ability to pursue an end. To illustrate this Connolly uses the example of a bacterium seeking out sugar in order to grow. Human agency, nevertheless, is still represented as an evolutionary advance that developed out of forms of proto-agency and in fact is still intimately intertwined with and dependent on proto-agency to function.

In appreciating it as a proto-agent and dark precursor to human agency, we may become more sensitive than otherwise to nonhuman forces, to the multiple layers of performance implicated in human agency and to the sources of drag or inhibition that attach themselves to the latter. ... To locate differential degrees of agency at multiple sites not only supports the theme of evolution; it also points to the complexity of our interactions with multiple systems with their own levels and degrees of agency. (Connolly 2011, 24-25)

This passage draws attention to the various forms of agency and the possibility coexistences of several types within the same assemblage, for example the human body. Connolly uses Bennett’s definition of an assemblage as “ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all

⁴⁷ Connolly specifically targets the notion of “the hubris of exclusive humanism”; the idea that only humans are capable of agency (Connolly 2011, 28).

sorts” (Bennett 2010a, 23 in Connolly 2011, 25).⁴⁸ Crucially the elements of the assemblage are not completely subsumed into it, and can still retain movements independent of the assemblage. These can influence the assemblage (for good or ill) or can be irrelevant to it.⁴⁹ This means that there are numerous sites of agency within any assemblage, which has important consequences not only for our understanding of agency, but also for causality, to which we will return later in this section. It creates a notion of agency as relational. Agency always involves multiple agents acting upon or in concert with one another. Moreover, it means that agency is always restricted, to some extent, by rival forms of agency; all agents perpetually engage with others in countless varieties of relationships, there is no such thing as completely free agency as no action ever takes place within a vacuum.

Nevertheless, Connolly reserves a special status for human agency, which is characterised by a specific understanding of consciousness in which it is not seen as the origin of action. Rather, it emerges as a result of action and creates a second order possibility for consciousness to form a response and adjust subsequent actions if deemed necessary. Moreover, while humans are not the only animals capable of such forms of agency, Connolly still recognises an unprecedented sophistication in human agency that puts them in a league of their own at one end of the continuum (Connolly 2011, 25-26). In order to further cement this distinction, he creates three categories: proto-agency that is unable to adjust, minimal agency, which would include animals, and complex agency which is mostly reserved for humans.

Complex agency involves a capacity to deepen sensitivity to others of varying degrees of agentic complexity. It also involves the capacity for self-consciousness, the ability to master the environment to some degree, and the

⁴⁸ Bennett in turn has taken her understanding of assemblage from Deleuze and Guattari.

⁴⁹ At least at that moment. These currently irrelevant movements are one of the possible sources for new things to come, seemingly spontaneous, into being, as currently latent aspects can be activated at a later date.

ability to work tactically on the self in response to external pressures and your own reflective responses. Thus, to form desires involved with the desires of others; to reflect on those desires; to form second order desires from those reflections; to be able sometimes to act on a second order desire out of, say, ethical considerations; to act tactically upon yourself to recode to some degree culturally embodied tendencies that so far resist second order desires; and to cultivate new sensitivities to human and nonhuman agents of multiple sorts - all these skills, capacities, and sensitivities are involved with complex agency.⁵⁰

(Connolly 2011, 26)

It is clear that while Connolly is opening the door to other forms of agency, he is maintaining the privileged position of human agency. Once more, Connolly is engaged in an effort to balance opposing narratives, trying to combine the dominant narrative of anthropocentrism with the notion of distributive agency. This balancing act is directly related to, and mirrors, the balance between chrono-time|duration and identity|difference. The notion of distributive agency is the result of the notion of emergent causation Connolly introduces to discuss duration. The notion of things coming into being without human involvement, but through the interaction of open systems with each other or with litter⁵¹ opens up the opportunity to explore a sense of agency that extends beyond human agency. However, chrono-time in its anthropocentric necessity, which I have explored above, requires a justification of human exceptionalism, for if human agency is like any other, it becomes inexcusable to let an anthropocentric understanding of time, which is specifically required to facilitate human action, dominate the way we understand the world. In keeping with his work on identity and time, the notions of self-reflection and self-transformation are crucial to

⁵⁰ This could be understood as an explicit conceptualisation of what is entailed in Nietzsche's idea that one can "give style" to one's character. Specifically, for Connolly, it involves the capacity to change habits established through social conditioning.

⁵¹ Small pieces of matter that float between assemblages and create interactions (Connolly 2011, 35).

set human agency apart from proto- and minimal agency.⁵² There is a particularly close connection between his conceptualisation of complex agency as the ability to change socially mandated conduct and habits and the requirement to be able to do so inherent in his civic virtues of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness. However, the privileging of human agency is offset by his insistence that humans are agentic assemblages, like all multicellular organisms, involving various levels and sites of agency. Even individual human agency, then, should be seen as a composite of activity at those different sites, it involves “a complex assemblage of heterogeneous elements bound loosely together” (Connolly 2011, 27). Moreover, Connolly explains that with modern scientific amplifications of our sensory capacities have shown that there might be forms of expression and agency that are not comprehensible or available to normal human perception. This last assertion of Connolly’s indicates that we may not be aware of the full extent of properties pertaining to the overwhelming majority of things in the world. In spite of this, Connolly still proposes to use human agency as the pinnacle and yard stick, while remaining open to the notion that human comprehension and understanding are fallible (Connolly 2011, 31).

Thus, in increasing his engagement with nonlinearity as an ontological principle, which is evidenced by the title of *A World of Becoming*, Connolly shows a similar tendency to the three preceding authors in this thesis to locate agency at a sub-individual level. However, Connolly tries to mitigate the tension this brings to his conceptualisation of the self discussed above by creating a type of human exceptionalism that is tailored to guaranteeing the agentic basis for the civic

⁵² Proponents of new materialism, discussed in more detail below, Coole and Frost specifically call out the basis that Connolly uses to distinguish complex from minimal agency, instead arguing that qualities such as “self-reflection, self-awareness, and rationality traditionally used to distinguish it [humanity] from the rest of nature, may now [in view of complexity theory] seem little more than contingent and provisional forms or processes within a broader evolutionary or cosmic productivity” (Coole and Frost 2010, 20). Rejecting the notion that humanity has any special place in evolution, instead they conceive of these vaunted qualities as: “diffuse chance products of a self-generative nature from which they never entirely emerge. It further invites acknowledgement that these capacities are manifest in varying degrees across different species of being, that they are indelibly material in their provenance ... From this perspective, the difference between humans and animals, or even between sentient and nonsentient matter, is a question of degree more than kind” (Coole and Frost 2010, 20-21). Coole and Frost thus use complexity theory as a basis to attack, rather than defend, human exceptionalism.

virtues that form the foundation for his conceptualisation of both politics and identity formation. But in both instances, in *Pluralism* and *A World of Becoming*, Connolly is seen to try to reconcile the logics of linearity and nonlinearity, attracted by the possibility and contingency in nonlinearity, but reluctant to abandon the securities and ontological premises of linearity. Through his work, it becomes increasingly clear that a concept of a stable self cannot be reconciled with the logics belonging to nonlinear becoming.

Crossings as Exploration of Nonlinearity

The work of Jane Bennett also explores the possibility of a nonlinear ontology as the basis for a new approach to politics. I will explore her engagement with nonlinearity through various themes in her work that are all aimed at extending the boundaries of agentic capacity through the rejection of the idea that matter is inert. It emerges for example in her discussion of enchantment in her book, *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (2001).⁵³ The understanding of nature as “vibrant”⁵⁴ and in and of itself a source of agency runs through the book, but is not its main focus. However, it is based on nonlinear premises, which are used to combat anthropomorphism and endow materiality with agency. The notion of agentic materiality, for Bennett (like Connolly), is related to complexity theory. She states that she “objects to the treatment of nature as (what Heidegger termed) *standing reserve*, that is, an inert set of resources awaiting human deployment”; instead, she

⁵³ The premise of this volume is the idea that Western modernity projects an image of disenchantment whether this is taken in positive terms (a place of reason, freedom and control as opposed to the premodern superstition and backwardness) or in negative terms (as a period of superficiality and alienation as opposed to premodern community which allowed deep attachment to the world surrounding the individual) (Bennett 2001, 3-4). The narrative of disenchantment inhibits us from perceiving and engaging with the vitality surrounding us. Some of the barriers Bennett discusses are the understanding of matter as inert and nature stripped from the wonder it once caused, relegated to an object of study, whose mysticism, insofar as it still persists, should be demystified and understood through logic and science as quickly as possible. Instead of the unpredictability that wonder inspires, the disenchanted world is marked by mastery and calculability.

⁵⁴ Bennett later uses “vibrant matter” as the term for her understanding of materiality as infused with its own agency. Though she does not yet use the term systematically in this way in *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, she does use the term vibrant several times to denote the mobile nature of materiality (Bennett 2001, 81, 114, 162).

introduces “the idea that complexity - the intricacies and convolutions in nature and culture - today functions as a site of enchantment” (Bennett 2001, 92). In order to give shape to this complexity Bennett focuses on Epicurean physics and modern complexity (or chaos) theory, which both provide a sense of spontaneity and unpredictability. Central to this discussion is the notion of swerve, the idea that sometimes, spontaneously, matter swerves, takes a different route and thereby creates new assemblages, brings new things into the world. She uses Lucretius to describe a balance between stability and change:

Lucretius’s idea of a primordial declination [the swerve] speaks to our intuitive sense that the world is open-ended, that the future is not determined until the moment of its arrival, that chance is in the nature of things. Our equally intuitive sense that things are ordered, that they repeat more or less familiar patterns, that matter arranges itself and lends itself to arrangement, is also given shape by Lucretian physics in the idea that the shape and texture of the different primordia limit the kinds of associations likely to occur and stabilize many that do occur. (Bennett 2001, 100)

As such, the swerve accommodates both stability and radical novelty. She compares Lucretian physics therefore to complexity theory with its concept of nonequilibrium systems.⁵⁵ Particles in nonequilibrium systems are more likely to behave erratically (not in accordance with discernible rules) and thereby they are more likely to be the source of a swerve, which is similar to Connolly’s bifurcation and Serres’ dovetail. Thus, we should adopt a notion of causality that can encompass both regularity and novelty or chance. So that when new things come into being, these can be

⁵⁵ Bennett also discusses nonequilibrium systems, which are characterised by unpredictability, self-organisation and irreversible trajectories in a collaborative paper with Connolly titled “Contesting Nature/Culture: the Creative Character of Thinking” (2002).

more easily understood and more readily accepted, for out of this random event new temporarily stable systems can emerge. Therefore, Bennett proposes the idea of a complex materialism that is neither reductive nor mechanistic but is centred on a notion of matter as agentic (Bennett 2001, 102-104). However, this complexity is not an unequivocal blessing, as Bennett states:

The complexity of physical events is ... both attractive and repellent. Attractive because it places my body among other natural bodies possessing a kind of agency or swervy vitality, and because it portrays the physical universe as a marvelous place that uncannily repeats the material lives of me and you. Repellent because this nonhuman complexity reduces the prospect of rendering nature safe for humans and confounds claims to the radical uniqueness of humans. (Bennett 2001, 105)

The exchange of human exceptionalism for a vitality of matter is apparent at other points in *The Enchantment of Modern Life* as well. In the second chapter Bennett discusses several instances of crossings, either imagined in literature or real, where creatures show capacities beyond those normally attributed to them and thereby exceed the boundaries normally set for their species. Bennett consciously chooses the term crossings rather than hybridity as the latter evokes the sense of “static entities coming together to form a compound” (Bennett 2001,31).⁵⁶ That is to say, it is understood as the intermingling or interaction between two previously constituted individuals. In that context, the crossing is often imbued with a sense of negation or subversion. Crossings are presented as moments, processes or self-experimentations that question identities, as the subject undergoing the crossing directly engages some form of otherness in Connolly’s terms. It

⁵⁶ Despite this assertion, Bennett uses the latter term to describe crossings throughout the chapter, particularly to describe the process of crossings as one of self-hybridisation.

challenges the notion that identity is naturalistic or fixed.⁵⁷ A crossing is a becoming in which the boundaries that are normally understood to delineate the identity and agentic capacity of the individual are challenged. Those engaged in the crossing exceed “their” presupposed limits, the limits set by their recognised identities and are possibly even becoming entirely other, their directionality having steered them into unexpected directions.

The final crossing Bennett discusses is Deleuze and Guattari’s “body without organs.” It is in the description of this crossing that Bennett exchanges the solidity of the concept of identity for the more fluid notion of self. It is the result of the fact that this is the crossing that is least recognisable as a fixture of any type, as it is described as a continual state of becoming, carried on a “circuit of intensity” that unifies the various elements into an organic, organised whole. It is a perpetual process, rather than an attainable state that is characterised by self-hybridisation and self-experimentation. Bennett’s discussion of the “body without organs” entails aspects that evoke several of the accounts discussed previously in this thesis. Its process is a self-adjustment according to its own tastes, which brings Nietzsche’s notion of “giving style” to one’s character to mind. It is the result of movement and techniques, reminiscent of Serres’ gymnastics. However, unlike Serres’ gymnastics, the creation of the body without organs is the result of the same processes that create ordinary bodies, which also accounts for the fact that Bennett provides a marginally more practicable and less confusing understanding of this process than Serres does for his equivalent, though the result is equally confusing (Bennett 2001, 24-27). For, like Serres’ un-differentiation, the process of the body without organs is aimed at liberating the individual from the pressures of organisation, to enable the individual to pursue the potentialities of its becoming. It appears to diminish the delineations - the strata - that shore up differentiations, particularly among humans and between humans and animals. Crossings, understood in this way, embody

⁵⁷ However, Bennett does not engage the question of what the notion of complex materialism or vibrant matter means for the notion of identity, which could have brought her to abolish the notion of identity altogether. However, as it stands, she is able to preserve it, resting on a similar standpoint as Connolly, whose dynamic essentialism describes identity as neither naturalistic nor entirely fixed.

the possibility of emergent causality, of becoming. It also, particularly in its most extreme form, foreshadows the attempt to understand agency as a force that suffuses and thereby connects all elements in the world. However, this comes at the cost of tension in the understanding and security of self-identity. Bennett's use of the terminology of self-hybridisation and self-experimentation express this tendency. The possibility to connect with and even become other, as Connolly has shown in *Identity|Difference* at the cost of instability to the self. Bennett's crossings echo this understanding and indicate that the certainty and solidity of the self cannot sustain the vicissitudes of becoming.

New Materialism as Vitalism

This is further confirmed by Bennett's later works on vitalism and vibrant materiality as expressions of a strand of political theory called new materialism. New materialism contests the inertia of matter, as Coole and Frost state in their introduction to their edited volume, *New Materialisms*:

materiality is always something more than "mere" matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable. In sum, new materialists are rediscovering a materiality that materializes, evincing immanent modes of self-transformation that compel us to think of causation in far more complex terms; to recognize that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency. (Coole and Frost 2010, 9)

As a proponent of new materialism, Bennett explores the notion of nonlinearity through the implications of complexity and vitality on agency. In particular, she seeks to extend the notion of

agency beyond the individual to come to an understanding of matter itself as endowed with agency. (Bennett 2010a, vii-vix) The notion that “matter is an active principle” (Bennett 2010b, 47) and therefore is its own site of agency is central to several of her works. In her contribution to Coole and Frost’s edited volume *New Materialism*, “A Vitalist Stopover on the Way to a New Materialism” (2010b), Bennett focuses on the dichotomy of matter|life in order to challenge its validity through discussing and critiquing the philosophical tradition of vitalism, in particular the evolution in the work of Hans Driesch. Vitalism is centred on the idea that “life” is irreducible to “matter”, that it only exists in relation to matter but is not material in nature (Bennett 2010b, 48). Throughout his oeuvre, Driesch moves from the Kantian notion of matter as inert to a position that interlinks life and matter so intimately that it almost (but not quite) eliminates the dichotomy. Driesch uses the Aristotelian term *entelechy* to denote the “life-principle”, which considers it to be “the *intensive* manifoldness out of which emerges the extensive manifoldness of the organism. (...) Neither a substance nor an energy (though active only in relation to those phenomena)” (Bennett 2010b, 50-51).⁵⁸ Entelechy is understood as the organising principle of all animate organisms and as such is involved in a wide variety of actions with differing degrees of complexity. Bennett describes the “life-force” acting as a selection mechanism that regulates which of “the many formative possibilities inside the emergent organism ... become actual” (Bennett 2010b, 52). This is particularly important, because the outcome is not determined by the stimuli that assail the organism, rather these create possibilities that are presented to the “life-principle”. This breaks with the notion of efficient causality, creating a so-called “indefiniteness of correspondence”, meaning that stimuli can, but don’t necessarily have a particular effect. This is an important development for Bennett, as it creates a possibility for creativity and freedom that is not directly tied to mechanistic determinism; it forms the basis for her contention that efficient causality should be reconsidered, even without a belief in entelechy as a life-force that is a semi-separate entity

⁵⁸ Italics in original.

from the matter it supposedly animates (Bennett 2010b, 53).⁵⁹ However Bennett contests Driesch's interpretation of entelechy because it retains a sense of anthropocentrism.⁶⁰ Anthropocentrism emerges from a differentiation between the organic and inorganic, which Driesch approaches through the process of morphogenesis which is the mode of becoming unique to organisms (Bennett 2010b, 51). Though mechanisms can change only organisms can morph; Driesch - like Bergson - considers the former as quantitative, whereas the latter is qualitative. That is to say, it can engage in innovative action which increases its complexity and self-repair. Driesch argues that organisms are further set apart by the fact that they can process multiple types of stimuli and can learn from their past experiences, which entails the twin capacities for memory and for adjusting their behaviour accordingly. In addition, they are capable of coordinated responses. However, Bennett argues that the main appeal of vitalism is its capacity to support anthropocentrism. This is because entelechy is considered to consist of two different general tendencies, the first engenders the formation of individuals, the second directs its movement. Though the former is equally active in all organisms, the latter has a stronger presence in humans than in other species. Driesch argues that the highest order of self-organisation and self-repair is displayed by humans, though it is extended to all animate organisms. Bennett tries to discard the tendency to anthropocentrism and therefore stresses the possibility of a notion of entelechy as

an *impersonal* kind of agency ... not the unique possession of each individual
but rather a vitality flowing across all living bodies. Entelechy coordinates parts

⁵⁹ There is a strong resemblance between entelechy and Bergson's vital impulse, though Driesch explicitly states, according to Bennett, that entelechy is specifically not psychical, whereas *élan vital* as the source of creative evolution expresses the material embodiment of duration's erstwhile strictly psychical power. Both are understood as the "life-force" that animates inert matter, exceeds mechanism and acts as a selective mechanism that organises the expression of the various tendencies contained in an individual. It is therefore not surprising that Bergson is mentioned in the preface to Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*, which will be discussed in more detail below.

⁶⁰ A charge which I would level at Bergson too, who considers humanity as the pinnacle of evolution.

on behalf of a whole without following a rigid plan; it answers events innovatively and perspicuously, deciding on the spot and in real time which of the many possible courses of development will in fact happen. Neither is the agentic capacity of entelechy a disembodied soul, for it is constrained by the materiality that it must inhabit and by the preformed possibilities contained therein. But despite this heteronomy, entelechy has real efficacy: it animates, arranges, and directs the bodies of the living. It is “an *effective* extra-spatial intensively manifold constituent of nature.”⁶¹ (Bennett 2010b, 55)

In order to underscore the seeds of possibility to regard entelechy as a starting point of the vitality of matter itself (rather than vitalism’s insistence on the separation between matter and life), Bennett also critiques the lingering mechanistic determinism in Driesch’s account. For, while the notion of entelechy as selecting the effects from possible options provided by stimuli attacks the machinic notion of efficient causality, she shows how Driesch’s notion of materiality associates it with efficient causality, where the machine is a fixed assemblage that can only process certain stimuli in a predetermined way. Bennett argues that we should broaden our understanding of the machine to include a capacity for self-organisation and self-repair. Driesch’s distinction between life and matter therefore depends on a narrow definition of the “machine”. As such, Bennett rejects the notion of entelechy as an entity separate from matter, but finds Driesch’s work useful in its insistence on the idea that entelechy is not a wholly spiritual force, but can only expend itself in relation to matter (Bennett 2010b, 56).⁶² Bennett is attracted to entelechy because it embodies

⁶¹ Bennett cites Driesch, *The Science of Philosophy of the Organism* (1908) vol 2, 326, emphasis in Bennett.

⁶² In this sentiment, Bennett echoes Elizabeth Grosz, whose concept of the incorporeal is defined as “the subsistence of the ideal in the material or corporeal” (Grosz 2017, 5). She attempts to create a non-dualist understanding of animated materiality by arguing that the ideal and material aspects of matter are indelibly linked. Matter is always infused with ideality, and ideality can only express itself through matter (Grosz 2017).

certain qualities that express a nonlinear nature and which it therefore shares with Nietzsche's drives, Bergson's *élan vital*, Serres' *noise*, as it is "a form or an agency that is naturalistic but never fully spatialized, actualized, or calculable" (Bennett 2010b, 63). It presents a fluidity that allows Bennett to extend agency to matter, but as I will show in more detail below, this locates agency at the sub-individual level. As a result, Bennett shows several of the tendencies that problematise the possibility of reconciling nonlinearity with a coherent sense of self.

Nonlinear Agency as Vibrant Matter

This conceptualisation of nonlinear agency as the focal point in a holistic universe coupled with a concern for the possible repellent qualities of complexity, as discussed above, can be seen as the starting point of *Vibrant Matter* (2010a), as it clearly argues strongly to embrace complexity in a rather radical form. It strives to make the human more comfortable with the unsettling notion of considering humanity on equal footing with nature. In order to do this, it centres on the notion of matter as agentic in and of itself; it is entirely focused on developing the concept of vital materiality. At stake is the development of an ontology of vibrant matter, which leads to a revision of conventional notions of agency and freedom, provides a challenge to several binaries including life|matter and organic|inorganic, and finally to use this theoretical basis to adapt our understanding of politics to include the increased perception of the agency of nonhuman actants (Bennett 2010a, x). The ontology of vibrant matter rests on the concept that all things ultimately are composed of qualitatively the same substance, which, though it may take many different forms, maintains the same capacity for agency. Therefore, all bodies have a capacity for activity, as the vitality is inherent in the matter itself, rather than a separate force. This is directly counter to the (original understanding of) entelechy of the vitalism discussed above. Bennett states that her "goal is to theorize a materiality that is as much force as entity, as much energy as matter, as much intensity as extension" (2010a, 20). Moreover, her vibrant materiality is inherently relational, as actants are always interlinked with others; they are continually both affecting and being

affected by other bodies. As such, even in stable or seemingly rigid situations there is ceaseless interaction. The composition of the bodies involved in the interaction determines its outcome, for every outcome is the result of the interplay of the various forces and when the composition changes the outcome may change as well. The forces may clash, inhibit or enhance each other (Bennett 2010a, 21-23). On the whole any interaction involves heterogeneous assemblages, which are “ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts” throughout which agency is distributed (Bennett 2010a, 23). Bennett’s assemblages are not structured hierarchically:

no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group. The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen ... is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone. Each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force, but there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an agency *of* the assemblage. And precisely because each member-actant maintains an energetic pulse slightly “off” from that of the assemblage, an assemblage is never a stolid block but an open-ended collective. (Bennett 2010a, 24)

Bennett’s notion of assemblage is essential to cement the notion of distributive agency as pertaining to all matter, whether organic or inorganic. Distributive agency rejects the notion of the subject as the “root cause of an effect. There are instead always a swarm of vitalities at play” (Bennett 2010a, 31-32). Moreover, it allows her to evade any sense of anthropocentrism; the cause of events are always conceived as a collective of actants, even human assemblages involve nonhuman forces. All action, including human action is understood as the outcome of a

variety of forces that are in contention or collaborate and are often coalesced into - more or less temporary - constellations. This understanding of distributed agency is remarkably similar to Nietzsche's theory of the drives. However, unlike Nietzsche, Bennett specifically argues that there is a specific agency that pertains to the assemblage as a whole that is not reducible to the sum of its parts. This creates the possibility that it is not the will to power of the dominant drives which determines the directionality of the assemblage, but that it has its own distinctive directionality that is more stable. Moreover, it could provide an avenue to resolve Nietzsche's problem of giving style to character; for agency of the assemblage could be the source of "giving style" to character, which also cropped up in relation to the body without organs if the latter is understood as an assemblage described above. Though, in order for this to work, Bennett would need to explore how the agency of the assemblage proper is constituted and how it would be separate from the forces that constitute it. This is presupposing that she would want to reconcile these assertions, for it would create a sense of overall agency that is strong enough to overrule the dominant tendencies in the self, which would most likely go beyond the supposition that the energetic pulse of the whole differs "slightly" from its parts.⁶³ This is likely undesirable, because if there was a substantial difference between the forces constituting the assemblage and the assemblage proper, Bennett would need to offer a separate source for this power, which is not readily available as forces are tied to materiality, which provides the basis for the composite forces. Hence, there is no room for a significant power associated with the assemblage proper, leaving Bennett open to the same criticism as Nietzsche: one appears to be able to change behaviour, while the capacity to act is situated at a sub-individual level.

In addition, the interpretation of all actants as assemblages, which, moreover, are in continuous interaction with other assemblages and forces, has repercussions for the

⁶³ It would also most likely contest Nietzsche's assertion that "giving style" to character is an extremely difficult feat of which only a very few are capable. That would not be in line with Bennett's attempt to combat anthropocentric exceptionalism by extending agency beyond its traditional bounds of human and animal individuals.

conceptualisation of responsibility. If agency is located at the sub-individual level it problematizes the attribution of actions to individuals. Yet this is necessary in order to open up the possibility of positive agency to pertain to inorganic assemblages as well as organic assemblages. Traditionally, inorganic matter can only exude “passive agency”⁶⁴ as constraining or permissive factors, Bennett, on the other hand, posits that inorganic assemblages can have “agency proper” (Bennett 2010a, 29). She points to the fact that both organic and inorganic assemblages can have efficacy, the capacity for creation - to make something new appear. This is available to inorganic assemblages when understood as the ability to cause an action that requires a response. This opens up the possibility to re-imagine the role of intentionality. Whereas, accounts of agency as an expression of moral capacity stress the role of intention and subjectivity, Bennett’s notion of material vitality and distributive agency interprets subjective intentionality as only one factor in a swarm of vitalities, the parts of which are intricately interrelated. Each of these parts can contribute their own strivings, which compete with human intentions - which are themselves the result of a multiplicitous swarm - and therefore the individual is not the decisive force in any outcome as supposed in accounts of moral agency.

Distributive agency retains the notion of directionality, without the need for - anthropomorphic - intentionality. As such, it is incompatible with efficient causality and instead supports an understanding of emergent causality. “Alongside and inside singular human agents there exists a heterogeneous series of actants with partial, overlapping, and conflicting degrees of power and effectivity” (Bennett 2010a, 33). This means that cause and effect fold into each

⁶⁴ Although the notion of passive agency might seem oxymoronic, I think Bennett uses the phrase “passive action” for two reasons. First, it emphasises the idea that “passive action” such as placing restraints on a situation, could be considered an action in the first place. As Bennett notes, agency is generally limited to the exercise of human will, and shifting this interpretation is the object, as such she uses this terminology to widen the sense of agency. Secondly, I think it implicitly shows the limitations that language places on our ability to accomplish a shift towards an understanding of agency that includes “matter”. Bennett states in *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, concerning the crossings that blur the boundary between human and nonhuman, that one of the first steps to accommodate crossings is to develop a vocabulary that is better suited to conceive of nonhuman agency (Bennett 2001, 99).

other, as it is impossible to know the effect beforehand because the interplay between forces is so intricate it is hard to partition the process into cause and effect.⁶⁵ Any effect is the result of a dissonant disjunction of a multitude of forces and assemblages. Therefore, the notion of human exceptionalism is incongruous. Moreover, due to the complexity of any interaction, we cannot be certain of how human agency works, and therefore it is impossible to conclusively determine whether it is qualitatively different from nonhuman agency. This qualitative inseparability is further strengthened by Bennett's conceptualisation of distributive agency, which asserts that any assemblage involving humans inevitably also involves nonhuman components and the agentic capacity of the assemblage depends on the vitality of the whole. As such, it is conceived as a "dynamic force emanating from a spatio-temporal configuration rather than from any particular element" (Bennett 2010a, 35). The assemblages are open and highly fluid, which allows them to form new internal and external relations.⁶⁶ Moreover, the force exuded by any assemblage is a mixture of both the combined, cooperative force and the individual momentum of its parts. Therefore, any human action is always a cooperation with nonhuman elements, and it is hard to determine which components are the origin of an effect. These two facts combined mean that human intentionality is itself the result of an association that gives a human assemblage its agentic capacities. Agentic relationality also means that responsibility is diffused, both among the members of the assemblage, but also among the assemblages it is in contact with and which might enhance or curb its activity. This mediates responsibility and requires us to become more attentive to the interplay of forces that are at the centre of any action and effect (Bennett 2010a, 36-37). It is interesting to note here that while Bennett suggests a high degree of fluidity and indeterminacy, the language she uses also reflects a sense of consolidation. That is to say, in

⁶⁵ Both Bergson and Nietzsche point out that nonlinearity exposes the fact that cause and effect cannot be separated.

⁶⁶ Though these are relative terms, as Bennett's ontology suggests such an interwoven world that it is difficult to separate the internal from the external at times - in this sense it echoes Bergson's psychic states in duration, which is extended to materiality as a result of its inherent agency.

order to show that the “individual” is an intricate aggregate of forces in complex arrangements of relationality, which is meant to convey the sense that agency is not located in a single site but is distributed throughout this temporary pattern, she has to resort to the unitary vocabulary of elements and parts. These hint at a clear delineation, which conveys a sense of stability in the sense that the defined must endure for some period of time in order to be ascertainable. It shows that Bennett too struggles with the linguistic tendency towards stasis, to, in Serres’ words, “speak of multiplicity itself without ever availing myself of the *concept*” (Serres 1995, 4).⁶⁷

Despite the linguistic constraints, Bennett attempts to paint a picture of an “ontological field without any unequivocal demarcations ... *All* forces and flows (materialities) are or can become lively, affective, and signaling. And so an affective, speaking human body is not so *radically* different from the affective signaling nonhumans.”⁶⁸ (Bennett 2010a, 116-117) This field is highly fluid, and congeals into various shapes and forms, but none of these is privileged in terms of agentic capacity; rather, various parts of the field are involved in any activity. Borrowing a phrase from Spinoza, Bennett calls this *natura naturans*, which is “the uncaused causality that ceaselessly generates new forms” (Bennett 2010a, 117). Drawing on Serres’ *The Birth of Physics* (2018), Bennett then argues that the interaction between bodies is not completely random, but follows vortical, spiral and eddying trajectories. The vortex adjusts the circle of life (origin, consolidation, decay) to accommodate for variation and difference, while retaining some possibility for repetition and stability (Bennett 2010a, 118-119). She clearly draws on Serres’ understanding of mobility and chaos as the defining characteristic of the world, and like him, only suggests a modicum of stability.

As Bennett states at the start of the last chapter of her book, the concept of vital materiality has three advantages over conventional matter/life ontologies: first it has a more horizontal perspective, which allows for a better appreciation of complexity. That is to say it flattens

⁶⁷ Italics in original.

⁶⁸ Italics in original.

hierarchies through the supposition of interrelation and interaction. Secondly, it is predicated on nonlinear, emergent causality which avoids devolution into linear, deterministic trajectories, whether expressed as a teleological organicism, which presupposes a purposive organisation to nature as a whole, or mechanism. Finally, and most importantly for the purposes of this thesis, vital materialism questions conventional notions of self, it replaces the notion of the single, united body with an array of bodies agglomerated into an assemblage of dubious stability. As Bennett puts it, there is a “*radical* kinship” between the organic and what was previously considered inorganic (Bennett 2010a, 112-113). These three advantages show three aspects of linearity that complicate the stable, linear self. Nonlinearity complicates the formation of structures⁶⁹ including hierarchies; the hierarchy of distributive agency, as visible in both Connolly and Bergson, which suggest human exceptionalism as the pinnacle of evolutionary development, is an important factor that cannot be sustained if nonlinearity dominates our ontology. Emergent causality engenders the fluidity that complicates delineation and sedimentation, denying the possibility of conceptualisation as Serres so astutely and explicitly notes, but which is also evident even at the heart of Bergson’s and Nietzsche’s sceptical attitude towards language. This fluidity exceeds all concepts and boundaries, it jettisons any attempt at clear delineation, differentiation; and ultimately the self is a concept, an attempt to formalise the boundaries of our influence, experience, capacity. Vibrant materiality, in extending agency, makes the self indistinguishable from other sites of agency. Stripping human agency from its exceptionalism shatters one of the aspects that are crucial to the delineation of the self. Like I explored through Nietzsche’s work, there is a sense in which the individual disintegrates once agency is located at the sub-individual level; though unlike Nietzsche, Bennett reserves a sense of agency for the aggregate as a whole. This is in a relation of tension with her explicit insistence that the world consists of open systems containing assemblages of forces, for the idea that the assemblage has its own sense of agency

⁶⁹ This is particularly apparent in Serres work, which Bennett draws on.

rests on a possibility for delineation that she also problematises. Open systems are always in contact with and often intertwined with other systems. As such, it becomes difficult to delineate the boundaries of the individual. Thus, Bennett too, exhibits the tensions between the destabilising tendency of nonlinearity and the tendency of the human intellect to organise things through delineation. Like the other theorists discussed in this thesis, she clearly considers there to be an identifiable individual at several points in her works, which in this chapter has been mainly evidenced in her discussion of crossings as special, enchanting sites of becoming other, of innovation, going beyond the normal. Bennett clearly wants to embrace the potentiality of an ontology of becoming, but in this potentiality, it is also a destabilising force to the self as an identity, which Bennett tacitly acknowledges in her verbal shift in the crossings chapter of *The Enchantment of Modern Life*. However, this is a problem that should be acknowledged openly, because it is not just problematic to an identitarian conceptualisation of the self, but to any conventional notion of self. The tendency towards crossings, the attempts to become a body without organs, blank, un-differentiated, show nonlinearity's inclination to disorganisation. This is fundamentally irreconcilable with conceptualisation, which is a method of organisation. As such, it is impossible to speak of a nonlinear self. It is impossible to find a notion of distributive agency is able to create systems that are sufficiently open to accommodate the spontaneity and contingency Bennett wishes to embrace, which opens up a holistic vista of materiality infused with agency, yet are simultaneously sufficiently closed to delineate boundaries that make things and individuals distinctive and separable, that allow a nonlinear sense of self.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on two political philosopher's attempts to construct their political philosophy on the basis of a nonlinear ontology. First, I have discussed Connolly's attempt to create a sense of self-identity that is capable of dealing with the vicissitudes and change inherent to nonlinearity by incorporating a sense of fluidity into it. This was followed by a discussion of

Bennett's attempt to use nonlinearity as a basis to generate a sense of materiality as inherently agentic.

I have argued that Connolly is unable to create a notion of self-identity that is consistent with nonlinear logics. I have shown that, though his formal engagement with nonlinearity succeeds his conceptualisation of the self, his earlier attempt to create fluidity within a monolithic understanding of self bears many hallmarks of nonlinear logic. This is further corroborated by the fact that his conceptualisation of the self as co-constitutive with difference shows clear parallels with his later dual coding of times, which introduces his formal engagement with nonlinearity in the form of time as duration. In both cases - identity and temporality - the stable logic of efficient causality is seen to be interrupted by emergent causality, which results in a need to adjust the self-identity. Hence Connolly creates two modalities of being which are co-constitutive of life in general and which are based on two parallel sets of dualities that, like Bergson's are based on separate logical systems and map onto each other. Connolly uses this technique to create a middle position between stasis and change, being and becoming. However, I have shown that this attempt is dominated by the modalities of being and chrono-time because it does not provide sufficient "space" for nonlinearity to set becoming and change at the centre of his ontology. I have shown that Connolly privileges chrono-time and its logics at several points throughout his work, in particular it is expressed in his assertion that chrono-time dominates everyday experience because it is necessary, whereas time as duration merely enriches it. I argued that the logics of chrono-time function as the standard for his philosophy and consequently set the parameters for the problem he engages; the problems of evil have become intensified as a result of the acceleration of socio-cultural change that undermines the stability of chrono-temporal logics. Hence it becomes necessary to theorise a capacity to incorporate change more quickly into the stable concepts established through linear logics, which would not be required if nonlinearity and the sense of becoming it engenders are the basis for our ontology, as the acceleration of change would not be a threat to inherently fluid "structures". Connolly implicitly acknowledges this when

he argues that an adoption of time as duration and the emergent causality it engenders would affect a change in our understanding of both cause and meaning. Thus, Connolly is motivated to engage the possibility of nonlinearity, but equally inclined to limit its scope. I have asserted that Connolly limits and displaces nonlinear logics through the formal separation of the two modalities of temporality, where chrono-time is dominant. He suggests that linearity is the foundational temporality of our everyday experience, which is interrupted by nonlinear duration. Despite the fact that he argues that these interruptions are becoming more frequent, it still leaves efficient causality as the dominant logic and centres stability in his ontology. Consequently, Connolly ends up with a dynamic essentialism, which creates some space for change, but limits its scope to the extent that its power is severely reduced. Therefore, I have argued that despite his best efforts to incorporate nonlinear logics into his conceptualisation of the self, Connolly ultimately is unable to centre the self on nonlinear logics and ends up with a linear self which is at increasingly frequent intervals beset by change, which it then struggles to incorporate. As such, he reveals that nonlinear logics are incompatible with the demands of the linear self. This is further evidenced by Connolly's attempt to salvage human exceptionalism from the more egalitarian distribution of agency that develops out of nonlinear complexity theory.

From this I moved on to Bennett's work, where I have focused on three separate attempts to incorporate nonlinear logics into her political theory. Throughout the three encounters, I have shown that Bennett's interest in nonlinearity leads her to embrace increasing degrees of disorganisation. First, I have shown the first stirrings of what would later become her conceptualisation of vibrant matter in *The Enchantment of Modern Life*. This is visible both in her ontology based on complexity theory and in her discussion of crossings, which focus on various attempts to extend the limits of self-identity. In the most extreme of these crossings, the examination of the body without organs, Bennett considers a method of disorganisation that is incompatible with the delineated concept of identity. This is intensified in Bennett's discussion of vitalism as an expression of new materialism. But even vitalism, though it creates a sense of

materialistic agency, does not sufficiently endow matter with this capacity, instead creating a scheme of co-dependence between matter and an animative life-force. Bennett uses this as a stop-over towards the inherent agency supposed in *Vibrant Matter*. Here, she lets nonlinearity become the dominant factor in her ontology and in doing so exposes the fact that nonlinearity is incompatible with conceptualisations of the self, which require linear logics to sustain them. The fluidity, interrelation and open-endedness of nonlinearity do not admit of the delineation, differentiation and agentic exceptionalism that set the self apart from other assemblages.

Both Bennett and Connolly show that, though their works are ontologically problematic, there is a necessity for a coherent self, which is not threatened by difference and is more in tune with the world in which it partakes and upon which it acts. In addition, despite the theoretical flaws, each produce vital insights and even useful, pragmatic strategies that allow us to engage in such behaviour. Therefore, I must conclude that, though neither can produce a sense of self that is based on nonlinear ontology because the concept of the self is irreconcilable with nonlinearity, the attempt to provide tools to introduce a sense of nonlinearity into our political praxis is valuable.

Conclusion

This PhD evolved out an interest to further investigate the concept of the self as expressing an enduring, embodied individual endowed with agency and distinctive through an essential identity. Monolithic, linear notions of identity create the “problem of difference” leading to practices of exclusion and violence. In order to avoid these tendencies, some political theorists, most notably William Connolly, have tried to use nonlinear ontologies of time to create a sense of self that could suppress this tendency to exclude that which is considered other. One of the avenues investigated by Connolly and others such as Bennett has involved conceiving a sense of self that is more open to change and contingency is the exploration of an interest in nonlinear ontologies. However, in this thesis I have shown that nonlinear ontologies not only problematise the conceptualisation of the self as an enduring, embodied agent but are also ultimately incompatible with such a notion of the self.

To this end, I have explored the nonlinear ontologies of three philosophers: Nietzsche, Bergson and Serres. Each one created his own nonlinear ontology, which problematizes different aspects of the concept of the self. In “The Will to Power, the Eternal Return and the Self,” I argued that Nietzsche’s nonlinear ontology, as inscribed in the will to power and the eternal return, sustains an understanding of the world as composed of drives that need to expend themselves, express their will to power. The theory of the drives complicates the notion of the self as an agentic unity, because it locates agency at the level of the drives, which are constitutive of the individual. In addition, I have shown that Nietzsche’s supposition that the majority of humans embody a weak will to power calls into question the unity of the self, because the drives may then not be strong enough to unite the various tendencies into a single assemblage.

My discussion of Bergson’s work in “Duration as Incompatible with the Self” has focused on the development of his philosophical theory of time as nonlinear duration by comparing his

doctoral thesis, *Time and Free Will*, to his magnum opus, *Creative Evolution*. I have shown that Bergson initially argues that duration is pure qualitative intensity and hence incommensurable with space, which is pure quantitative extension. As a result, Bergson's understanding of the self was split between the necessity to express a qualitative experience in duration and the embodied experience in space. This problematized the self as a unified entity. I then showed that Bergson tried to reconcile these opposing tendencies into a continuum, by arguing that they are inverse directions of the same movement. However, I have shown that this does not eradicate the tensions between these two terms, because Bergson maintains the sense that each of them is subject to their own logical framework, which are incommensurable as they function on the basis of different types of causality. In relation to the self, Bergson tries to reunite the two registers of the self through the notion that intuition would be able to enter into both duration and materiality. However, this is dependent on the idea that the logical systems can be synthesised into a single framework, which Bergson is unable to explain. What is more, he is unable to provide a way for consciousness to experience duration, for that too depends on the aforementioned intuition, which lacks the theoretical, logical grounding to be able to function as Bergson wishes. Finally, I have shown that Bergson's extension of duration to be the force inherent in the *élan vital* undermines the material unity of the self that he had assumed in *Time and Free Will*. Consequently, there is no basis for a unified self except Bergson's mystical belief in the power of duration, which undermines Bergson's whole attempt to show that duration can secure the self as a unified entity.

The problem of the self as a unified entity was also present in "The Multiple, Chaotic and Undifferentiated Self," where I explored the work of Michel Serres. Serres nonlinear ontology tries to expose how "unities" are actually multiplicitous assemblages. He argues that multiplicity is the source of movement through productive chaos. Because pure chaos is inconceivable to the human intellect, Serres tries to approach the underlying multiplicity in "unities" through the notion of mixture and the idea that multiplicity is self-organising and as such establishes semblances of unities, which are actually multiplicities that have entered into repetition and redundancy. As a

result, mixtures are a combination of organisation and disorder, the former being what allows us to perceive them. The notion that pure multiplicity, which is of a nonlinear nature, is imperceptible creates several problems in Serres. I have argued that Serres is unable to create a nonlinear logic that allows us to explore multiplicities without needing to resort to the familiarity of organised “unities,” complicating the possibility that we are capable of understanding multiplicity and its movements at all. Serres portrays nonlinear movements as possibility itself because they are undifferentiated, which means that they become imperceptible. However, because Serres relies on mixtures, the notions of movement that he presents are often unified in a notion of the self as a coherent entity, such as the dancer or the thinker. Yet, the function of the movement is to dissolve the differentiating elements of these entities, dissolving them into pure multiplicity. Despite his metaphorical references to these selves, then, Serres’ nonlinearity is therefore antithetical to the notion of the self, which requires delineation to exist as a concept. In addition, Serres’ account, like Nietzsche’s, locates agency at the sub-individual level, with the multiplicities that constitute unities such as the self. The movement of these multiplicities are only nonlinear when they are innovative, whereas conceptualisation requires repetition. Therefore, Serres shows that nonlinearity is incommensurable with the very idea that there should be a concept of self.

In the final chapter I turned toward the political theory origins of this thesis and discussed Connolly’s and Bennett’s use of nonlinear ontology to create a sense of fluidity and contingency in a self that can resist the tendency towards dogmatic and monolithic understandings of itself. Their works provide two examples of “Political Explorations of the Nonlinear Self”. I have shown that they use similar strategies to those of Nietzsche, Bergson and Serres to establish their nonlinear ontologies. Consequently, they too fall prey to the same tensions that result within the notion of the self because of the concept’s incompatibility with nonlinearity. They reproduce some of the problematic tendencies I revealed in the preceding three chapters. The heavy influence of Bergson on Connolly’s work leads him to suggest a dual coding of time, which replicates the opposing logical frameworks that split Bergson’s self in two. For Connolly, this translates into a

sense of self whose stability is irregularly interrupted by contingency. I argued, however, that this is essentially a self that is based first in linear logic, and subsequently interrupted by the logic of duration, rather than being primarily constituted through the latter. Bennett, on the other hand, uses nonlinearity to complicate our understanding of agency as embodied in individuality. She argues that agency is distributed throughout inherently vibrant matter. This resonates with Nietzsche's theory of the drives and Serres' conceptualisation of multiplicity. It is therefore unsurprising that Bennett inherits their problem of delineation and as a result has trouble creating a sense of self as a unified entity.

The works of the nonlinear philosophers used in this thesis are focused on altering our ontology from one based on stasis to one that is characterised by dynamic and never fully predictable change. Nietzsche, Bergson and Serres try to create nonlinear ontologies because they think that linearity is predicated on an often arbitrary reduction of the complexity inherent in the world. Bergson and Nietzsche agree that this reduction is useful in facilitating action, legitimising to some extent that which they are trying to overturn. However, the main problem that each of the three philosopher's encounters is that it seems impossible to create a nonlinear logical system that remains compatible with an acting self. Perhaps this is due to the fact that, as Serres would argue, a system already implies organisation. Therefore, nonlinearity must be pure randomness, and therefore incompatible with all modes of organisation including concepts such as self. But, as all three note, our intellect is unable to grasp this and as a result cannot grasp the movement of the drives, duration or pure multiplicity. But this creates a simple logical problem in all their philosophies, because they are trying to express something through language, rationality and intellect, which are inherently incapable of both conveying and understanding it. Philosophy is the domain of words and thoughts, both of which require organisation and therefore are at best mixtures. They cannot begin to approach the contingency and disorder of nonlinearity. And yet, once you encounter their arguments against linearity as an ontological principle, once you become aware of the fact that the world must exceed the rules and regulations we perceive in it,

because there are so many aspects that it cannot adequately explain, we must conclude that nonlinearity must indeed be, if not *the*, then at least *an* ontological principle. As such, we must keep trying to approach the unapproachable, think the unthinkable and write about that which cannot be captured in words.

However, the elaboration of a nonlinear ontology is not sufficient on its own. As Grosz notes in the introduction to *The Incorporeal*:

I am aiming to develop an ontoethics, a way of thinking about not just how the world is, but how it could be, how it is open to change, and above all, the becomings it may undergo. ... Insofar as we create ontologies that reflect not only, or primarily, beings but also becomings, that is, insofar as ontologies can be considered ontogeneses, an ontoethics cannot *but* address the question of how to act in the present and, primarily, how to bring about a future different from the present. (Grosz 2017, 1)

Ontology, in the sense that it shapes our understanding of the world, ourselves and the relations it contains, necessarily has ethico-political connotations. This realisation is at the heart of the ontological turn in political theory. It requires us to reconsider from time to time our ethico-political praxis, including the assumptions we are committed to, which values determine our world view and whether they provide the best way to approach the world. In view of this understanding, it must be considered that nonlinear ontologies, flawed though they may be, are indispensable resources in the struggle to create a society, present and future, we and those who may follow us want to live in. Especially if we consider that both Bergson and Serres argue that nonlinearity is expressed in our world in mixed states, that the world admits of both regularity *and* invention. Nonlinearity has practical value, even if it is ontologically beyond our capacity to grasp in its entirety. In a world of mixtures, it is imperative to use the insights we glean of nonlinearity to try

to effect, facilitate and anticipate changes, even if our agency is not our own, or if it might be insignificant in the face of the myriad of forces that are contained in the world. Striving towards things we believe in, even if that belief expresses a contingent faith and will likely face opposition, makes life worthwhile.

Nonlinearity does not provide easy answers. It did not provide a clear solution to the problem of difference; for in gaining fluidity we are also at risk of losing the self entirely. But that is inherent in its nature: the world, as consisting of turbulence, must be negotiated. There is no pure answer, pure possibility only exists in the abstract, but so too does pure organisation. There is no problem that cannot be negotiated, nor is any negotiation final. A nonlinear ontology engenders, above all, a world of becoming, a world that can never stand still and will always surprise us. Despite their problematic logical foundation, Connolly's civic virtues are tools that can be used to try to create a more equitable and just society, in whatever meaning that these words are being negotiated. I hope that nonlinearity can make us humbler, and can let us appreciate those who share the world with us, whether these are fellow humans or vibrant matter that is itself endowed with agency. I hope that endeavouring to come to grips with a nonlinear ontology will help prevent the exclusionary tactics and violence that followed 9/11, whether in the increased racism in Western societies or the inexcusable international behaviour that involved the invasion of two countries in the Middle East for no good reason. Nonlinearity can also make us more appreciative of the natural world in which we live. Bennett shows that an appreciation for vibrant materiality can decrease our sense of self-importance, and appreciate that nature is not so different than we are. This could pave the way for a revaluation of nature as inherently valuable, perhaps more valuable than the economic growth that the Western world keeps prioritising over it. Thus, I think that nonlinearity can bring hope, as it engenders a world that will change, that will be different tomorrow than it was today. However, this is also frightening, as we are always frightened by the unknown. It is also a spur to keep trying to find ways to create a sense of nonlinearity that can inform our ontology, in order for it to inform our daily life and create a better

praxis. It may require us to change the way we think about ourselves, to let go of the notion of the self as determined in accordance with principles of identity. Or even to stop considering ourselves as a self entirely and to embrace the idea that we are no more than forces, potentialities and modes of organisation. But here too, the tension emerges between the self as a delineated agent, someone who can act, and the nonlinear tendency to decompose the one into the multiple, into drives that struggle to express their will to power. Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge that the sense of self as an embodied, enduring agent has practical and political importance. Hence, it is above all important to create a balance between nonlinearity and linearity, becoming and being that allows us to remain hopeful, but also remain active participants in the world.

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